

15th July 2019

Agenda Item: 4

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 2018/19.

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 (previously known as the Co-ordinator of the Virtual School), and the Senior Educational Psychologist for LAC. The wider team includes a Virtual School

Data Officer, and five full time 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 is 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 604. This is a significant increase from 541 at this time last year.
 - of these, 433 attend Nottinghamshire schools
 - by key stage, 30 are in reception, 200 are primary age, and 372 are secondary age
 - 19 are Nottinghamshire LAC living in Nottinghamshire but educated in other local authority schools (6 are primary age and 13 secondary age).
 - a further 152 are Nottinghamshire LAC living out of county and being educated in other local authority schools (7 being of reception age, 42 primary age and 103 secondary age). This represents a significant increase from 127 at this time last year.
9. These increases have clearly placed additional challenges on the Virtual School team. However, these are being addressed through the development of strong networks and partnerships with designated teachers.
10. The table below shows the percentage of Looked After pupils attending schools by Ofsted category.

	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
July 2019	18%	70%	8%	4%
July 2018	18%	74%	8%	1%
July 2017	14%	74%	10%	2%

11. 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.
12. 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.

13. The current Year 12/13 cohort of LAC is 116. Again, this is a significant increase from 94 at this time last 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.
14. 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. There are currently 38 young people receiving targeted support to avoid them becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).
15. The Assistant Head of the Virtual School monitors Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to identify those LAC who are not making expected progress or who are experiencing difficulties in educational settings. Once identified as being 'at risk', the Virtual School's risk and management information system is used to gather a more detailed picture of the LAC's profile and needs. This monitoring process then informs the priority of involvement for LAC Achievement Officers.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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. In addition, the Virtual School senior leadership team is working with senior leaders within Children's Social Care to develop strength-based working practices within the wider social care workforce.

Supporting work of Designated Teachers

19. 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. The Virtual School has a responsibility 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.
20. Good links are in place with Designated Teachers in 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 twice yearly basis. During the academic year 2018/19 over 140 DTs have received this training.
21. The Virtual School, alongside Educational Psychology colleagues, has 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. The intention is for this pilot model to be rolled out across all areas and for all Families of Schools.

Monitoring and maximising the use of the Looked After Pupil Premium

22. 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.
23. The size of the Pupil Premium budget which is overseen by the Virtual School is £1.4m. The value of the Pupil Premium Plus allocation per Looked After Child for each school is £2,000. The number of LAC for whom schools accessed Pupil Premium Plus last year was 620.
24. 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. This information is shared with schools and settings to support intervention planning for those pupils not making good progress.
25. 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 project

are successful examples of the use of Pupil Premium funding which are worthy of celebration.

Celebrating success

26. 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	18
Year group 1	21
Year group 3	29
Year group 5	39
Year group 7	49

27. The quality of the work which has come out of the Multi-modal Project, which is a literacy initiative to engage vulnerable looked after learners to improve confidence and progress is being formally recognised and celebrated in an exhibition at the Harley Gallery on the Welbeck Estate, as well as at the Southwell Minster Chapter House. The current cohort has 27 pupils taking part, 4 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.
28. The Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) project was a national initiative to raise awareness in schools and within the general workforce of the impact of early childhood experiences on a child's ability to form positive relationships. In Nottinghamshire an external provider was commissioned to deliver training to schools. Whilst this training was positively received, there were concerns about the extent to which the learning which took place became embedded in day-to-day practice in schools. As a consequence the approach to developing this work has been redesigned. AAS development work is now delivered to groups of senior leaders by educational psychology colleagues, with a commitment to Action Research evidencing a change in practice within the school setting. The active role of the senior leader in the school is emphasised in this approach.
29. The Virtual School hosts an annual achievement event to celebrate the success of Nottinghamshire's LAC. This is attended by LAC young people, their carers, their teachers, their social workers, and various senior officers of the Council as well as the Virtual School team. Over 100 Looked After Children will be receiving awards at the 2019 achievement event. 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.
30. In partnership with Nottingham Trent University the Virtual School hosted a conference for Designated Teachers (DTs) and other professionals with a focus on supporting and developing the role of the DT. Over 120 delegates attended and the evaluation was 100% positive. Key note speakers included Sir John Timpson, Lisa Cherry and Luke Rodgers, all of whom have direct experience of fostering or being in the care system. In addition a key note speech was given by a Nottinghamshire LAC. A range of workshops were provided by keynotes, school colleagues and educational psychologists. The outstanding success of the conference has prompted the LAC and Care Leavers Partnership Board to request

that further conferences be organised, and for these to include the wider children's care workforce beyond the designated teachers in schools.

31. The Virtual School, together with other strategic partners, has continued to develop the *Work Readiness and Career Ambition Programme*. This is an ambitious piece of development work with the ultimate aim that all Nottinghamshire's LAC embark on a systematic programme of experiences from Year 8 onwards which better prepare them for the world of work. These experiences are in addition to whatever these pupils access within their own school, and have been designed with a view to Looked After Children having an 'edge' as they transition into adulthood.

Future priorities

32. 2019-2020 planning for the Virtual School includes:
 - to continue to work on a framework of partnership working to build capacity through a school-led system
 - to continue to develop the Virtual School's method of service delivery
 - to further develop the Attachment Aware Schools project
 - to create a Virtual School website to host resources and information which can be accessed by schools, professionals, parents and carers, as well as young people
 - to develop a system for sharing, within General Data Protection Regulation rules, data which supports the effective transition and ongoing support for LAC into post-16 placements.

Other Options Considered

33. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

34. 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

35. 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

36. 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 2018/19.
- 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 (SLB 18/06/19)

37. Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report. If Committee resolves that any actions are required it must be satisfied that such actions are within the Committee's terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SH 25/06/19)

38. 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.

C1268