

Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

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Purpose of this report

This report provides information on the role of the Virtual School and the confirmed outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2013/2014.

RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to:

- Consider this report, the progress made to date and comment on the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children in the future.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. It is not planned to present this report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Issues

The Virtual School

2. 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 Looked After Children.
3. 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 their resources;
- d) works with social workers to improve attendance, attainment and progress of Looked After Children;
- e) ensures that Looked After Children 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 looked after children including monitoring the effective use and impact of this funding by schools and settings

Background

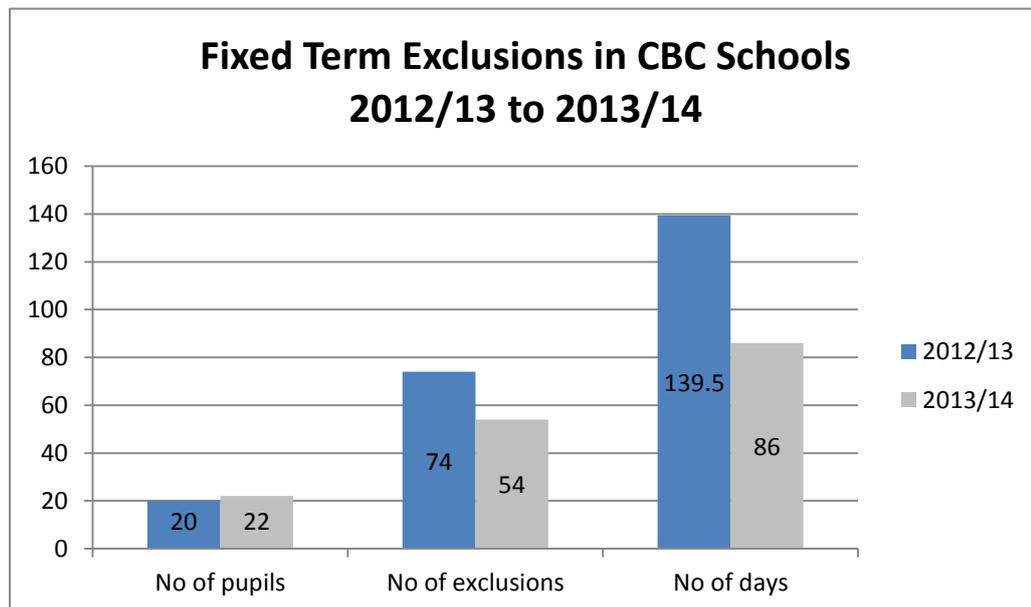
- 4. In September 2014 a permanent head of the Virtual School was appointed to drive improvement in the attainment of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire. This includes working closely with schools and social care services to identify and intervene with those who are at risk of disengagement or under achievement.
- 5. 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 February 2015 the total number of Central Bedfordshire pupils of statutory school age who are part of the Virtual School is 174 (Reception to Year 11). This does not include 41 Y12 and Y13 young people still in care who are being monitored by the Virtual School. This is a significant rise since the last report. 14 attend school/college of which 9 have chosen to continue with the PEP. A new role is being recruited to in order to support this increase.

6. 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 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.
7. 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.
8. 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 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.
9. 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 looked after children at risk of disengagement or under-achievement. This allows significant additional support to be allocated to those pupils who need it.

Exclusions

10. 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.

