

Item No. 8	Classification: Open	Date: November 19 2008	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		The Virtual Head Teacher	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Assistant Director Specialist Children's Services and Safeguarding	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee endorses the new approach to improving attainment for children in care as summarised in paragraph 12.
2. That the committee acknowledges the contribution of the virtual head teacher over the past year to the improvement in services.
3. That the head teacher forum should maximise learning from the virtual head teacher project.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. The Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) White paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' sets out the steps needed to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care.
5. The need to deliver a first class education for children looked after is government priority, and the white paper identified a series of initiatives needed to improve education outcomes. Piloting the role of the virtual head teacher is one of these initiatives. Although Southwark was unsuccessful in its bid for pilot status, and therefore did not receive funding, the department established a part-time virtual head teacher post to signal its intention to drive up attainment levels for children looked after.
6. The role of the virtual head teacher was to oversee the education of children in care, and children in the authority's care who are placed out of the authority, as if they were head of a single school. Southwark already had in place, a team of education professionals, dedicated to improving outcomes for children in care, and it was agreed that the virtual head teacher would work with this team to identify, and put in place, further activities which would support the attainment of this vulnerable group.
7. The post has worked both across the local authority and its children's trust partners and with individual schools, including academies, and further education settings that provide 14-19 education for children in care. Acting as a source of expertise, offering capacity to broker arrangements that are likely to improve outcomes for children in care, the virtual head teacher worked with school improvement partners, school head teachers and designated teachers to raise the attainment of children in care, reduce absence and tackle exclusions, and ensure that provision meets their learning needs.

8. The post holder has championed the educational needs of children in care, spreading best practice across schools, the authority and its partners. In particular it focussed on improving working between schools, education professionals, and social care.
9. An important area of work for the virtual head teacher was to continue to work with children who are placed out of the authority's area. The virtual head teacher was able to develop good links with those authorities to enable them to champion the education of those children placed in other areas. The post holder was able to identify complex cases which needed additional support, and in some cases prevent exclusions

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

10. Although the pilot had some success on limited cases it failed to secure the support from secondary head teachers in particular, who felt that they should play a greater role in improving attainment for children in care. Unfortunately the pilot has proved unsustainable as funding could not be secured in the longer term, and only limited resources have been provided by Government to deliver the wide ranging proposals set out in Care Matters.
11. Consultation with head teachers about how to maintain and further develop the successful practice established by this post has been underway. The Assistant Director (Leadership, Innovation and Learning support) and Assistant Director (Specialist Children's Services and Safeguarding) will be considering the outcomes of this consultation and the learning from other virtual head teacher pilots before bringing forward new proposals to further improve educational attainment for children in care.
12. In the interim, the existing education team which is based in the Children Looked After Business Unit, will continue to build on the good practice identified through the project. In addition, two Head teachers have volunteered to act as champions for children in care, and will work with Children's Services to develop a new model of support. While this will undoubtedly strengthen the approach within Southwark, and secure greater buy-in by schools, the role of the new champions will include advocating for children in care with head teacher colleagues of schools outside Southwark.

Policy Implications

13. The role of the virtual head teacher is in line with initiatives outlined in the DCSF white paper 'Care Matter: Time for Change'. The educational attainment of children looked after is a key performance indicator for children's services, and outcomes are reported to the DCSF as part of a national data set.

Community Impact Statement

14. The virtual headteacher oversees the education of children in care who do less well in education than children and young people in the community. Children looked after are one of the most vulnerable groups in the community, and the post with the support of partner agencies and schools, aims to improve education outcomes, and positively impact upon

their life chances.

Resource Implications

15. There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Consultation

16. Consultation has taken place with Southwark head teachers about the future of this role, and further work is being undertaken to develop an approach which is led and supported by this group. When these new proposals have been fully developed, they will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee for consideration.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Children's Services

17. Without the support of Southwark Association of Secondary Head Teachers (SASH) the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) was only able to make limited headway in developing a positive working relationship with secondary schools. The VSH has helped to build some important systems and procedures for better tracking the progress of children in care, and this has enabled the established education team to further improve educational attainment.
18. The funding was only ever approved for the pilot period, and is not sustainable in the long-term. However, the important learning from the project will be used to develop a new model with the full support of SASH.

