

Appendix 1 - Virtual School report – January 2012 to cover the educational work streams of the Virtual School

Brian Roberts

Head of Learning & Opportunity for Children in Care / Virtual School Head

This report looks at the progress made by the Peterborough Virtual School since the last report to the corporate parenting panel in January 2011. This report covers the period since then and specifically focuses on the academic year 2010/11.

The highlights

- Rebranding of the Education Team for Children in Care as Peterborough Virtual School for Children in Care.
- Continued training to empower partners and stakeholders to improve the achievements and outcomes of children in care and care leavers. This includes on going training for Foster Carers on the Induction Standards, Sections 4 & 5, Education, Play and caring for children with / affected by Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, (FASD).
- The development of a strategy to successfully support students enrolled on to Higher Education courses.
- The implementation of a policy to ensure that care leavers who become 18 or are older during their post 16 education can remain in their foster home until the end of the academic year, with carers who continue to receive their fostering allowance.
- Successful organisation of the National Virtual School Heads conference in Peterborough
- Extensive programme of training, including providing face to face and online training on the education of traumatised children

During 2011 the management of the Virtual School transferred from the Learning and Skills Division to Children's Social Care.

The staffing of Peterborough Virtual School has reduced during 2011. Since January 2011, one advisory teacher has taken voluntary redundancy, one remains seconded to the Early Years Team and one has been on long term sick leave for 6 months. In addition the Team Administrator has moved to a private company as part of corporate reorganisation and we were with out administrative support for four months.

This means that the staffing for 6 months of the year was as follows:

The Head of Learning and Opportunity / Virtual School Head – Brian Roberts
1 Advisory Teacher – Dee Glover and
The Children in Care Participation Officer – TJ Trambadia

1 advisory Teacher – Gillian Lee returned to work in mid December following her sick leave and a new Business Administrator was appointed in Mid October by Manor Drive Solutions (now Serco).

The caseload of the Advisory Teachers is relatively high when compared with other virtual schools and this has been added to due to the long term illness. All staff in the Virtual School have been responsible for visiting schools and classrooms to provide advice support and guidance on educational issues. However, this has meant that the hands on, work that teachers once undertook is impossible. The focus of the team has been to empower others to support children in care so that their educational achievement will increase. We have the aim of ensuring that all children in care are supported so that they are able to reach their full potential.

Our priorities at the current time are included in appendix A.

Results:

See separate reports for Years 6 and 11.

Peterborough Children in Care achieved the best results ever in the summer of 2010. In the results for 2011 we have not quite reached these levels, but as before, all children performed at or above the levels predicted by their schools. The results reflect the hard work of the Advisory Teachers and an increased emphasis on the educational achievement of children in care from our partners.

The results that Peterborough children in care achieve are in line with national expectations. Given that over 60% of our children have full statements of special educational needs (the national average for children in care is 27%) achieving the national average is a very real achievement.

Funding to promote educational attainment:

Peterborough City Council has taken the decision that funding that was once used to fund Personal Education Allowances (PEAs) for some of our children in care has been removed since the Pupil Premium came into being. This means that as a team we have been unable to transfer funds to carers or other partners to use to promote education as we were able to do with the PEA.

The passing on of funds to schools relating to the Pupil Premium (£488 per child who had been looked after for 6 months or more) has been delayed due to the lack of funds to administer payments and in some cases the reluctance of schools to furnish the Council with bank details so that the payments could be made. We believe that both are now resolved and payments for the spring and summer terms 2010/11 and autumn 2011/12 have now been distributed. The decisions about the way that these funds are used are totally down to the individual schools and we have little control over this. We are attempting to monitor this via the Personal Education Plan reviews and also Child Care Reviews. It is too early to comment about the effectiveness or other wise of this source of funding in improving the educational attainment of children in care.

In the past many children in care in Post 16 education were eligible for Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMA's). These ceased in August 2011. A transitional payment has been put in place for young people in Year 13 to ensure that they continue to receive a payment. From September, all children in care and care leavers are entitled to the full 16 to 19 bursary which is valued at £1,200 per young person per year. We will be able to comment next year on the effectiveness of this as promoting Post 16 education, but early indications are that there has been a patchy response to ensuring that funds reach our children in care on Year 12 courses.

The Schools Forum continues to contribute funding from the Designated Schools Grant to support the role of the designated teacher for children in care in our schools.

This is a sum of £600 per annum for very Peterborough School plus £200 per term per child on role.

Attendance and Admissions:

Peterborough continues to be successful in finding school places for children in care and in making sure that they attend school. Our attendance figures for children in care are better than for all Peterborough children and this reflects the hard work of our carers.

