

Meeting of:	<b>Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Thursday, 16 September 2021</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Education Update on the Syrian Resettlement Programme
Purpose of Report:	To make Members aware of the Syrian Resettlement Programme from an education perspective at a local level.
Report Owner:	Martine Coles, Vulnerable Groups Manager
Responsible Officer:	Paula Ham, Director of Learning & Skills
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	<p>Clr Lis Burnett</p> <p>Morwen Hudson, Head of Standards and Provision</p>
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and a matter for Members consideration.
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Vale of Glamorgan (VoG), like all Local Authorities (LAs), has a longstanding obligation to ensure that all children of school age receive a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise, including those who are part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP).</li> <li>• This year the Welsh Government (WG) Minority Ethnic Achievement and Gypsy, Roma Traveller (MEAGRT) grant is again being provided to all LAs and the VoG will continue to provide and create specialised support and resources for Syrian Resettlement Programme learners.</li> <li>• The Vulnerable Groups Team has improved support for learners in the SRP over the last 12 months by providing targeted support and assistance for schools to access additional funding from the Home Office.</li> </ul>	

## **Recommendations**

1. That Members consider the progress made in the education remit of SRP in the last 12 months.
2. That Scrutiny Committee (Learning and Culture) receives a further progress update report in 12 months as to ongoing delivery, further raising awareness of the use and impact of MEAGRT funding grants for the support of SRP learners.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. The Council has legal obligations under the Education Act to ensure all learners or statutory school age receive a suitable and full time education either at school or otherwise.
2. To ensure that Members of the Scrutiny Committee continue to have oversight and awareness of ongoing expectations placed on the LA regarding SRP learners.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Syrian Resettlement Programme is part of the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme operated by the Home Office. The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was launched in January 2014 and has helped those in greatest need, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk.
- 1.2 The then Prime Minister announced on 7 September 2015 that the scheme would be expanded to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection by 2020, making it the largest resettlement scheme in Europe. In July 2017, the Home Office took the decision to extend the scope of the scheme to include refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria but do not have Syrian nationality.
- 1.3 Under the VPRS, the Home Office identified vulnerable refugees who have fled Syria, who were deemed in need of resettlement and whose needs could only be met in other countries such as the UK. The scheme aims to provide refuge for vulnerable refugees by offering a direct safe and legal route to the UK.
- 1.4 Local authorities and community sponsor groups have played a vital role in helping those who have arrived here to settle into a new life in the UK.
- 1.5 For the purpose of this report, the programme will be referred to as the Syrian Resettlement Programme, as it is part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The families identify themselves as being part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP).
- 1.6 Since the start of the SRP in April 2016, the Vale has welcomed 15 families in total: 11 families with children of school age and four families with children under school age.
- 1.7 One family with three children has been resettled under the Community Sponsorship Programme called Croeso Penarth. The VGT are also liaising with the

SRP Resettlement Coordinator and Croeso Cowbridge in relation to a new family in 2021 due to arrive in Autumn 2021.

- 1.8** The Vulnerable Groups Team (VGT) collaborate with local authority officers, schools, families, and Community Sponsorship Groups to ensure all children in the SRP and new Global Resettlement programme can access a curriculum that meets their individual needs.
- 1.9** The VGT identify effective school-based provision for learners from the SRP and consults with schools and partners to engage families and other stakeholders. In partnership with the admissions team, the VGT supports learners in accessing school places following their entry into the UK.
- 1.10** On arrival, the learners endeavour to adjust to the new schools in challenging circumstances. To facilitate this, the VGT liaises with class teachers and other school staff to discuss on-going academic, social, and emotional support to meet the needs of each pupil, along with their families and agree a way forward.
- 1.11** The VGT supports schools to apply for Home Office funding to employ Arabic speaking Grade 5 Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). These school based LSAs and the VGT funded from the MEAGRT, provide support for the learners in the schools and liaise between home and school. The LSAs and the VGT have developed excellent relationships with the children, their families and school-based staff. These relationships facilitate schools' and parents' communication to ascertain the changing needs of the children and how these can be met. These home school relationships were consolidated during the past year as the LSAs and the VGT provided targeted support for the learners in the SRP.
- 1.12** The VGT provide a central and key point of contact between the schools and home, especially when there is no additional Home Office Funding to support the SRP learners. This home school liaison has been pivotal in ensuring the families from the SRP were able to support their children with home learning during lockdown. The VGT were able to allay the families' fears in enabling these groups of learners to access the hub school places offered. The team provided regular contact with families from the SRP during lockdown to ensure academic, social and emotional support was in place for the children, and to continue to develop the positive relationships already established with these families, especially as many of these parents felt isolated.
- 1.13** The team make every effort to move the children towards a level of social and emotional independence, assisting with friendship difficulties, discussing cultural norms and rewards and consequences where appropriate. The targeted support involved upskilling the parents in online learning, such as video lessons on using online platforms and online reading resources.
- 1.14** In January 2020, the VGT trialled the use of 'Giglets', an award-winning online literacy platform supporting schools with multilingual literacy and language. This online resource was funded through the MEAGRT and piloted in Spring and Summer 2020. The team included parents in the online literacy lessons to support their children's learning, which they reported also helped improve their own English language skills. During lockdown, this online resource became an

essential tool for supporting and maintaining reading skills with learners from the SRP. The schools and the VGT were able to allocate online books to learners of all ages and abilities to provide relevant and appropriate opportunities to them at a time when they were unable to access structured reading materials.

