



Virtual Headteacher Report

Corporate Parenting Board

8th October 2018

Virtual Head Teacher Report to Corporate Parenting Board

Staffing

Appointment of the Virtual School Head teacher

The Personnel Committee of the Virtual School Governing Body carried out the interviews for the Virtual School Head teacher post on the 27th & 28th September. Four candidates were interviewed over the two days and completed a range of tasks including a presentation, data exercise, interview with young people and a formal interview. I am pleased to report that the committee offered the post to Linda Mason subject to references.

Linda has previously worked at Monkwearmouth School in Newcastle as a School Improvement Officer, Bradford City Council as Virtual School Head Teacher and latterly as the Interim Assistant Director of SEN and Access and as such she brings a wealth of experience to the post. Linda has agreed to take up post on 1 November 2018.

Other Staffing Issues

The Virtual School's administrative support officer is currently on maternity leave. Since the beginning of May we have experienced some resourcing difficulties which have impacted on some elements of the work of the Virtual School; however, I am pleased to report that these have been rectified and since the beginning of term we have welcomed an interim administrative support officer who has settled extremely well into the team and has shown that she is highly proficient in all aspects of her work. She has been working with our Database Adviser to learn about our database and has taken to it with ease. She has also received some financial training from our finance department and is undertaking further training in Liquid Logic, Welfare Call and H.R processes.

The team have been thanked for the work that they have undertaken during the period of reduced capacity; of particular note was their whole team approach during both employee absences and the recent Ofsted inspection.

Premises

The KS1 PRU have relocated to Tudor Grove as they could no longer stay in their premises. Due to the specific needs of the KS1 PRU it was agreed that the Virtual School would move into demountable classroom space on the site of Tudor Grove. During the summer holidays there was limited access to computers and telephones however, I can now report that the re-organisation is complete and following some initial teething problems the Virtual School is now fully operational.

Ofsted Outcomes

The outcome of the recent Ofsted 23rd April 2018 - 18th May 2018 was that children looked after and achieving permanence, 'Requires Improvement'.

During the inspection we attended a number of interviews with the inspectors which included:-

- Attendance and Exclusions
- Attainment
- Post 16 and the ELEET Team
- Improvements

Recommendation 1)

Children's emotional and mental health needs are not met well. Not all children in care receive a timely strength and difficulties questionnaire. When these are undertaken, they do not always identify and result in timely additional support. Children and young people experience delay in accessing specialist services when they are needed. Senior managers have responded by commissioning clinical psychologist consultation for residential staff and foster carers. This is making a difference to the care provided. Foster carers receive training on how to identify and better support children's emotional needs. Recent and improved partnerships with schools to develop mental health and well-being groups are beginning to improve the awareness of the needs of children in care.

In response to this recommendation last year the Virtual School have continued to develop more support for our Children Looked After by extending our provision for art therapy and mindfulness within the classroom at Tudor Grove. Young people also from Tudor Grove access this provision in partnership with the Link School.

We support young people who are at risk of being excluded or indeed have been excluded. We are only into the fourth week of the new term and we already have seven young people accessing support. This means we can educate the young person and also allow them to express their views and feelings in a calm environment so we can support their return to school. We are in the process of joining Place2Be as part of the Trailblazer Cities for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

There has been significant improvement in the management, support and training offered by the Virtual School for children looked after during the last 12 months. This means that children are receiving better support and more targeted interventions to address their learning needs. Attendance has improved. The Virtual School addresses any concerns about attendance or punctuality swiftly, regardless of where the children are placed. Visits to out-of-area placements are prioritised. This ensures that those children furthest away are receiving equitable levels of support to those living in the City.

Due to the wide variety of out of area school/placements the Virtual School will continue to undertake, update and review so that we can be more accurately informed of the quality of a school/placement and indeed we have raised awareness of what each offers. We are working closely with our colleagues in commissioning and when this is completed we hope this will give more confidence in placing our young people in the correct setting and help us by giving more up to date/ correct advice.

