

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date of meeting: 30 October 2020
Report by: Director of Children's Services
Title: Virtual School Annual Report - 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020
Purpose of report: To outline the performance of the Virtual School between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

Recommendations:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the report

1. Background

1.1 The Virtual School Report is contained within Appendix 1.

2. Budget Implications

2.1 The Virtual School is funded via a combination of grants and will continue to direct the Pupil Premium to interventions which will have the best possible educational outcomes for Looked After Children.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE

Director of Children's Services

Contact

Sally Carnie - Head of Looked After Children's Services

Tel: 01323 747197

Email: sally.carnie@eastsussex.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Virtual School Report 2019/20

Appendix 1

Virtual School Report 2019/2020

1. Introduction

1.1 During this period the Virtual School (VS) focused on the delivery of support to Schools, Carers and Social Workers to ensure the best possible outcomes for children who were looked after (CLA), previously looked after children (PCLA) and care leavers (CL). All interventions were designed to meet this overriding objective and used an evidence-based approach, incorporating national research and local quantitative and qualitative data.

1.2 The VS supported 358 CLA in schools and 606 children and young people (CYP) when care leavers were included. 23.7% of the CLA cohort had an Education Health and Care Plan, 17% were on the special needs register at SEN support level and 17% were in Special Schools. In March 2020, there were 44 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in years 7 to 13, 15 of whom were of school age. Caseworkers in the VS had an average caseload of between 80 and 100 CLA. The higher number occurred between January and March when one Caseworker had left, and another had been appointed but was unable to take up the post until April.

1.3 This academic year was obviously a highly unusual one. The Department for Education (DfE) announced on the 8 April that school, college or multi-academy trust (MAT) level performance data based on summer 2020 tests, assessments and exams at any phase would not be published. Schools and Colleges should not be held to account for exam and assessment data from summer 2020 and data would not be used by others, such as Ofsted and Local Authorities, to hold Schools and Colleges to account.

1.4 For 2020, pupils were awarded the higher outcome between centre assessed grades or an algorithm that incorporated centre assessed grades but considered school and pupil prior performance. Because of this change in methodology, trend comparisons between years should be treated with extreme caution.

1.5 The current indication is that National and Local Authority data will not be published by the DfE. It will therefore not be possible to issue a further briefing note outlining East Sussex's performance compared to Statistical Neighbours, Core Cities and National performance for 2020.

1.6 Our current understanding is that a National CLA dataset for 2020 will not be published by the DfE or issued to NCER to populate the Local Authority reporting tool for VS's.

1.7 Primary Phase end of Key Stage tests were cancelled and grades were not awarded.

1.8 The VS was responsible for the management and administration of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) for CLA. In the financial year 2019- 2020 each CLA was allocated £2,300. Funding from the PPG was pooled to ensure the best outcomes for our children as outlined in 1.1 and according to the priorities set out in the VS Development Plan as described below. Pupil Premium funding for PCLA was also £2,300 but was held by their individual School. The VS advised Schools on the appropriate spend for this grant allocation for this cohort.

2. Virtual School Structure

2.1 During this period the VS employed a Head Teacher, two Education Officers (Caseworkers with supervisory and additional responsibilities), an Advisory Teacher, 7 Caseworkers (fte) and a Teaching Assistant. The VS also employed 12 casual Intervention Teachers. In addition, two Personal Advisers (PAs) were funded to work within the Through Care Service. One PA focused on working with young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and on

increasing youth participation in local and national issues; the other on supporting the education of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). In addition, a VS Extended Support Assistant was appointed to work within the East Sussex Behaviour and Attendance Team (ESBAS). This has enabled the VS to respond to children in crisis, in their individual school environment, more quickly. This structure also ensured that the support offered was incorporated into the wider package of intervention delivered to schools.

3. Key Developments

3.1 The quality of teaching and learning continued to be the VS's key focus. The VS's team of Teachers delivered interventions across all age ranges. Literacy and numeracy remained the main areas for intervention and included phonics intervention at Key Stage 2 to improve reading. In addition, the VS embedded an assessment and reporting policy to evaluate the impact of this work, to be assured of the effective assessment, planning and delivery of each intervention. The VS also used tutors from private agencies to deliver face to face and online lessons, and the year 11 cohort participated in on-line maths revision lessons as part of a Local Authority pilot project.

3.2 Teaching and learning since the middle of March 20 was adapted to be delivered in a virtual format. VS teachers worked hard to use digital technology for teaching and several on-line lesson products were purchased to assist. The VS provided both individual and group sessions, which focussed initially on year 11s and year 6s. In total, 77 CYP received one to one tuition in March, and 24 took part in group interventions. Results show that 75% of year 11 students achieving a level 4 and above had received additional tuition.

