

Virtual Head Teacher Report February 2012

Context

The concept of the 'Virtual School Head' for Children Looked After was first outlined in the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (DCSF, June 2007) and was piloted on a national basis with 11 local authorities between September 2007 and August 2009.

It was envisaged at that time that the Virtual School Head would be;

- A senior individual working within a local authority
- Charged with ensuring improved educational achievement for this specific group
- Responsible for overseeing a coordinated system of support for children looked after
- Responsible for holding to account providers of services for children looked after (with a specific educational focus)

Harrow was not part of this national pilot but also established the post of 'Virtual Headteacher for Children Looked After (CLA)' in 2008. This post, which was part-time (0.6 full-time equivalent) was shared by three local headteachers, each with experience of different stages and phases of education, on a secondment basis. The decision to introduce the 'Virtual School' model independently of the national pilot is evidence of the authority's long standing commitment to improving life chances for its CLA.

This system had several advantages, particularly in terms of communication with and support for other education professionals; however, when the model of provision was reviewed in 2011 it was decided to establish the role of Virtual Headteacher as a single, permanent role within the authority. As a result, a permanent appointment was made in December 2011 with an associated brief to establish a high performing 'Virtual School' for CLA, drive forward a 'step change' in local practice and performance and take the lead for coordinating a local Improvement Plan.

It was therefore imperative to make an initial review of current practice so that areas for development could be identified and prioritized. This initial review included

- Discussions with a range of staff, including the outgoing Virtual Headteachers
- Review of available data sources, means of access and methods of reporting
- Review of a sample of CLA files, including Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion
- Review of current attendance performance, including action plans produced by the Educational welfare officer (EWO)(CLA)
- Review of the current educational performance of the 2011-2012 Year 11 cohort and their predicted performance at the end of this academic year
- Discussion with the staff currently allocated to the Virtual School (PEP Coordinator, Educational Welfare Officer for CLA) regarding current practice

This initial review enabled the identification of key issues regarding current functioning and highlighted areas of practice needing to be developed further. The subsequent sections of this report will discuss those issues in more detail and offer a proposed plan of action (Feb 2012 – August 2013).

Issues

National guidance regarding the key responsibilities of a Virtual School Head (VSH Toolkit, DCSF 2009) states:

The three key areas of responsibility of a virtual school head for which s/he should be accountable are:

- To make sure that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of looked after children*
- To ensure that all looked after children have a robust and effective personal education plan and access to one-to-one support, including personal tuition where appropriate*
- To champion the educational needs of looked after children across the authority and those placed out of authority*

This guidance provides a helpful framework for further consideration of current practice and issues arising from this.

1. To make sure that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of looked after children.

Current practice indicates that, although a great deal of data is currently collected and stored regarding attainment and progress (and, in addition, attendance and exclusion) this data is often somewhat fragmented in its collection and storage and therefore not easily accessible for the purposes of tracking and monitoring either individual pupils or groups of pupils.

For example;

Welfare Call provides information, collected on a daily basis, regarding Harrow CLA attendance (and exclusions). Information on exclusions is always retrospective. Framework-I has PEP's stored on individual client files; information from school (letters, information re targets/progress, school reports) may also be scanned into client files – but this practice is not consistent and information stored this way cannot be easily accessed or reported on.

EMS holds information, including Fischer Family Trust data, for children in Harrow schools (but not for Harrow children placed elsewhere)

Currently there is no effective system for collecting and collating data on CLA from other authorities in Harrow schools; systems (other than Welfare Call) are equally 'patchy' regarding CLA from Harrow placed out of borough.

Areas for development

- i. Investigate ways of achieving a single storage point for education data, such as via EMS/SIMS (setting up a Virtual School area) or within Framework-I (developing currently unused capacity for storage of education data)
- ii. Using dedicated administrative support (yet to be appointed) to ensure that data collected manually (particularly information on CLA placed out of borough) is entered onto the system, creating consistency in the availability of data.
- iii. Establishing a regular system of review for all school age CLA, to be coordinated with reports to Targeted Services Performance meetings/ Corporate Parenting Panel
- iv. Using data to formulate action plans for individual CLA around specific issues such as attendance or preventing exclusion

2. To ensure that all looked after children have a robust and effective personal education plan and access to one-to-one support, including personal tuition where appropriate.

Harrow's current system firmly places responsibility for initiating the Personal Education Plan process with individual social workers. Support may be available from the PEP Coordinator (requested on a case by case basis) but each caseworker must

Arrange and attend the PEP meeting

Complete the PEP on Framework-i

Make the PEP available to the Independent Reviewing Officer/CLA Review.