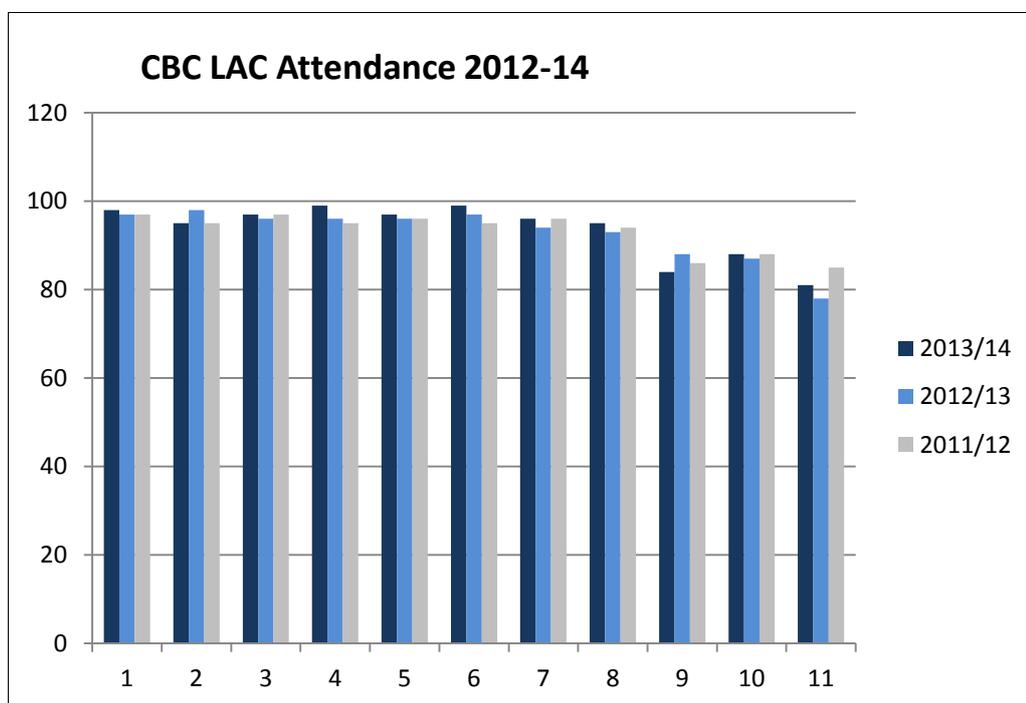
11. Whenever there is the threat of a permanent exclusion the Virtual School will contact the school to explore all the options available including a change of placement. Schools are actively discouraged from permanently excluding Looked After Children, and all other options are explored.
12. There has been 1 permanent exclusion this academic year (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.
13. In the Academic Year 2013/14 there were a total of 86 days lost as a result of fixed term exclusions of Looked After Children 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 of which became a permanent exclusion. Both pupils are now settled in new schools. This is a key priority 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.



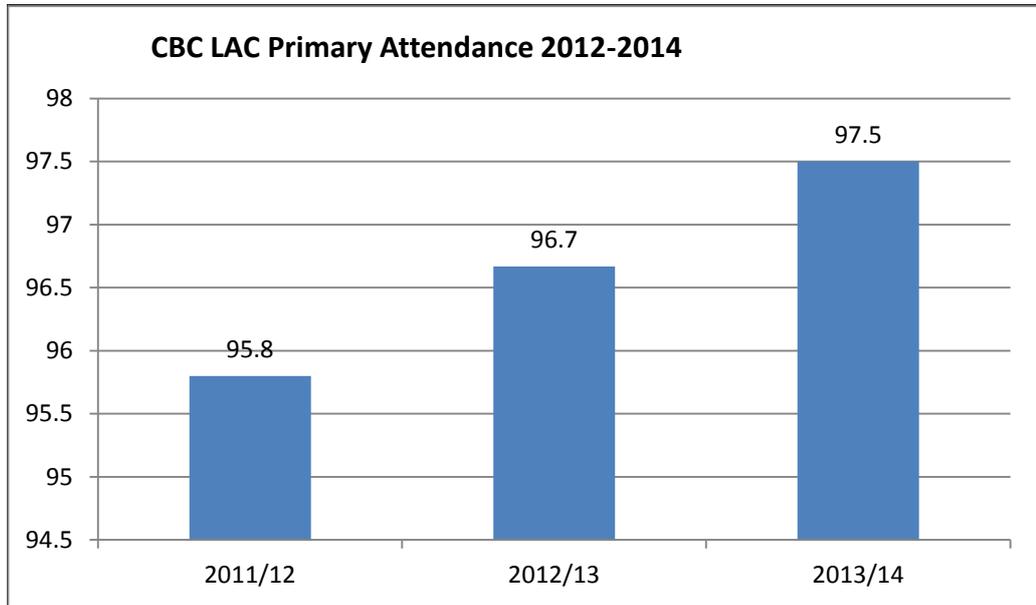
14. The Virtual School is immediately informed by the Inclusion Officer when an exclusion of a LAC occurs. The school are immediately contacted by the Education Adviser to discuss day 1 provision and plan a re-integration meeting to prevent repeat exclusions. 22 pupils had at least one Fixed Term Exclusion, 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

