
Meeting: Schools Forum
Date: 19 September 2011
Subject: Virtual School
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Summary: To request that the Schools Forum agrees to additional funding for the Virtual School to cover the work supporting vulnerable learners.

Contact Officer: Sylvia Gibson, Head of Learning
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Reason for urgency (if appropriate): Risks noted below

RECOMMENDATION:

To agree the allocation of £95,000 from the unallocated DSG to meet the shortfall in the budget for the Virtual School.

Background

1. The Virtual School has responsibility for raising the attainment of children and young people looked after and for ensuring that vulnerable children and young people make progress. The focus of the Virtual School is to:
 - a. monitor the educational progress of all children in care who are being educated within Central Bedfordshire regardless of setting as if they were attending a single school;
 - b. monitor the educational progress of Central Bedfordshire pupils placed out of area;
 - c. support schools with the development of Personal Education Plans;
 - d. analyse all available data and identify priorities for improvement, both at individual pupil and cohort level, for other vulnerable groups;
 - e. work with headteachers, teachers and designated teachers to raise achievement.

2. The Virtual School team delivers the statutory responsibilities for looked after children and has expanded its remit to work with schools to reduce the gaps in performance between different groups of learners. These groups include pupils eligible for free school meals, children from service families, pupils learning English as an additional language, pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, pupils with special educational needs and pupils whose behaviour and/or attendance is causing concern.
3. The Virtual School team ensures that the needs of vulnerable pupils are known, understood and met using the most appropriate resources, including the expertise already in schools, school to school support and access to appropriate teaching and learning resources. A specific focus for the team is identifying the ways in which low achievement can be addressed, including through the effective use of data to raise standards and improve educational outcomes for vulnerable groups.

Funding for the Virtual School

4. The ending of both the Area Based Grant and the Standards Fund has left a pressure in the budget to staff the Virtual School. This poses a risk to support for vulnerable children and young people.
5. The summary of the current situation is:

Total DSG allocated to the Virtual School	£233,472
Pressure	£ 95,000

Link to Priorities

6. This report supports Priority 2 of Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2009/11:
 - Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

It also supports the following priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan:

- Priority 1: Transforming teaching and learning and raising achievement for all learners including underachieving groups and children in vulnerable circumstances;

Priority 2: Protecting Children and Keeping Them Safe.

Recommendation

7. Schools Forum is asked to mitigate the impact of the removal of external grant funding by agreeing to allocate the shortfall of £95,000 to the Virtual School from the unallocated DSG.