
VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on the performance of the Virtual School for Looked After Children.

Summary

2. This report outlines the progress of the Virtual School for looked after Children in the last term and details progress on key performance measures such as examination performance, attendance, exclusion and post-16 destinations.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

**Alison Murphy
Interim Director Children's Services**

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Calvin Kipling

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no implications arising from this report.
Health and Well Being	Supporting Looked After Children to maintain their health and well-being.
Carbon Impact	There are no implications arising from this report.
Diversity	Ensuring all young people 's academic potential is promoted.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected.
Groups Affected	Looked After Children.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	No.
Urgent Decision	No.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Support for Looked After Children contributes to the One Darlington priority and to provide children with the best start in life.
Efficiency	Streamlined practice and improved outcomes.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

The Virtual School for Looked After Children

4. The Darlington Virtual School exists to promote the academic achievement of Looked After Children (LAC). The Virtual School has a full time head teacher (from September 2015) who provides challenge and support to professionals involved in the education of our looked after children. The Virtual School distributes the pupil premium plus funding that is aimed at accelerating the educational progress of LAC. The virtual school aims are;
 - (a) to narrow the gap in achievement relative to all learners
 - (b) to place LAC in good or outstanding educational provision
 - (c) to ensure LAC achieve 95% school attendance
 - (d) to reduce the rate of fixed-term exclusion of LAC from school
 - (e) to manage the transition of LAC between KS1,2,3,4 and Post 16
 - (f) to reduce the % of LAC who become NEET
 - (g) to use pupil premium to accelerate academic progress of LAC
 - (h) to raise aspirations of LAC

5. Ofsted made two key recommendations about the work of the Virtual School following the inspection in Summer 2015. Firstly "Improve the monitoring of educational progress of children looked after so that action is taken to narrow the gap in attainment compared with all children in Darlington" and secondly "Improve the consistency and quality of personal education plans and ensure that the pupil premium is effectively utilised to improve the educational attainment and achievement of looked after children". Detailed action plans to address these recommendations have been prepared and are included in the Children's Services

Improvement Plan. Actions have commenced to ensure the more systematic monitoring of academic achievement, attendance and exclusion of LAC, and to ensure that all PEPs identify SMART targets to utilise the pupil premium to ensure that LAC are making more rapid progress in schools.

Current Cohort

6. The virtual school monitors and supports children aged 2-19. There are currently 111 pupils on roll at the Virtual School from Reception to Y11. Sixty-eight attend schools within the borough and 43 are in out of borough settings. There are 39 pre-school children and 38 young people in Y12 and Y13 who are accessing 16-19 education that the Virtual School also monitors.
7. The full school roll is shown in the table below.

Year group	Darlington Borough	Out of Area	Grand Total
Year 13	7	8	15
Year 12	13	10	23
Year 11	12	3	15
Year 10	7	8	15
Year 9	9	2	11
Year 8	2	6	8
Year 7	6	6	12
Year 6	6	0	6
Year 5	3	0	3
Year 4	3	3	6
Year 3	2	5	7
Year 2	9	2	11
Year 1	4	5	9
Reception	5	3	8
Pre-School	32	7	39
Grand Total	120	68	188

Pupil Outcomes 2014-15

8. The Y11 cohort was made up of 24 pupils, 12 pupils who attended mainstream schools, 1 pupil who attended a day special school. 10 Pupils accessed alternative provision (for example Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or Home and Hospital (H+H) provision) and one pupil was in a 52 week residential placement.
9. Preliminary examination results show that 3 pupils secured the benchmark 5A*-C at GCSE including English and Maths (5A*-CEM), this is significantly lower than the number projected by reporting from schools and highlights some of the issues with the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process. Three pupils did narrowly miss 5A*-CEM obtaining 4 GCSEs including Maths and English. Results are still provisional at this stage and the Scrutiny committee will be updated with final results when they are validated. These young people have now progressed in to post-16 provision. Twenty-one are now engaged with positive destinations; two are currently not in

education, employment or training (NEET) and PAs are continuing to work with both young people; One young person is no longer a looked after child (LAC).