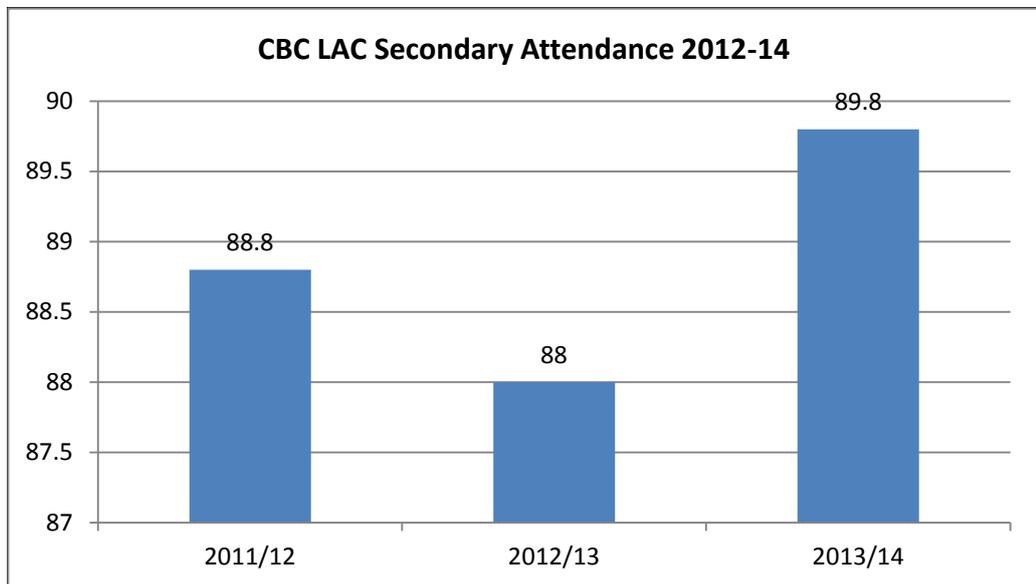
15. Welfare Call is now used as an effective way of monitoring and challenging the absence of Looked After Children. Welfare Call contacts all schools where there is a pupil of statutory school age both in and outside of Central Bedfordshire. If a pupil is absent the carer and/or social worker is contacted 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.
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. As numbers are low in some year groups, this impacts on the percentages.
17. 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.



