

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 1 December 2014

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

Report of: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

Summary: This report provides information on the role of the Virtual School and the indicative outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2013/14. It also identifies 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, and sets out the next stages of its development.

Advising Officer: Helen Redding, AD School Improvement

Contact Officer: Jackie Edwards, Virtual School Head

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) High Needs Block.

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 Virtual School Head became a statutory post in June 2014. The current Virtual School Head was appointed as permanent from 1 September 2014. Previously she carried out this role as a Consultant.

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 (LAC) 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 LAC. The Virtual School monitors the attendance and progress of Central Bedfordshire's LAC, 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 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 improvement in the educational achievements of the children they look after. In Central Bedfordshire this is managed through the work of the Virtual School for LAC.
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 LAC;
 - b) ensures that each LAC has a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP);
 - c) works with schools to improve overall attainment of LAC 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 LAC;
 - e) ensures that LAC who are educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire Council receive the right support to achieve the best educational outcomes.
 - f) manages the Pupil Premium funding allocated for LAC including monitoring the effective use and impact of this funding by schools and settings

Background

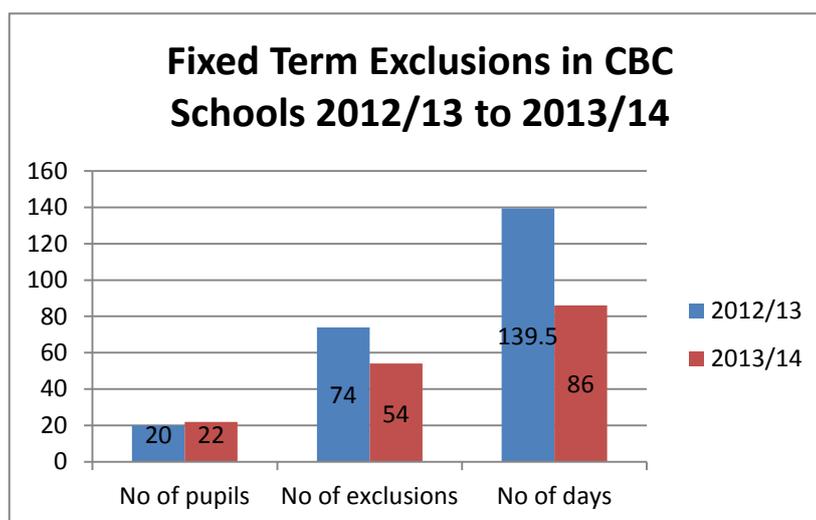
7. In September 2014 a permanent head of the Virtual School was appointed to drive improvement in the attainment of LAC in Central Bedfordshire. This includes working closely with schools and social care services to identify and intervene with those who are at risk of disengagement or under achievement.
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 November 2014 the total number of Central Bedfordshire pupils of statutory school age who are part of the Virtual School is 173 (Reception to Year 11). This does not include 26 Y12 Y13 and Y14 students who attend school/college of which 10 choose to continue with the PEP and are supported by the Virtual School.
9. There is a statutory requirement to monitor the progress of all children who are looked after and to ensure that each LAC 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 take place termly where appropriate to enable the Virtual School to closely monitor academic progress. This enables appropriate support and challenge with regard to ensuring pupils are making expected or better than expected progress. There is a quality assurance checklist for all 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 it was piloted in the summer term 2014 and rolled out in September 2014. Initial feedback from schools has been very favourable. The Virtual School Educational Advisers are 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 increased in April 2014 to £1900. Through PEP reviews, schools are challenged to identify the impact of Pupil Premium funding on the achievements of LAC. 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 LAC 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. After consultation with schools and other stakeholders it was agreed that the Virtual School would retain £400 from the £1900 allocated per pupil. The remaining £1500 is given termly to schools to support them in raising educational achievement. There is now a clear application process for schools to request additional funding to support LAC at risk of disengagement or under-achievement. This allows significant additional support to be allocated to those pupils who need it.

Exclusions

13. There were 2 permanent exclusions during 2013/14. One young person returned to her family during the time of the exclusion, and so ceased to be looked after. The other pupil was in a school in a neighbouring Local Authority. Despite the school being willing to withdraw the permanent exclusion this was not supported by that Local Authority's policy on exclusion. The Virtual School worked 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 2014. This second young person who is still LAC is now settled in a mainstream school.
14. 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 LAC, and all other options are explored.
15. There has been 1 permanent exclusion in September 2014 of a pupil for serious behaviours. The pupil is receiving significant support from a range of specialist agencies and received 40 hours of 1:1 tuition funded by the Virtual School until a place was secured for him at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire.