Strategic Director of Legal and Democratic Services

19. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

LIST OF APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Impact of Part-Time Post of Virtual School Head for Children Looked After (VSH) October 2007 and December 2008 - Evaluation

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director, Specialist Children's Services and Safeguarding.
Report Author	Ann Shapiro, Virtual Headteacher.

Version	Final	
Dated	November 11 2008	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes/No	Yes/No
Executive Member	Yes	Yes/No
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	November 11 2008	

Impact of Part-Time Post of Virtual School Head for Children Looked After (VSH)
October 2007 and December 2008 - Evaluation

The part-time post from October 2007 until December 2008 evolved into the following key operational and strategic roles:

- to prepare for JAR and sit on the JAR Board
- to support the development of data collection as a tool to raise standards
- specifically to track year 11 progress
- to track all pupil progress across phases and set realistic CLA targets year-on-year
- to improve communication across teams-around-children looked after, bridging education and CLA Service
- to develop a network of dedicated senior leaders and open dialogue about practice
- to focus on complex cases, identified by the managers of the CLA Education Project Team, and to endeavour to resolve these both in and out-of-borough at headteacher level
- to support individual Southwark headteachers to take forward complex CLA issues, including seeking beyond the school for the appropriate solution
- to work with other VSHs and pan-London specialists in CLA to develop data, training and to improve inter-borough communication
- to monitor the Shaftesbury contract
- to develop relations with Academies

The Virtual School Head post holder was:

- line-managed by the Deputy Director for Children's Services
- reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee
- the post did not sit within a published structure

The outcome of the Joint Area Review, which focused robustly on vulnerable children:

- The intense preparation for the JAR meant that the VSH needed to know, very well, several complex cases; read histories, attend meetings and visit key students and the teams around them as far north as Newcastle and as far South as Devon.

- The VSH was interviewed by the inspectors and the appointment praised in the oral de-brief to the JAR Board and others.
- The provisional outcome of the inspection was a judgement of ‘good’ for Children Looked After, including education.

The development of robust CLA data was seen as a key aspect of the national pilot for VSH and as a key part of the Southwark VSH evolving role:

- The VSH joined the Virtual Heads Forum under the aegis of Young London Matters: an extension of this activity was the development of working strands. The Southwark VSH joined two groups – one looking to improve the quality of data on CLA, and the other looking to improve the quality of training.
- In order to track all pupil progress across phases and set realistic CLA targets year-on-year it became obvious that the Virtual School Head needed the same tools as those employed by substantive headteachers to interrogate data and then support school governors to set realistic targets based on high expectations of progress. With the FFT and Raise-online that has since been introduced into Southwark as a tool for the Virtual School for CLA, it is now possible to recommend realistic but challenging targets based on robust data.
- The development of these tools became a focus of the Data Working Strands: Southwark benefited very significantly from the VSH sitting on the pan-London working. Working with Bromley, MIA was able to develop our first FFT data base for CLA late in the Spring term.. This was available by the time of JAR, essentially to measure the progress of our CLA towards agreed targets. During JAR the impact of the new FFT allowed the VSH to offer robust evidence to the inspector on the progress of pupils in Year 11. (FFT information is currently being subsumed into Carefirst to inform educational targets for individual pupils.)
- Of equal significance is the impact of work begun with the same data working group to inform OFSTED and the DCSF about the need for the development of Raise-online for CLA in all boroughs. This data tool will rollout over the next few weeks and be a very substantial tool for monitoring and measuring the whole CLA population of children looked after by Southwark, and potentially children who are educated in Southwark but looked after by another borough. (The national pilots are likely to recommend that each VSH tracks all CLA in their own borough schools.)

