

Reviewed Policy for the Education of Children with a parent or Close Relative in Prison or at Risk of a Custodial Sentence

Context

This policy was first written in 2002 and was developed with the aims to raise awareness of the needs of children and young people with a parent or close relative in prison; to secure their educational achievement and attendance and to promote social inclusion. This early work was evidence of a clear commitment by Gloucestershire schools and Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young People's Services, to support the children of parents and relatives in prison.

This policy review was undertaken following the **Joint Department for Children, Schools and Families/Ministry of Justice Review (2007)** and subsequent national and regional government conferences. The findings of this review were publicised in order to support children of prisoners to achieve better outcomes.

This government review found that there is an estimated 160,000 children with a parent in prison in any year. This figure is around two and a half times the number of Looked After Children and over six times the number of children subject to child protection measures.

Children with a parent in prison are at the very heart of the Every Child Matters agenda as they are true victims of their parents' crimes. They often achieve poor outcomes, with a high probability of them growing up in poverty and disadvantage; some of them have complex needs and are from socially excluded families. Research (The Bromley Briefings published by The Prison Reform Trust November 2009) identifies this group as having high level risks of vulnerability and safeguarding with the potential for future offending behaviour, exclusion from school, poor attendance and academic achievement.

(For the purpose of this policy the term 'parent' will refer to parent, carer, partner, sibling, significant adult or family member)

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to build upon the positive aspects of the original policy that included the practice of identifying a named person in each school to be responsible for this group of children, and names of individuals within the local authority who can provide information and advice to schools and partner agencies. This review has been completed with the understanding that appropriate support for these children is already available through existing assessment and services, and that some children of parents in prison, may already be receiving services and support from voluntary and statutory agencies.

As part of this review, parents who were serving a custodial sentence at Eastwood Park Women's Prison and HMP Gloucester in July 2009 were consulted and their views have been taken into account when reviewing this policy. Children with parents in prison who have received support from Castle Gate Family Trust were also consulted and contributed their views and experiences.

Aims

Gloucestershire LA is committed to working in partnership with schools and other agencies to promote the positive educational outcomes for children who have a parent or significant family member in prison.

- To raise awareness of the needs of the children and young people with a parent in prison or at risk of a custodial or community sentence
- To secure the educational achievement and attendance of these children and young people
- To ensure positive outcomes for this group of children and young people in line with 'Every Child Matters,' through effective multi-agency working
- To promote social inclusion and equal opportunities of these children and young people
- To promote and share best practice in the support of these children and young people

Statutory and voluntary agency commitments to support this policy

- Gloucestershire County Council and National Offender Management Services South West (NOMS SW) will work in partnership to improve the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes for children of offenders, encourage engagement of statutory and voluntary agencies and promote integrated working to raise awareness of this group in the community.
- Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young People's Services will ask all schools to identify the designated named person with the responsibility of children

with a parent in prison, and young offenders, at the start of each academic year. For pre-school settings, primary phase, special schools, pupil referral centres and alternative provision the head teacher or manager will be presumed to be the named person unless the LA is informed otherwise

- Gloucestershire County Council will develop and maintain a webpage with the contact details of named LA staff who will provide information, advice and guidance together with associated links to partner agencies and relevant documents for professionals and families on the public website
- Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) will promote partnership working with adult services to encourage parents and carers to inform a child's school should a parent be imprisoned subject to information sharing procedures
- Gloucestershire County Council (CYPS) will promote partnerships with post -16 education providers to support young people with a parent in prison
- Gloucestershire County Council School Governor Services will promote the identification of a named governor in each school and the implementation of this policy in Gloucestershire Schools
- Gloucestershire County Council, HMP Gloucester, Castle Gate Family Trust and Gloucestershire Probation will continue to work in partnership to develop support and services for children and young people with a parent in prison locally.
Castle Gate Family Trust has secure funding for two years and can offer:
 - One to one support for children and young people, around the issue of having a parent or close relative in prison
 - Help to maintain communication and family ties via letter writing, activities and assisted visits to the prison where appropriate
 - Support for parents and signposting to additional specialised support for prisoners families
 - Information for professionals and workshops highlighting consequences of offending for young people and the effects it may have on their family
- HMP Gloucester will identify a named person to act as a point of reference for enquiries relating to parents who are prisoners in that prison and other prisons
- Gloucestershire County Council (CYPS) will promote links with prisons outside of the county
- Agencies that have contributed to this policy will be asked to continue to meet on an annual basis in order to celebrate good practice and review the policy

Good practice guidelines

- Head teachers are asked to identify a designated person to look after the interests of children and young people in their school with a parent in prison and young offenders

- School Governing Bodies are asked to nominate a governor to be responsible to support the designated person for children and young people with a parent in prison and young offenders
- When a school becomes aware of a child or young person with a parent in prison the designated named person should seek the consent of the child's parent or carer before offering any support. Information sharing should also be discussed so that the designated person is clear about who can be included in the sharing of information. Views of a parent in prison can be obtained via the named person in HMP Eastwood Park, HMP Gloucester or other prisons
- If consent is provided, the designated named person should then initiate an assessment of the child's needs (CAF or alternative) unless a Core Assessment has already been carried out by the Children and Families Team
- The designated person will then convene a multi-agency meeting to address the identified needs to provide support for the child in line with the aims of this policy. At this meeting a key worker will be identified and an individual education plan, or review, will be agreed
- If a parent does not consent to an assessment of the child's needs, schools should monitor the achievement, attendance and behaviour of the child and if the school has concerns the parents can be approached again for their consent to complete an assessment of needs taking into account current guidance on information sharing in the best interests of the child
- NOMS research indicates that Looked After Children (LAC) have poor levels of visiting parents in prison. Schools, including the Virtual School are asked to support and encourage LAC and their social workers, carers and private foster carers to visit their parent in prison.
- If the child of a parent in prison is at serious risk of exclusion from school, other interventions such as Pastoral Support Plan or Managed Move could be considered. These will be supported by the Area Education Officer for the school.
- Education Welfare has a statutory responsibility to ensure regular school attendance. They will provide advice and guidance on this matter for schools, parents/carers and other agencies. It is important that parents / carers are aware of the law around regular school attendance.
<http://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/schoolsnet/index.cfm?articleid=18492>

Monitoring

Partnership agencies that contributed to the review of this policy will be requested to maintain their support by attending annual meetings to review this policy and share good practice.