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**UPDATE ON IMPACT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN LOOKED
AFTER IN HERTFORDSHIRE**

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Schools Forum of the outcomes of the Virtual School for Children Looked After in Hertfordshire.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Hertfordshire Virtual School was created in 2010 to champion the educational needs of young people looked after by Hertfordshire, to ensure they have the best possible education and every chance to realise their potential. The Virtual School is committed to empowering schools, social workers and carers to make education a priority for Children Looked After. The primary focus is to narrow the achievement gap between children looked after and their peers, both locally and nationally. This is achieved through both challenge and support for key deliverers.
- 2.2 The Virtual School receives support from the Direct Schools Grant to fund the post of the Lead Adviser, who works directly with schools to improve outcomes, funding to support access to education for children in Hertfordshire residential homes and for two children in mainstream boarding provision.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Peer review held in June 2014 noted the Virtual School as a strength:

'The Virtual School has been able to provide effective support to young people and care leavers for a number of years. It has been clear from discussions with social workers and leaving care workers that the service is valued and that it does have a positive impact for young people. The

additional support provided to improve educational attainment is valued by young people.

There are a number of positive examples of how the needs of children and young people in care are considered and initiatives have been developed to promote better outcomes for them. These include the use of care leaver mentors, the development of apprenticeship opportunities that have benefited young people and led to permanent employment'.

3.2 Funding

The Virtual School receives support from the Direct Schools Grant:

Lead Adviser to the Virtual School: £78k

- 3.2.1 The post of Lead Adviser for the Virtual School has been financially supported to strengthen the working partnership between the Virtual School and all Hertfordshire schools and academies. The focus of this role is to support schools in their work to improve the academic outcomes and standards for this vulnerable group and for schools to be supported in the effective and efficient use of Pupil Premium Plus funding. This work has significantly raised the profile of the Virtual School with Hertfordshire schools. Since the funding of this post, the Virtual School has laid strong and firm foundations through robust use of data and systems. The work is innovative and the Virtual School is well placed to promote better outcomes for children.

Funding for the education of children in residential care in Hertfordshire: £61k

- 3.2.2 Children and young people who live in residential care within Hertfordshire present major challenges to the education system and schools due to their unregulated behaviour and extreme social and emotional responses to the trauma they have experienced prior to entry to care. A specialist approach has been adopted with a proven track record to enable these hard to place children to be educationally supported and prepared for transition post 16.

The £61k budget continues to fund both a part time Education Adviser (working only with the children from the residential homes in Hertfordshire) and funds discrete teaching and learning for these young people within the North Herts Secondary Centre in a unit called Bridge 29.

Payment of Fees to Independent Schools for vulnerable pupils without SEN – Boarding Pathfinder: £52k

- 3.2.3 The Boarding Pathfinder Project is a national scheme that has been promoted to all local authorities by both the last and current administration to offer an alternative way to support disadvantaged children and families in crisis. Only a very small number of children meet the criteria for this support.

The Boarding Pathfinder has an annual budget of £52k. Children placed have an on-going cost to support their school place until the end of year 11. Therefore, only a maximum of 3 children can be placed at any one time. This funding is currently supports two children looked after.

3.2.4 The introduction of Pupil Premium Plus* in April 2014 has given additional resources to schools to improve pupil outcomes. The total funding for Hertfordshire children looked after is £1,492,000.

3.2.5 The allocation of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) grant is made through the Virtual School. A Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) policy for Hertfordshire CLA was agreed by Schools Forum in 2014 that allocated £1500 of the notional £1900 per CLA pupil directly to schools. The remaining funds are retained centrally so that schools can bid for additional funding on the basis of individual need as part of the Personal Education Planning process. Over 75 bids for additional funding for schools have been made and agreed to date. It is anticipated that the centrally retained funding will be fully allocated by the end of the financial year.

3.2.6 The impact of the funding on raising the achievement of this group is assessed through both the Personal Education Planning review process, and as a key element of the Ofsted inspection framework.

*It should be noted that Pupil Premium Plus funding was not available until April 2014, therefore, its impact cannot be measured fully in the 2013/14 outcomes for Children Looked After.

