

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 7 October 2013
Subject: Interim 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 2012/13. 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, and sets out the next stages of its development.

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 two of the priorities in Central Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan: 'Improve educational attainment' and 'protect the vulnerable', and also Central Bedfordshire's Medium Term Plan: Delivering your priorities – Our Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012-2016 within the specific priority of Improved Educational Attainment.

Financial:

1. The Virtual School is fully funded through the Dedicated 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 in partnership with schools and other services.
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 and those living and accessing education in other Council areas.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel considers this report and comment on the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children in the future.

The Virtual School

5. Councils work in a number 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.
6. The Virtual School must ensure that 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 regularly track and monitor the attendance, 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 challenging schools to improve the achievement and progress of individual children through good use of their resources;
 - (d) works with social workers to improve attendance, attainment and progress of Looked After Children;
 - (e) ensures Looked After Children who are educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire Council receive the right support to achieve the best educational outcomes
7. This Interim Report contains the provisional educational outcomes for Looked After Children for the academic year 2012/13 which are, as yet, not validated. This approach was agreed by Corporate Parenting Panel in March 2013. The annual report which comes to the Corporate Parenting Panel in March will include all data which has been collected from schools and validated, and will include comparative data with other Councils.

Background

8. 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 2012/2013 was 170. This number includes pupils who may have come in and out of care across the year.
9. 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 Personal Education Plan (PEP). The PEP for a Looked After Child is the main means by which the Virtual School, social workers 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 by the Virtual School.
10. Staff in the Virtual School liaise with Designated Teachers to ensure schools have high aspirations for their looked after children and 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 is not making at least expected progress.
11. 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 2012/13 was £623 and for April 2013/14 it was increased to £900. It will increase again in April 2014. 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 of schools within the new Ofsted Framework. The Virtual School is collating examples of good practice through its Governing Body.

12. In September 2012 as a consequence of a service restructure and in order to focus the Virtual School on improving standards, 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 take responsibility for attainment and progress of Looked After Children themselves. This is currently achieved through analysing data and providing challenge to schools, and the providing advice over the telephone or face to face and through attendance at PEP reviews twice a year. The role of the Virtual School Head teacher is being made statutory in the Children and Families Bill 2013.

Exclusions

13. In the Academic Year 2012/13 there were a total of 132 days lost as a result of fixed term exclusions of Looked After Children from schools and this related to 18 different pupils. This compares to 141.5 days lost in 2011/12 relating to 20 Looked After Children. There was 1 permanent exclusion during 2012/13 as there was in 2011/12. Whenever there is the threat of a permanent exclusion the Virtual School will contact the school to explore all the options available including a change of placement. Schools are actively discouraged from permanently excluding Looked After Child, and all other options are explored. Fixed terms exclusions will be addressed as a priority in this academic year as every day of education lost to fixed term exclusion will impact negatively on outcomes.
14. 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.