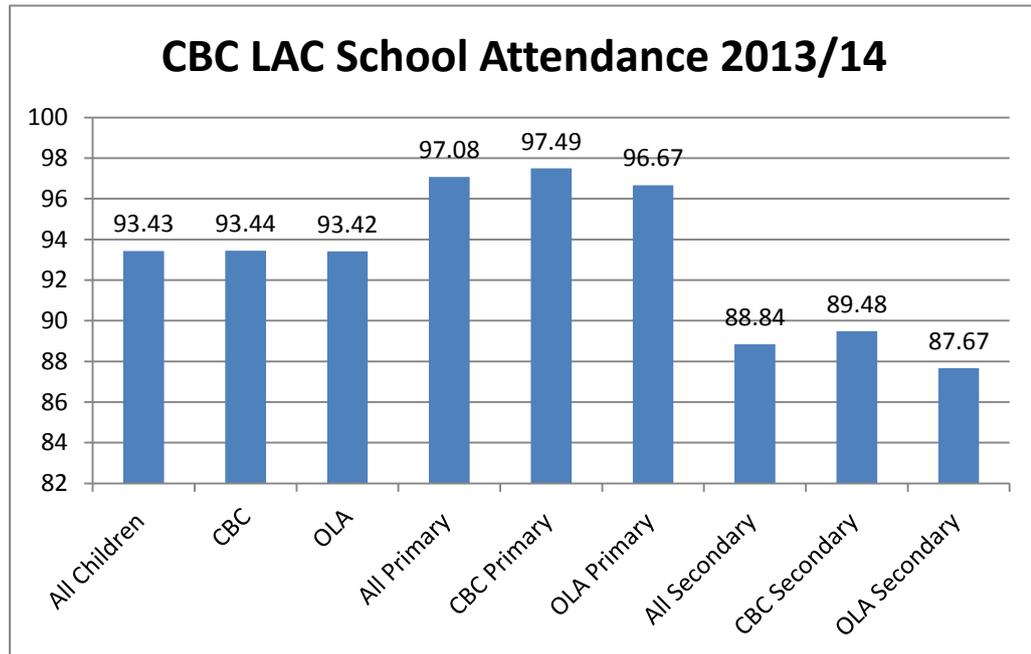
18. This table demonstrates that in the primary year groups overall attendance improved by 0.8%.



19. 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



20. 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.
21. 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.
22. The Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.

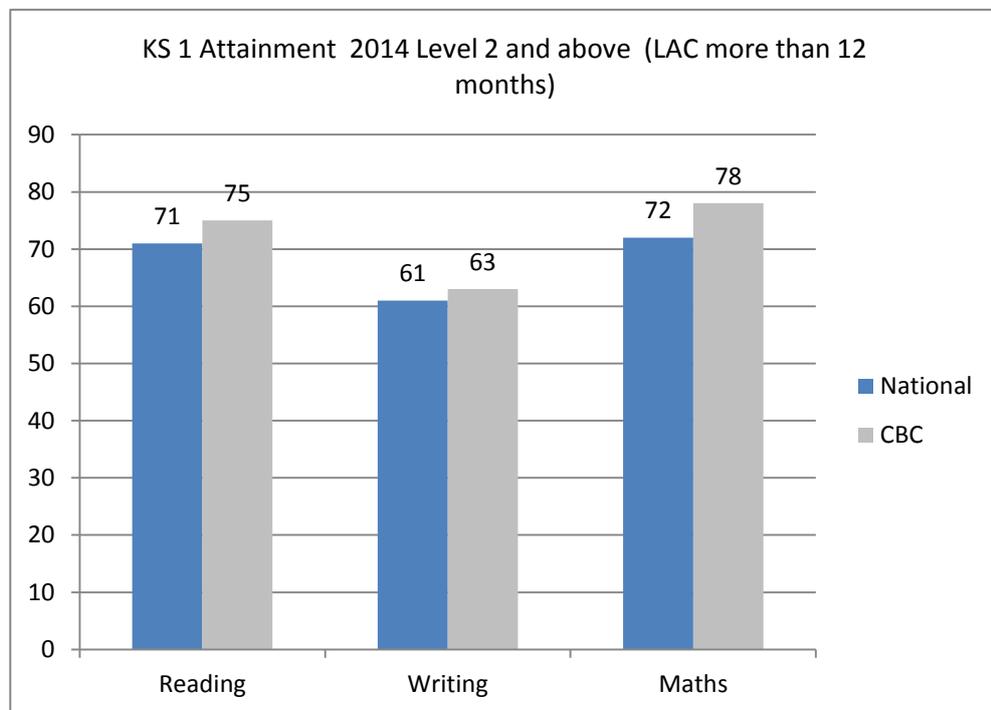
Pupils' Achievement

23. 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 Results 2013/14 (end of year 2)

24. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2014 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level (level 2 or above) in reading, writing and mathematics in 2014 was 71 (69) per cent, 61 (61) per cent and 72 (72) per cent respectively (2013 figures in brackets).

