ITEM 06

Report sponsor: Pauline Anderson, Service Director, Learning, Inclusion and Skills
Report author: Graeme Ferguson, Virtual School Head teacher

Report on the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC) 2019/20

Purpose

1.1 **To outline the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The exams and assessments in 2019/20 were cancelled due to Covid 19 and so the usual content of the Virtual School Headteacher Report is not possible as the academic outcomes are not available to report on. However, this gives the opportunity to report on a broader range of areas in relation to the Virtual School

1.2 Outlined in this report is the role and staffing structure of the Virtual School; and, an outline of the areas of work undertaken by the Virtual School which help support young people

Recommendations

2.1 To recognise and understand the role and range of activities which are undertaken by the Virtual School in supporting improved outcomes

Reason

3.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty under 22 (3A) of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. As corporate parents, maximising educational opportunities and outcomes is important for Derby's Looked After Children.

Supporting information

4.1 **There are three core functions:**

1. to monitor and track the educational progress and achievement for every child in care of Derby City Local Authority

2. to support and challenge schools, settings and other professionals where provision is not good enough or where aspirations are not high enough

3. to promote inclusion and equality of access for all looked after children which includes raising attendance and reducing exclusions

The Virtual School supports the needs of all looked after children and is made up of a network of professionals both within the Virtual School team and a range of commissioned staff with specific expertise. The staff bring professional expertise alongside knowledge of the children they work with. Their role is to work alongside schools, social care professionals and carers to make sure that our most vulnerable children can access the education they deserve and identify the different areas of support needed for each child to stay engaged with their learning.

4.2   **The Virtual School Team**

The staffing structure of the Virtual School is:

Head teacher of the Virtual School:
Graeme Ferguson

Specialist Education Officers: 5 posts:
one full time post
one post (0.8 FtE)
one post (0.6 FtE)
two posts (0.5 FtE)

Administrative Staff:
one post (0.5 FtE)
one full time Apprentice

Other staff who are commissioned to offer support by the Virtual School were:

- Educational Psychologists
- Speech and language specialists
- Mentors
- Teaching staff
- Teaching assistant staff

Each Virtual School Specialist Education Officers has a caseload of looked after children aligned to the social care teams across the City. This has led to much closer cross team working between the Virtual School and Social Care.

4.3   **Specific activities which have supported looked after children**

Targeted one to one support for Y6 pupils

Y6 pupils who are working towards the national expectations are offered additional teaching support from staff within the Virtual School to improve their outcomes. 8 pupils were offered this support

Bespoke provision for looked after children in the Childrens Homes

Two members of staff from Kingsmead School (1.2FtE) have been commissioned to work on promoting educational provision for young people in the Derby City Childrens homes. This has involved working closely with care home staff, schools and alternative providers. Many of these young people are our most vulnerable. Early indications are that with a relational approach, which is consistent each day, the young people being supported are beginning to re-engage with education.

Mentoring support for the most disengaged

This was the second of a three-year contract working with Enthusiasm looking at mentoring support for 5-8 young people who are our most challenging and furthest from accessing mainstream education. This workstream integrates with a multi-agency approach to wrap around a support package. A progress tool called the "Cromarty Model" has been developed which holds all the educational information and interventions in one place.

Creative Mentoring

Working with the creative industries in Derby we have been able to offer six-week blocks of mentoring support for looked after young people who either have a creative interest which they want to develop or just need some confidence building. This programme has supported 6 young people.

Speech and language support for those with poor literacy skills

Over this year we have had several children who have become looked after and when initial assessments had been done, they had very low levels of literacy. As a team we commissioned specialist teachers to work intensively with these children to improve their literacy skills so they could begin to read and write and access the curriculum being taught.

Education Psychology Service (EPS) Support

The Virtual School commissions the EPS to provide support to the professionals working with the young people. This can take the form of some direct work with the young person but predominantly it focuses on the support and associated supervision required for the team working with the young person. Each specialist education officer has a number of EPS hours to deploy to support young people on their caseload.

Seguridad

This was a bespoke, in-depth piece of work to support one young person in a Derby City Childrens home, commissioned from an organisation called Touchbase. The young person presented with particular difficulties both in the home and increasingly in school resulting periods of fixed term exclusions. This approach was seen as a trial as other approaches had had little success. Seguridad is a developmental trauma intervention which enables the team of professionals supporting the young person who may have experienced developmental trauma, relational disruption, trauma, and loss from pregnancy onwards. This approach helps support all those involved with the young person to work in close partnership towards recovery and learned security, so that the young person can live well at home, within education and out in their local

communities. This intervention is based on the latest findings in child development, attachment, and neuroscience.

Touchbase met with the team around the child and gathered all known information. Touchbase created an in-depth fact file. What became clear is that the young person was communicating through her behaviour, the fact file identified approximately 48 significant relational traumas and known losses. This helped the team understand her communication and the support needed.

