

Corporate Parenting Panel

30 November 2018

Virtual School Annual Report



Report of Christine Stonehouse, Durham Virtual School Head, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide an executive summary of the full virtual school annual report for 2017-2018 which is available on the website <http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2345/The-Durham-Virtual-School---supporting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>. This summary focuses primarily on outcomes for children and young people of statutory school age.

Background

- 2 As of August 2018 there were 502 Durham looked after children of statutory school age. 49% were of primary age and 51% were of secondary age. 42% were female and 58% were male. 87% attended Durham schools. In addition, 108 children and young people looked after by other authorities attended school in Durham.
- 3 At the end of the academic year 2017-18, 74.4% attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or outstanding. This figure rises to 91.1% for the primary phase. The figure for the secondary phase is 63%. All Durham secondary Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) settings are currently rated requires improvement and twenty children were attending these schools last year because this was the right provision for them. 2.3% attended a school with an inadequate rating, all children had attended the school prior to the Ofsted judgement and it was not appropriate to move them.
- 4 Stability of educational placement is better in Durham than nationally and for our stability statistical neighbours. There is a consistent three year trend for schools moves and in 2017-18 65% of moves were to support a permanent placement and 11% to support a Special Guardianship Order.
- 5 49% of Durham looked after children had an identified special educational need (SEN) in 2017-18 with 24% of them supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This has remained static over the last two years and once again the highest number of young people with an identified need were in year 11.

Headline Outcomes 2018 –unvalidated data

- 6 The data refers to the reporting cohort for 2017-18. The reporting cohort is made up of those children and young people who were continuously in care from April 2017 – March 2018. The targets referred to come from Fischer Family Trust (FFT) targets series 50 which takes account of the disrupted learning for many looked after children.
- 7 Early indications suggest that the overall performance is broadly positive with improvement in writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) and maths at KS2 and strong performance in English at KS4. More children and young people achieved the higher grades.
- 8 The KS1 cohort was very small with just 15 children and therefore it is not possible to draw accurate conclusions or to identify trends. Outcomes show that children performed better than their FFT targets, but outcomes are below those for 2017. Six of this cohort had identified special educational needs. Five children were working at performance attainment targets (P scales) for children with special educational needs (SEN).
- 9 There were 43 children in the KS2 reporting cohort. Both writing and GPS showed a significant improvement from 2017 and were well above the FFT targets. Maths also improved but was slightly below target, whilst reading showed a significant dip, despite being above FFT targets. Girls performed significantly better than boys who made up 74.4% of the cohort. 49% of the cohort had an identified SEN, 23% had an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- 10 Progress from KS1 to KS2 for Durham children in Durham schools (out of county data not is yet available) was strongly positive for writing and maths but negative for reading which has to be a key priority for us for 2018-19. We are working in partnership with Durham Learning Resources to develop better reading materials and activities to promote engagement. We are developing this alongside closer working with the permanence teams and fostering service to encourage foster carers to promote reading at home. We hope to hold a grand launch event in February and we will circulate an invite to Members as soon as it is agreed.
- 11 There were 53 young people in the KS4 reporting cohort. 21 of them attended specialist provision. English results showed a significant improvement from 2017 whilst maths remained broadly consistent. Both results were below FFT targets, however, young people in mainstream schools and girls in particular achieved above their targets at grades 9-4. We are pleased to report that more young people also achieved the higher grades in 2018; we had worked hard with schools to promote a message of high expectations for looked after children and young people. Emerging data for Achievement 8 (A8), the measure across 8 subjects shows an improvement from 2017.
- 12 For all cohorts of statutory school age the gender gap is too big with girls performing significantly better than boys. The gap between looked after children and non looked after Durham children is also still too wide.

- 13 The data for the small reporting cohort of Early Years children is only currently available for the 10 children in Durham schools. This shows a gap of 12.7% between looked after children achieving a good level of development (GLD) and all Durham children.
- 14 Post 16 data shows that an increasing number of care leavers are attending university, but this is still below the national average. Six young people achieved A level results in 2018 which gave them access to university degree courses.
- 15 There is a still a large gap between care leavers not in education, employment or training and all young people.

Attendance and Exclusions

- 16 There continues to be a very positive three year trend for attendance and persistent absence for the most recent national data available, 2016-17. Attendance for Durham looked after children was ranked 14th and in the top quartile (A), persistent absence was ranked 9th and in quartile A, whilst unauthorised absence was in quartile B. The attendance of looked after children and young people at special schools remains a priority area, particularly for those in Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) settings.
- 17 We have not had any permanently excluded looked after children since 2014. The most recent national data for fixed term exclusions (FTE) is for 2015-16 where Durham was ranked 13th and in quartile A. Rates of FTE are highest in SEMH schools. We continue to provide support at our Inclusion Base and respite to support schools to avoid exclusion.

Quality Assurance of the Personal Education Plan (PEP)

- 18 Following a dip in the quality of the PEPs in the autumn term 2017, we had discussions with some schools and social care teams to challenge this and to plan for improvement. By the end of the year, high quality PEPs had increased by 9% and social worker involvement had increased by 11%. The format of the PEP has been adjusted slightly for 2018-19 as we consider a more comprehensive review for the following year.