February 2015 (comparative data of CBC pupils who were in care for more than 12 months on the 31 March 2014)



25. Key Stage 1

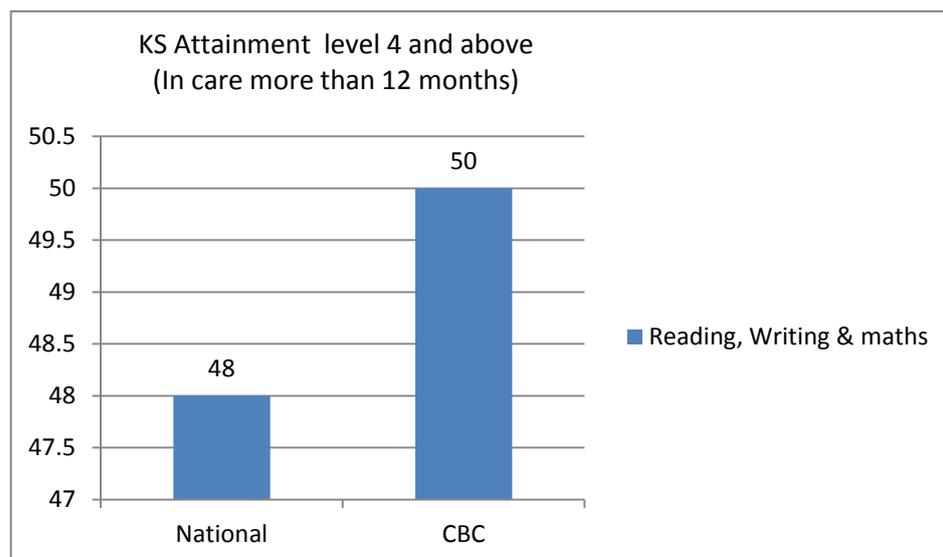
This data is for **all** pupils looked after by Central Bedfordshire, **not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months**. One pupil was educated in Wales and comparative data is not available.

- a. 15 pupils were LAC in July 2014, 4 (27%) of whom have a statement of SEND.
- b. 7 pupils were educated in Central Bedfordshire schools, 8 pupils in other LAs.
- c. 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.
- d. 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. One pupil with a statement of SEND made age expected progress achieving level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- e. Of the 8 pupils educated OLA, 6 pupils (75%) achieved level 2 in reading, 4 pupils (50%) in writing and 6 pupils (75%) in mathematics.

Key Stage 2 Results 2014

26. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2014 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level (level 4 or above) in reading, writing and mathematics in 2014 was 68 (63) per cent, 55 per cent and 61 (69) per cent respectively (2013 figures in brackets)

February 2105 (comparative data of CBC pupils who were in care for more than 12 months on the 31 March 2014)

