

By: Malcolm Newsam, Interim Managing Director, Children, Families & Education Directorate
Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member, Specialist Children's Services

To: Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee

Date: 30 March 2011

Subject: Update regarding the work of the Virtual Head Teacher for Looked After Children.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: *This report provides Members with an overview of the priorities for the Virtual Head Teacher, and details;-*

- the progress made by the Integrated Looked After Children Support Service (ILSS) in its development into the Virtual School (VS)
- the challenges for the Virtual School in tracking the progress made by our Looked After Children (LAC)
- the next steps for the service to support our LAC to achieve their potential

Introduction

1. (1) Further to the report received by the Vulnerable Children and partnerships POSC on 21 October 2010, this report provides an overview of the positive strides made this academic year in the development of the Integrated Looked After Children Support Service (ILSS) into the Virtual School.

Significant developments include;

- the formation of the governing body,
- the virtual school identity,
- the submission of a business case to form 6 locality teams, moving to a position where all Kent LAC are supported in an improved ratio of 1 worker to on average 40 children.

These are the foundation stones of our work, and given us the basis from which to build our service.

The development of the service

2. (1) By September 2011 we are on target to achieve 5 core ambitions.
 - Pan Kent Strategy for Looked after Children, including specific targets in relation to exclusions and attendance.
 - Locality teams up and running reducing ratios of key staff: LAC, implementing improved tracking and monitoring to ensure good levels of progress are being made.
 - Aim Higher mentor working within the team, deployed to support all LACs with aspirations. The worker is in place until the end of this academic year, a business case to review the feasibility of retaining this approach is underway.
 - Portfolio of assessment tools developed in conjunction with the KEP by the virtual school team rolled out and sustaining improvements in the development of the Personal Education Plan. Learning needs assessments will be completed within the first 20 days of children coming into care.
 - Information and tracking of Kent's LAC will come together in an Integrated Data Set (IDS) in order that we know where our children are, what support they are receiving and what targeted actions we need to take,

The final bullet remains a significant challenge. There have been considerable technical barriers to pulling together a robust data set that will allow us to identify, track, monitor and support our LAC. Management Information have assigned a project manager to support us with this work we are close to having an initial data tool that allows us to manage the data.

(2) Addressing our key challenges

As highlighted in October, the low profile of the service and high staff ratios meant limited support for our LAC. Very few Head teachers had heard of the service and that was also true of many LA officers. Several consultation processes have been undertaken, including reviewing the name of the service, with a view to re-launch with a more nationally recognisable name in line with the Virtual School agenda. Partner services were included and a list of potential names was shared with our LAC to canvass their opinion. The outcome identified the preferred name of **Virtual School Kent (VSK)** with 79% of all votes cast

Kent has been significantly behind other areas in reviewing the health needs of looked after children. To combat this, the service has a formal line management structure which includes the operational management of the East Kent LAC Nursing Team; this was not the case before this academic year. West Kent is

considering the integration of their nursing team within our service which will mean we can be confident of achieving our target for next year of 85%.

(3) **Governance**

Good progress has been made in the development of a governing body for the Virtual School where 90% of identified representatives have confirmed their support. These colleagues include representatives from key Specialist Children Service Group (SCSG) and Learning Group services, Health providers and commissioners, Headteacher/ Principal representatives, Connexions CEO and elected members.

The Numbers

3. The current number of KCC Looked After Children is 1,400, with the Asylum figures omitted. In addition there are 228 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). District breakdown continues to highlight significant variance across the County.

(1) LAC Permanent Exclusions

The rate of permanent exclusions for LAC has not reduced over the last 3 years and is significantly above the national average of 0.4% (150% above Nat Av.). Worryingly 2010 data shows no improvement and the gap is widening against both our statistical neighbours and the national average.

(2) LAC Attendance

There is a variable picture of attendance for our Looked After Children, which again evidences the gap between our statistical neighbours and national averages. 2010 25+ days absence data set evidenced an increase in LAC from 15% 2009 to 16.3% 2010.

(3) Educational progress

To ensure that we can improve outcomes for our LAC there needs to be a holistic approach which is strategically targeted based upon accurate data. To achieve this it is imperative that there is a functional integrated data set that can be used proactively to track and monitor students progress

Next Steps

4.

- Finalise a Service Level Agreement with Attendance and Behaviour to ensure robust business processes are in place to drive down absence and exclusions for Kent's LAC.
- Provide effective induction and clear implementation priorities for our locality teams around LAC.

- Finalise the development of the integrated data, to ensure effective implementation of tracking, monitoring and targeting support.
- Identify vulnerable cohorts / learners within our LAC population and effectively deploy resources in a timely manner to maximise LAC outcomes.

Recommendations:

5. Members of the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- Note the proposal to change the name of the service from Integrated Looked After children Support service (ILSS) to Virtual School Kent (VSK) as supported by our LAC.
- Support the ongoing development of services for our Looked After Children

Tony Doran
Virtual School Headteacher
01622 221105
tony.doran@kent.gov.uk

Background Documents:

Virtual Headteacher for Looked After Children - Vulnerable Children & Partnership Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21st October 2010

Other Useful Information: *None*