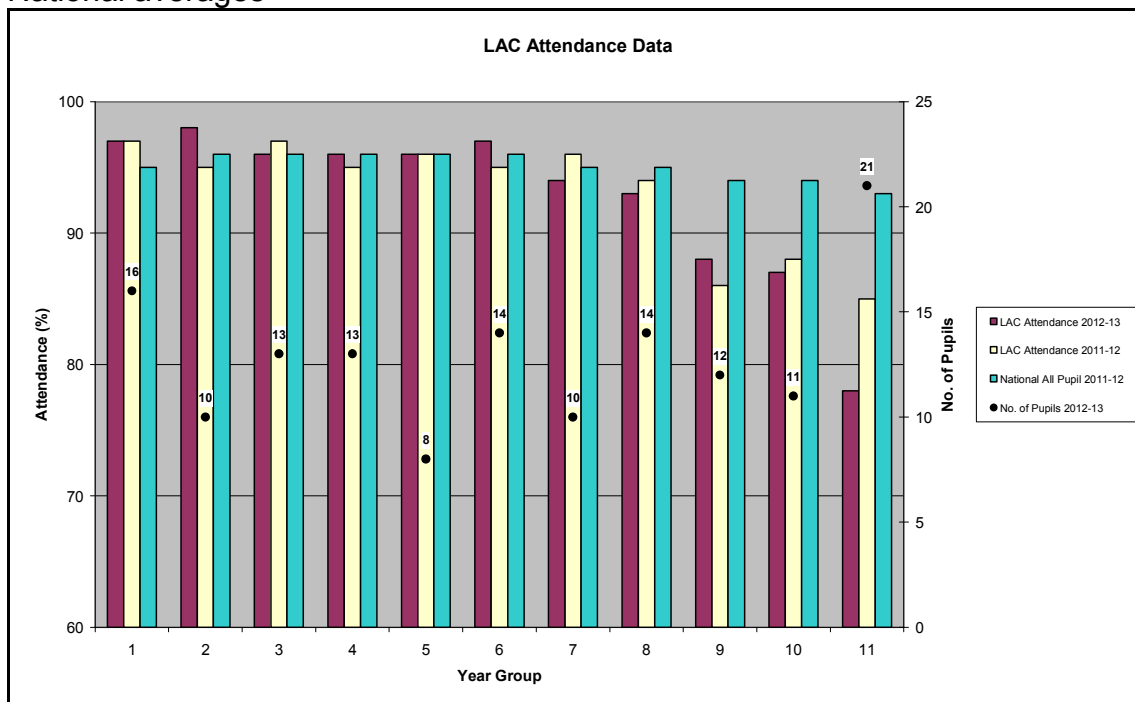
Attendance

15. Until October 2012 attendance information was collected retrospectively on a termly basis from Designated Teachers on all Looked After Children. This process had meant the Council was unable to follow up absences until it was too late to take action to improve attendance. Since October 2012 'Welfare Call' has been commissioned to collect attendance data on a daily basis, and any concerns regarding unauthorised absences are discussed on the same day as the absence occurs with carers, social workers and the Virtual School.
16. This system enables the Virtual School to generate attendance data which can be regularly interrogated and shared, and appropriate actions identified immediately to support pupils' improved attendance.
17. Attendance data for the 2012/13 academic year 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 child has a significant impact on the overall averages.

18. Table 1 indicates that Central Bedfordshire pupils' attendance in 2012/13 was broadly in line with or above the national average attendance for all pupils for 2011/12 (national data not available until February 2014) in year groups 1-6, but below the national average in year groups 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. The gap is particularly significant in years 9, 10 and 11.
19. In year 9, 1 pupil's attendance was only 48% and this impacted adversely on the overall average within a small cohort. This pupil was newly looked after, and it took time to identify the most appropriate placement for him, which impacted on his attendance. Since then his attendance has improved and is regularly monitored.
20. In year 10 the overall results were influenced adversely by 1 pupil whose attendance was 45%. This pupil has challenging behaviour, but the designated teacher at the school has taken a range of appropriate approaches to support him and is working well with the Virtual School and foster carers to ensure an individualised curriculum is in place and short term targets are set that will support improved attendance.
21. In year 11 there were 5 pupils whose attendance varied between 25% and 56% and this affected the overall average adversely. All of these pupils had significantly challenging behaviour, and the Virtual School has worked alongside carers, social workers and school staff to improve attendance. Improving attendance has been the core focus of the PEP reviews. One pupil had home tutoring to support her particular needs while a new placement was identified. Due to this support this pupil achieved a GCSE in English.
22. Table 1 Attendance figures for Looked After Children by year group: CBC (2012/13) v National averages (2011/12).