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) Funding

- 19 Schools spent the bulk of their allocated PP+ funding on 1:1 tuition and / or small group and cohort support for their looked after children. Durham Virtual School spent the bulk of the retained funding on therapeutic intervention, inclusion support and alternative pathways and provision. We have implemented a less bureaucratic and less complex allocation system to schools for 2018-19 which will enable them to better forward plan to meet the needs of the cohort.

Durham Virtual School Team

- 20 The duties of the Virtual School Head (VSH) were extended from September 1st 2018 to include previously looked after children and currently both the VS head and deputy are receiving an increasing number of requests for support and advice from schools, parents and carers. The DfE is providing additional burdens grant funding to 2020. We want to use this to provide extra capacity to develop the offer through building links with appropriate agencies, developing the website and linking with schools, parents and carers. We believe this role could also encompass developmental work for the virtual school to enhance and enrich the lives of all care-experience children and young people.
- 21 The virtual school casework team has recently restructured to become part of the new SEND, Looked After Children and Vulnerable Groups Team, within the Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Groups Service. This will give an opportunity, once the initial turbulence of the restructure has settled, to bring additional capacity to support looked after children. The casework team is now much bigger and will extend its remit to early years and post 16. Caseworkers have a bigger caseload, but fewer looked after children.
- 22 The Virtual School Head continues to sit within the Education and Skills Service with a more strategic role to provide challenge and support, analysis and evaluation and to ensure there is planning for improvement and development. This will be informed by working with the National Association of Virtual School Heads at a regional and national level. Being a joint regional lead for the north east provides a place on the extended board of the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH). This gives us earlier access to the direction of thinking of both the DfE and Ofsted with regards to the education of care experienced young people.
- 23 The role of deputy head of the virtual school has been retained as an additional responsibility for a team manager to ensure the focus on looked after children is not lost and the new team reports to the Strategic Manager for SEND and Inclusion.

Virtual School Areas for Development

- 24 The key priorities for 2018-19 have been identified through consultation, data analysis and government agenda:
- Reduce the gender gap
 - Reduce the gap between Durham looked after children and all Durham children with a focus on reading and maths
 - Work in partnership to develop clear academic and vocational pathways in preparation for adulthood
 - Raise awareness in secondary schools of the impact of early trauma and insecure attachment on behaviour and learning and support schools to review policies and implement change

- Develop enrichment and enhancement opportunities to unleash the aspirations of our young people and celebrate success
- Listen more closely to the voice of the young person and respond more flexibly
- Contribute to an increasingly integrated and joined-up process with health and social care teams to provide a holistic and cohesive approach to support readiness to learn
- Develop and deliver on our offer for previously looked after children.

Recommendations

25 It is recommended that Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel:

- a) note the contents of this summary and full annual report
- b) through the Sub Group, monitor the impact of the restructure to ensure that looked after children and young people remain a priority focus within the wider team.
- c) through the Sub Group, monitor the use of the additional burdens funding to discharge duties towards previously looked after children
- d) monitor the de-delegated funding from schools to ensure this is used to maintain the high quality provision for looked after children within the wider team
- e) Acknowledge that the virtual school head should ensure that the identified priorities are actioned to enhance the educational achievement of looked after children.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – Maintained schools have once again agreed to de-delegate funding to support the work with looked after children for the financial year 2019-20. This amounts to £227,974, from a rate £3.46 per primary pupil and £11.46 per secondary pupil.

The total estimated Pupil Premium Plus funding for 2018-19 is £1,520,300 with £462,700 retained centrally and £1,057,600 distributed to schools in three instalments. We have contingencies for the potential fluctuation in this amount according to numbers.

The Additional Burdens Funding of £38,674.52 to support local authorities to implement the extension to the role of the Virtual School Head has been allocated to the team budget. It is anticipated that this will fund an additional temporary manager to develop and embed the offer and create sustainable systems.

Staffing – There is a need to create capacity to develop the offer for previously looked after children and to develop enrichment opportunities for looked after children and vulnerable groups.

Risk – The Virtual School Head and Deputy are providing close scrutiny to ensure that the restructured team, whilst providing additional capacity, do not lose the focus on looked after children within the wider SEND agenda.

Equality and diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty – As a public body, the Council must take into account the Equality Act 2010, a consolidating Act which brings together previous Acts dealing with discrimination. Decisions must be reviewed for potential impact on persons with "protected characteristics".

Accommodation – n/a

Crime and disorder – Young people who do not access full-time education are more at risk of criminality, CSE or criminal exploitation across county lines. There is a need to ensure that the team recognises this and works to prevent exclusion.

Human rights – n/a

Consultation – Ongoing consultation with schools through briefings and designated teacher focus groups to agree improvements to the PEP. Consultation with the CiCC sits alongside this. There has been consultation with headteachers with regards to funding via the Schools' Forum

Procurement – n/a

Disability Issues – n/a

Legal Implications- The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that top priority is given to creating a culture of high educational aspirations and to strive for accelerated progress and age-related attainment or better for looked-after children.