| Nottinghamshire County Council | Report to Children and Young People's Committee |
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30th November 2020

Agenda Item: 5

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS**

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC)**

## Purpose of the Report

1. To update Committee on the impact of the work of the Virtual School and its partners for the academic year 2019/20.

## Information

2. The Virtual School (VS) discharges the Council's statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children (LAC) in all phases of education. It does this by working in close partnership with schools and other partners to build shared responsibility, and in particular to build capacity in schools.

3. The work of the Virtual School contributes to the achievement of the ambitions summarised in Nottinghamshire's Partnership Strategy for Looked After Children & Care Leavers 2018-21. The Virtual School is a key contributor to the Local Authority's LAC and Care Leavers Partnership Board; this accountability board ensures that key partners come together from across and beyond the Local Authority (LA) to have collective responsibility for the education, health and wellbeing of those children in care to Nottinghamshire LA.

4. The work of the Virtual School, including its structures, processes, planned actions, and outcomes, are recorded in a working document referred to as the Annual Report and Development Plan (ARDP). The ARDP is informed by the Council's three commitments outlined in its Children and Young People's Strategy (2018-21), and the six ambitions outlined in the Council's Partnership Strategy for LAC and Carer Leavers 2018-21. The ARDP is reviewed and updated by the Virtual School's senior leadership team on a termly basis.

5. The Virtual School's Senior Leadership Team oversees the strategic and operational working practices of the team. This leadership team currently comprises the Head of the Virtual School, who is also the LA's Group Manager (Psychology Services), the Assistant Head of the Virtual School and the Senior Educational Psychologist for LAC. The wider team includes a Virtual School Data Officer, and five LAC Achievement Officers (AOs). The

number of AOs has been increased from four to five as a consequence of the statutory extended duties supporting previously looked after children.

6.  When compared with other local authorities, Nottinghamshire's operational Virtual School team remains relatively small in size. This is the justification and rationale for the Virtual School to be focused on building capacity in schools through strong partnership working, rather than the Virtual School carrying primary responsibility at an individual child casework level. Within an increasingly 'schools-led' and academised education system, it is essential that the Virtual School promotes a clear, shared vision for developing systems capacity and accountability through strong partnership working, thereby securing good quality educational provision and outcomes for LAC.

7.  The Committee already receives updates on validated educational outcomes of Looked After Children through quarterly performance reports to Committee.

8.  The current profile of Nottinghamshire's statutory school-aged LAC and their educational settings or alternative provision is as follows:

    -   the number of statutory school aged LAC under the care of Nottinghamshire at the time of writing is 545
    -   of these, 401 attend Nottinghamshire schools
    -   by Key Stage, 26 are in reception, 181 are primary age, and 338 are secondary age
    -   13 are Nottinghamshire LAC living in Nottinghamshire but educated in other local authority schools (all 13 are secondary age)
    -   a further 135 are Nottinghamshire LAC living out of county and being educated in other local authority schools (7 being of reception age, 43 primary age and 85 secondary age). This represents a decrease from 152 at this time last year.

9.  The table below shows the percentage of Looked After pupils attending schools by Ofsted category.

|  | Outstanding | Good | Requires Improvement | Inadequate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sept 2020 | 18% | 67% | 13% | 2% |
| July 2019 | 18% | 70% | 8% | 4% |
| July 2018 | 18% | 74% | 8% | 1% |
| July 2017 | 14% | 74% | 10% | 2% |

10. Looked After Children are not moved out of their school if an Ofsted inspection results in the school receiving a less than Good judgement. Any children in less than Good settings are monitored closely.

11. The Virtual School uses pupil level progress and attainment data to support and challenge educational settings to maximise their impact on progress and attainment. The aim is to ensure that all initiatives to drive up attainment and progress are accessible to Nottinghamshire's LAC both in and out of county. Data systems used by the Virtual School have become increasingly sophisticated, and this facilitates greater challenge of publicly funded schools and other providers when individual pupils do not make educational progress. The Council's Performance and Review team works closely with the Virtual

School Data Officer to provide support with accessing and analysing data sources locally, regionally and nationally.

