Report from the Admissions Task and Finish group – meeting held on Thursday 19th September, 1.30 p.m. at St Teresa’s R.C. Primary School.

Attendees: Mary Frain (HT St Teresa’s), Janet Dennis and Kayleigh Spalding from the Admissions Team, Penny Thompson representing housing and social care, Rachel Williams (HT St Joseph’s)

Apologies: Julie Thomas, Mark Tilling, Neil Nottingham

Aims of the group: To look at the causes of in year transfers, and try and reduce the number.

To work with other agencies, such as housing and social care, to look at the wider issues impacting on the transfers.

Current situation;

In the past academic year there were 681 transfers; 462 Primary and 219 Secondary. There were 75 managed moves, 2 of which were Primary.

325 pupils, 47.8%, were pupils coming into Hartlepool. This includes pupils who may have lived in Hartlepool before and were moving back to town.

In year transfers affects all of the Secondary schools. It does impact on all Primary Schools, but with only a small impact on schools with very few surplus places. It has a significant impact of some primary schools situated in areas where there are very transient populations and rented properties on a short lease, or hard to let properties.

Penny shared information about the housing situation. Of approximately 45,000 houses in Hartlepool, 15% are rented through the private sector and 30% through the social sector, which includes a number of different landlords. Approx 60% of all rented properties are in rent arrears, and there is an eviction rate of 4 to 5 families per week. This situation is not likely to improve, and is likely that the problem will grow. If evicted, families are then housed in short term leases in very poor quality housing as they need to live somewhere. Finding the home becomes the immediate priority, so it could well be some distance away from the current schools.

The Home Office, responsible for housing asylum seekers, have recently changed providers. This has meant a number of families moving house – the housing team have no control over this but they have checked all moves in relation to current schools and this shouldn’t mean any school transfers.

Hartlepool has one of the cheapest average rent rate in the country, and some landlords from the South are targeting Hartlepool and we have seen an influx of families who have no support networks and no previous knowledge of the town. This situation is only likely to continue, as there is no shortage of housing stock. Potentially, the number of asylum seekers in town could at least double.

The Admissions Team work hard to try and persuade parents of the importance of stability in schooling. Ultimately, however, parental preference is the overriding factor. Schools, when they know of issues, can support this process. Sometimes relationships break down. It may be that the attendance team agree with parents that a school move for a fresh start would improve attendance.

Parental perceptions of schools can be very powerful, whether true or untrue, and can take a long time to change. Popularity of schools, particularly at Secondary, can vary and the patterns can rarely be predicted.

Parental expectations of how far their child should be travelling to school can vary. There are sometimes requests to move between schools that are within half a mile of each other and where the family is living.

There are a number of children who have frequent moves between schools. In previous years this data has been collated and circulated.

Actions:

* Since GDPR, parents haven’t needed to return the transfer form to the current school. A signature box for the Headteacher has been reinstated. **The admissions team will monitor whether this has any impact in reducing in school movement this term and will report back to the Admissions Forum.**
* The group felt it could be very useful to share our figures with other authorities in the Tees Valley and work together to share any good practice. **With schools’ forum approval, working with the Admissions team, Mary to approach the appropriate officers/representatives and set up a meeting within the next six weeks.**
* It was felt that it would be very valuable for schools to hear the housing messages from Penny, either through a Headteacher briefing and/or with psas or pastoral teams. It is unlikely to reduce in year transfers, but there is scope for schools working together with housing, when consent is given, to try and support families and sign post financial help. **PT to prepare a briefing for HTs/PSAs and secure agenda time.**
* For social workers to continue to be mindful of the risk and issues of the children moving schools. **PT to do some awareness raising work with the team.**
* Health visitors working with vulnerable families to emphasise the importance of stability in schooling – **PT to do some awareness raising work.**
* **The Attendance team to be invited to join the next meeting of this group.**
* **For a representative of the SEND team to be invited to join the next meeting of this group, as sometimes transfers are requested due to a school being unable to accommodate need.**

It quickly became apparent during the meeting that are no quick or obvious solutions to this issue, and with movement into town the situation could become worse. No future meeting dates were agreed as we felt this information needed to be shared with Forum, then move forward with the first five actions before meeting as a group again. This term’s transfer information will be available at the Admissions Forum meeting on 14th November.