

## Partial Audit Update – Education of Children in Care

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Frances Nicholson – Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Lead Officer: Emily Walters, Virtual Headteacher for Children Looked After and SEND

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| <b>Summary</b> | <p>As part of the 2017-18 internal audit plan a review has been undertaken to assess the implementation of recommendations made in the Education of Children Looked After (CLA) non-opinion review carried out in 2016-17.</p> <p>All local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their care. This includes a duty to promote the promotion of educational achievement for looked after children, regardless of where they live or are educated.</p> <p>The Virtual School Head is primarily responsible for ensuring that there are effective systems in place to maintain an overview of all children on the Virtual School roll, their attainment and any actions that must be taken to facilitate improvement.</p> <p>The role of a Virtual School is to provide additional support for looked after children in mainstream schools or specialist provision through the collaboration of professionals such as social workers, foster carers and designated teachers, as well as the Virtual School itself. The Virtual School aims to support the education of CLA's by providing support to designated teachers and other professionals, monitoring the completion and quality of Personal Education Plans, arranging relevant training and development opportunities for staff, providing CLA's with one-to-one support and becoming involved in cases where there are attendance issues or there is a risk of exclusion.</p> <p>This report sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current arrangements for the Virtual School and Learning Support Team</li><li>• Progress towards the priority actions identified in</li></ul> |
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|                        | the 2017-2018 Report   |
| <b>Context</b>         | <p>This report and updated outcomes related to the period of the academic year 2017-2018. Shortly after this period the Virtual School Head left her role and Emily Walters picked up the interim leadership of the service. She was appointed to the substantive Headteacher post in May of 2019 and a restructure of the service was undertaken.</p> <p>The Virtual School is now called the Virtual School and Learning Support Team, and comprises a team of advisory teachers and learning mentors, under the leadership of a Virtual School Head and two full time equivalent Deputy Heads, one with a SEND focus and the other with a CLA focus.</p> <p>The review of activities below reflects the current situation and gives context around the progress towards meeting these outcomes.</p>   |
| <b>Review activity</b> | <p><b>Finding 1:</b></p> <p>1. Educational outcomes for Children Looked After are reduced because agencies do not liaise effectively and do not have a clear understanding of their roles. <b>Medium</b></p> <p>1.3a Proposed Outcome: <b>Priority 4</b></p> <p>We recommend that the Operations Manager - Children Looked After works with the Virtual School to develop standard induction materials relating to the Virtual School. These should be used during all inductions for professionals working with CLA.</p> <p>Previous documentation is no longer relevant due to the development of the new service. Ongoing liaison between Head of Service for CLA and Head of Virtual School ensures that new processes are agreed and shared.</p> <p>1.3b Proposed Outcome: <b>Priority 4</b></p> <p>We recommend that the Operations Manager - Children</p> |

Looked After ensures that all social workers in the Child Looked After team complete the Promoting Successful Education for CLA training course and that completion of the course is made mandatory.

This was available each term through the Virtual School team for Social workers and foster carers. Take up was variable and we are therefore working with Social Care Ops Managers to find an approach which is more accessible and practical to all social workers. This will also include a SEND input from the Statutory SEND team.

Foster Carer training remains in place and continues to run twice a year. The document called 'Expectations of a CLA social worker' document was agreed by the previous Ops Manager and VSH. A revised document in line with the new service is currently under review with VS management team and CLA Ops managers.

1.4a Proposed **Priority 4**  
Outcome:

We recommend that the Operations Manager - Resources and the Operations Manager - Children Looked After reminds officers of the need to ensure placement plans are fully completed. Placement planning meetings should be held prior to placement wherever possible and should clearly record any steps carers must take to support the education of children in their care.

This remains an ongoing area of work with the placements planning team. There is now a joint funded staff member working in the placements team – this ensures improved communication between SEND, placements, and VS. Monthly meetings in place with VSH, Strategic manager for placements, and Head of Service for CLA.

1.5a Proposed **Priority 3**  
Outcome:

We recommend that the Strategic Commissioner - Vulnerable Children ensures that all IPAs completed for CLA in external placements have a fully completed 'Enjoy and Achieve' section.

We would welcome this development and ensure that enjoyment and achievement is as the heart of our newly

developed PEP documents. This objective is not yet embedded and a dip sample audit is needed to track progress and assess current situation.

1.7a

Proposed

**Priority 3**

Outcome:

We recommend that the Virtual School Head Teacher ensures that an up to date list of designated teachers is always available to the Virtual School.

Complete and in place

1.10a

Proposed

**Priority 3**

Outcome:

We recommend that the Virtual School Head Teacher ensures that overdue PEP paperwork is promptly followed up.

For September 2019 the PEP process and document has been completely revised and therefore we anticipate a 'settling in' period. However there is now a clear escalation process which is now embedded. The admin team of the Virtual School now owns this process and escalation of non-submitted PEPs includes social workers, team managers, IROs, Head teachers, and ultimately Chairs of Governors. Funding is also linked to the timely submission of a completed and high quality PEP.

1.13a

Proposed

**Priority 3**

Outcome:

We recommend that the Virtual School Head Teacher reminds the SEN team of the need for the Virtual School to be notified and involved in school moves for all CLA with ECHPs.

Inclusion Somerset now has permanent strategic managers for Statutory SEND, Access and Additional Learning Needs, SEND Advisory Services, and Virtual School with regular meetings. In addition, the alignment of the Learning Support Team, SENIT and Virtual School has further strengthened the links between services. A secondment has been agreed for a member of the Statutory SEND Team to sit within the Virtual School to facilitate and support understanding of the EHCP process for CLA.

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| <b>Recommendations</b> | <p>The outcomes identified above will now been re-visited in light of the changes to the service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continued liaison between CSC, VS and SEND at strategic as well as operational level</li><li>• Review of the induction materials in light of the new service</li><li>• Evaluation following the implementation of the reviewed training arrangements on 'Promoting Successful Education for CLA'</li><li>• Commissioner for independent placements links with the VS team on the IPAs and the focus on 'enjoy and achieve'</li><li>• The joint funded post in the placements team is a focus for the audit which is currently ongoing so this should feed into the outcomes described above</li></ul> |