3.3 Partnerships between the VS and local providers were developed to deliver services to young people who were not engaging with school. Eggtooth and the Education Futures Trust, both based in Hastings, provided educational and therapeutic interventions to CLA in the Hastings area. Develop Outdoors worked with our young people across the Authority. The VS also started to work with Jamie's Farm, an organisation that offers disadvantaged young people a programme, combining farming, family and therapy.

3.4 Over the past 6 months, alternative providers continued to work face to face with individuals where possible, and provided virtual support based on a range of creative activities including the use of a therapeutic dog. This has been an area of challenge during COVID. The Youth Employability Scheme, YES, offered a universal service to all young people from year 10, and worked intensively with those who required more support in identifying future pathways. As a result of these partnerships there has been an increase in the levels of engagement of CLA in education and in post 16 pathways.

3.5 Personal Education Plans (PEPs) remained critical in raising educational outcomes for our children. Any applications for Pupil Premium funding to support CLA and their learning continued to be made via the PEP. Last year the VS developed its in-house PEP auditing system which was successful and will replace the need to purchase a commercial E PEP programme. There has been a significant increase in the completion rates of PEPs and the VS will continue to work with schools to ensure that they are of a high quality.

3.6 In March, a VS writing competition was launched based on a book of pictures by Chris Van Allsburg. The entries were all made into a book, participants received a certificate and the winners a book token.

"The children really enjoyed the task, even those that did not submit stories have loved working on them from home". (Teacher)

"X said he could never write 500 words but with the carers support and nudging he did it. He was very pleased to receive a winners' gift token and certificate. His carer has now challenged him to write a 1000-word story which he was working on each morning". (Social Worker)

“This comes at a perfect time for D. I have informed her that she is a winner. I have printed out the certificate on fancy paper and shared your email”. (Head Teacher)

3.7 The preparation of CLA for key educational transitions remained a focus during 2019/20. A summer school for pre-reception children and Spring School for years 8,9 and 10 was held. However, the year 11 revision school had to be cancelled because numbers were affected by a train strike.

3.8 Unfortunately, the planned 2020 transition events had to be cancelled due to COVID, but Caseworkers worked with schools to offer virtual support. The VS sent regular information and resources to Carers, Social Workers and Designated Teachers on preparing for transition from home. This included running a workshop on Using Pupil Passports to share information about a CLA and the importance of involving them in the process. The YES Service continued to work with CLA re post 16 planning.

3.9 The VS continued to work closely with Bede’s school to further develop the Springboard boarding project and plan placements for the next academic year. Four additional students were offered residential places and one student a day place to start in September 2020. Bede’s also hosted the Children in Care Awards and VS Governor meetings, but a planned event for younger children involving a visit to their zoo had to be cancelled due to COVID. The VHT met with the Buttle Trust and Eastbourne College to explore placements and partnership working and there are plans to meet with Christs Hospital in the near future.

3.10 The Children in Care Awards held in October 2019 to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people was again a success. The children’s author, Jacqueline Wilson produced a filmed message for the nominees and award winners. Plans are currently underway to deliver a virtual awards ceremony for 20/21.

3.11 The VS has continued to work closely with other services to develop support for Social and Emotional Health across the Authority. Regular messages were sent out to Carers and Designated Teachers during lockdown, sharing strategies and resources to support mental health. The VS jointly ran a virtual summer conference on Mental Health with Judy Perraton, Mental Health Co-ordinator and the Educational Psychology Service. In total, 650 staff attended the ten workshops which were very well received. The VS also funded 50 places on an extended course in Attachment and Trauma.

3.12 More recent information sent to schools, social workers and carers has focussed on supporting children and young people back into school.

3.13 The VS will be involved in the STrAWB (Shared Training and Assessment of Well-Being for Looked-After Children) project feasibility study. This project will deliver a training and assessment package for foster carers and schools, designed to identify and support those children who are at greatest risk of developing mental health difficulties, as well as those who are most resilient following maltreatment. It is led by researchers from the Universities of Oxford and Sussex.

4. National Agenda for Virtual Head Teachers

4.1 The Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) worked collaboratively with the national cohort of VHT’s on a range of national priority areas.

4.2 The VS continued to work to develop better communication with local authorities across the country where CLA were placed out of the county. This remained an area of key challenge, particularly for those children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or those awaiting assessment for an EHCP. The VS worked closely with ISEND to develop policies and procedures to address this issue and continued to reduce the timescales for school admissions. This year some highly personalised and creative educational packages for young people with the highest level of

need were successfully put together. The VS also worked with the English as an Additional Language Service and Post 16 providers to develop provision for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.