.Year Group	No of Pupils	CBC LAC Attendance 2012-13	CBC LAC Attendance 2011-12	National All Pupils 2011-12
1	16	97%	97%	95%
2	10	98%	95%	96%
3	13	96%	97%	96%
4	13	96%	95%	96%
5	8	96%	96%	96%
6	14	97%	95%	96%
7	10	94%	96%	95%
8	14	93%	94%	95%
9	12	88%	86%	94%
10	11	87%	88%	94%
11	21	78%	85%	93%
Total	142	93%	93%	95%

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



23. Attendance can 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. The Virtual School works with other professionals to ensure full attendance is in place. Part time timetables are only approved if they are in the best interests of the child and are for a short period and kept under regular review. In the past year 1 pupil in year 9, 3 pupils in year 10 and 4 pupils in year 11 have had part time timetables for limited periods of time.
24. 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. 3 KS4 pupils moved placement during 2012/13.
25. The Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.
26. All individual pupils' attendance records are tracked and actions identified at PEP reviews and more frequently when required to ensure that there is improved attendance for each of them. A focus for 2013/2014 is to ensure that part time timetables are fully supplemented with appropriate full time education opportunities to maximise outcomes. The Virtual School will also focus on ensuring that if a looked after child is fixed term excluded, alternative provision is in place on the first day of this exclusion.

Pupils' Achievement

27. Welfare Call has been commissioned to collect pupil achievement data since December 2012 to enable the Virtual School team to analyse standards and progress on a termly basis. This element of the commission is not yet being delivered as it should be to support planning for challenge and support. The Virtual School Lead is working with the company to address this. This element of the commission is being reviewed.

Key Stage 1 results

28. a There were 9 pupils in this cohort with eight pupils attending Central Bedfordshire schools and 1 an out of authority school. 4 pupils (44%) achieved L2+ in English and 5 pupils (55%) achieved L2+ in mathematics, which is in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 1. 1 pupil (11%) achieved L2+ in reading and mathematics but L1 in writing, so improving writing is the focus for this pupil. 3 pupils achieved L1 in all areas, of which one pupil was newly looked after. All of these pupils made progress in line with their targets, and monitoring this has been a key feature of their PEP review. 1 pupil in a Special School made appropriate progress within P levels.
- 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% of pupils achieved L2 and above in reading, 57% in writing and 71% achieved the expected level in mathematics. Given the very small cohort of KS1 pupils in Central Bedfordshire it would not be appropriate to draw any conclusions in comparing results with national averages, but the Virtual School ensures that each pupil has the right support in place to maximise their progress. This is monitored.

Key Stage 2 provisional outcomes

29. a There were 12 pupils in the cohort with 10 attending Central Bedfordshire schools and 2 in out of authority schools. Overall 8 pupils (66%) achieved level 4+ in English and 7 pupils (58%) achieved L4 in mathematics. These pupils are on track to achieve 5A*-Cs at GCSE, including English and maths and their progress will be tracked. They should then progress to A levels and on to higher education. 3 pupils (25%) achieved L2 or L3 in English, and 4 pupils (33%) achieved L2 or L3 in mathematics. These pupils made at least expected levels of progress from the end of KS1, and one of them made better than expected progress, having been assessed as achieving within the P levels at the end of KS1. Monitoring of their progress has been a key feature of their PEP reviews. The remaining pupil, educated in a Special School, made appropriate progress within the P levels. Designated Teachers have tracked progress from the end of Key Stage 1 and they have been encouraged to ensure that Pupil Premium is used to support these pupils effectively this year so that their individual needs are met and they can demonstrate the impact of the Pupil Premium.

- 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. However, it is important to track each individual pupil's progress.