A 'snapshot' taken in January 2012 indicated that approximately 70% of Harrow CLA had a PEP entered onto their case file. However, reviewing Year 11 case files showed that these PEP's were frequently only partially complete, with a full educational history which showed all schools attended and information on prior attainment often either missing or only partially complete. This area of weakness indicates that either information is not routinely provided by the school's Designated Teacher for CLA or that social workers may not fully understand the value of gathering and recording this information.

In addition, documents such as target reviews (carried out by the school) or school reports are sometimes scanned into the child's file but this information cannot be incorporated into the PEP or drawn down into a report to review progress.

Conversations with social workers and their line managers also indicated strong views concerning responsibility for completion of PEP's; this was usually expressed in a way that suggested that the responsibility for organisation /completion of PEP's should either rest with 'education' (but without precisely saying who that referred to) or with the PEP Coordinator. Again, these views may demonstrate a lack of understanding about the fact that the PEP should be an integral part of the individual care plan; on a practical level current systems do not allow for anyone other than the named social worker to actually enter the PEP onto Framework-i.

There was also a lack of information about any individual support that may have been requested for or provided to individuals; this may be, at least in part, due to the recent change from the availability of Personal Education Allowances (which were held centrally) to the Pupil Premium (which is passed directly to schools).

The conclusion that must be drawn from this, therefore, is that further developmental work will be needed before Harrow can confidently claim that all its CLA have a 'robust and effective personal education plan' or that individual support is being offered in all cases when appropriate.

Areas for development

- i. Ensure that up to date guidance is available to both social care staff and Designated Teachers for CLA. This guidance will need to show a clear process to be followed together with an indication of where the responsibility for different tasks rests.
- ii. Further develop and establish termly Network meetings which can be used to provide training for both education and social care staff. In addition, offer short training sessions for social care staff – possibly in their team meetings.
- iii. Review the current PEP format (for 5-16 yr olds). Consider ways of making it both more effective and 'user friendly'
- iv. Introduce a rolling programme of auditing PEP's both quantitatively and qualitatively so that issues can be raised and support offered to individual social workers/ schools as necessary
- v. Review and revise the current PEP Coordinator role, so that there is greater emphasis and focus on support for individual children and young people.
- vi. Explore potential ways of commissioning additional direct support for CLA; for example;
 - A worker able to advise and assist with transition issues for older CLA, supporting future planning beyond statutory school age

- The creation of a register of local, qualified teachers available to be commissioned for sessional work with individuals as needed
- Purchasing access to online resources (e.g. ‘My Maths’, ‘Rosetta Stone’) as used by mainstream schools – for specific use by the Virtual School.
- Developing a ‘drop-in’ facility with a classroom space where additional tuition can be offered (or help with homework, revision, etc)

3.To champion the educational needs of looked after children across the authority and those placed out of authority.

The Virtual School Head in any authority carries a clear remit of both support and challenge for CLA and those professionals working with them so far as educational issues are concerned; there are three distinct groups of CLA which need to be taken into consideration;

Harrow CLA educated in Harrow schools

Harrow CLA educated in other authorities (including specialist settings)

CLA from other authorities educated in Harrow schools

Discussion with the previous VHT’s indicated that, up to this point, the clearest focus and greatest effort had been concentrated on the first of these three groups, with some support being offered for Harrow CLA in other authorities – usually at a point of crisis – and much less attention being given to those CLA based in Harrow schools but belonging to other authorities.

It was also evident that one of the effects of having three people covering a single role was that there was no clear focal point for referral of issues or action when necessary. The effectiveness of the dedicated staff (PEP Coordinator, CLA EWO) was also reduced; their efforts tended to be reactive rather than proactive; their brief might be seen as diffuse rather than precise- and, most importantly, there was no single reference point to provide leadership, support and direction.

Areas for development

- i. Formulation and dissemination of information concerning the Virtual School for all relevant partners. (This to include relevant guidance concerning roles and responsibilities.) This will include:
 - Information on web pages currently under development
 - Electronic / printed reference materials for school staff / social workers / foster carers
 - Attendance at different fora to present information / raise awareness of the work of the Virtual School for CLA
- ii. Establishment of a termly Network for Designated Teachers / Social Care staff in Harrow
- iii. Formulation of a training programme with specific elements aimed at different professional groups
- iv. Collection of data (educational placement, attainment, attendance, exclusions) regarding all three groups of CLA that make up the roll of the Virtual School
- v. Review and revision of the job description/roles of the current PEP Coordinator and EWO (CLA)