We have offered training for E.PEPS to other professionals and will be rolling this out after the half term break.

Training for Virtual School Team will include promoting and developing more smart targets for young people (particularly Key Stage 4). We will raise the profile more around the EPEP and due to the Welfare Call system, will be able to monitor PEPS more effectively. We will be more readily aware of other schools or other professionals not working within the timeframe as the new system has a range of alerts. Also linked to the smart targets is the Pupil Premium allocation. This is only passed on when a PEP is deemed good enough.

The Virtual School have a fortnightly update in relation to out of area cases to discuss any issues. This is followed up by a termly meeting with commissioning to quality assure the placements.

Support and planning for Children's education has improved. Resources are targeted to raise the educational attainment of children in care. The quality of personal education plans (PEPS) has improved significantly. The clear majority are now completed with appropriate timescales, but the quality remains inconsistent. Not all PEPS have sufficiently targeted actions to improve specific learning needs and facilitate progress. The Virtual School Headteacher now tightly monitors pupil premium funding and holds the school to account for the spend. This ensures that children receive the additional learning resources they are entitled to.

We continue to evaluate the PEPS that schools sent to us. We challenge any school who has not set SMART targets. This year we will have an improved format for evaluation. Key Stage 3 and 4 are a real focus for us as the quality of PEPS is variable and do not offer a secure platform for the identification of robust, measurable targets supported by effective use of Pupil Premium. Training will be provided to designated leaders to improve the quality of their PEPS based on true person centred approaches.

Team members have analysed current datasets and are targeting all young people where data demonstrates that young people are at risk of under-achievement and personalised plans are being devised to support these children with a particular emphasis on pupils who will be subject to end of Key Stage assessments.

The Virtual School has commissioned a number of places with NISAI learning who provide distance learning packages for young people in Key Stages 3 & 4 who are having some difficulty in accessing school. It also offers the opportunity for pupils to access after school study and revision programmes linked to the young person's current school study modules.

The key focus of our work this academic year will be focused on raising attainment and improving progress of all of our pupils. The newly appointed Virtual Headteacher has a background in school improvement and will be focused on working with our schools and social care staff in ensuring that outcomes improve.

The picture is more encouraging for those 16 and 17 year olds preparing to leave care. Good collaboration between social workers, personal advisers and the virtual school post 16- coordinator is improving outcomes for these young people. Of 78 in this cohort, 69 (82%) are in education, training or employment. The remaining 18% are receiving intensive support to find appropriate placements. This is better than the national average.

Our Post 16 worker continues to support our young people. We are closely maintaining the apprenticeships we have in a local school and are endeavouring to roll this model out as the process of recruitment and package of support put together for the young people proved successful.

We are working very closely with Sunderland College and have been invited to meetings with the college's lecturers/tutors so we can explain the specific needs of our young people and reinforce the strong networking we have to support them.

Senior managers know the rate of progress for children looked after is not rapid enough to close the gap between peers. Low attainment of children looked after continues to be a major cause for concern. Better progress made in early years and at key stage 1 and 2 is not sustained when children move on to secondary school.

Data – GLD, phonics, KS 1 & 2. Please note that this data is unvalidated and could be subject to change. Validated outcomes will be shared with members through the Annual Report of the Virtual Headteacher in January 2019.

Early years – GLD

Unvalidated data shows that 71.4% of CLA achieved a good level of development which is 0.2ppts above non CLA.

Year 1 phonics

70% of CLA achieved the threshold in the phonics test. This was 12.3ppts below non CLA but an improvement on the previous year of 3.6ppts

Year 2 Reading

44.4 % of CLA achieved the expected level in reading against non CLA of 76.1%. The gap has narrowed this year but there is considerable work that needs to be carried out

Year 2 Writing

44.4 % of CLA achieved the expected standard in writing against the non CLA cohort of 71%. The gap between CLA and Non CLA was decreased since 2017.