16. In the Academic Year 2013/14 there were a total of 86 days lost as a result of fixed term exclusions of LAC from schools in Central Bedfordshire and this related to 22 different pupils (see chart below). Days lost to fixed term exclusions have reduced significantly in the last academic year (139.5 days in 2012/13 compared to 86 days in 2013/14). There were 72.5 days lost related to 7 pupils in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire in the academic year 2013/14. 2 pupils contributed 49 days to this total one ending up being permanently excluded. Both pupils are now settled in new schools. This is a key priority for this academic year. Fixed terms exclusions continue to be addressed as a priority in this academic year as every day of education lost to fixed term exclusion will impact negatively on outcomes, and can put pressure on a foster placement.

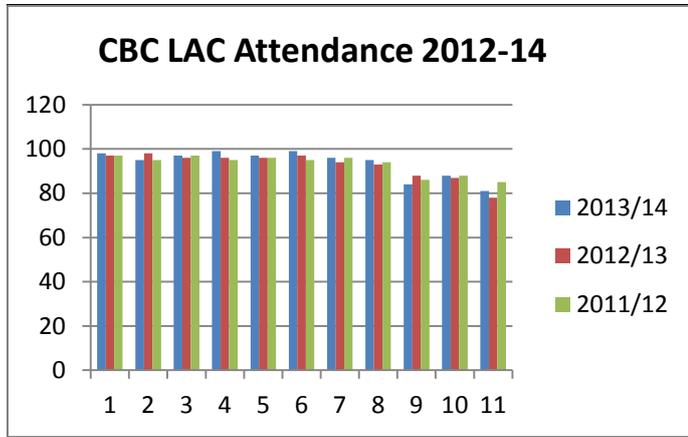


17. The Virtual School is immediately informed by the Inclusion Officer when an exclusion of a LAC occurs. The school are immediately contacted by the Education Adviser to discuss day 1 provision and plan a re-integration meeting to prevent repeat exclusions. 22 pupils had at least one Fixed Term Exclusion, 5 pupils were only excluded once. Exclusions by schools outside of Central Bedfordshire are now being monitored by Welfare Call, enabling the Virtual School to respond as it does with CBC schools.

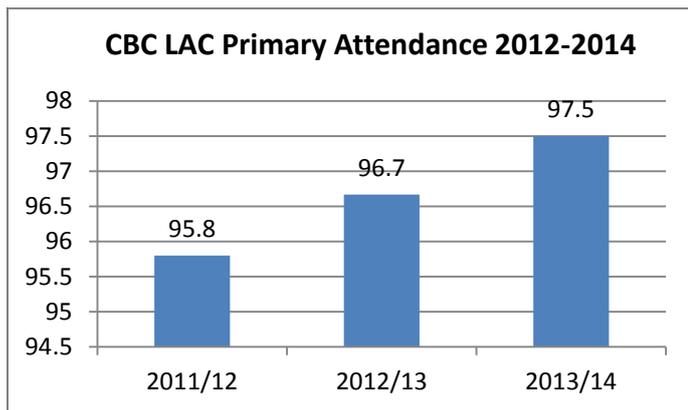
Attendance

18. Welfare Call is now used as an effective way of monitoring and challenging the absence of LAC. Welfare Call contacts all schools where there is a pupil of statutory school age both in and outside of Central Bedfordshire. If a pupil is absent the carer and/or social worker is contacted to ascertain the reason for absence. This system ensures rigorous procedures are in place for safeguarding, as well as accountability for absence from school. The Virtual School and Social Care Managers receive daily updates regarding pupils who have had periods of absence of more than 3 days. This 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.
19. 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. As numbers are low in some year groups, this impacts on the percentages.

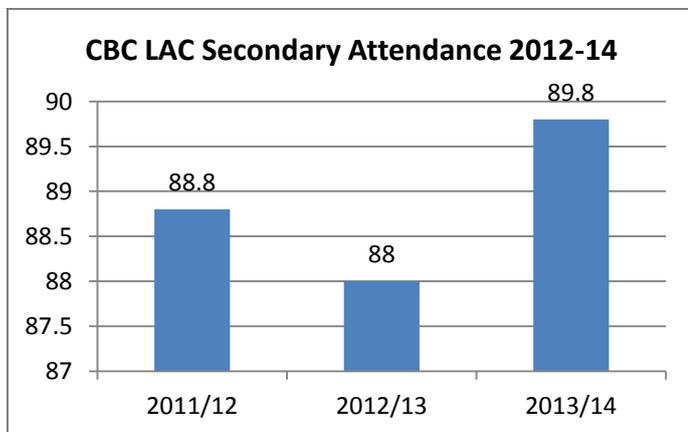
20. This table illustrates the overall attendance data over 3 years. Attendance in Years 9,10, and 11 remains the key challenge and therefore key priority. The Virtual School is working with schools and young people to reengage them in learning. Individual tutors are commissioned where needed to ensure access to learning if a pupil is not attending school.



