

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1	Meeting:	Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel
2	Date:	Friday 15 th October 2010
3	Title:	The ‘Welcome Offer’ to vulnerable children and young people
4	Directorate:	Children and Young People’s Services

5 **Summary**

Since 2008/9 the Local Authority has responded to significant and increasing challenges to its provision for children and young people arriving in Rotherham, principally from the newly incorporated European Economic Community countries, by fundamentally reorganising its services to this most vulnerable of groups. During Spring 2010, strategic overview of these initiatives was assumed within the Chief Executive’s office, exemplifying the importance attached to the work. This report provides an updated assessment of progress in relation to the schools’ element of this strategy approximately nine months after the initial summary to Council.

6 **Recommendations**

That Scrutiny:

- **Note the actions (detailed at Appendix 1) taken, and progress made, since the review was implemented.**
- **Supports the continued development of a coordinated strategy across all the appropriate Council services on behalf of this vulnerable group.**

7 **Proposals and Details**

Since Autumn 2008, fundamental changes have been effected in the provision of services within CYPS to those children who are newly arrived in Rotherham and who experience significant challenges in accessing learning. Those changes, moreover, have been an integral part of the overall expansion of the School Effectiveness Service (SES) and have represented a considerably enhanced commitment to vulnerable learners and groups across the spectrum of acute need.

In summer 2009, the management of services to ethnic minority pupils and students was formally transferred from the Inclusion Directorate to Learning Services and, in particular, to School Effectiveness. In practice, this was necessarily an incremental process which is now, for the moment, complete. SES has established a Vulnerable Groups team led by a Assistant Head of Service (AHOSE) who was previously Headteacher of a Special School and is passionately committed to the needs of vulnerable learners. The AHOSE is able to deploy small but very capable Primary and Secondary ethnic minority achievement teams each led by a Curriculum Adviser (CA) for each phase.

Both colleagues have the trust and respect of schools and are recognised as experts in this area of work by our partners in the Department for Education and the National Strategies.

The staffing of both teams has benefited from the deployment of colleagues previously based at the Kimberworth Welcome Centre which has closed as a pupil resource. Most colleagues have been allocated to Primary phase work and are attached to a single school or network of schools. Other colleagues are committed to Secondary phase work on a similar principle or staff the Pre-Admission Register (PAR), which supports newly arrived students in the initial stages of induction to school or college while their language and other learning needs are assessed and appropriate provision designed and implemented. New colleagues have been appointed to reinforce the teams, notably Teaching Assistants from the Slovak Roma community and a Programme Manager for Community Cohesion. This workforce is now better resourced in relation to the scale of the challenge in Rotherham and more strategically deployed to support schools in addressing the needs of their pupils. It remains unavoidable, however, that the resources available do not yet match the scale of the demands on schools and families.

The work on ethnic minority achievement embraces both the needs of newly arrived pupils, characteristically with very little or no English and a comparably limited experience of schooling, and support for advanced learners, typically British Asian students from well established Rotherham families. The numbers of newly arrived children from EU countries continues to grow locally despite the economic context which has led to a reduction in arrivals/ stayers elsewhere in the UK.

Approximately 544 school-age pupils have joined Rotherham since September 2009, of whom 364 are of Primary age and 180 Secondary. Of these, 449 pupils are from the EU and 379 of Roma origin. The total includes 26 asylum seekers. Actual school admissions are a lower number but at 277 during the year exceeds the previous years' totals, as follows:

2008/9	250	children
2007/8	220	children
2006/7	264	children

This is an unprecedented pressure on the educational resources and social cohesion of the main recipient schools and local services; St Anne's Primary School, for example, continues to admit a cohort significantly in excess of a class size annually and that pattern is replicated, at a proportionate level, across Coleridge PS, East Dene, Ferham and Thornhill with a dispersed impact well beyond that inner core of schools; it may well be the most significant continuing challenge to our educational and broader communities for the foreseeable future. It requires, therefore, constant vigilance and regular readjustment to ensure provision matches a changing reality on the ground.