- Working with MIA in Education, the VSH supported and consulted on the planning for and development of an individual pupil tracker for CLA and vulnerable children: this went out for consultation with some primary and secondary designated teachers and with the CLA education team. It has since been showcased at the Virtual Heads Forum. When fully developed this tool will maximise the designated teachers' capacities in our schools to monitor and track each individual CLA's progress.
- In October 2007 the two independent information systems in Education and the CLA Service did not talk to each other: During 2007-2008 improved communication, facilitated to a degree by the pressing need to improve data flow on CLA across all London boroughs and London schools, and highlighted within the Virtual School Heads forum has impacted on the resolution of related data issues between different systems.
- The VSH tracked standards at Year 11 for CLA: data collected shows that standards improved across 2007-8

GCSE & EQUIVALENTS 2008

OC2 DATA DEFINITIONS	2005/06	%	2006/07	%	2007/08	%
Number in cohort	57		59		61	
Number who sat at least 1 examination	39	68.42%	41	69.49%	43	70.49%
Number who obtained at least 1 GCSE A*-G	38	66.67%	37	62.71%	42	68.85%
Number who obtained at least 5 GCSE A*-G	22	38.60%	19	32.20%	31	50.81%
Number who obtained at least 5 GCSE A*-C	9	15.79%	8	13.56%	12	19.67%

The Improvement of Communication Across Teams-around-Children Looked After promoted improved linked working, bridged education and CLA Service, and raised expectations and standards for CLA

- Within the developing the VSH pan-London network, it became apparent that some other boroughs contracted with Welfare Call to improve attendance by phoning schools on a daily and weekly basis and informing the Service about data on each child looked after. This allowed earlier intervention by our Service personnel on absence and directly reduced growing gaps in learning.
- In addition the contract with Welfare Call included the collation of summative attainment for CLA in out-of-borough schools: this has been welcomed in the Service as a monitoring tool. In addition it has freed up two months of administration work, at minimum, carried out by a trained teacher advisor /member of the CLA Education Project Team
- The VSH visited secondary and primary schools and children's centres in the borough: a small group of interested parties at secondary level began to evaluate practice: a primary based project to improve induction for children in care and their progress was established
- Articles about CLA issues in 'Learning Matters', a virtual publication that reaches headteachers and their staffs, were written from Jan 2008
- Two presentations by the Virtual School Head to Governors' Forum in the Spring and Summer Terms improved the understanding of governors about the issues surrounding CLA in education and supported governor training so that a clearer understanding could be taken back to Full Governing Bodies and to raise the profile of the governor linked to CLA.
- The VSH made a presentation alongside the VSH in Merton and Greenwich to the Young London Matters Conference, attended by representatives of a range of agencies around looked after children from across London.
- The Southwark VSH worked to improve improve inter-borough communication, meeting with other Heads of Education and VSH in London: the supported the induction of the Tower Hamlets VSH
- Membership of a second development strand, this time on training, within the Virtual Heads Forum, has led to plans for the training for designated teachers, governors and foster carers : the training sessions that come from these with impact positively on outcomes for CLA

- The VSH has worked with the Manager of Southwark School Improvement Partners to ensure that issues around CLA in individual schools are looked at in conversation with each school head.
- A good relationship with the legal team by working on complex cases has been built up
- The Shaftesbury contract has been monitored– through data collection and face-to-face meetings and by visiting a Shaftesbury home.
- The potential for a Virtual Learning Environment has been explored with the City Learning Centre: this can be developed in the future exclusively for CLA, and in the interim all CLA can access the Virtual Learning Environment through their schools and through the NGFL

Development of a Network of Dedicated Senior Leaders and open a dialogue about practice

- In the Spring Term I worked with a small group of secondary designated teachers on self-evaluation of our practice, in preparation for the JAR
- Across both the Spring and Summer Terms I facilitated small group working with primary designated teachers and headteachers to look at both the induction of CLA, to ensure maximum progress and minimum loss of learning, and with MIA to consult with the same group on how to improve tracking of CLA and other vulnerable children and empower designated teachers for CLA.
- The real focus of this work in effect led to strategies for identifying what would improve each new CLA entrant's capacity to develop their full learning potential.