3.3 The Educational Achievement of Children Looked After in Hertfordshire 2013/14

The data in this report is based on the outcomes for children and young people who have been in the care of Hertfordshire Local Authority for one year or more. This is the cohort that the DfE uses to measure outcomes in the annual Statistical First Release (SFR 49/2014). The SFR was released in mid-December 2014 and is publically available from the DfE website. It should be noted that children looked after with a statement for special educational need are not disaggregated from the data. Within the reported cohort, 24% of children and young people have a statement of SEND. This percentage is similar to the CLA cohort nationally, but is significantly higher than the average of 3% for all children in Hertfordshire.

4. **Contents of report**

4.1 The following outcomes are taken from the SFR 49/2014.

4.2 Key Stages 1 and 2

4.2.1 Key Stage 1

Outcomes at Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with national and regional for reading, below national and regional in writing and above both national and regional in mathematics.

	<i>Pupils who achieved at least Level 2 in the following:</i>		
	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
National for CLA	71	61	72
Regional East of England CLA	73	62	73
Hertfordshire CLA	72	55	76

4.2.2 Key Stage 2

Outcomes at Key Stage 2 have risen at Level 4+ in both reading and mathematics and now stand at 79%. These are the highest results achieved to date by CLA in the care of Hertfordshire

Combined reading, writing and mathematics at Level 4+ has increased to 69% and is now above the floor target for all schools.

	Outcomes for Key Stage 2 2013/14				
	<i>Percentage who achieved at least Level 4 in the following</i>				
	Mathematics	Reading	Writing	Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling	Combined reading, writing and mathematics
National for CLA	61	68	59	49	48
Regional East of England CLA	56	65	55	47	44
Hertfordshire CLA	79	79	72	62	69

4.3 Key Stage 4

The methodology reporting for the outcomes at 5A*-C including English and mathematics for CLA has changed this year* and there are 2 sets of data published. The SFR 49/2014 highlights that *'due to reforms to the educational and assessment systems for key stage 4 during 2013/14 it is not possible to make comparisons with earlier years.'*

	2013-14 Methodology *1				2013-14 Methodology *2			
	Number eligible to sit GCSEs	5A*-C GCSE's at grades A*-C	5A*-C at grades A*-C including English and maths	A*-C in English and maths	Number eligible to sit GCSEs	5A*-C GCSE's at grades A*-C	5A*-C at grades A*-C including English and maths	A*-C in English and maths
National for CLA	4,800	31.1	14.4	15.7	4,800	16.3	12.0	14.2
Regional East of England CLA	480	28.2	12.8	14.5	480	15.2	10.3	12.6
Hertfordshire CLA	95	29.8	13.8	16.0	95	14.9	10.6	13.8

Comparisons with Local Authorities with 95 or more eligible pupils in year 11 2013/14 ranks Hertfordshire as second in the country for 5A*-C including English and mathematics.

Hertfordshire remains above the regional average, however, it is acknowledged that this is below National.

Local Authority	2013-14 Methodology *1				2013-14 Methodology *2			
	Number eligible to sit GCSEs	5A*-C GCSE's at grades A*-C	5A*-C at grades A*-C including English and maths	A*-C in English and maths	Number eligible to sit GCSEs	5A*-C GCSE's at grades A*-C	5A*-C at grades A*-C including English and maths	A*-C in English and maths
Birmingham	135	33.1	18.4	19.1	135	21.3	16.9	18.4
Hertfordshire	95	29.8	13.8	16.0	95	14.9	10.6	13.8
Essex	95	35.1	11.7	13.8	95	13.8	8.5	12.8
Kent	140	25.4	13.0	14.5	140	11.6	8.0	13.0
Manchester	95	34.0	11.3	12.4	95	13.4	10.3	12.4

Notes:

*1 The '2013 methodology' data removes the rules regarding the Wolf Review recommendations and early entry policy from the calculation of performance measures

