

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 22 April 2013

Subject: Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

Report of: Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services

Summary: This report provides information on the role of the Virtual School and the outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2011/2012. It also identifies the steps taken since September 2012 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Paul Harpin, School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The report supports Priority 2 of the Central Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan: Educating, Protecting and Providing opportunities for Children and Young People. The report also supports Priority 1 of the Children and young People's Plan: Helping children and young people achieve more and transforming our relationship with schools.

The report supports Central Bedfordshire's Medium Term Plan: Delivering your priorities – Our Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012-2016 and the specific priority of Improved Educational Attainment.

Financial:

1. The Virtual School is fully funded through the Direct School Grant (DSG).

Legal:

2. The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. In Central Bedfordshire, this duty is delivered through the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children.
3. The governing bodies of all maintained schools are required under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 to appoint a Designated Teacher to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children who are on the school roll.

Risk Management:

4. The Virtual School ensures that it knows which children are looked after and that there is a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place for each Looked After Child. The Virtual School monitors the attendance and progress of Central Bedfordshire's Looked After Children, in Central Bedfordshire schools.

Staffing (including Trade Unions)

5. Not applicable.

Equalities / Human Rights

6. Not applicable.

Public Health

7. Not applicable.

Community Safety

8. Not applicable.

Sustainability

9. Not applicable.

Procurement

10. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:**That the Corporate Parenting Panel:**

1. **considers and comments on the Virtual School report for the academic year 2011/12;**
2. **agrees to receive an interim report on standards achieved at the Virtual School in October each year and will continue to receive the annual report each March.**

The Virtual School

11. Councils work in a variety of ways to drive forward improvements in the educational achievements of the children they look after. In Central Bedfordshire this is managed through the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children.

12. The Virtual School exists first and foremost to ensure each looked after child achieves optimum educational outcomes at each stage of his or her schooling. In order to achieve this the Virtual School:
 - (a) ensures that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of Looked After Children;
 - (b) ensures that each Looked After Child has a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP);
 - (c) works with schools to improve overall attainment of Looked After Children by maximising the achievement and progress of individual children;
 - (d) works with social workers to improve access and attainment of Looked After Children;
 - (e) supports Looked After Children who are educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire Council boundaries.
13. This Annual Report contains the validated educational outcomes for Looked After Children for the academic year 2011-2012. It is proposed that in future the annual report comes to the Corporate Parenting Panel after February each year to ensure that all data has been collected from schools and validated, and that comparative data is available.

Background

14. The Virtual School for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire was established in September 2009. It has pupils on roll who are in the care of Central Bedfordshire Council and who are being educated in Central Bedfordshire schools or in schools in other authorities. In addition, the Virtual School has pupils on its roll who are living within Central Bedfordshire and who attend Central Bedfordshire schools, but who are in the care of other councils. The total number of Central Bedfordshire pupils of statutory school age who were part of the Virtual School at any point over the academic year 2011/2012 was 197. This number includes pupils who may have come in and out of care across the year.
15. There is a statutory requirement to monitor the progress of all children who are looked after and to ensure that each Looked After Child has a PEP. The PEP for a Looked After Child is the main means by which the Virtual School and designated teachers in school monitor the educational attainment and progress of every Looked After Child. The PEP records children's' previous educational experiences and attainment as well as setting targets for future achievement. The nominated social worker is responsible for instigating the writing of the PEP with the designated teacher. Completed PEPs are held in the Virtual School.
16. Staff in the Virtual School liaise with Designated Teachers to support schools in setting appropriate, measurable targets for progress. There is a quality assurance checklist for all new PEPs which ensures that they are of a consistently high standard. PEPs are reviewed at least every six months. Appropriate challenge and support is provided where there are issues and when a child falls behind his or her target trajectory.

