

Item No. 7.	Classification: Open	Date: 7 July 2010	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Establishing a Virtual School for Looked After Children	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Alastair Wilson Interim Virtual School Headteacher	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the report for information.
2. To feedback any comments and recommendations to be incorporated in the Virtual Head Annual Report to be provided for a future Corporate Parenting Committee meeting.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The educational outcomes at a national level for Looked After Children (LAC) are still very low. Since April every local authority has had to have a Virtual School Head (VSH) for looked after children (LAC).

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. The core purpose of a VSH is to be relentless in driving up improvements in the educational progress and attainment of all LAC, including those that have been placed in schools in other local authorities. They also have an important role in working in partnership with VSHs in other local authorities to support the educational progress of children in their schools but looked after by other local authorities. Because LAC are being educated across a large number of schools, the VSH has a powerful role in tracking their progress as if they were in a single school.
5. An evaluation of the VHS pilot in 11 authorities concluded that: *“VSHs had successfully raised the priority of educating LAC. It is a valuable role and those from a strong educational background are best placed to undertake these responsibilities. VSHs operate at the heart of complex issues in inter professional working between education and social work. Virtual schools resembled ‘schools’ in some ways but not others.”*

The three key areas of responsibility of a VSH are:

- **To ensure that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of LAC to:**
 - rigorously track and monitor data on where LAC are at school and their progress, in a similar way to a head teacher of any school.
 - maintain an accurate record of the location and educational progress of LAC in their local authority, including those whom they look after but are placed in another local authority or a non-local authority school and those who are looked after by another local authority but educated in this one.
 - act where necessary and work towards improving overall attainment at the virtual school, by maximising achievement and progress of both individual and cohorts of LAC.
 - ensure that the headteacher and the designated teacher in each school know which of the children on their roll are in care, and what can be done to support them.

- **To ensure that all LAC have a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP) and access one-to-one support, including personal tuition where appropriate by:**
 - working with relevant professionals to ensure PEPs are of a high quality, subject to a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process
 - They should also ensure that LAC are able to access one-to-one tuition and Personal Education Allowances (PEAs) wherever appropriate.
- **To champion the educational needs of LAC across the local authority and those placed out-of-local authority by:**
 - championing the needs of LAC across the local authority and spread effective practice, particularly in relation to improving behaviour and attendance, promoting stability of placement and school stability through admissions policies and use of school transport.
 - working with others in Local Authorities and schools to ensure that measures are taken across the local authority to promote positive behaviour, good attendance, and reduce exclusions, which should in turn lead to good progress and improved attainment.
 - ensuring social workers adequately consider the educational needs of LAC when a child/young person comes into care or when taking decisions about moving placements. Where moving placements is absolutely essential, wherever possible a new placement should be found which enables continuity of schooling but at KS4 ensures there is no change of educational placement. The VSH should take responsibility for making sure that admissions powers to admit LAC to the most appropriate school are used wherever necessary, and they should ensure that school transport is provided as required to help children stay in the same school.

6. The educational outcomes for Southwark LAC are broadly in line with the national cohort results but remain low. Moreover, the outcomes for Southwark LAC have not improved at the same rate as that of the universal Southwark school population.

7. An Interim VSH for Southwark was appointed in April. His initial brief is to develop a proposal for the structure of the virtual school. There is also Looked After Children Education Services Team (LACES). The pilot concludes that there are advantages in integration and VSHs becoming overall head of the LACES teams, working mainly but not exclusively in a strategic manner. Those pilot authorities with VSHs were almost all moving in this direction. However *“none of the virtual schools structures and services were simply a continuation of what already existed but signified a step-change.”*

8. Proposals on the structure and nature of the virtual school are currently being formulated and will be disseminated accordingly

Community Impact Statement

9. Proposals are intending to improve the educational outcome for looked after children.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance

11. There are no specific implications.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
DCSF: Looked After and Learning – Evaluation of the Virtual School Head Pilot Research Information	Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF): http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u015448/index.shtml	Alistair Wilson Tel: 020 7525 5000

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Jane Bailey	
Report Author	Alastair Wilson	
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Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	No	No
Finance Director	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes	No
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