10. Our new Key Stage four pupils consist of 15 pupils in Year 11. Eight are in mainstream schools, four attend alternate provision (PRU or Home and Hospital) two attend day special schools and one is in a 52 week residential placement. Currently Y10 has fifteen pupils, six of which are in mainstream schools, six are in 52 week residential placements two are in day special schools and one is accessing alternate provision. This is summarised in the table below,

Year Group	Mainstream School	Alternative Provision	Special School Day Pupils	52-Week Residential Provision
Y10	6	1	2	6
Y11	8	4	2	1

11. In Y6 there were ten pupils in 2014-15, eight of these attended mainstream primary schools. One attended a day special school and one attended a 52 week residential placement. Six pupils achieved the benchmark level four or above in reading, writing and maths. There are five pupils in Y6 this year, four attend mainstream primary schools and one attends a day special school.
12. There are significant differences between cohort composition that makes year on year comparisons with benchmarks such as 5A"-CEM unhelpful. The Rees Centre has conducted research that suggests that *expected progress* and *above expected progress* are better indicators of the quality of provision (*The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England : Linking Care and Educational Data 2015*). In order to enable this to be analysed across the virtual school, the system for monitoring the attainment of LAC has been recently revised and a new PEP process devised that will allow the monitoring of progress on a termly basis. This will also allow for the different ways that schools have begun to assess pupils in the era of "no levels". The system is planned to be fully operational at Easter 2016.

Attendance

13. The virtual school commissions Welfare Call to monitor attendance on behalf of the corporate parents. Officers have been trained on making the best use of this facility and this has had a positive impact. Social workers are now contacted within 24 hours of a school absence by Welfare Call, and can intervene quickly with any emerging issues.

Table: showing provisional Monthly attendance of all LAC pupils
(Source: Welfare Call)

Month	Present (%)	Authorised Absence (%)	Unauthorised Absence (%)
September 2015	96.28	3.09	0.63
October 2015	95.91	2.91	1.18
November 2015	93.76	3.76	2.48
Cumulative to date	95.12	3.33	1.54

14. 50 pupils have 100% attendance to date (Nov 30th 2015). Seven have below 80% attendance, including one young person who is refusing to attend despite being offered provision that they had initially requested. The Young person's social worker, staff from the care home, school and the virtual head continue to seek ways to re-engage the young person with their education. The seven account for over half of the absences of the entire virtual school cohort and have an attendance of 61% between them, compared with the overall attendance of 95.12% for all the pupils, which remains fractionally above the target for the year.
15. Nationally Data is reported with respect to children who have been looked after for 12 months continuously on 31st March. The latest published figures for absence are in the table below (2014). Darlington's small cohort (75 pupils in 2014) magnify the effect of one or two complex cases.

	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence
National	2.9	1.0	3.9
North East	2.4	0.8	3.2
Darlington	2.1	2.6	4.8

Exclusion

16. There have been no permanent exclusions of LAC for 3 years. There is a challenging target of reducing fixed term exclusions by 25% in 2015-16 included in the Children's Services Improvement Plan. Currently we are well on track to achieve this.
17. The first half term (September and October 2015) two students have been excluded for a total of six sessions. All of these took place in September. There were no exclusions in October. In November two pupils were excluded for a total of 8 sessions. Following intervention from the VSH one pupil has subsequently moved to a more suitable setting. Schools have received advice from the Virtual

School on strategies aimed at avoiding further exclusion in all cases. One setting has been subject to intense support from the VSH to address issues that account for two periods of exclusion totalling 10 sessions in total.

18. The exclusion figures show a substantial improvement to the same period last year when in September 2014, 3 pupils were excluded for a total of 11 sessions and in October 2014, 4 pupils were excluded for 21 sessions. November's figures were similar to last year. This data is summarised in the table below, with last year's figures in brackets.
19. No pupils placed in the Darlington authority area were excluded in the first half term, and there has been only one exclusion in November. This is testament to the success of the behaviour and attendance partnership which works tirelessly to avoid exclusion. The VSH attends all secondary behaviour and attendance sessions to promote the welfare of LAC.
20. Members will note the marked reduction in male exclusions this year (currently zero) and the increase in females excluded to date. This will continue to be monitored and any longer term patterns explored. Currently it is difficult to attribute this to one particular factor, though the appropriate provision secured for many of the young people will contribute to improved behaviour. We also have a number of females with complex issues attending schools outside the borough where our influence is reduced.