- 1.15** Schools use 'Giglets' to support vulnerable learners and focus on interventions for EAL learners as a homework tool and for sharing texts used within the classroom. Schools received this online resource and training in how to implement this resource with learners and their families. The online resource strengthened home school links and was welcomed by families as the resources were bilingual, allowing their home language of Arabic to support reading. Many 'Giglets' books look at families having to move from a country to seek safety, sanctuary, and hope in another country. The books provide opportunity to discuss different cultures, and consider empathy, understanding and acceptance.
- 1.16** Targeted learners from the Syrian Resettlement Programme in the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 have been directly supported by the VGT. This support has involved extensive literacy, including English language interventions (reading via WhatsApp, FaceTime and 'Giglets' online literacy resource) during Covid 19 restrictions to ensure the continued literacy progress of the learners.
- 1.17** All targeted learners from the Syrian Resettlement Programme retained their National Curriculum levels and reading levels to those prior to the Covid 19 restrictions. The acquisition of English language improved for all targeted SRP learners within the New to English competency stage. Targeted learners from the SRP in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 received continued support during Covid 19 restrictions, directly and in real time via Google classroom. All targeted SRP learners in KS3 and KS4 improved their reading accuracy and comprehension age by at least 12 months (baseline YARC assessments September 2019 and re-assessed September 2020).
- 1.18** Two SRP learners in Year 10 have achieved GCSE outcomes in 2020. One learner, who has been in school in the UK for just over 18 months achieved GCSE grade D in English literature and grade C in numeracy, and the other learner who has been in school for almost 5 years, achieved GCSE grade D in English literature and grade E in numeracy. In 2019-2020, there was one SRP learner in Year 12. The learner was in school in the UK for just under 3 years and achieved AS grade C in psychology, grade D in biology, grade C in textiles and grade E in chemistry which allowed the learner to progress to Year 13.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** The VGT and schools have been able to meet the children's learning needs with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The schools and the VGT have finite resources which have been utilised to best effect thus far.
- 2.2** However, the learners present with a range of additional educational, emotional, and social needs as a result of their experiences prior to arriving in the UK. These additional needs become more evident from their second year onwards and cannot be met under the current funding arrangements.

- 2.3 To support the need for additional resources, the VGT liaises regularly with the Regional Resettlement Co-ordinator and has supported two schools to submit a funding bid to the Home Office for 'Exceptional Cases' Fund for Syrian pupils. St Cyres Comprehensive School was successful in accessing this funding to support learners' additional needs. Holton Primary School is awaiting a response due to the current demands on the Home Office.
- 2.4 It has been challenging to source appropriate, specialist, social and emotional support for the learners and their families. This identified gap in provision has been highlighted to the Home Office as there is a need for a national solution for the SRP to have long term success.
- 2.5 Using parents as a resource to build capacity can enable meaningful integration. A suggestion to build capacity in terms of support for the learners and the families currently being explored is for parents to volunteer, however the current barrier to this is in relation to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) process.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1 The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. Therefore, under the 2015 Act, the team collaborate with other stakeholders to ensure that SRP learners continue to be engaged with education, employment or training.
- 3.2 The Vulnerable Groups Team operate alongside Health and Careers Wales to ensure all SRP learners can access health and careers support and services.
- 3.3 The learners receive the universal offer from schools in terms of social emotional support using SELFIE and Trauma Informed Practice.
- 3.4 The team assists SRP learners with the need to support learning, employment, and sustainable economic growth.
- 3.5 The remit of the LA with SRP learners is to enable the raising of overall standards of achievement for all learners, whether they are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background or not.
- 3.6 The team seeks to collaborate with SRP stakeholders as well as a range of professional partners to raise achievement for the learners, enabling them to access all to which they are entitled.

### **4. Resources and Legal Considerations**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 The Vulnerable Groups Team is funded via the Welsh Government's "Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners grant" of £365,018 which forms part of the WG Local Authority Education Grant.

- 4.2** Welsh Government is unable to provide certainty over the future funding of this grant resulting in annual concern over the funding of costs, including staff salaries, whilst the Council awaits the annual award of funding, which was received this year in June 2021. As a result, the majority of staff have been on temporary contracts in the long term.

**Employment**

- 4.3** The SRP learners are support by the VGT.
- 4.4** There are currently two school-based Grade 5 LSAs funded from the Home Office.

**Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 4.5** The families will have to apply for settled status after they have been in the UK for five years.

**5. Background Papers**

No background papers