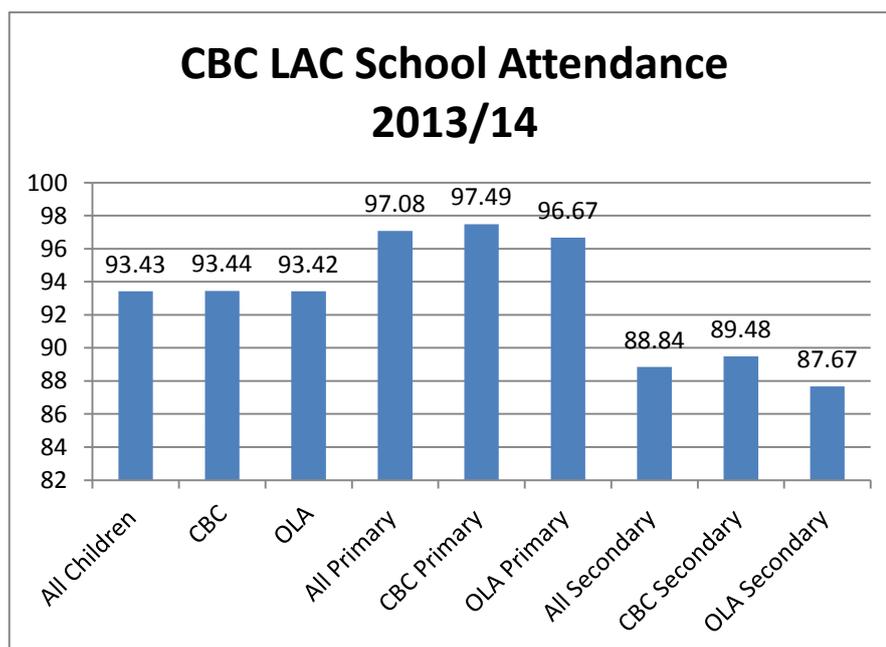
21. This table demonstrates that in the primary year groups overall attendance improved by 0.8%.



22. This table demonstrates that in the secondary year groups, overall attendance has improved by 1.8%.



This table demonstrates that in all phases pupils attending schools in Central Bedfordshire have better attendance



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. Currently all pupils where attendance has been identified as a concern are being closely monitored by both the Virtual School and Social Care. 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.
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. There were 3 Year 11 pupils moved in academic year 2013/14. This was as a result of either an irretrievable placement breakdown or concerns about the young person's safety. The Virtual School worked closely with social care to minimise the disruption to the young person's learning for example paying for 1 to 1 tuition for a student who moved out of the area, allowing them to sit her English and maths GCSE.
25. The Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.

Pupils' Achievement

26. 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.

Key Stage 1 Provisional Results 2013/14

27. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2013 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level (level 2 or above) in 2013 was 69% in reading, 61% in writing and 71% in mathematics. For reading and writing, this represents an increase on the figures for 2012. For mathematics, the figure remained the same in 2012 and 2013.

28. Key Stage 1 (end of year 2)

The following data is for academic year 2013/14 which cannot be directly compared with the national data above, which is for the academic year 2012/13 and for pupils who have been looked after for more than 12 months. This data is for all pupils looked after by Central Bedfordshire, not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months. One pupil was educated in Wales and comparative data is not available.

- a. Data on 15 pupils is currently being confirmed.
- b. 4 (27%) of these pupils have a statement of SEND.
- c. 7 pupils were educated in Central Bedfordshire schools, 8 pupils in other Local Authorities.
- d. Of these 15 pupils, 10 pupils (66%) achieved the expected level (level 2 or above) in reading, 8 pupils (53%) in writing and 12 pupils (80%) in mathematics.
- e. Of the 7 pupils educated in Central Bedfordshire, 4 pupils (57%) achieved the expected level (level 2 or above) in reading, 4 pupils (57%) in writing, and 6 pupils (85%) in mathematics.
- f. 1 pupil with a statement of SEND made age expected progress achieving level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- g. Of the 8 pupils educated outside of Central Bedfordshire, 6 pupils (75%) achieved level 2 in reading, 4 pupils (50%) in writing and 6 pupils (75%) in mathematics.

Key Stage 2 Provisional Results 2014

29. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2013 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level (level 4 or above) in 2013 was 63% in reading, 55% in writing and 69% in mathematics. For reading and writing, this represents an increase on the figures for 2012. For mathematics, the figure remained the same in 2012 and 2013.