*2 New 2014 methodology applied to 2013/14 data. Two major reforms have been implemented which affect the calculation of key stage 4 (KS4) performance measures data. Professor Alison Wolf's Review of Vocational Education recommendations which restrict the qualifications counted, prevent any qualification from counting as larger than one GCSE and cap the number of non-GCSEs included in performance measures at two per pupil. There is also an early entry policy to only count a pupil's first attempt at a qualification. More details can be found in the statistical release:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2013-to-2014>

4.4 **Key Priorities:**

The Virtual School has a comprehensive improvement plan, which draws upon the Key Priorities for 2014/15. These priorities are:

1. Raising achievement through data analysis and intervention
2. Raising the achievement of vulnerable groups
3. Improved joint working
4. Building capacity of stakeholders and partners

4.5 Examples of current areas of improvement include:

4.5.1 **Data**

The data system used by the Virtual School (SIMs and Assessment Manager 7 reports) has been developed further in the past year enabling precision in establishing the exact barrier to learning for individual students. The impact this year has been evidenced by students passing GCSE examinations and exceeding expected grades due in part to the precise support received. This data will be used for additional meetings in school with leaders for English and maths to analyse and remove the particular barrier to learning. This is to be trialled with Year 3, 5, 6 and 11 students in 2014/15 and makes 'tracking' a more effective process to assist in closing the in-school achievement gap as well as the gap between CLA and all children nationally.

4.5.2 **The Virtual School Offer**

The 'Virtual School Offer' details all the services of the 'school' and is published on the Hertfordshire Grid. It is a comprehensive provision map of intervention that outlines universal services to all children looked after as well as those to support targeted children and groups that are not making expected progress.

4.5.3 **Virtual School SIMS**

The Hertfordshire Virtual School information management system is used to support the Virtual School central registers of vulnerable students within the CLA cohort, e.g. Children missing from education, in part time or alternative provision, asylum seeking minors, young people placed at a distance from the authority, in residential homes and in custody. The registers are revised monthly and the action plans to support this group are reviewed during monthly 1:1 supervision meetings, Pupil Progress meetings and a monthly leadership meeting devoted to scrutiny and tracking of the cases of children in these vulnerable groups.

4.5.4 **Training**

A significant programme of training for partners which includes taught courses, supportive up to date handbook material and on-line learning facilities. This programme has been evaluated consistently good or excellent by partners and is developed with the support of representative

focus groups. The partnership work has been extended this year to include Early Years providers, Children's Centres, school governors and the adoption team and parents. The 2014 Annual Designated Teacher Conference in October was attended by over 180 schools and was evaluated as being 100% good or excellent by delegates. In March 2015 the Virtual School will hold the first conference for carers on education as well as a series of professional development days for teachers and social workers.

4.5.5 The Personal Education Plan

Since April 2014 the allocation of Pupil Premium Plus has been made through the Virtual School and closely linked to the effectiveness of the Personal Education Plan. To make the process more efficient the Virtual School has commissioned an 'ePEP' which is a web-based document that will draw information from existing data sources to support the completion of the plan. The ePEP was launched at the annual Designated Teacher conference. The ePEP is currently being trialled by volunteer schools and will be implemented fully by September 2015. PEPs are routinely quality assured for effectiveness and are regularly reviewed throughout the academic year. There is also a programme of quality assurance of schools against a rigorous framework of compliance with statutory guidance and pupil progress from the starting point in school.

4.5.6 Building Capacity

To increase the impact in schools, expertise has been seconded from Head Teachers or leading practitioners across all phases, in key areas of development for the Virtual School. For example: early years, designated teacher development and data integrity. Successful partnerships are also in place with a number of experienced educational professionals adding cost effective expertise for the Virtual School in the work with schools and education providers.

4.5.7 Challenge

The Virtual School Governing body and the Hertfordshire Improvement Partner (HIP) programme actively challenge and support the work of the Virtual School. This has led to systematic improvement in both systems and operational practice. The Governing Body have received information throughout the year from the 'front line' staff in the Virtual School and from Designated Teachers.

5. Conclusion

The Virtual School continues to offer challenge, support and guidance to promote the best possible outcomes for children looked after within Hertfordshire schools and academies and those placed out of county.