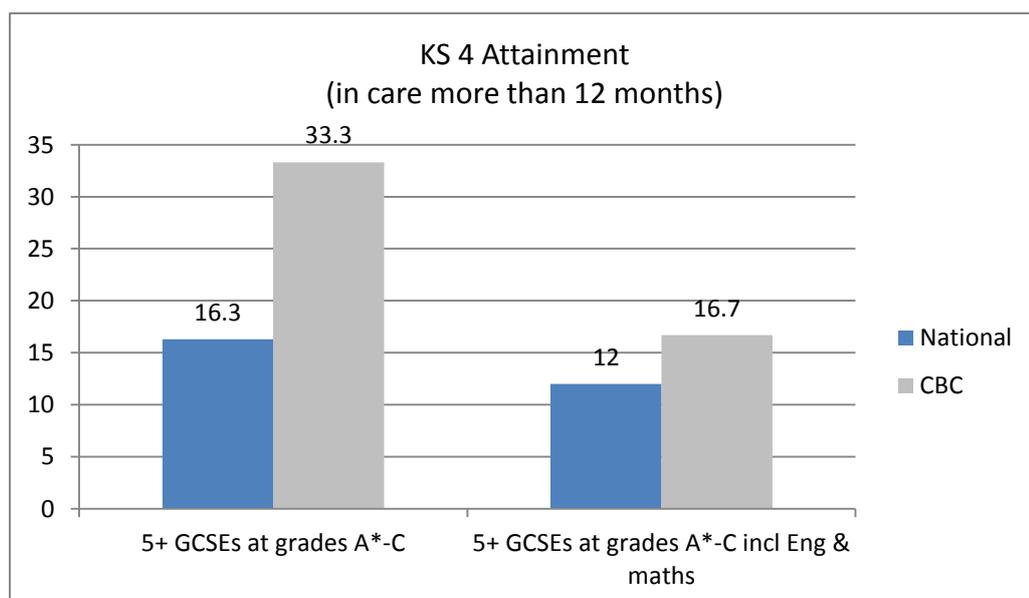


27. This data is for **all** pupils LAC by CBC not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months
- 8 pupils were LAC by CBC in July 2014, 3 pupils (37.5%) have a statement of special educational need. 1 pupil is currently at school action plus.
 - 5 pupils are educated in Central Bedfordshire schools, 3 pupils in other LAs.
 - Of the 8 pupils for whom data is collected, 5 pupils (63%) achieved level 4 or above in reading, 4 pupils (50%) in writing and 5 pupils (63%) in mathematics.
 - 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.
 - Of the 3 pupils educated in schools OLA, 3 pupils (100%) achieved level 4 in reading, 2 pupils (66%) in writing and 3 pupils (100%) in mathematics.
 - 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 Results 2014

28. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2014 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving 5+ A* - C or equivalent in English and mathematics was 12 per cent . However, due to reforms to the educational and assessment systems for KS4 during 2013/14 it is not possible to make comparisons to earlier years.

February 2105 (comparative data of CBC pupils who were in care for more than 12 months on the 31 March 2014)



29. This data is for all pupils LAC by CBC not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months.

There were 16 students (two of whom ceased to be LAC in the last 6 months) LAC by CBC in July 2014.

- a. 1 student (6%) achieved 5 A* - C including English & mathematics
- b. 4 students (25%) achieved 5 A* - C GCSEs
- c. 11 students (68%) achieved 5 A* - G at GCSEs.
- d. 13 students (81%) were entered for GCSE examinations
- e. 3 students with identified SEN have achieved a range of nationally accredited vocational qualifications including GCSEs and Functional English and mathematics.
- f. 12 students were educated in Central Bedfordshire, the remaining 4 in schools/settings OLA.
- g. 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.
- h. Of the 7 students educated OLA
 - 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.

30. Pupils not entered for GCSE.

3 students were not entered for any GCSEs. One 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

31. 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

32. 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 have focused 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.
 - 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 LA) 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.

February 2015 update

Attendance of LAC is closely monitored with daily reports to the Virtual School and Social Care Managers. Periods of absence of three days are followed up and where appropriate a multi-service response takes place. This may include putting together a part or full time timetable of alternative provision including 1:1 tuition. This resulted in on the 196 pupils monitored in the autumn term 2015 (this includes pupils who had left care in the previous 6 months) 39% had 100% attendance, 49% had above 90% attendance, 12% had less than 90% and 6.7% had less than 85%. This group are closely monitored by both the Virtual School and Social Workers.

All services actively work to prevent mid-term transfers and where they are necessary the Education Advisers and Social Workers work closely together to ensure a smooth transition. Places are only applied to schools which are currently judged good or better by Ofsted at their last inspection. Currently 67% of CBC LAC are placed in good or better schools, only 3 pupils are currently in schools judged as inadequate.