Year 2 – maths

33.4% of CLA achieved the expected standard in mathematics against the non CLA cohort of 77.1%. The gap between CLA and non CLA has decreased since last year but the gap is remains too wide.

Key Stage 2 - Reading, writing and mathematics combined

37.5% of CLA achieved the expected standard against the non CLA cohort of 67.8%. This is a decline on the previous year. However, 6.3% of CLA achieved greater depth across all three subjects against the non CLA cohort of 10.9%. This is an improvement of 6.3% from the previous year where no CLA achieved at the greater depth.

Key stage 4 & 5 data is not yet available.

Attendance and Exclusions

We continue to improve on the attendance of our young people, with last year being 94.8%.

Welfare Call continues to give us excellent support in informing us of any abnormalities. We have a handful of schools who continue to be difficult in giving us the attendance data (due to their authorities interpretation of GDPR), but we get good support in tackling this from our colleagues at TFC.

Since encouraging schools to contact Virtual School before they consider excluding a looked after child we have been able to work out some solutions to help those children cope with the situation. On a number of occasions we have been able to come out to a young person and discuss the situation. On other occasions we have put some support in the school to alleviate the situation (a short term measure). In more difficult or complex cases we have brought young people in for a more focused intervention. This again is a short term solution but quite often gives both the school and the young person some respite until a longer term solution is found. These solutions vary and are individual. It might be that the school refers the young person to the cities panel which allocate PRU, Returners Home Tuition. It could even be that in consultation with social workers an external placement/ education is considered.

As a result of our actions we have not looked after children subject to a permanent exclusion during the academic year 2017/2018.

Fixed term exclusions 2017/2018 (unvalidated)

2017/18 provisional data shows there have been 37 LAC pupils fixed term excluded, which equates to 123 fixed term exclusions over 201 days.

Prior to 2017/18, historical data indicates that there has been a continuing decrease in the number of fixed term exclusions for looked after children over the preceding 3 academic years. However, Current data indicates that there has been a 3% increase in the number of LAC fixed term excluded, compared to 2016/17. A 38% increase fixed term exclusions which equates to a 13% decrease in the number of days lost due to exclusion for looked after children compared to 2016/17.

The main reasons that LAC were fixed term excluded was due to 'Other' (27%) and persistent disruptive behaviour (24%), comparable to 16/17 data. There has been an increase in the number of fixed term exclusion for looked after children recorded at 'Other' 28 of the 37 LAC pupils were fixed term excluded more than once.

The exclusion of CLA was tracked throughout the year and Letters were sent to schools by the Acting Chief Executive of Together for Children and the Vulnerable Children Service manager challenging actions and requesting information about the provisions being set in place for these children. In addition the Inclusion and Access manager and Virtual School Head Teacher made repeated visits to some schools to challenge their decisions.

In addition, concerns were raised about individual schools with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), the Department for Education and Ofsted by the Director of Education Services in regular meetings.

As a result of these actions one academy has made significant changes to approaches and is now engaging pro-actively with Together for Children in sharing their revised protocols.

Post 16 Provisions and NEETS

As of 25th September 2018 there were 102 16-18 year old young people on roll with the Virtual School, 46 in Year 12 and 56 in Year 13.

The current overall NEET figure currently stands at 13, equating to 12.7%. Breaking down these percentages further, current Year 12's account for 7.8% of the overall figure and Year 13's 4.9% of NEETs. Viewed by year group, this means 17.3% of Year 12's and 8.9% of Year 13's are currently NEET. Early destination information was collated from Post 16 education providers (where they were expected to attend, from Schools, alternative Education, Secure units etc.). Final destination information (where they actually enrolled and attended in Sept. 2018) was arrived at by information sharing and contact with Social Workers, Care Home Key Workers, Foster Carers and Connexions professionals in early September 2018.

Comparatively low NEET figures (37% nationally, DfE Feb 2018) have been maintained by early contact with schools and individual young people seen as being at risk of becoming NEET whilst in Year 11 and supporting the retention of Year 13 Young people on courses or transition to higher level courses and carefully selecting courses and training providers that most closely match the support needs and abilities of the individual.