It is essential that the urgency of the needs of EU migrant pupils is met but that the Service also focuses effectively on the needs of other vulnerable groups – and this is a significant challenge within the personnel resources available. In particular, we have renewed our approaches to the advanced learners whose

progress in Rotherham schools is encouraging by 16+ but cannot be taken for granted, especially at KS2. The coordination of all support for vulnerable groups – ethnic minority learners, Looked After Children (LAC), the More Able, students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), pupils in Special Schools and those who are part of the Positive Progression strategy and particularly vulnerable to become NEET – falls within the remit of the AHOSE Vulnerable Groups who deploys the entire workforce across this sphere. Each team, therefore, is able to learn from and benefit the others and we are working towards a greater coherence of approach and impact across the whole.

To date, SES would identify the following as the core benefits of the new 'Welcome Offer' developed during 2009/10:

1. a more efficient and effective deployment of the available staffing to school needs
2. a more coherent induction process for newly arrived children on the site of the school they will attend longer-term
3. a strategy which builds capacity in schools rather than encourages reliance on an external service which can never be sufficient to the scale and range of challenges
4. more productive partnership working between schools and between schools and the LA
5. improved strategic coordination between ethnic minority approaches and other programmes designed to address under-achievement, for example Raising the Bar, The Extra Mile initiative and Improving Schools Programme (ISP) in Primary
6. significantly improved schools' engagement, especially in secondary schools, where confidence in the LA was weakest
7. important new work in community cohesion where the lead officer has very quickly built strong relationships with schools and community partners and introduced a range of innovative programmes
8. exciting and innovative practice which is influencing broader work in schools and SES for all learners, for example the ethnic minority achievement website

Evidence to support this assessment would include the Autumn 2009 Audit Commission survey of schools which recorded fundamentally improved ratings for this area from both Primary and Secondary Headteachers in comparison with 2008. Moreover, much of our practice is recognised as strong-to-exemplary by the National Strategies who lead for government in this area and who have showcased our work at regional and national conferences. Equally, every effort has been made by the team to 'test' Rotherham practice against the best work available in other LAs.

Nevertheless, considerable challenges remain and our own advances are at least matched by the pace of change in the community. At this point it is critical that we enjoy the confidence of schools and are able to present them with a service which is highly committed, well trained and informed and able to make a difference on the ground. Dialogue with schools, particularly the Clifton Action Zone, has continued to shape changes in practice, notably the revised PAR arrangements from September 2010 and the deployment of staff.

8 **Finance**

Investment in the enhanced service has been achieved through a remodelling of existing SES and CYPS budgets and additional funding from contingency to meet acute needs, for example Roma speaking Teaching Assistants. Increased investment in this area of work has, necessarily, reduced funding to other priorities.

A review is currently in place to assess continuing needs and the sustainability of resources, particularly in the context of reduced staffing across SES from April 2011 when National Strategies funding ends and government cuts to Local Authorities increase in impact. This is an area where investment remains absolutely critical in the short and medium term both within SES and in the broader multi-agency services supporting schools and the community. It is not yet clear what policy direction and level of investment will be provided by central government from 2011.

9 **Risks and Uncertainties**

Failure to meet the needs of newly arrived and acutely vulnerable children and young people will have serious implications for Rotherham and its schools, including:

1. patterns of underachievement leading to individual pupil and school failure
2. negative inspection outcomes for schools and the LA, where the performance of vulnerable groups has an unprecedented level of importance
3. potential disturbance to the strong ethos Rotherham schools historically enjoy, provoking poor behaviour, absenteeism and other anti-social features
4. potential threats to the social cohesion of local communities if sections of the population become disengaged and disaffected because they feel denied equality of opportunity in schools

10 **Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Despite the important progress achieved during the last twelve months, this remains a high priority area for CYPS and the broader Council. New arrivals continue to pose significant challenges to a growing number of schools but especially those in the Clifton, Thrybergh and Winterhill communities. Some of these students will begin to impact on schools' performance profiles in 2010 at KS2 and GCSE and we are also seeing increased emphasis on their progress in the new Ofsted inspection framework outcomes – to date, very positively in the schools inspected since September 2009. Both schools and SES will need to respond as these challenges develop but we will not be successful without sustained support from across CYPS and the broader Council.

11 **Background Papers and Consultation**

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