Table summarising exclusions to date 2015-16

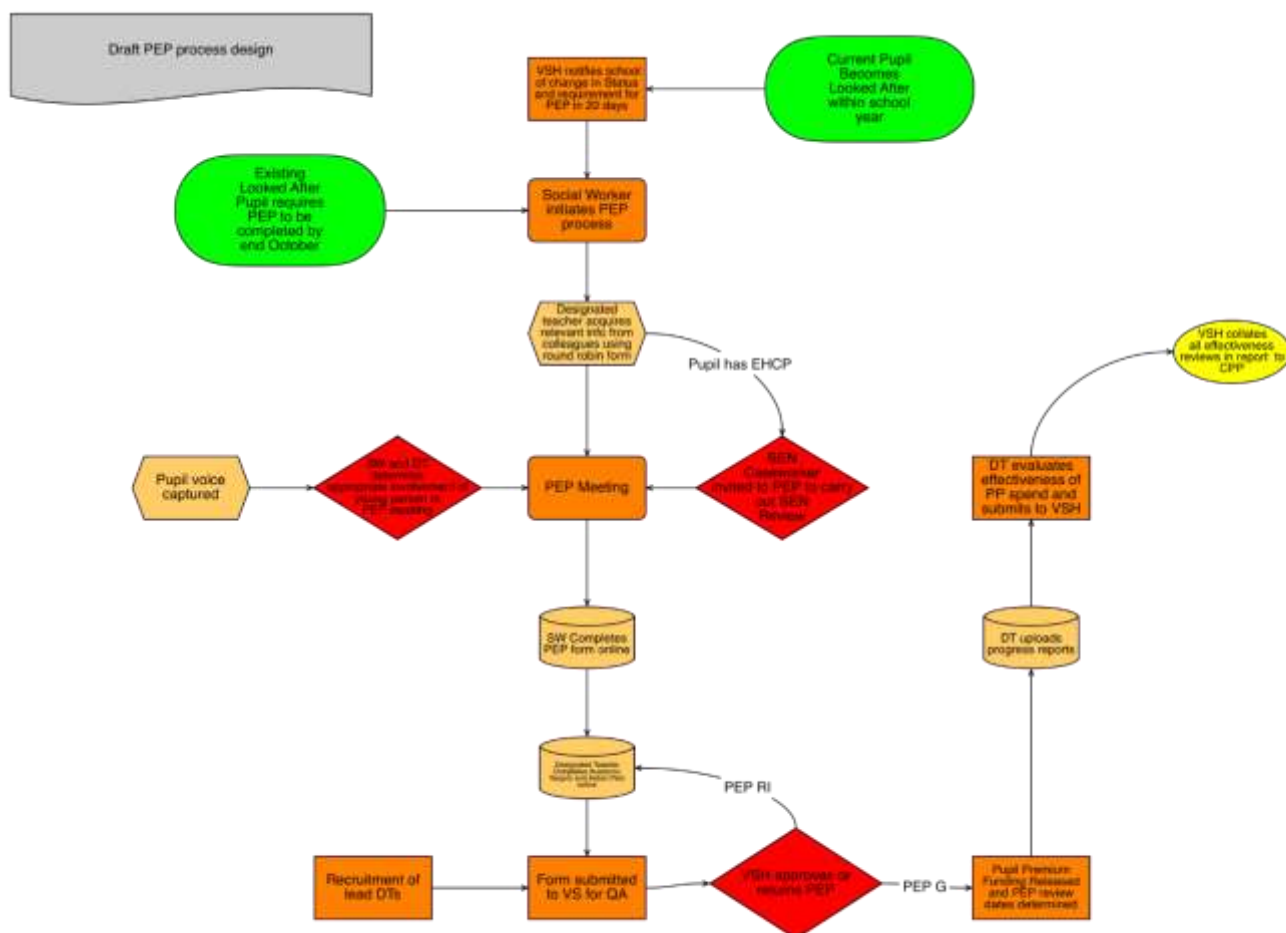
All Exclusions are counted in sessions (2014 in Brackets)							
Year	Month	Children	Fixed	Female	Male	In Borough	Out of Borough
2015	Sept	2 (3)	6 (11)	6 (1)	0 (10)	0(5)	6 (6)
2015	Oct	0 (4)	0 (21)	0 (0)	0 (21)	0 (13)	0 (8)
2015	Nov	2 (2)	8 (8)	8 (0)	0 (8)	2 (2)	6 (6)
2015	Total	4 (9)	14 (40)	14 (1)	0 (39)	2 (20)	12 (20)