As a concept of one person maintaining a watching brief, the role works:

- The VSH was allocated 35 complex cases at the start of her tenure and has responded to emerging complex cases over and above these, with 100% success rate. This has led to the prevention of permanent exclusion, to improved provision and better communication with headteachers facing some very challenging behaviours among our CLA population. In addition it has led to the recognition that some children's needs are better served in more specialised educational

environments. In such cases as these the VSH has brokered the managed moves.

- This level of operational work – cross-phase – and mainly out-of-borough is time-heavy, but has in every case improved interlinked agency working.
- As reported from the national pilot this level of integrated working by Virtual School Heads has led to real progress being made on key complex cases, because the VSH is able to go into schools and have access to headteachers because they speak the same language

Supporting individual Southwark headteachers to take forward complex CLA issues, including seeking beyond the school for the appropriate solution

This was very similar to work outside the borough and arose if and when a headteacher contacted me directly. Otherwise, the Education Project Team for CLA has a designated manager whose remit is to work directly with Southwark schools. This valuable resource has been directly funded for several years by the Southwark Schools Forum and offers the majority of headteachers the appropriate level of support on CLA issues that is wanted by them.

Monitoring the Shaftesbury contract:

- A significant number of children with complex challenges live within Shaftesbury. As part of the role of the VSH, the postholder has met regularly with Shaftesbury to up-date on and monitor the progress of each of the pupils.

Relations with Academies:

- The VSH paid courtesy calls to several Southwark schools, including academies. Because designated teachers in these schools work closely with the long-standing Deputy Manager of the Education Team, no significantly complex cases have been presented in Southwark secondary schools since October 2007.

Pupil Voice/Speakerbox:

- The voices of CLA are heard through Speakerbox. An article has been published about the work of the VSH in the Speakerbox magazine.
- Both the facilitator of Speakerbox and the Head of Speakerbox actively supported the recent celebration of excellence and achievement held at Glazier Hall: their views informed the planning committee for the celebration event, on which the VSH also sat: the event itself was facilitated by two members of Speakerbox, who showed great commitment to the role.

Southwark Education Steering Group:

The steering group is chaired by the head of Children's Services for Looked after Children, Chris Saunders and the VSH contributes to each agenda. This steering group effectively bridges CLA and Education

Issues that emerged across 2007-2008:

- The progress reports on the national pilot of VSHs indicate that some headteachers have been reluctant to engage with VSHs: this issue has been a diversionary part of the VSH experience in Southwark, because headteachers believe themselves to be sufficiently well served already by the existing historic arrangements.
- The national pilot is showing that structures seem to be important in relation to being able to influence colleagues across the whole authority. Correlations are emerging about the degree of influence and where the VSH sits in the structure and the supporting mechanisms the VSH is able to plug into.
- The re-direction of the Virtual School Head's energies to the surge of complex cases outside the borough from January 2008, impacted the postholder's limited time and capacity to visit every academy/secondary school and primary school in the borough: however, I was received most graciously by the headteachers and senior staff at: Walworth Academy, Harris Academy Peckham, The Charter, Geoffrey Chaucer, Sacred Heart, St Thomas the Apostle,

Kingsdale, , Highshore and Bredinghurst: also Tower Bridge, Camelot, Charlotte Sharman, Albion and Snowsfields and Nell Gwynn.

- Southwark applied to be involved in the national pilot for the VSH which would have meant that additional resources were given to the borough to support a post. The additional resources were allocated internally to deliver the service in the short term. A bid was made to the Schools Forum for financial support which was turned down. Supporting this important work through internal resources was not a sustainable position, particularly in light of the reduced financial settlement for the council and contracting budgets. With the pressures associated in the run up to the JAR this may not have been clearly articulated.
- Neither Social Care nor Education can currently sustain the cost of such a senior post as VSH, performed. So, how the key functions could be delivered using a different model is being explored.
- What should be celebrated is the quality of service being delivered by the current Education Project Team for CLA. The range of experience in this team offers a strong foundation on which further work could be built.

Ann Shapiro