17. In April 2011 the Government introduced the Pupil Premium. This is paid to schools for all Looked After Children who have been in care for six months or more. The amount allocated per child for 2011-12 was £488. Through PEP reviews, schools are challenged to identify the impact of Pupil Premium funding on the achievements of Looked After Children. Amendments to the PEP now include a question on how the school uses the Pupil Premium for eligible children to enable the Virtual School to track its use. The impact of the Pupil Premium on the progress and outcomes of Looked After Children is now also a core focus for inspection within the new Ofsted Framework.
18. During the 2011-12 academic year, progress and attendance information was collected on a termly basis from Designated Teachers on all Looked After Children. This has been improved in 2012-13 as explained in paragraphs 24-25 below.

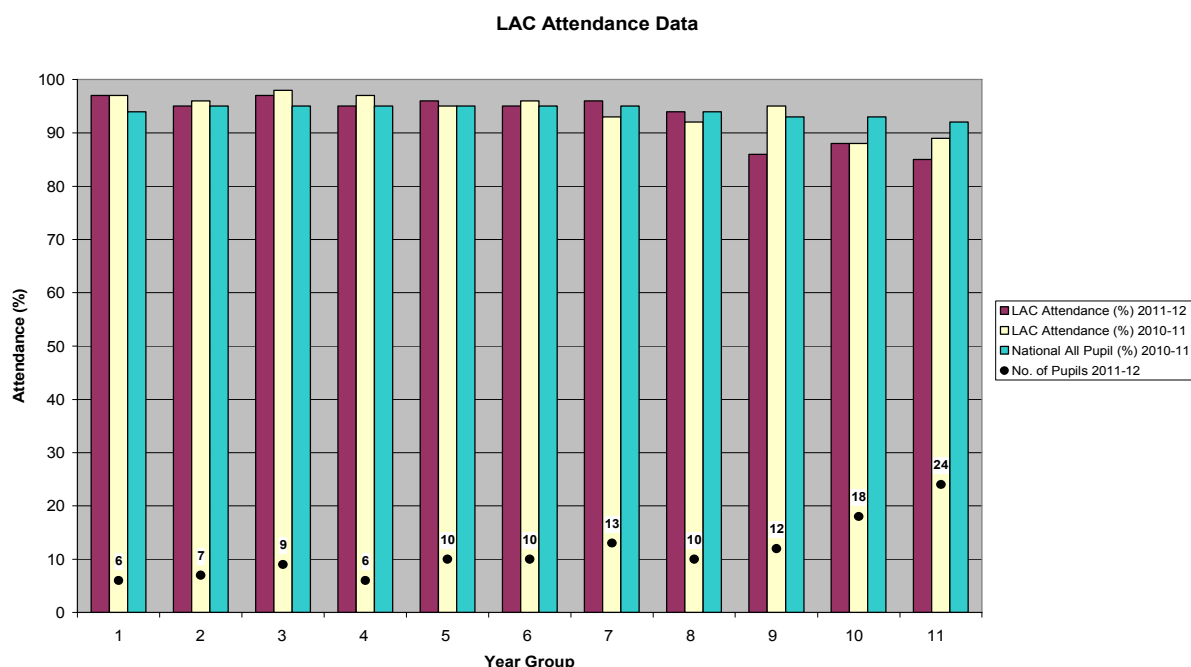
Exclusions

19. In 2011-12 there were a total of 58.5 days lost as a result of fixed term exclusion of Looked After Children from schools and this related to twenty different pupils. There was one permanent exclusion where alternative provision was set up as a suitable alternative.
20. The Virtual School works with the Inclusions Officer who provides advice on exclusions in order to support schools in recognising the impact of exclusion on a Looked After Child, and to help schools to uphold the Council's policy that Looked After Children are not permanently excluded.

Attendance

21. Attendance data for five of the six half terms for the 2011-12 academic year, validated in January 2013, is shown in Table 1 below. It is important to note that these figures reflect small cohorts of pupils and as a result the attendance of each individual child has a significant impact on the overall averages. Table 1 indicates that Central Bedfordshire was in line with or above the national average attendance for all pupils for 2010 in year groups 1-8, and below the national average in year groups 9, 10 and 11. In Year 9 one pupil's attendance was only 44% and another was 69% and these two pupils affected the overall results adversely within the context of a small cohort. In Year 10 the overall results were influenced adversely by two pupils whose attendance was 40% and 57% respectively. In Year 11 five pupils' attendance was below 90% and this again affected the overall average attendance in an adverse way. The steps that the Virtual School is taking to improve attendance are set out in paragraphs 24 and 25 below.