Quality of Provision

21. 90% of pupils are attending provision rated by Ofsted as good or better. Currently two children attend provision rated as inadequate. The siblings both became looked-after whilst attending this provision. The VSH has visited the school and is satisfied that the quality of this provision is rapidly improving. The school has had its third and final Ofsted monitoring visit and is likely to receive an improved Ofsted grade on its re-inspection during this academic year. The VSH considered the disruption caused to the individuals by a school move under these circumstances as not in the best interests of the children.

Development of the Virtual School

22. The capacity of the Virtual School has been increased. Since the last report to the Scrutiny Committee the LAC Education Co-ordinator has left her post. The VSH has commenced a full time role (previously seconded for one day per week). Two lead designated teachers, one from the Primary phase and one from the Secondary phases have been identified to help design and quality assure the new PEP process. They will be released from schools for 2 days per term. Extra time has been secured from the Educational Psychologist to focus on LAC, this will allow the priority updating of Statements of Special Educational Need into the new Education and Health Care plans and ensure that LAC are in the appropriate settings to meet their primary needs. The aim is for all LAC open to the LATC team to have their EHC transferred by August 2016 (ahead of the 2018 deadline for all children) The VSH continues to work closely with the Looked After Through Care (LATC) team, participation officer and PAs to ensure that any emerging issues are dealt with in a timely manner.
23. A main focus this term has been the redesign of the PEP process to focus more on achievement and the use of Pupil Premium plus. The VSH has attended numerous PEPs for quality assurance purposes. Schools have been notified that pupil premium plus will be withheld if the PEP does not demonstrate how the additional funding will improve outcomes. Ofsted have identified that the PEPs must include SMART targets and the use of pupil premium, and that the use of pupil premium should be evaluated. These requirements have been designed in to the new PEP process. The redesign of the process is linked to implementation of new Liquid Logic IT system to replace Care First. In the interim the current system continues, but Designated Teachers and Social Workers have been given additional guidance to address concerns that were raised at the Ofsted inspection. The proposed new process is summarised in the flow chart below.



24. The main aim of the Virtual School is to narrow the gap in attainment between LAC and all pupils. In addition to ensuring that pupils are in the best educational settings steps need to be taken to address the issue of disrupted education. Fifty software licences have been purchased to trial the use of mobile learning to help fill the gaps in learning looked after young people often have as a result of their disrupted education. The software runs on most mobile devices. It is called “NIMBL” and has been specifically designed for children who are looked after. Letters have been sent to schools and carers and passwords distributed to those with most need.
25. The Virtual School has engaged with the raising aspirations work in partnership with Teesside University on behalf of the five North East Universities. The virtual school is currently aware of three looked after young people who are at University, though we may have more who were previously looked after. Targeted work has been planned with young people, social workers, designated teachers and crucially foster carers in order to improve the number of LAC who aspire to go to university. The virtual school is currently supporting the “Choices Together” programme which is a six week programme for Looked After Young People in Years 10 and 11 that allows them to find out what it’s really like to be a university student. The young people will visit three universities in the region (Teesside, Sunderland and Durham) and attend a welcome launch event and later a celebration event at the Stadium of

Light in the New Year.

26. Funding has been secured from the Teaching School to facilitate the training of Designated Teachers. This training will focus on the journey of the young person and will be delivered by North Tyneside's looked after training team. The date is to be confirmed in the New Year.
27. A model policy has been supplied to schools encouraging them to appoint a Governor responsible for LAC, to monitor the school's response and be a key advocate for the young person in school. A training event for Governors is planned to take place on the same day as the designated teacher training.