

West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Council Meeting: 27 August 2008

Subject: Voluntary Mentoring Scheme for Secondary School Pupils

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** To provide information on the viability of developing a voluntary mentoring scheme employing S6 pupils who have left school for a positive destination, mentoring S4 or S2 pupils currently in education.

2. Background

- 2.1** At the Full Council meeting of 28 May 2008, Members considered the motion by Councillor Patrick McGlinchey regarding the possibility of developing a mentoring scheme for S2 pupils preparing to choose their Standard Grade subjects and/or S4 pupils preparing to sit formal exams for the first time. (the full motion is attached as Appendix 1).
- 2.2** Having heard Councillor McGlinchey and Councillor Smillie, the Council agreed to approve the aforementioned motion and requested that the Executive Director of Educational Services should prepare a report on the viability of the proposal for consideration at a future meeting of the Council.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Secondary schools in West Dunbartonshire employ mentoring for a variety of purposes and there is a range of practice across schools in relation to current or former pupils offering advice or support to younger peers. As a consequence, secondary head teachers were canvassed for their views on the specific proposal contained within the Council motion.
- 3.2** While in principle secondary head teachers consider that using former pupils as positive role models is a useful strategy, they raised a number of concerns regarding the possible implementation of a specific mentoring programme as outlined in the motion. Their concerns can be summarised as follows.
- The majority of former pupils who have achieved a positive destination are likely to have day time commitments in terms of further education, employment or training. It was therefore felt that very few former pupils would have consistent free time to offer a service to pupils during the school day.

- While the mentoring role would be a positive experience for young people and provide evidence of community service on their CV, this may be insufficient incentive in the absence of a fee or the payment of expenses.
- Given the age of the potential mentors and their likely commitments to other aspects of their lives, there was concern regarding their reliability as mentors, and the impact on the continuity of support to young people in school.
- Young adults working directly with pupils in school would require to go through the Disclosure Scotland process. This would incur a cost to the authority and may prove a barrier to some young people.
- It would be extremely difficult to monitor the quality and content of the advice given during the one-to-one sessions.
- While former pupils who have achieved a positive destination may be a positive role model for other young people, they, by nature of their age and experience, can provide only a limited perspective which would restrict the effectiveness of the advice they could offer.

3.3 All of our secondary schools currently make a range of opportunities available to pupils where they can benefit from the positive experience of former pupils, or other members of the local community. These opportunities for the most part tend to take the form of one-off seminars or conference events aimed at motivating pupils at key stages, usually S3/S4, or to provide information again at key stages often as part of the S2 option choice process. For example, St. Columba's High School runs an S2 Option Conference annually which is entirely led by former pupils who are willing and able to talk about their own experience of education and careers.

3.4 One-off events like seminars or conferences have the advantage of reaching all pupils at a particular stage, providing a quality assured consistent message and giving the speakers and their message a high status and profile. Such events are relatively easy and cost effective to organise and manage.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 If schools were required to implement a formal mentoring scheme using former pupils, there would be costs associated with Disclosure Scotland checks and possibly travel or other expenses for the mentors.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1 The adoption of a formal mentoring scheme using former pupils would raise some concerns regarding the quality and continuity of the mentoring support provided to young people.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The use of successful former pupils as positive role models to motivate or inform existing pupils is a strategy currently employed by all of our secondary schools. The implementation of a formal mentoring scheme aimed at S2 or S4 pupils would be difficult to initiate, maintain and quality assure.
- 7.2 The use of one-off seminar/conference events at key stages in schooling has proved to be popular, effective and manageable both in terms of the school timetable and the commitment of former pupils. There is an opportunity to share good practice regarding these kind of events and explore further opportunities to tap into the resource of former pupils or other successful members of the local community to support and guide pupils.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Council Members are asked to note the contents of this report and agree that the Corporate Director of Educational Services should support secondary schools to share good practice in relation to the use of successful former pupils to motivate and inform existing pupils and to encourage schools to explore further opportunities to use positive role models to improve the outcomes for young people in West Dunbartonshire.

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Appendix: Appendix 1 – Motion on Mentoring Scheme

Background Papers: No background papers

Wards Affected: All Wards