12. During Covid-19 lockdown beginning March 2020 the Virtual School worked with Children's Social Care (CSC) colleagues to ensure those pupils needing to be in school or provision, for various reasons, secured placements. The table below indicates how many pupils were accessing their setting and those that remain supported by their settings to learn from home.

| Remain at home | Stayed at school | Attending school P/T | Receiving bespoke provision |
|---|---|---|---|
| 75% | 15% | 3% | 7% |

13. As work began to support schools with the planning for pupils returning to their settings, the Virtual School was involved in the work by the Educational Psychology Service to produce the comprehensive resource now available for schools to access supporting the return of all pupils. This resource has been received very positively both within the Local Authority and beyond and specifically supports the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of children/young people and also providing tools and resources to support planning for any children/young people who are requiring extra support to return.

14. The current Year 12/13 cohort of LAC is 256. This is a significant increase from 196 at this time last academic year. The Council's ambition is to make sure all post-16 LAC are placed on appropriate education, employment or training (EET) pathways, and to provide effective support and challenge for post-16 settings.

15. The Virtual School works in collaboration with a dedicated Leaving Care Achievement Officer to support the post-16 cohort of LAC. This includes providing information of those Year 11 young people who the Virtual School considers may be at risk of not securing an appropriate EET pathway. The wider Leaving Care team of achievement officers support Year 13 young people with making choices from a range of EET opportunities.

16. The Virtual School is working with Futures, who have secured D2N2 funding, on a project called Unlocking Potential. This project is aimed at Year 10 pupils and upwards to ensure quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) is available, particularly to those pupils with risk factors to post-16 planning, to avoid pupils becoming NEET. In the next phase of the project young people in Years 12 and13 will also receive IAG to maintain their chosen courses or make decisions on whether the course currently being undertaken is the most relevant and sustainable. This project will be bringing together all relevant services: Children's Social Care, Virtual School, Leaving Care Achievement Advisors and post 16 settings to ensure quality planning is in place to maintain EET.

17. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have been updated for the academic year 2020-2021. This was necessary in order that they are reflecting the strength-based approach that is now a key theme through the Local Authority children's services. There will be a joint quality assurance process that will be undertaken through multi-agency forums including Children's Social Care colleagues to maintain a focus on meaningful PEP processes. Training has been delivered to schools, alternative provisions and social care teams to support the quality of personal education planning for our children. The Virtual School senior leadership team continues to work with senior leaders within Children's Social Care to develop strength-based working practices within the wider social care workforce.

18. The Virtual School team works in close partnership with other Council teams, including the Fair Access Team, to ensure that there is a robust joined-up approach to identifying and monitoring those LAC who are at risk of missing education. This process is delivered through the work of the Vulnerable Children's Education Committee (VCEC), Children Out of School Group (COOS) and the Children Missing Education Panel (CME). These processes enable a clear escalation process for those LAC who are at risk of not receiving appropriate full-time education. These forums have also provided the Virtual School with a mechanism for the early identification of children who may be at risk of coming into care.

19. The Virtual School works closely with colleagues in the Education, Learning and Skills division in areas where there are shared responsibilities, for example with Achievement and Equality consultants in supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs), and with Early Years Teachers to ensure effective partnership working with early years, schools and settings to implement the Early Years Pupil Premium.

20. The Virtual School team works closely with colleagues across Children's Social Care and especially with the Children's Placement team to minimise disruption in education should placement moves be required. There is also a robust decision making process through senior colleagues in Commissioning and Placements to support the decision making when any education placements are required as part of residential placements for our children.

**Supporting work of Designated Teachers**

21. Each publicly funded school is statutorily required to have a qualified teacher undertaking the role of Designated Teacher (DT) for Looked After Children, and previously Looked After Children. This DT's statutory role is detailed in the legislation The Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children, February 2018. The Virtual School has a responsibility, as detailed in the local authorities guidance Promoting the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children, February 2018, to:

   • ensure all governors and school leaders are aware of their requirement to appoint and train a DT for LAC
   • work closely with, and provide training and support for all DTs to ensure that they understand and fulfil their statutory role for LAC
   • provide regular updates for governors, school leaders and DTs in terms of current outcomes for LAC and good practice examples.

22. Good links are in place with Designated Teachers in Nottinghamshire schools through a regular email service, which provides DTs with update information and guidance on all topics related to LAC provision. In addition, free 'new to role' or 'refresher' training is offered to all DTs on a termly basis. During the academic year 2019/2020 over 69 DTs have received this training. In addition to this the Virtual School has developed the DT Curriculum offer. This is a full range of training that DTs from all settings can undertake. This training includes understanding trauma, executive functioning and the emotion coaching approach. These courses are offered at no cost to schools/settings and commissioned through the Educational Psychology Services using retained Pupil Premium funding or delivered by Virtual School staff. Despite the required changes due to the current Covid-19 restrictions all training was moved to online delivery and well attended.