4.3 The exclusion of CLA from school has been a significant national issue during this period and is one that is being reviewed in relation to post COVID policies in school. This year the VS worked with all schools to support children who were in crisis, to avoid exclusion where possible. Fixed term exclusion for 2018-19 was 10.11% (National 11.67%)

4.4 The admission and attendance of CLA continued to be a key issue nationally with significant numbers having poor attendance. The VS tracked the attendance of all ESCC CLA educated both in and outside East Sussex and intervened as early as possible. The 2019/20 national attendance data has not been collected due to COVID and the partial closure of schools.

4.5 The VS has been tracking attendance for CLA since lockdown. Attendance during lockdown was monitored as part of the vulnerable children group and support was given to ensure that all CLA were offered school places. The VS Headteacher was also part of the Vulnerable Children Risk Assessment Group who met weekly to ensure that adequate safeguarding was in place for vulnerable groups of children including CLA.

4.6 When year groups returned to school, the attendance of CLA was in line with or above the attendance of all children.

4.7 A very small number of children have not returned to East Sussex schools since September and are being supported to get back into education by VS Caseworkers as well as by ESBAS.

4.8 VS's receive no funding for Post 16 provision. This is a key issue for all VS's and as such the DfE announced a pilot for funding Post 16 provision but unfortunately, due to COVID, this has not progressed.

5. Governor priorities for the Virtual School 2020/21

Outcome	Subsidiary	Tasks
Improve KS2 progress outcomes, particularly in reading, writing and Maths	To ensure high quality intervention through support, training, monitoring and evaluation	<p>Embed teacher induction, training and supervision</p> <p>Provide guidance for schools on high quality planning and review Monitor quality of PEPs and send regular feedback to schools</p> <p>Work with CLASS to develop a KS2 phonics intervention project</p> <p>Develop policy to promote use of technology to support development of literacy skills and removal of barriers arising from literacy difficulties</p>
To improve progress outcomes at KS4	To ensure high quality intervention through support, training, monitoring and evaluation	<p>Embed teacher induction, training and supervision</p> <p>Work with a range of Alternative providers to expand options available to CYP.</p>

	<p>To develop a range of high-quality alternative provisions for young people out of school</p> <p>To ensure that Alternative Provision supports academic and wider outcomes and supports transitions into post 16 pathways</p>	<p>Work with providers to produce information on their provision</p> <p>Ensure that AP interventions include appropriate assessment, planning and review to ensure positive impact</p> <p>Work with residential homes, placement support and Alternative Providers to train staff in delivery of ASDAN courses.</p> <p>Virtual School to become a registered ASDAN centre</p> <p>Support staff from residential homes, placement support and Alternative Providers to identify appropriate ASDAN courses for CYP out of school or on part time timetables, to plan sessions and to carry out and mark assessments.</p>
<p>To develop inclusive practice re CLA in all schools – academic and pastoral differentiation so that all CLA have access to good and better schools and enjoy going to school</p>	<p>To support the transition of CLA and PCLA on their return to school after absence due to COVID related issues.</p> <p>To improve enjoyment of school and confidence in school for CLA with specific reference to changes in response to COVID</p> <p>To work with other services and schools to improve understanding and support for mental health and emotional wellbeing (MHEW) and of the needs associated with attachment and trauma.</p> <p>To work with education, care and health partners to support schools in developing MHEW policies and practices including whole school policies and interventions.</p>	<p>Work with LA services to support co-ordinated develop of whole school practices and interventions re MHEW</p> <p>Work with SIP and ISEND to promote inclusive practice and use of the Inclusion Quality Mark</p> <p>Support the development of high quality MHEW interventions through joint working with mental health practitioners in schools and LACAMHs</p> <p>Develop VS training offer to schools and carers within a wider East Sussex offer.</p> <p>Roll out Beacon House training offer to Designated Teachers</p> <p>Produce and share information promoting inclusive practice through an online presence.</p> <p>Share information and strategies/resources with foster carers</p> <p>Explore reasons that some CYP felt they had learnt more at home</p>

