

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 24 March 2014
Subject: 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 impact of the steps taken since September 2013 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: Jackie Edwards Interim Virtual School Head Teacher
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. The lead of the Virtual School will become a statutory post when the current Children and Families Bill receives Royal assent (advised by DfE to be June 2014).
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.
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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, the progress made to date, and comments on the actions identified and being implemented within the revised Development Plan (attached as Appendix A) to improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

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, monitor and challenge 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 the right resources and interventions;
 - (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 report includes the validated educational outcomes for Looked After Children for the academic year 2012/13 (attached as Appendix B), as well as the impact of actions identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children. Comparative data on outcomes is restricted and so not available due to small numbers. However it is evident that Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children have not made appropriate progress, and the gap between them and other pupils is too wide. Therefore a range of actions have been identified to ensure that every looked after child makes the most progress possible.

Background

8. The Virtual School 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. At March 2014 the total number of Central Bedfordshire pupils of statutory school age who are part of the Virtual School is 171 (Reception to Year 11). This does not include 15 Y12 and Y13 students who attend school/college who choose to continue with the PEP and are supported by the Virtual School. A further 40 Y12/13 students choose not to engage in the PEP process as is their right.
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 records children's' previous educational experiences and attainment as well as setting targets for future achievement. The nominated social worker and the designated teacher are responsible for instigating the writing of the PEP. Completed PEPs are held by the Virtual School. Currently PEPs are taking place termly where appropriate to enable the Virtual School to closely monitor academic progress so that support and challenge can be offered regarding pupils making expected or better than expected progress. There is a quality assurance checklist for all new PEPs which helps ensure that they are of a consistently high standard.
10. After consultation with schools and other services it was agreed that the PEP would be revised and piloted in the summer term 2014 with the launch of a new rolling PEP from September 2014. This will align closely with the system and information collected in Framework I. The Virtual School Educational Advisers are now taking a more proactive role in managing this new documentation to bring about more rigour and consistency to the process.
11. In April 2011 the Government introduced the Pupil Premium. The amount will increase in April 2014 to £1900. 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. Advice has been reinforced to schools through a number of means. Currently case studies are being collected on the effective use of the pupil premium on accelerating pupil progress.

12. In October 2013 an interim head of the Virtual School was appointed to drive an improvement in the attainment of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire. This includes working closely with schools and social care to identify and intervene with those who are at risk of disengagement or under achievement. This role will be permanently appointed to in September 2014.

Exclusions

13.

	Days lost to Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE)	Number of pupils	Permanent Exclusions (PE)
2011/2012	141.5	20	1
2012/2013	132	18	1
2013/2014	Autumn: 62 days Spring: 9.5	17	1

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 are being addressed as a priority in this academic year as every day of education lost to fixed term exclusion will impact negatively on outcomes.

The reduction of Fixed Term Exclusions is as result of the Virtual School working pro-actively with schools and other services to prevent exclusions as set out below.

The Virtual School is immediately informed by the Exclusions Officer when an exclusion of a LAC occurs. The school are immediately contacted by the Education Adviser to discuss day 1 provision and plan a re-integration meeting to prevent repeat exclusions. Days lost to FTE have reduced significantly since the new approach has been taken. 5 pupils have only been excluded once. Three pupils contributed 30 days to the Autumn term total, but 2 are now attending the Academy of Central Bedfordshire (ACB) and the other is currently accessing 3 days Alternative Provision in Hertfordshire, with a plan to increase to full time provision if appropriate by March.

There has been one permanent exclusion (PE) of a pupil who at the time was looked after. However the pupil ceased to be LAC and the Virtual School were no longer in a position to challenge the school on this ground. This pupil is still being closely monitored by social care.

Another pupil in a school in a neighbouring Local Authority was excluded and despite the school being willing to withdraw the PE this was not supported by that LA's policy on exclusion. The Virtual School are working closely with the social care team, the carer and the identified provision to support the pupil prior to transfer to a new school in September.

Attendance

14. The table below demonstrates the overall improvement in attendance in each year group. It should be noted that small numbers do affect the percentage figures.

Year Group	No. of pupils	CBC LAC	No. of pupils	CBC LAC	National All Pupils 2011-12
		Aut 2013		Aut 2012	
1	15	97%	11	96%	94%
2	17	94%	5	98%	96%
3	13	97%	10	94%	96%
4	12	99%	9	98%	96%
5	18	97%	7	98%	96%
6	7	99%	9	95%	96%
7	16	96%	11	92%	95%
8	11	94%	12	94%	95%
9	15	85%	10	82%	94%
10	17	88%	12	79%	94%
11	15	83%	22	73%	93%
Total	156*	94%	118	91%	95%

15. Through Welfare Call The Virtual School now receives daily updates as to the attendance of pupils and on the first day of absence they contact the carer. Any prolonged absence (more than 3 days) is followed up by the Education Adviser in discussion with the Social Worker. If there is no acceptable reason for absence a multi-professional meeting is called.

The Virtual School is now able to generate attendance data which can be regularly interrogated and shared, and appropriate actions identified immediately to support pupils' improved attendance. All pupils where attendance has been identified as a concern are being closely monitored by both the Virtual School and Social Care.

Autumn term 2013 overall attendance for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire was 93.25%

70% (122) of pupils attending 95% and above (47 pupils attending 100%)

13 % (22) pupils attending between 90% and 94.9%

3% (6) pupils attending between 85% and 89.9%

14% absence below 85% including 4% (7 pupils) attending below 50%.

The 7 pupils attending below 50% are all being closely monitored and all have multi-professional support to re-engage them in their education.