23. The Virtual School, alongside Educational Psychology colleagues during 2019, established a pilot network which brings together DTs from within a Family of Schools in Mansfield to provide a termly opportunity for peer support, training and good practice sharing. Following the positive feedback from this pilot there are now networks set up across Mansfield and Ashfield with Newark, Rushcliffe and Broxtowe and Gedling expressing an interest in setting up their networks during 2020-21 academic year.

**Monitoring and maximising the use of the Looked After Pupil Premium**

24. The Pupil Premium is additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities, and to ensure educational opportunities for all regardless of need. Pupils eligible for Pupil Premium are children eligible for free school meals, looked after and previously looked after children, and forces children.

25. The size of the Pupil Premium budget which is overseen by the Virtual School is £1.6m. The value of the Pupil Premium Plus allocation per Looked After Child for each school is £2,300. The number of LAC for whom schools accessed Pupil Premium Plus last year was 690.

26. In order for the Virtual School to release the LAC Pupil Premium, all schools must return a detailed Pupil Premium Plan which is quality assured by the Assistant Head of the Virtual School to ensure chosen 'spends' are appropriately focused on the particular educational needs for each eligible child. The Virtual School monitors the impact of this funding and has identified a number of evidence-based interventions which have a positive impact on progress, for example, Switch-on and Reading Recovery, Numicon (maths) and 1:1 tuition and relational based support such as ELSA's (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) to overcome barriers to learning. This information is shared with schools and settings to support intervention planning for those pupils not making good progress.

27. Due to the Covid-19 situation this financial year a number of year groups will be targeted to receive funds at the beginning of the new academic year. These year groups are Years 10 and 11 (academic year 2020-21). The decision on this early release before approved plans are received has been made to ensure schools have maximum time with the allocation of funding to identify and support any gaps that may have occurred during the past months of limited teaching time. This temporary change is for this financial year only and has been detailed in the Statement which the Virtual School releases each year.

28. In line with the 'Conditions of Grant' guidance, Nottinghamshire's Virtual School retains some Pupil Premium funding in order to commission and provide a number of additional, far-reaching development projects which aim to either involve and inspire groups of LAC or to pilot and develop collaborative good practice across Nottinghamshire's schools. Letterbox club, the Multi-modal Literacy Project and the Attachment Aware Schools, now known as the Relational Schools: Becoming Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed, are successful examples of the use of Pupil Premium funding which are worthy of celebration.

**Celebrating success**

29. The Letterbox Club, which is an initiative run by the Book Trust to promote reading for pleasure, has been evaluated as being extremely positive, with many carers reporting that their young people are now enjoying reading. The current cohort consists of:

| (Early Years) Year group 1 | 24 |
| Year group 1 | 22 |
| Year group 3 | 23 |
| Year group 5 | 38 |
| Year group 7 | 46 |

30. The Multi-modal Literacy (MML) Project, which is a literacy initiative to engage vulnerable looked after learners to improve confidence and progress, was impacted by the Covid-19 situation which prevented the delivery of face to face training and support to schools. However, the Virtual School supported the practitioners commissioned to deliver the MML project, to move the work to an online delivery aptly named as the Multi Modal Hub. This Hub enabled students on the project to access live one hour teaching sessions three times a week which continued to build on the resources the pupils had from the project. This was a huge success and engaged some very hard to reach learners who had not been on the project previously. The intention is to maintain the Hub as a blended approach for the MML project and also as an offer to those learners that might find face to face teaching a challenge. Feedback from adults supporting the Hub included comments such as: a way for children to expand their literacy and technology skills, able to achieve, empowering – great for self-esteem and positive learning environment.

31. The MML project will be delivered again during the 2020-21 academic year. The Virtual School and MML practitioners have developed a plan to deliver either face to face training or online training for foster carers and teachers both new to the project or continuing. The Virtual School is also working with the practitioners to develop the virtual reality aspect for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils, the MML app and once again work with the Southwell Minster and Harley Gallery.

   The current cohort has 41 pupils taking part, four are Key Stage 3 pupils who have been with the project sometime. An impact report will be produced at the end of this academic year.