- b Ensuring that Looked After Children 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 LAs 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

February 2015 update

There are very few cases where CBC LAC are out of school for significant periods of time. The most challenging placements are those pupils moved OLA with statements/Education Health Care plans despite the work done by Education Advisers and Social Workers before the move takes place. As a Local Authority we depend on the SEND services within the placement LA to identify and consult on a school place. This has led to a delay for 2 pupils, and in both cases the Virtual School worked with the Social Worker and the other LA to identify some 1:1 tuition prior to admission to school. A similar picture is seen with non-English speaking asylum seekers of a school age. In two cases recently, an ESOL tutor was identified by the Virtual School for two asylum seekers awaiting a school place.

Identified further action:

Ensure asylum seekers have quick access to additional support to learn English and access a school place.

- 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 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

February 2015 update

PEP review meetings being chaired by Education Advisers and schools are now updating section B of the PEP. All PEPs are quality assured by the PEP Co-ordinator who follows up any missing information. The Education Advisers complete a quality assurance document after each meeting. The Virtual School Head samples PEP documentation and follows up with schools if issues are identified.

During PEP reviews schools are expected to report if pupils are making at least expected progress and when not, give reasons why not, and agree actions that will accelerate progress. Progress data is now collected and recorded on a termly basis.

Schools may apply for additional funding when a pupil is at risk of underachievement or disengagement.

The Virtual Head teacher reports termly to the Governing Body on pupil progress, attendance and exclusion.

The training for new designated teachers was attended by 25 teachers in November 2014. A further two networking meetings were held for more experienced designated teachers with 24 attending.

Case studies have been requested from schools where there has been clear evidence of impact of Pupil Premium. This is to be followed up in the summer term.

After further discussions the development of a VS webpage will not take place through the Teaching School. How to take this forward will be discussed at the next governing Body meeting in March.

Identified further actions:

- Evaluate the use of the additional pupil premium accessed by schools.
- Discuss with Governing Body how to develop a web site for the Virtual School.
- There to be a web page on the CBC website by June 2015.

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.

February 2015 update

The new section B of the Personal Education Plans has been positively received by schools. There is still a certain amount of inconsistency in the completion of this paper work; however the prompt return of these by schools has improved. Further training will be offered at the next network meeting.

Identified further actions:

- Share learning at the summer Designated Teacher meeting on effective PEP meetings and the targeted use of pupil premium

- 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.

February 2015 update

Current data indicates that the progress at KS1 and KS2 compares favourably with other groups of pupils. The biggest challenge is still KS4 – we are currently monitoring 16 Y11 pupils. This involves monthly meetings between the Virtual School and Social Care Managers. Y11 PEP meetings were a priority in the Autumn term and all pupils have had one meeting since September 2014. 9 of this group have an identified SEN including 6 with statements (EHCPs). 4 pupils are working towards 5 A* - C at GCSE including English and maths. Currently only 2 pupils are not working towards KS4 accreditation

- 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.

February 2015 update

Interviews have taken place to appoint a Personal Adviser to work across the Youth Support Service and the Virtual School. A second interview will take place on Wednesday 25 February (UPDATE FOLLOWING INTERVIEWS)

Monthly meetings are taking place to discuss Y12 students to identify and agree additional support where appropriate. This has included support for post-16 asylum seekers to further develop their language skills through access to a 1:1 tutor and funding for alternative pathways.

Identified further actions:

- Appoint a personal adviser to work with LAC in year 9, 10. & 11 to raise the achievement of Key Stage 4 pupils in the next 3 years

- 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.

February 2015 update

Next Governing Body meeting is in March 2015. The Virtual School development plan has been reviewed to include the current priorities including KS4 achievement.

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.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

33. 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 permanently from 1 September 2014. Previously she carried out this role as a Consultant.
34. 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.

Financial Implications

35. The Virtual School is fully funded through the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) High Needs Block.

Equalities Implications

36. 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.

Conclusion

37. This report provides information on the role of the Virtual School and the confirmed outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2013/14. It also identifies the steps the Virtual School is taking in the current Academic Year 2014/15 in partnership with other agencies including schools and social care to raise the achievement and progress of all looked after children.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None