Table 1 Attendance figures for Looked After Children by year group: CBC v National averages.



.Year Group	No of Pupils	CBC LAC Attendance 2011-12	CBC LAC Attendance 2010-11	National All Pupils 2010-11
1	6	97%	97%	94%
2	7	95%	96%	95%
3	9	97%	98%	95%
4	6	95%	97%	95%
5	10	96%	95%	95%
6	10	95%	96%	95%
7	13	96%	93%	95%
8	10	94%	92%	94%
9	12	86%	95%	93%
10	18	88%	88%	93%
11	24	85%	89%	92%
Total	125	93%	93%	94%

22. Attendance tends to be low where pupils have moved placement or have spent some time waiting for a school place in other authorities, or where they have had periods on part-time timetables.
23. In order to counter this, Care Planning Guidance and Regulations (2010) suggest that unless it is an emergency, students in Key Stage 4 should not move care placement unless a school placement is available.

24. As a result the Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.

Pupil Achievement

25. Key Stage 1 results

- (a) Key Stage 1 Whole School Cohort Results at Level 2 and above. There were six pupils in this small cohort, and they all attended Central Bedfordshire schools. Two pupils (33%) achieved level 3 in English and mathematics, which is above age related expectations. Two pupils (33%) achieved L2 in English and mathematics in line with national expectations and two pupils (33%) achieved L1. Both were in mainstream schools.
- (b) The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2012 shows that at the end of Key Stage 1 67% achieved L2 and above in reading, 57% in writing and 71% achieved the expected level in mathematics. Given the very small cohort of KS1pupils in Central Bedfordshire during 2011-12 it would not be appropriate to draw any conclusions in comparing results with national averages, but two of the six pupils achieved in line with national outcomes and two exceeded them.

26. Key Stage 2 Results

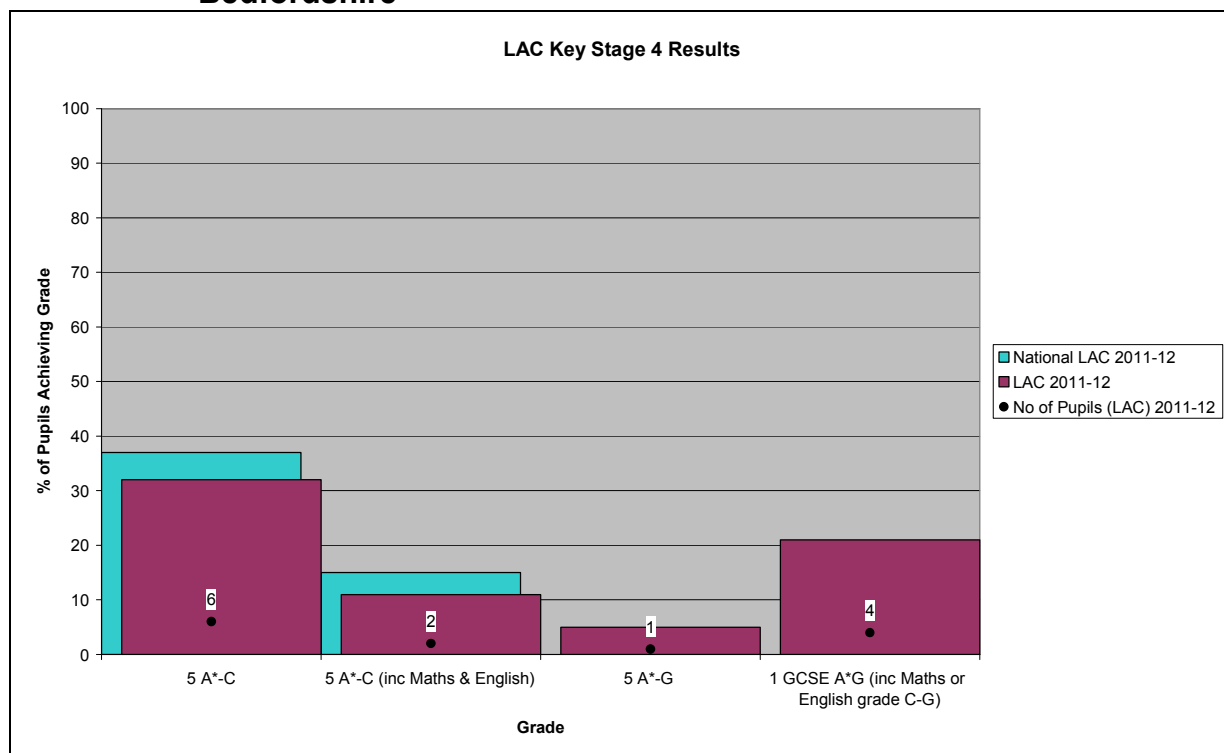
- (a) There were ten pupils in the cohort with six attending Central Bedfordshire schools and four out of authority schools. Overall six pupils (60%) achieved level 4 in English and mathematics, one pupil (10%) achieved level 3 in English and maths whilst three pupils (30%) achieved L2.
- (b) The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2012 shows that at the end of Key Stage 2, 50% achieved L4+ in English and mathematics. The small Central Bedfordshire cohort exceeded these national age related expectations and standards.

