

PUPIL REFERRAL SERVICE (PRUS): PROGRESS REPORT

Report By: HEAD OF CHILDREN'S AND STUDENTS' SERVICES

Wards Affected

Countywide.

Purpose

1. To consider the progress made towards implementing the targets identified during the Best Value Review in 2002 (Appendix 1) and to consider any further action that needs to be taken.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Report

3. Herefordshire has 3 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) – one for Key Stage 3 pupils (ages 11-13) and 2 for Key Stage 4 pupils (ages 14-16).
4. The unit for Key Stage 3 pupils is based at the Aconbury Centre. It occupies the refurbished premises of Blackmarston Special School and provides good quality accommodation. Aconbury has the capacity to cater for 32 full-time equivalent (FTE) pupils. The focus for the KS3 PRU is around intervention and reintegration, which it does successfully, and the work of the Centre is highly valued by high schools. Following a significant reduction in the number of medical referrals, the Centre is able to offer a greater number of placements for intervention and support work, including placements under Personal Support Plans (PSPs). PSPs provide a proactive approach to behaviour management, which is proving successful. Aconbury is also able to work comprehensively with high school colleagues on training and the development of strategies for managing challenging behaviour. Some pupils move on from the KS3 PRU to one of the KS4 PRUs, where appropriate.
5. The 2 PRUs for Key Stage 4 pupils are -
 - St. David's, which provides excellent facilities in refurbished and extended accommodation at the premises of the former John Venn unit. The Centre caters for 35 FTE pupils.
 - The Priory in Leominster provides more limited but pleasant accommodation for 25 FTE pupils. The Centre is well-maintained and, although limited in its capacity, provides very good facilities for its pupils.

6. The focus for both KS4 PRUs is examination preparation, and preparation for the world of work, including work experience and alternative curriculum activities. The overall programme includes access to college placements, vocational training and supervised leisure activities.
7. At KS4, the difficulties of subject and examination access precludes much reintegration work with high schools, although it is still possible to reintegrate a few pupils for whom a very short term placement in a PRU is appropriate.
8. All 3 PRUs provide calm and positive supportive environments for their pupils. Many students placed there experience sustained success for the first time in their school careers.
9. The PRUs provide good value for money, but are expensive compared with high school placements. However, the educational loss to these pupils, and the potentially adverse impact on others in their age group in high schools, of not providing them with the individual attention that a PRU can offer, would be much higher.

Staffing

10. The Headteacher at the Aconbury PRU, who has had 2 excellent years there, has resigned from August this year. A replacement has been appointed who has the qualifications and experience to build on the excellent work the unit has achieved.
11. The Headteacher at St. David's (formerly the Headteacher at The Priory) moved to the newly refurbished Centre in September 2003 and he and the staff continue to develop excellent opportunities for the pupils.
12. The Priory has had an acting and part-time Headteacher since the former Head moved in September. An experienced replacement has now been appointed from Worcestershire, and he joins The Priory after Easter.
13. Within the Service, the pressures on staff are very high and the stress levels are a major factor in staff movement. All staff have access to a counselling service and are encouraged to use it. There is also a high level of involvement from the Head of Children's and Students' Services, the Manager of Special Educational Needs and the Manager of Pupil, School and Parent Support, because of the level of continuing support and advice that needs to be readily available at all times.

Ofsted

14. All 3 PRUs had very successful Ofsteds in 2000 – summaries from these reports are included at Appendix 1. They have all developed considerably since then. It is anticipated that further good reports will be achieved in an area which is frequently criticised by Ofsted teams during the inspections across the Country.

The Arrow Group

15. Following the Best Value Review, an outreach class has been developed and piloted for 6-8 statemented pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD). It makes provision for KS4 pupils and is attached to The Brookfield School. The 2-year pilot study period is reaching its conclusion. After a recent review of its success to date, the Cabinet Member (Education) agreed to a recommendation for the Arrow

Group to be made a permanent feature of The Brookfield School. The Teacher-in-Charge and some of the students took part in the Members' Seminar on 5th December 2003.

16. The success of the Arrow Group has grown out of the flexible provision and caring leadership provided by 2 well-qualified staff. They have very successfully engaged with, and provided opportunities for, a very disaffected and damaged group of young people, who would otherwise have placed other financial and social demands on the local community.

Primary Age Pupils

17. There are no primary PRUs in Herefordshire. The Medical and Behavioural Support Service (MBSS) work with pupils with problems within their primary school setting. The work of the MBSS Primary Intervention Team is highly regarded by schools and there are, as a result of excellent work by schools supported by MBSS, very few permanent exclusions from primary schools (see separate report elsewhere on this agenda).

Further work

18. Appendix 2 lists the targets identified during the Best Value Review of the Service, and reported to the Education Scrutiny Committee on 3rd December 2002. The report has been updated to show current progress.
19. There is a cause for concern currently about the consequences of there being a very small number of girls for whom an EBD statement for The Brookfield School is appropriate. The specific point of concern is that, at any moment in time, Brookfield does not have an appropriate peer group of girls for the school to be regarded, securely, as co-educational provision.
20. The situation, which has attracted comment from Ofsted, needs to be kept under review. If it proves to be a longer term problem, alternative provision may need to be developed for the small number of relevant girls.
21. Further work is also being developed around therapeutic provision at St. David's. It is important that such a development should be progressed as a multi-agency initiative.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee note the provision made by the Pupil Referral Service and the progress towards achieving the targets of the Best Value Review, and identify any other areas not highlighted in this report that require further action.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Behaviour Support Plan
- SEN Policy
- Education Development Plan