16. If appropriate a part-time timetable may be agreed if it is in the best interest of the child. However it is closely monitored by the Virtual School and only seen as a short term arrangement.

17. 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. There have been 2 Year 11 pupils moved to date this year.
18. The Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.

Pupils' Achievement

19. Validated pupil outcomes are as reported in November 2013, and are attached as Appendix B.
20. Progress and achievement data is collected using the PEP process on a termly basis. The Virtual School now analyses the data and works with schools to identify appropriate next steps. Designated Teachers track progress from the end of each Key Stage and 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. The Virtual School provides challenge where pupils are not making at least expected progress. Where required other agencies are supporting intervention for these pupils.

Progress of pupils in 2013/2014

21. There are currently 16 pupils in the Year 2 cohort who will reach the end of KS1 this academic year. 10 out of the 12 pupils without identified SEN are on track to achieve at least age expected levels of attainment. 3 pupils with statements are making expected progress. 1 pupil with significant issues is now in a settled foster placement, and a place at a special school has been identified. This stability will support him in making expected progress.
23. There are currently 8 pupils in the Year 6 cohort who will reach the end of KS2 this academic year. 4 out of 5 pupils without an identified SEN are on track to achieve at least at age expected levels. 1 pupil is expected to achieve at least 1 level more than expected levels. The 2 pupils with statements of SEN are on track to make at least 2 levels of progress.

24. There are currently 14 pupils in the Year 11 cohort who are reaching the end of KS4 at the end of the academic year.

4 pupils (28%) are on track to achieve 5A* - Cs including English and Maths. 1 is currently settling with a new carer and accessing 1 to 1 home tuition to support progress.

3 pupils (21%) are on track to achieve 3 GCSEs not including English and maths. One pupil has recently moved to a Children's Home and attainment will depend upon this placement remaining stable. 1 pupil has recently been referred to the Academy of Central Bedfordshire (ACB) where support will be provided to access appropriate qualifications.

1 pupil (7%) is on track to achieve a level 2 in Sports Science and functional skills level 1 in English and maths

4 have statements (28%) and all are on track to make expected progress including vocational qualifications and level 2 functional skills (1 is expected to achieve 3GCSEs)

All those with statements are being closely monitored by Youth Support Services as well as SEN Services, and where appropriate application are being made for top up High Needs funding to support College places in September.

2 (14%) are not on track to achieve formal accreditation. One is a school refuser and the other is in a residential home in Liverpool. In both instances social care, the Virtual School and Youth Support Services are working collaboratively to make sure that the pupils have a positive post-16 pathway plan.

Social Care, the Virtual School and Youth Support are meeting monthly to track the progress of all Year 11 pupils. All Year 11 pupils have had PEP reviews this term and where possible the Senior Youth Support Officer has attended.

Progress against Priority Actions for 2013/14

25. In order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children the priorities of the Virtual School have been jointly identified with the Head of Service for Looked After Children and set out within a Virtual School Improvement Plan which has been agreed with the Governing Body and the Practice Development Board, and focuses on a range of key priorities. Progress made against these actions is set out below.

26. 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.

Update March 2014. The Virtual School receives data daily. First day absence is followed up with carers, continuous absence of 3 days or more is followed by the Education Adviser and/or the Social Worker. The Virtual School have worked directly with schools to arrange 1 to 1 tuition and/or quality assured alternative provision for those pupils most at risk of a permanent exclusion. Currently 4 permanent exclusions have been prevented through this work. There is improved discussion between the Virtual School and Social Care staff regarding the availability of appropriate educational provision if a child moves foster placement. Where appropriate transfer PEP meetings take place (involving both schools) when it is essential that a child moves schools for safeguarding reasons or a necessary change of foster placement.

27. Ensuring that Looked After Children are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas.

Update March 2014 The Virtual School now works closely with Social Care staff, supporting carers and social workers in identifying new schools where appropriate and supporting transfer between schools by carrying out PEP meetings with both old and new schools.

28. 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.

Update March 2014 Where appropriate PEP reviews are now taking place termly to monitor academic progress and effective use of the pupil premium. Training has taken place raising awareness of expected pupil progress with the LAC Social Care team. The need to accelerate pupil progress was highlighted and prioritised with designated teachers at the recent network meeting. The Chair of the Governing Body has shared good practice with schools on demonstrating impact of the use of Pupil premium through the Headteacher and Governors briefings.

29. 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.

Update March 2014 Developing the PEPS in consultation with all stakeholders to link directly with Framework I. Designated teacher network meetings are taking place regularly.

30. 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.

Update March 2014 The priority since October has been on monitoring Y11 pupils to support them to achieve at least in line with their peers where appropriate. Where pupils are disengaged or have significant issues links have been made with Youth Support Services to develop pathways to post-16 education, training or employment. The Virtual School currently has data on pupil progress against age related expectations and are in the process of collating accurate baseline data.

31. Ensuring robust monitoring and tracking of all 16-21 (or 25) 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.

Update March 2014 This continues to be a key area for development as post-16 students may choose not to continue with PEPs. The Virtual School has made links with the Youth Support Services in relation to Y11 pupils most at risk of becoming NEET.

32. Embedding the role of the governing body, providing appropriate levels of challenge and support.

Update March 2014 2 Governing Body meetings have taken place in October 2013 and January 2014 both well attended including school, social care, health, foster carer and Councillor representation. The Governing Body are now monitoring progress of the Virtual School against the school development plan.

33. **Next steps**

Further priority actions will be identified as the Virtual School role develops and in the light of the Children and Families Act.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Virtual School Development Plan 2013-2015

Appendix B – LAC Validated Outcomes 2013

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None