27. Key Stage 4:

- (a) Of the nineteen children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2012 who took GCSEs, six students (32%) achieved 5 A*-C. This was below the national figure of 37%.

- (b) Two Central Bedfordshire students (8%) achieved at least 5 A*-C grades including English and Mathematics. This was below the national figure of 15% for children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March, 2012. One student (4%) achieved 5 A*-G passes whilst four students (16%) achieved one GCSE graded between A*-G with either English or Maths grade C-G. Those students who did not achieve well at GCSE have now accessed a range of vocational courses or apprenticeship options including child care, plumbing, beauty, health and social care.

Chart 2 2012 GCSE result for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire



Actions taken in 2012/13 and Next Steps

28. Virtual School staff continue to work with designated teachers, social workers and independent reviewing officers to drive up standards for Looked After Children.
29. In September 2012 the School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead took on the responsibility for the Virtual School. The roles and responsibilities of the Virtual School staff were reviewed and amended to reflect a more strategic role which is resulting in schools relying less upon direct external support for Looked After pupils and being enabled to provide that support themselves.
30. From September 2012 the Virtual School bought into 'Welfare Call', an organisation used by many Virtual Schools to gather attendance and progress data for Looked After Children.

31. Attendance data is now collected on a daily basis and immediate actions are taken when required in order to improve attendance for individual pupils. This system enables the Virtual School to generate data which can be regularly interrogated and shared, and appropriate actions identified to support pupils. Comparisons are now possible between Looked After pupils in Central Bedfordshire schools and those in out of authority schools, which was an action identified in the last inspection.
32. Welfare Call has also collected pupil achievement data since December 2012 on to enable Virtual School team to analyse progress on a termly basis. End of Key Stage data will also be collected by Welfare Call during the second half of the Summer Term allowing a much earlier evaluation of pupils' achievements against national outcomes.
33. This new data will inform the Virtual School report for 2012/2013
34. The Council is currently investigating models of governance for Virtual Schools which will support the further development of the Virtual School in 2013 and ensure that it is cognisant of recent Department for Education best practice guidance.
35. The Service Lead has developed stronger links across agencies, and with Virtual School leads across the country in order to identify best practice that can be implemented in Central Bedfordshire.

CONCLUSIONS

36. In order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children the priorities of the Virtual School will be:
 - (a) to ensure that Looked After Children attend school well, in line with their peers.
 - (b) to ensure that Looked After Children are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas
 - (c) to strengthen the school's abilities to meet the needs of Looked After Children
 - (d) to further improve the quality of PEPs
 - (e) to ensure that schools intervene promptly and effectively if a Looked After Child falls behind their target trajectory.
 - (f) To develop a methodology to evaluate the impact of its own activities.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: None

Location of papers: N/A