The importance of a stable family life became clear, this can be difficult to replicate in a residential children's home. Touchbase recommended that a team of residential workers replicate a family for our child. Instead of her seeking out attention from staff, one of her team would always aim to be on shift and give her the time needed, instead of her seeking out the staff through behaviour. This was replicated in school, a teaching assistant has been employed to be her constant person, helping to regulate her throughout the day. Her attendance at school has increased from 54% to 83%.

Encouraging Reading

The Virtual School over the past two years has sent out reading book vouchers to be spent in bookshops. With lockdown and shops being closed we still wanted to encourage the children to read. We worked with procurement colleagues to arrange for carers to request books from Amazon for the children and these were sent directly to the homes of the children. This was particularly well received by carers and had the added benefit that the Virtual School could see what books were being purchased.

Educational Provision for pupils with no school place

If a young person has a move of care placement a change of school may be necessary, and a new school needs to be applied for. If the young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan the statutory consultation process needs to be followed which again means the young person is without educational provision. In these instances, the Virtual School will commission a 1 to 1 tutor to provide learning whilst a school place is found.

Cookery School

Each half term the Virtual School organises a "cookery school" in conjunction with the YMCA. These days have a theme and give the young people confidence and the life skills in being able to cook some great dishes.

4.4   **Allocation of Pupil Premium Plus funding to schools**

The Virtual School is allocated £2345 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding per pupil to support with improving educational outcomes. The Virtual School has a Pupil Premium Plus Policy which outlines what activities will be supported through the additional money. Allocations are given to schools through the targets set in the Personal Education Plan.

The Pupil Premium Plus will only be provided to meet clear quantitative (and exceptionally qualitative), costed SMART targets in the following six areas:

- Academic achievement and progress – SMART educational targets
- Attendance
- Wider achievement - in an area in which the child is gifted and talented
- Inclusion - by reducing internal and external exclusion
- Social skills
- Transition into the next key stage and/or a new learning provider

In addition to the allocation of PP+ funding to schools PP+ is also used to pay the specific activities listed above.

4.5 Personal Education Plans

The Personal Education Plan or PEP is a record of how professionals around the looked after child will support their educational outcomes and achievement. It is developed and reviewed with the designated teacher, young person, social worker, carer and virtual school. In Derby we have an electronic version of the PEP which has now been established for four years.

During "Lockdown 1" a shorter and more appropriate PEP was completed by staff. Throughout the pandemic PEPs continued to be completed in a timely manner with 95% being completed within a month of their due date. As with a lot of practice PEPs have been completed "virtually" through video conferencing which has had the benefit of no travelling time for staff to attend.

Every PEP is quality assured by the Virtual School and feedback given. Pupil Premium Plus funding is allocated in a timely manner so the funding can be used in schools to support the children.

4.6 Support of LAC for remote learning

With the lockdown and the switch in many cases to online lessons every pupil in the Virtual School has access to a laptop. Laptops from the DfE which were allocated to children with a social worker were made available to all LAC in Derby City schools. If pupils were out of area laptops were provided through pupil premium plus funding

As in accordance with the national guidance looked after children were encouraged to be in school if this was the best place for them to continue learning. However, this was decided on a case by case basis taking into account many issues including care placement stability. Across all the pupils in the Virtual School around 40% of pupils attended schools during the first lockdown.

The Virtual School provided carers with access to two online virtual education platforms to promote maths and English; these were Maths Whizz and Readingwise. The Maths Whizz was more interactive and was aimed at Primary school aged pupils. The progress made by the pupils was measurable and some pupils made big improvements in their maths outcomes. The Readingwise application was aimed at early years and infant aged pupils; this was not used greatly as pupils found it a bit "dry".

With both applications outlined carers were asked if they wanted access to the applications and whether they would be willing to support the pupil with doing the learning at home. When it came to actually promoting the use of the applications it was a very mixed picture in uptake and support. This could have been because schools very quickly came up with their own online offer which the pupils engaged with.

In addition, carers were encouraged to visit the Virtual School website which was updated with learning resources and ideas for home learning.

4.7   **Attendance**

Meaningful attendance reporting and comparisons to previous years is not possible due to the impact of the pandemic. The decision as to whether a pupil attended or not was arrived at on an individual case by case discussion between the school, carer, social worker and Virtual School. During the first lockdown around 40% of the pupils in the Virtual School attended school. The pupils who attended schools benefitted from the smaller class sizes, the routine and consistency which attending gave them. Many pupils who were educated at home thrived with home schooling by their carers.

4.8   **Exclusions**

Again, meaningful comparisons on exclusion data from previous years is difficult as many pupils were not in school.

Public/stakeholder engagement

5.1   None

Other options

6.1   N/A

Financial and value for money issues

7.1   None

Legal implications

8.1   None

Climate implications

9.1   None

Other significant implications

10.1   None

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu, Head of Service, Legal Services	19/01/21
Finance	Alison Parkin, Acting Director of Financial Services	19/01/21
Service Director(s)	Pauline Anderson, Director Learning, Inclusion and Skills	19/01/21
Report sponsor	Pauline Anderson, Director Learning, Inclusion and Skills	19/01/21
Other(s)		

Background papers:	
List of appendices:	