

Case study: School-based interim provision - Croydon Virtual School

Introduction

The Virtual School in Croydon Local Authority has established a programme of interim education based within a local secondary school, to provide a learning environment for newly arrived Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) awaiting a mainstream school place.

The key problem this case study addresses

Local Authorities aim to get newly arrived UASC into education within 20 school days of being taken into care. However, admissions can be delayed for several months, particularly for older children attempting to enter the school system at the upper secondary (or Key Stage 4) level. Whilst they wait for a school place, children are often only able to access a couple of hours English language tuition per week - becoming frustrated, unable to progress in their education at a critical stage of development, and denied the critical opportunity to participate in a normalising routine, make friends and become part of their new community that school provides.

What they do

Croydon Virtual School has developed interim provision for new arrivals awaiting school places. It does not claim to be a substitute for full-time mainstream education, but responds to the reality of delayed access to education for new arrivals seen across the majority of the UK. The interim provision consists of three full days (15 hours) of education per week, on the premises of a local secondary school, and can cater for up to 25 children at any one time. A variety of subjects are offered, including English, Maths, Science, Music, Art, Physical Education (PE), Religious Education (RE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. The programme aims to provide new arrivals with a taster of the full mainstream school experience, and expose them to a breadth of subjects that they may not be exposed to were they to arrive at KS4 level and go straight into college ESOL provision.

The Virtual School partners with external agencies to strengthen the provision, bringing in a sports organisation to deliver PE and build basic literacy skills through football, and wellbeing specialists Compass to deliver PSHE.

Alongside offering this interim provision, the Virtual School staff work to secure full-time school places for all of the new arrivals. The interim provision is designed to be a six-week programme, with children rapidly transitioning to mainstream education. However, where further delays occur, children are able to remain in the interim provision. Typically, children transitioning out of

the interim provision will either gain a place in the host Secondary School, or move to a local FE college providing specialist 16-19 ESOL.

The provision is funded through the pooling of Pupil Premium, which would otherwise pay for a couple of hours per week of 1:1 tuition for each out-of-school child.

The difference this makes/why this is an example of good practice

It is recognised that newly arrived children should access full-time education as soon as possible after they arrive in the UK. However, in the face of widespread delays, Local Authorities across the UK routinely use Pupil Premium money to pay for 1-2 hours per week of English language tuition for new arrivals waiting for school places. The Local Authority has found this model to be more cost effective, using the same finance to provide children with significantly more hours of education, a greater breadth of subjects, social interaction and the introduction to a school routine and environment.

The location of the interim provision within a secondary school also has several benefits. First, it enables the new arrivals to immediately interact with mainstream students: break times and lunch are aligned so new arrivals are able to form friendships outside of their immediate peer group. Second, it facilitates close liaison with the host school Head teacher and EAL teachers, which has enabled a number of the new arrivals to move easily into mainstream provision within the host school.

The model also equips Virtual School staff with higher levels of knowledge when advocating for school or college places for newly arrived learners. Through the interim provision, they have become more familiar with each young person's academic and social profile, and are therefore able to provide more detailed information to a prospective school about literacy levels, strengths and gaps in their previous learning, as well as the personal characteristics such as determination or creativity that they may have demonstrated.