		<p>and use information to inform practice in schools.</p> <p>Develop use of ELSA strategies and resources within schools</p> <p>Contribute to planning and delivery of the DFE's Wellbeing for Education Return Project</p> <p>Work with academic teams from Sussex and Oxford on the 'Shared Training and Assessment of Well-being Project (STrAWB)</p>
<p>To reduce exclusions – both fixed term and permanent</p>	<p>To work with schools to develop differentiated behaviour policies particularly within organisational changes created because of COVID.</p> <p>To work as part of the LA team that promotes Therapeutic Thinking and other complementary approaches</p> <p>To support schools to develop more inclusive behaviour policies</p>	<p>Participate in the 'whole school programmes for emotional well-being working group' – looking at a range of inclusive approaches</p> <p>Challenge exclusions and work with schools to put in an alternative plan</p> <p>VS team to receive training in Therapeutic Thinking</p>
<p>To increase the participation of all CLA and care leavers in opportunities that will raise aspiration and prepare them for the challenges of an independent future (Extra Curricular activities, Work experience, CICC developments)</p>	<p>To ensure high quality IAG for care leavers e.g. University, apprenticeships</p> <p>To ensure engagement of CYP in WP activities</p> <p>To develop YP participation in local and national initiatives</p> <p>To use care leavers views to inform practice</p> <p>To embed the use of SEND Vocational Profiles and other SEND Community of Practice interventions within VS practice</p>	<p>Involve care leavers in Local Offer and run dissemination event – suspended because of COVID</p> <p>Develop 16 plus meetings to involve WP co-ordinators in colleges and schools and ensure a coordinated approach</p> <p>Work with Universities to develop their Widening Participation programme and ensure engagement by involving CYP in programme planning</p> <p>Explore development of year 6 and 11 transition events to ensure maximum impact</p> <p>To develop online communication re extra curricula</p>

		<p>events for pre and post 16 students</p> <p>To pilot an adapted PEP for post 16 students – informed by the SEND Vocational Profiles</p>
<p>To develop high quality advice and support re Previously Looked After Children</p>	<p>To develop knowledge and understanding of team</p> <p>To work with post adoption team to develop understanding of VS role and key educational issues</p> <p>To work with Amaze to share support offer parents of PCLA</p>	<p>Increase staff knowledge, understanding of issues specific to PCLA via input from Adoption Team</p> <p>Create a VS link staff member within the Adoption team.</p> <p>Hold regular drop-in sessions with Adoption social workers</p> <p>Work in partnership with Adoption South East to develop practise re PCLA</p>
<p>To increase attendance rates overall and reduce persistent absence</p>	<p>To reduce amount of time CLA are out of school when they move in or out of county</p> <p>To develop range of Alternative Provision to encourage engagement of CYP who have become disengaged from school (see above)</p>	<p>Embed policies and procedures re CLA with EHCPs moving in or out of county – adapt policy to take account of children who are granted an EHCP after they have moved out of East Sussex</p>
<p>To improve the quality of Personal Education Plans</p>		<p>To develop a robust for monitoring quality of PEPs</p> <p>To further develop a robust and staged system for ensuring timely completion of PEPs</p>
<p>To ensure clear and effective educational pathways for UASC</p>	<p>To develop EAL provision for all new and existing UAS</p> <p>To increase staff knowledge, understanding of issues specific to UAS</p>	<p>Work together with EALs to develop a clear policy re EAL delivery to UAS CLA and care leavers – to include online teaching</p> <p>Regular UASC updates at team meetings</p> <p>Work with East Sussex College group to identify a choice of ESOL pathways for UASC</p>

<p>To ensure that all young people are engaged in education and aspire for their futures</p>	<p>To develop links with a range of independent schools so able to offer residential and day school places and extracurricular support.</p>	<p>Work with YES and Enterprise team to develop Information, advice and guidance from start of year 10 and with a focus on students likely to be NEET</p> <p>To develop work experience and volunteering opportunities for CLA and ensure CLA are included in schools' work experience offers</p> <p>To work with Springboard to share boarding school experience with VSs across the country.</p> <p>To develop links with Eastbourne College, Christ Hospital and Cranbrook re educational provision and extra curricula activities</p> <p>Hold a raising aspirations' event/s using outside speakers to inspire CYP.</p>
<p>To promote the work of the VS and share information and resources with schools, carers and social workers.</p>	<p>To develop our online presence</p> <p>To enable VS users to interact with the school through an online platform/s.</p>	<p>Meet with comms manager to plan online presence</p> <p>Plan and develop online presence</p> <p>Ensure quality and updated content and opportunities for interaction with users</p>

5.1 The VHT, together with the national group of Virtual Head Teachers, to contribute to the national debate regarding the ongoing DfE commitment to funding Pupil Premium Plus for CLA and PCLA and issues impacting CLA such as admissions and exclusions.

5.2 The VS to review priorities above on an ongoing basis in response to the impact of COVID 19 on education.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to comment on and note the report