In the academic year 2010/11 there were two children, both year 11's, who came into care late in the academic year that were recorded as being without a school place. Both young people faced complex problems, one was assessed as placing other children under considerable risks and the other was pregnant. Both were placed with foster carers 60+ miles away from the City. In both cases, the Virtual School was unable to secure a mainstream school placement for the young people concerned. In the case of the pregnant young lady we were able to work alongside the Fostering Agency to ensure that she received tuition while in a stable placement. Unfortunately, the other young person moved through a series of foster placements and we were not able to provide the same degree of tuition or alternative education for them.

Exclusions:

Increasingly, the team is becoming involved in a number of exclusions of children in care. The team works with carers to ensure that all educational providers fulfil their statutory requirements with regard to finding alternative placements for children within the care system. However, since September 2011 there has been an increase in official and unofficial exclusions that children and carers are facing. The virtual School alongside the Pupil Referral Unit is working hard to attempt to address these issues.

Higher Education:

While a place on a University course is not for everyone, Peterborough City Council is very successful in getting Care Leavers to University. In 2010/11, there are 10 care leavers who are at University. This reflects the work of the Leaving and After Care workers supported by the Advisory Teachers. Carers also play a key role in raising aspirations and supporting the care leavers while studying.

As an Authority, we are currently committed to providing course fees, accommodation costs and support with materials and books to support our children in their studies. This is a generous offer compared to most Local Authorities across England and is currently under review following announcements relating to Higher Education fees in particular.

Children in Care Participation:

Listening to and working with children in care must be central to the work that we all do. We have been very fortunate to be allowed to develop the role of the Children in Care Participation Officer as part of the Virtual School. This has allowed us to develop a more integrated approach to the work that is undertaken. We have come a long way with the plans that we had in place to develop the role and integrate the views of children throughout the system.

We are supporting successful and growing Children in Care Council which includes a formal group of young people who meet on a monthly basis as well as satellite 1 in 100 clubs in some of our Secondary Schools.

Mutli-agency & National Virtual School Heads Conferences and Training:

As part of empowering partners who work with children in care we have developed an extensive programme of training including a multi-agency conference in March 2011. This was open to designated teachers, foster carers and social workers. For the first time a group of carers from an independent agency attended this event.

The multi-agency conference was attended by over 100 people and was run in conjunction with Akamas. The theme was supporting traumatised children and all participants and all schools in the City gained access to an on line learning resource provided through Akamas. Feedback from the conference was very positive.

The Virtual School has also provided bespoke training for Designated Teachers and some of our schools, for Independent Reviewing Officers, Foster Carers, Educational Psychologists, School Governors, Clerks to Governing Bodies and Social Workers. This has included specific training for foster carers on Learning, Education, Play, Communication and FASD.

In March 2011, Peterborough hosted the national Virtual Heads conference which was addressed by OfSTED and HMI representatives.

The Future:

The structure and function of the Virtual School will feature in the Consultation that will take place in the spring (2012) as part of the reorganisation of Children's Services.

The current plan is to reduce the staffing by the Two Advisory Teacher posts, with the Virtual School Head post reduced to a four day a week appointment allowing for the appointment of a part time co-ordinator of Personal Education Planning for children in care. This will mean that the way that the school can work and the support that we are able to give to individual children, schools, social workers and carers will change.

The budget of the Virtual School suffered a considerable cut in the financial year 2011/12. This reflected the transfer of funding from central government that the Council used to receive to direct funding of individual schools and colleges. Further savings from reducing the staffing of the Virtual School were pencilled in to the budget for this year, however for a variety of reasons this has not been possible.

Brian Roberts
January 2012

Appendix A



Workload Priorities for the VSCiC from January 2012.

If either of the proposals is accepted for restructuring the VSCiC it will mean that the Virtual School will be a less hands on organisation. The new Virtual School staff will not be able to support partners as we have in the past.

This means that there will be a new set of priorities for the work that we undertake. The following represents the priorities:

Education

- 1) **Initial Personal Education Planning** – co-ordination and holding the initial meetings.
- 2) Securing an **educational placement** for CiC without a suitable school place
- 3) CiC in **educational crisis**
- 4) Providing **Information, Advice and Guidance**
- 5) **Training** of partners to empower them to deliver the best for our children.
- 6) **Monitoring any statutory requirements** relating to CiC education, including progress and attendance.
- 7) **CiC transitioning** to new schools
- 8) **Panels, networking meetings and working groups** as determined by the Governing Body
- 9) Anything else determined from time to time by the Governing Body and Director of Children's Services

Participation

- 1) **CiC Council**
- 2) **Holiday & other activities** Programme
- 3) Direct **Communication with Children in Care** to update them and inform them of their rights.
- 4) Providing **Information, Advice and Guidance** from the young persons perspective
- 5) Quality Assurance via **Something to say** cards & monitoring the use of the **Active Card**
- 6) Social care **interviews & consultations**
- 7) **Training** of partners to empower them to deliver the best for our children.
- 8) **Panels, networking meetings and working groups** as determined by the Governing Body
- 9) Anything else determined from time to time by the Governing Body and Director of Children's Services

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