Key Stage 4 provisional outcomes:

30. In 2012/2013 there were 21 pupils in Year 11 with 5 educated in Central Bedfordshire mainstream schools, 2 being home tutored at the time of the GCSE examinations and 2 who attended the Central Bedfordshire Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The remaining 12 pupils were educated Out Of Authority (OOA) schools, and of this group 4 were educated in mainstream schools.
31. 5 A*-C:
- 1 pupil educated in a Central Bedfordshire Upper School achieved 5 A* - C including English and maths and a second pupil educated OOA achieved five A* - C. These 2 pupils represented 10% of the overall cohort.
32. 5 A* - G:
- 2 pupils (10%) achieved 5 A* - G with 1 attending a Central Bedfordshire Upper School and 1 educated OOA.
33. GCSE Candidates:
- 6 pupils were entered for GCSE examinations with 3 of them educated OOA. 2 pupils within this group gained 1 GCSE each. Of the remaining 4 pupils, 2 attended OOA Special Schools and 2 attended the Central Bedfordshire Pupil Referral Unit. The 2 Central Bedfordshire pupils who attended the PRU were subject to 15 fixed term exclusions during the year totalling 27 days. They were the only Year 11 pupils to be excluded during the year. The PRU closed at the end of the academic year 2013.
34. Pupils not entered for GCSE.
- 11 pupils (52%) were not entered for GCSE. Three of these pupils attended Central Bedfordshire Special Schools and five attended Special Schools / alternative provision OOA and were following an alternative appropriate curriculum for them.
35. Those pupils with poor attendance in Year 11 did not achieve well academically with only one of them gaining one pass at GCSE. Analysis of this data identifies a clear priority for 2013/14 to ensure that looked after children if fixed term excluded receive an appropriate full time education provision from the first day of the exclusion and do attend school. This will be a priority within the Virtual School Improvement Plan.

Governance

36. The Council has investigated models of governance for Virtual Schools which will support the further development of the Virtual School in 2013/14 and ensure that it is cognisant of recent Department for Education best practice guidance.
37. The Governing Body has been constituted and met for the first time in July 2013. Its key role is to provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to the Virtual School head teacher, and to schools. It will evaluate the impact of actions within the improvement plan, and will ensure that appropriate actions are included in the plan to address the key priorities identified from the data. It is chaired by a head teacher, and has representatives from all phases of school, plus representatives from social care and health, a foster care representative and a Councillor.
38. There are now 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. The leadership of the Virtual School has been reviewed for 2013/2014 in the light of the Children and Families Bill 2013 so that the leadership has a single focus on ensuring the improvement of outcomes for Looked After children.

Priority Actions for 2013/14

39. In order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children the priorities of the Virtual School will be jointly identified with the Head of Service for Looked After Children and set out within a Virtual School Improvement Plan which will be agreed with the Governing Body, and will focus on:
 - a ensuring that Looked After Children attend school well, in line with their peers. This will be achieved through:
 - the systematic monitoring of attendance data provided by Welfare Call for each pupil, with actions identified to support improved attendance.
 - challenge to schools and foster carers directly and through the evaluation of PEP reviews.
 - providing schools with clear guidance on alternatives to fixed term exclusions and part time timetables, and evaluating the impact of that;
 - supporting all key transition points in the child's education.
 - b ensuring that Looked After Children are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas.
 - c strengthening the school's abilities to meet the needs of Looked After Children. This will be achieved through:
 - the challenge provided by Virtual School staff at PEP reviews;
 - the challenge provided through the Virtual School Head teacher and the Governing Body;
 - analysis of the impact of schools use of Pupil Premium;
 - targeted CPD and annual training which focuses upon maximising pupils' achievements.

- d further improving the quality of PEPs by
 - quality assuring all PEPs (Virtual School staff);
 - sharing good practice through subsequent PEP reviews, CBTSP good practice website and annual training.

- e ensuring that schools intervene promptly and effectively if a Looked After Child falls behind their target trajectory by:
 - challenging the designated teacher regarding use of Pupil Premium and other funding to ensure that each pupil is keeping up with or exceeding their expected level of progress;
 - keeping a Virtual School database that monitors each looked after child's progress and ensures intervention if a child is falling behind their expected rate of progress

- f Ensuring robust monitoring and tracking of all 16-21 (or25) year old young people, and making sure they access further education, training and employment and are in suitable accommodation by contributing to the Support for Success Panel.

- g embedding the role of the governing body, providing appropriate levels of challenge and support.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None