30. The following data is for academic year 2013/14 which cannot be directly compared with the national data above, which is for the academic year 2012/13 and for pupils who have been looked after for more than 12 months. This data is for all pupils LAC by Central Bedfordshire Council not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months
- a. Data on 8 pupils is currently being confirmed.
 - b. 3 pupils (37.5%) have a statement of special educational need. 1 pupil is currently at school action plus.
 - c. 5 pupils are educated in Central Bedfordshire schools, 3 pupils in other LAs.
 - d. Of the 8 pupils, 5 pupils (63%) achieved level 4 or above in reading, 4 pupils (50%) in writing and 5 pupils (63%) in mathematics.
 - e. Of the 5 pupils educated in Central Bedfordshire schools (3 of whom had identified SEND) 2 pupils (40%) achieved at least level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics.
 - f. Of the 3 pupils educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire, 3 pupils (100%) achieved level 4 in reading, 2 pupils (66%) in writing and 3 pupils (100%) in mathematics.
 - g. All pupils made expected progress from KS1, and of the 4 pupils without an identified SEND 100% achieved at least level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics

Key Stage 4 Provisional Results 2014

31. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2013 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving 5+ A* - C including English and mathematics in 2013 was 61%, achieving 5+ A* - C or equivalent in English and mathematics was 15.3% and 5+ A* - C or equivalent was 36.6%.
32. The following data is for academic year 2013/14 which cannot be directly compared with the national data above, which is for the academic year 2012/13 and for pupils who have been looked after for more than 12 months. This data is for all pupils looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council, not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months.

- a. Data on 16 students (two of whom ceased to be LAC in the last 6 months) is currently being confirmed.
- b. 1 student (6%) achieved 5 A* - C including English & mathematics
- c. 4 students (25%) achieved 5 A* - C GCSEs
- d. 11 students (68%) achieved 5 A* - G at GCSEs.
- e. 13 students (81%) were entered for GCSE examinations
- f. 3 students with identified SEN have achieved a range of nationally accredited vocational qualifications including GCSEs and Functional English and mathematics.
- g. 12 students were educated in Central Bedfordshire, the remaining 4 in schools/settings outside of Central Bedfordshire.
- h. Of the 9 students educated in CBC schools settings
 - 3 students (33%) achieved 5+ A* - C GCSEs or equivalent
 - 2 students (22%) achieved 5A* - C at GCSE.
 - 8 students (89%) achieved the equivalent to 5A* - G at GCSE.
- i. Of the 7 students educated outside of Central Bedfordshire
 - 1 student (25%) achieved 5 A* - C including English & mathematics
 - 2 students (29%) achieved 5A* - C at GCSE.
 - 3 students (43%) achieved the equivalent to 5A* - C at GCSE.
 - 3 students (43%) achieved the equivalent to 5A* - G at GCSE.

33. Pupils not entered for GCSE.

3 students were not entered for any GCSEs. 1 was a school refuser; the other 2 had significant issues that led to placement breakdowns and disengagement from learning. All 3 continue to be supported by social care and the Youth Support Service.

Governance

34. The Governing Body is now well established and has met on three occasions. It continues to be well attended and offer appropriate challenge. The current chair will remain in post for this academic year 2014/2015.

Priority Actions for 2014/15

35. In order to improve the outcomes for LAC 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 will focus on:

- a Ensuring that LAC 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.
 - Follow up any periods of absence from school including multi-professional meetings if the child/young person is at risk of disengagement,
 - Providing schools (both in and out of the Local Authority) with clear guidance on alternatives to fixed term exclusions and part time timetables, and evaluating the impact of that including effective 1:1 tuition.
 - Offering the opportunity for schools to apply for additional funding when a child/young person is at risk of underachieving or disengagement from learning.
 - Supporting all key transition points in the child's education.
- b Ensuring that LAC are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas.
- Virtual School Head is invited to monthly placement stability meetings
 - Social Workers seek advice from the Virtual School prior to a child/young person moving placement that results in a school move.
 - The Virtual School liaises with other Local Authorities to ensure that the child/young person accesses appropriate educational provision in a timely manner
 - The Virtual School works closely with social care and the Assessment & Monitoring Team (SEND) when a child with a statement
- c Strengthening the school's abilities to meet the needs of LAC. This will be achieved through:
- The challenge provided by Virtual School staff at termly 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.
 - Greater links with the Teaching School to identify tutors and to develop a website

- d Further improving the quality of PEPs by
- New PEP documentation now being used. Section B (a rolling document) is completed by the school and Section A by the social worker.
 - 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 LAC 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 (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.
- Developing greater links with Youth Support to have more rigorous tracking of post-16 students.
 - Monthly meetings to discuss Y11 and Y12 students and identify appropriate intervention for including accessing additional funding.
- g Embedding the role of the governing body, providing appropriate levels of challenge and support.
- Three Governing Body meetings have been held and attendance is very good with representation from a range of stakeholders including schools and carers
 - Virtual School Head meets termly with the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the development plan.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Virtual School Development Plan

Background Papers:

None