32. The Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) project has now been renamed to Relational Schools: Becoming Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed and this is to reflect the approach that we know is a positive intervention when meeting the needs of vulnerable children. Currently 45 schools have undertaken or about to start the programme. A key aspect of the project is sharing good practice that schools develop and this remains an expectation of the participants; this is shared widely through either designated teacher networks or through other training forums that the Virtual School will facilitate to continue to develop the designated teachers' knowledge and confidence throughout Nottinghamshire.

33. The Virtual School hosts an annual achievement event to celebrate the success of Nottinghamshire's children and young people. This is usually attended by our children and young people, their carers, their teachers, their social workers, and various senior officers of the Council as well as the Virtual School team. Unfortunately due to the Covid-19 situation the event was not able to be held under normal circumstances at the Albert Hall in Nottingham City Centre. However, over 232 Looked After Children received their certificate, book token and letter to acknowledge their achievements. Colin Pettigrew, Corporate Director, also recorded a congratulatory message that was accessible through the Virtual School website. The achievements range from graduation from university to overcoming

huge barriers in personal and social lives.  The LAC and Care Leavers Partnership Board now routinely shares and celebrates the particular achievements of Nottinghamshire LAC and Care Leavers.

34.     In partnership with Nottingham Trent University the Virtual School was due to host another conference for Designated Teachers (DTs) and other professionals with a focus on supporting and developing the role of the DT.  Key note speakers who were booked to deliver at the April 2020 conference included Richard McCann and Stuart Guest, all of whom have direct experience of the needs of vulnerable children and the support required whether pupils were looked after, previously looked after or identified as vulnerable.  A range of workshops were also identified to be provided by keynotes, school colleagues and educational psychologists. The conference is hoped to be delivered through webinar forums during April 2021 with the colleagues involved booked for the 2020 conference.

35.     The Virtual School, together with other strategic partners, has continued to develop the Work Readiness and Career Ambition Programme.  This Programme has the ultimate aim that all Nottinghamshire's LAC embark on a systematic programme of experiences from Year 8 onwards which better prepares them for the world of work.  The activities during 2019-20 academic year were curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions in March 2020.  As it is very uncertain as to how the project in its current form will be delivered due to continued restrictions,  the Virtual School has worked with all partners both outside and inside the Council to transform the programme to an online delivery via the Virtual School website.  Colleges, Futures and other providers have all delivered their workshops through this method and there are activities available to support these deliveries.  This will be kept up to date regardless of whether the programme is delivered on a face to face model again as it gives all children and young people the ability to draw on the resources, advice and guidance provided by the project.

36.     The Virtual School encouraged Nottinghamshire schools with looked after children on roll to take part in a research project, conducted by What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC), which will be evaluating the impact of a mathematics intervention delivered by Third Space Learning, an online intervention programme.  A number of schools registered their interest with this, 15 in total.  The Virtual School will receive updates on a termly basis by WWCSC and the findings will be shared with all schools after the year's research is complete. These findings will help to inform any Pupil Premium expenditure where mathematics may be a need.

**Future priorities**

37.     2020-2021 planning for the Virtual School includes:

*   to continue to work on a framework of partnership working to build capacity through a school-led system
*   in collaboration with Children's Social Care support quality strength-based PEP for ages 3 to 18 and develop an effective quality assurance process
*   further develop post-16 educational support in collaboration with the Leaving Care Service
*   build positive working relationships with locality teams to the benefit of our children's educational outcomes

- to continue to effectively support our children to achieve their education potential through supporting designated teachers and professionals to meet any identified additional needs to promote engagement in learning.

## Other Options Considered

38. No other options have been considered.

## Reason/s for Recommendation/s

39. The report provides an opportunity for the Committee to consider any further actions arising from the information contained within the report.

# Statutory and Policy Implications

40. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## Financial Implications

41. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

# RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

1) considers whether there are any actions it requires in relation to the information in the report on the impact of the work of the Virtual School and its partners for academic year 2019/20.

2) agrees that further annual reports on the work of the Virtual School be presented to the Children's and Young People's Committee.


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**Constitutional Comments (KK 03/11/20)**

42.     The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee.

**Financial Comments (SAS 09/11/20)**

43.     There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Promoting the Education of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children (February 2018)

Nottinghamshire's Partnership Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2018-21

**Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

C1402