Meetings have been held with Connexions, Sunderland College and various training providers to help target support on those young people currently NEET. All current NEET young people have been contacted and support offered including supported visits, CV writing and long term application and job/training/education search support via the most appropriate professional (SVS, Connexions etc.) given their individual support needs taking into consideration SEN, emotional wellbeing and current cared for status. There has been a reduction in the number of training providers offering courses in the Sunderland area which has had an effect on engagement, and on the variety and range of courses offered by those that continue to serve the area. To remedy this meetings have been arranged with current training providers and contact made with the North East Training Providers Association to discuss further opportunities which may be available with specific focus on looked after young people and in particular attracting NEET back into education or training.

PEPS and Liquid Logic

Due to the way that PEPS are recorded the full six weeks holiday period is counted into the PEP timeline. As it is impossible to undergo PEP meetings in the holidays (schools are closed) when we return in September as expected the number of out of date PEPS has grown dramatically. This obviously has an extremely negative impact on our KPI. This issue needs to be tackled if our KPI is to be a realistic measure.

We have been working with our data colleagues to also match up the figures on our Virtual School Database with the records now held on Liquid Logic. This is proving a mammoth task but by working and continually sharing data sets we are making progress.

We were tasked with putting the PEPS onto Liquid Logic, which we did. We are awaiting instruction to find out where they need to be placed so they are recorded on the system.

Most staff are now trained on Liquid Logic (only 2 left to train) and that also puts us in a better position to populate the system.

The number of PEPS on our system still does not mirror Liquid Logic and we still continue to have that conversation.

The PEP's from KS4 were quite often not focussed enough and did not have smart enough targets. Bearing in mind the challenges that Year 10/11 present in raising achievement, the Virtual School will have a very sharp focus on supporting and challenging the schools where PEPS were not robust enough.

The Virtual School continues to evaluate the PEPS. Each week the team review the PEPS received. When the E'PEP becomes live this will be a more seamless process. Now that the data set matches from Liquid Logic are improving we are close to the E'PEP going live. We have been working very closely with our colleagues to reach that outcome.

Partnership Working

The Virtual School continues to develop strong partnerships with our co-workers in Together for Children. We have very positive relationships with the staff in our residential homes. Over the last 12 months we have worked closely with them to support our young people who are struggling with their education.

We have had a number of successes in overarching support and helping young people reintegrate back into their schools/ training placements. Equally we have encountered a number of issues such as exclusions or young people refusing education. This area is one of our priorities. Partnership working with schools has continued to be strengthened.

Virtual School continue to strengthen and develop its partnership with the Link School, last term, we had some very successful outcomes for a number of our "shared" children. It is particularly heartening that one young person who has previously had the highest number of missing episodes is now settled and accessing 25 hours of education. This was the result of the Virtual School and The Link School developing a package of support around that young person and moving forward at a pace that was suitable for them.

We had 12 young people accessing our "Rainbow Room" last year. Each bespoke package included support for Mental Health and Wellbeing and Mindfulness. We are reviewing this way of working and will be extending it this year.

O Gravity

We have been invited to pilot O Gravity. This is a really exciting opportunity for a number of our young people. The project revolves around how to learn coding and build a Minecraft universe. The classes are delivered from Software City and volunteers are highly qualified professionals from the IT industry. The coding club is being hosted in Saggezza's Offices in Software City. Saggezza is a global solutions provider.

We are hoping that our young people will be inspired by this opportunity and that we will lead the project being developed and extended.

LCEP- Local Cultural Education Partnership

We have been invited to be a partner in our new LCEP. The vision is to establish a cross sector partnership that works together to join up and improve cultural education for children and young people in their local area. Obviously we at Virtual School will be looking at how the partnership will extend more cultural activity to **Children Looked After**. It is part of the Cultural Education Challenge led by the Arts Council England and supported by the Department of Education.