

Written evidence submitted by Southwark Virtual School

Parliamentary Enquiry: 'Education: Are prisoners being left behind?'
Contribution submitted by Adam Marling, Deputy Head Teacher/ Key stage 5 Lead, The Virtual School, London borough of Southwark.
Context
Virtual Schools have a statutory duty to monitor the academic development of young people in Care including those in Youth Offending institutions (<i>Promoting the Education of Looked After and previously Looked After children, 2018</i>). I am the Deputy Head Teacher/Key Stage 5 lead for the LB Southwark Virtual School. I have worked in an educational capacity with Care Leavers in the 16-18 age group for two local authorities since 2009.
Area of concern
Education Provision during Pandemic induced Lockdown in Youth Offending Institutions (YOI's)
Rationale
<p>2020 was the first year in living memory where Schools and Colleges were forced to close their classrooms to students. The Covid Pandemic presented academic institutions/education providers with logistical challenges about how to deliver their respective Curricula.</p> <p>Prior to the Pandemic, inmates at HMP YOI's (Cookham Wood, Feltham, Wetherby) could expect to receive up to 25 hours of classroom based learning per week. An example of this provision supplied by Cookham Wood in their 20/21 prospectus includes access to the following subjects: Art, Business/Social Enterprise, Carpentry, Catering, Computing, Creative writing, Drama, Duke of Edinburgh Award, Entry level functional skills Employability, Fitness/Healthy living ,Higher level functional skills, Horticulture Life skills, Multi-skills, Music technology, Peer mentoring, Prison radio, Project based learning, Skills development, Uniformed services and Effective thinking.</p> <p>These areas of learning would make up part of an education pathway that begins with assessment:</p> <p><i>At Cookham Wood Children will have their educational work tailored to their needs which range from language barriers to SEMH. An increase in the number of children with Limited English Proficiency has necessitated the translation of documents and work for children as well.</i> - H.I. Head of Inclusion, HMPS Cookham Wood</p> <p>Further information was provided by the Inclusion department of Cookham Wood relating to achieving qualifications and access to education, based on varying lengths of sentence :</p>

As an education department, the decision was made to move qualifications to unit based segments instead of whole qualifications. Children on remand will be guided towards the unit based qualifications which enables them to achieve while they are at Cookham Wood. If the opportunity arises for the full qualification to be achieved, this is also possible. Boys on longer sentences will have courses tailored to their needs which will allow them to achieve GCSE's and more formal qualifications based on their initial assessments for suitability for those courses.

-H.I. Head of Inclusion, HMPS Cookham Wood

Two former inmates (both *Looked after Children*) offered the following insight into education pre Covid lockdown at Feltham YOI:

Young person A (18) who was serving a sentence of 2 years shared that he 'was not given a choice of subjects to study. I was taught in 3 subjects (Life skills, business and Healthy Living (plus Maths and English))'.

Young person B (17) stated that whilst on remand, he also was 'not given a choice and studied Maths and English only.'

During 'normal times' it would appear that the educational needs of inmates were to an extent being met in the classroom albeit in some cases through a very limited curriculum.

However during the lockdown period (from March to August 2020) reports were received that inmates were spending considerably longer in their cells than normal and access to classroom learning ceased. According to HW, (Engagement & Resettlement team, Cookham Wood YOI), students were instead provided with:

A different work pack each week, consisting of a different subject, incorporating maths, English and/or enrichment.

This information was confirmed by A.S. (Southwark Youth Offending Service) who added:

Unfortunately the education offer is very limited due to lockdown restriction. we were informed that M was receiving worksheets to complete in his cell. However, they did not appear to reflect a syllabus, these worksheets were not being marked and he did not receive feedback. Caseworkers were not receiving any feedback about M's engagement with the worksheets.

The need for adjustment during challenging times is understood but the Southwark Virtual School considered that the education provision fell far short of the standards expected and challenged Cookham Wood on this provision. The following response was received from the Engagement Manager:

Due to the restrictions, education have been forced to move to a non-contact model. Over the last five weeks we have been able to move from a daily generic work pack to more personalised approach. This has been developed through feedback sheets, calls to boys in their rooms through the

Engagement & Resettlement team and calls from the SEN team to children with additional needs. There has been increased communication through officers and requests from children via other staff.

We have recently completed a survey, through the interventions team, which has enabled us to develop the content further. Children are requesting work from their exiting education pathway plus there are requests for maths work.

Marking of work was initially an issue but we have a robust system in place and staff are providing comprehensive written feedback and where possible making calls to support development needs.

An incentive scheme is in place for those who have completed exceptional work. Children are still being paid for education.

The Head of Inclusion is working with the prison team on those children separated under Rule 49 and attends a weekly meeting to review progress.

This approach is being strategically monitored in line with the Government response and development of face to face work is being considered at the highest level between Novus, the POA & UCU union and YCS.

- N.P. Engagement and Resettlement Manager

Whilst this development demonstrates an improvement on the early days of lockdown (Highlighted by the YOS) it still does not compare favourably with classroom teaching. Schools and colleges in mainstream education adapted quickly to the demands of remote learning. The same did not appear to be the case within YOI's.

It should be noted that we did not receive responses to our information requests from Staff at Feltham YOI and Wetherby YOI.

Conclusion

The observation and main point of this submission is that the education provision within HMP YOI's during lockdown was significantly diminished.

At the time of writing a large part of the country are under tier 3 or 4 restrictions and lockdown conditions prevail. The Covid strain has evolved into a faster spreading virus and there is no guarantee that this will be the last pandemic of its kind.

It is generally accepted that all institutions will be changing working practices in the future, schools and colleges amongst them.

As educators, we at the Virtual School Southwark have overseen the delivery of remote learning by schools via a number of on-line portals (*Zoom, Google Classroom, Team*). We have rolled out a comprehensive programme of IT equipment supply to Looked After Children so that they can continue to access learning. We have also witnessed the development/ refinement of on-line teaching and the greater availability of learning resources to supplement learning. It is our considered opinion that the provision of learning packs supplied to inmates in YOI's during lockdown does not represent sufficient education delivery.

Recommendations

The following suggestions might be considered in the event of future lockdown

situations:

1. Inclusion and engagement teams in YOI's work with heads of education in developing an education delivery plan in the case of any future lockdown.
2. The above plan follows the 'normal' classroom delivery and curriculum as closely as is possible through the use of mediums such as Google Classroom.
3. That inmates are provided with appropriate learning resources such as Laptops/Tablets/Desktop Computers (It is understood that there security implications to be considered) so that education can be accessed whilst in isolation.
4. That work submitted is assessed and marked in the usual way and that ongoing formative assessment is practised as a standard teaching tool.
5. That all inmates receive 'tutorial time' – a weekly one-to-one remote session with a tutor to assess progress, facilitate discussion/gather feedback.
6. That all inmates receive Information, advice and guidance (remotely) relating to options open to them on release and on the implications of the changes of working practices brought about by Lock down restrictions.
7. Specific training (as part of a curriculum) on presenting in front of a camera/screen as this will become an essential skill in the future.
8. Special consideration be given to students with SEN with pedagogical approaches adjusted accordingly. This might include the use of additional learning resources relating to how a student learns such as sensorial /audial/visual stimulants.

January 2021