Action	Led by	Support from	Timescale	Review date	Impact/ outcomes	Evidence source(s)	Current situation (May 2012)
1. Write information guidance re CLA and Virtual School for circulation to relevant partners	VHT	GH NC AP VS staff	February 2012	March 2012	All partners aware of Virtual School, and its purpose, including CLA Clear, accessible information available to all	CLA web pages Documentation	Material written for CLA webpage ready for insertion
2. Attend a range of fora to disseminate widely information created in (1)	VHT	Director, CS Workforce Development Officer GH AP NC	Mid Feb – end of March 2012	Start April 2012	Opportunity for direct contact with partners; establishing Harrow's Virtual School as a reality	Presentation materials Feedback from meetings	Discussions at CSMT, Heads and Directors meeting, CLA Managers meetings
3. Resolution of data issues - Collection - Collation - Reporting and potential for creating a "Virtual School" space	VHT	Performance team	Mid Feb – April 2012	Start May 2012	Creation of a comprehensive and accessible data source. Ability to track individuals/groups of pupils; improved ability to target resources	'Virtual School' space on EMS and/or improved capacity on Framework-i	Access to EMS given; improved access to Framework-I; up to date dataset created detailing attainment info. Discussions opened regarding future use of Framework-i.

							Development likely to include change to current PEP form and use of education section (currently not used) on Framework-I to store/update education info
4. Review roles/ responsibilities of Virtual School staff	VHT	GH HR (PRT)	End Feb – mid March	Mid March	Greater clarity of roles/responsibilities for existing staff Improved capacity for direct support of CLA Greater efficiency and removal of duplication of effort	Job descriptions	Initial discussions have taken place with staff regarding possible changes and a potential new structure. Work continues on this area for implementation by Sept 2012.
5. Audit all PEP's for completion and quality	VHT	Virtual School staff QACS QA&SI staff	Mid March – end March	End March	This will provide accurate info re completion rate and information re quality. Guidance for review of format	Report of PEP audit	Initial audits on Year 11 pupils, those selected for review recently and cases where intervention has been needed has indicated similar quality issues re completion. These will be fully addressed by the

							development work to be done under 3 and 6. A recent audit of completion rates indicated improvement from 70% (Feb 12) to 85%
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6. Revise PEP format	VHT	Performance team Virtual School staff GH/NC	Start April – mid April	Mid April	Easier format to use Improved quality Improved access to data Able to support judgements for commissioning support for individual CLA	New format on Framework-i	See comments under 3.
7. Investigate possibility of Easter revision classes/individual tuition for Year 10/11	VHT	School staff External providers	Mid Feb –mid March (tuition during Easter break)	End March	Targeted individual support Improved confidence for CLA receiving tuition Improved performance in core subjects	Records of tuition/revision classes Exam results Summer 2012 /2013	Some individual tuition has been provided; revision classes not viable this year – will remain a target for 2012-2013
8. Confirm resources available and areas to be prioritised for commissioning of CLA support	VHT	GH JS	March 2012 – July 2012	Aug 2012	Improved staffing Wider range of support available for CLA Improved outcomes in terms of attendance/exclusions/progress	Staff in post Menu of available support expanded Data showing some improved outcomes for individuals	Initial discussions with Divisional Director have taken place and a base budget agreed.

9. Establish a network for Social Care/Designated Teachers	VHT	Virtual School staff ESSO HSIP	May 2012 –July 2012	Aug 2012	Improved knowledge / understanding of issues Ability to share and learn from the good practice of others Improved provision for CLA	Records of Meeting(s); feedback from membership	This is primarily an action for academic year 2012/13 .
10. Review pupils transferring to secondary education; check transition provision	VHT	Admissions Primary school staff Virtual School staff	May 2012 – Sept 2012	End Sept 2012	Transition programme which meets individual need CLA make a confident start to secondary education	Schools report CLA confident and settled at start of Year 7 Attendance not an issue	Work here to begin at May half term onwards
11. Develop training programme for academic year 2012 - 2013	VHT	Other colleagues providing specialist input; CS L&D Officer; P/ship Workforce Dev & Training Officer Virtual School staff	May 2012 – Sept 2012	After each session/course Full review at end of academic year	Greater confidence and competence in supporting CLA Better understanding of issues covered	Participant feedback	Plan to be circulated for school staff in second half of Summer term; a session for foster carers is also planned for Dec 2012
12. Ensure system in place for	VHT	Performance	June 2012 –	Start of new	Comprehensiv	Data sources	See comments

collection/entry of data for all CLA		team Schools Social care staff Virtual School staff	Sept 2012	academic year 2012 - 2013	e and accurate information available for all three groups of CLA Improved ability to interrogate data and target resources Improvement in depth and quality of support available to colleagues Improvement in direct support for CLA	available to interrogate	under 3
13. Establish a rolling programme of audit (by Year group/Key Stage)	VHT	Social care managers; QACS/QA&SI staff Virtual School staff	Sept 2012 onwards	After each audit	Enhanced accountability Ongoing check on individual progress Ability to proactively	Regular reports for each group	To begin Sept 2012

					plan for improvement enhanced		
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