

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29 JUNE 2010 REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF FAMILY SERVICES

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2009 – 2010

This report is the third annual report detailing the work and developments of the Royal Borough's Virtual School for Looked after Children. It provides the context of the work being undertaken and gives some clear indicators in relation to the education attainment of the current cohort of Looked after Children.

FOR INFORMATION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Levels of educational achievement among looked after children tend to be very significantly lower than their peers. The 2003 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report *A Better Education for Children in Care* showed that there are five key factors behind this under-achievement:

- young people in care **spend too much time out of school**: they do not have a school place, they are excluded, or they do not attend;
- too many young people's lives are **characterised by instability**: a change in care placement can also mean a change of school, and this lack of stability can have a critical impact on educational attainment;
- children do not have **sufficient help with their education if they get behind**: children in care may need extra support in education, either because they have missed out on schooling, or because they have special educational needs;
- **primary carers are not expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development**: effective support at home for learning and development is important for all children, including looked after children;
- children have **unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education**: educational outcomes can be strongly influenced by a child's health, and school can

boost a child's health through raising self-confidence and self-esteem, improving participation in sports and providing access to health and sex education.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Virtual School for Looked after Children is now in its third year. Staffing levels have remained fairly constant; although the Education Officer who was previously managed within the Looked after Children's support and review team is now line managed by Head of the Virtual School.
- 2.2 Overall numbers of Looked after Children have reduced slightly, with considerable changes to the age profile. In June 2009 there were 169 young people in care from Reception to Year 13; in June 2010 the number was 157. The biggest decrease has been in the Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils, from 42 in June 2009 to 25 in June 2010. However, the numbers in Key Stages 3 and 4 have remained the same at 74 while the numbers in Key Stage 5 have increased from 53 last year to 57 this year. Only 18.7% of these young people are educated in RBKC schools, including Parkwood Hall. Our schools also have to give priority to Looked after Children from other boroughs and, when these are counted, Sion-Manning has the highest concentration of Looked after Children.

Key Stage	Number of Looked After Children	Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)/in the process of being stated (Approximately 3% of the population as a whole have SEN)	Of whom are Children with Disabilities	Unaccompanied asylum seeking children
1	11	9%	9%	0
2	14	16%	0	0
3	35	37%	8.6%	11%
4	39	28%	7.7%	18%

3. ATTENDANCE

- 3.1 The Virtual School continues to use Welfare Call to provide attendance data and this has proved very helpful for pupils from Reception to Year 11.

- 3.2 This year The Virtual School has been supported in improving attendance and punctuality by an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) supplied by the Borough's Education Welfare Service. This has been most helpful with the EWO working with schools, foster carers and residential home workers where attendance and punctuality have needed improvement.
- 3.3 In the academic year 2008 - 2009, there was a 37% increase in attendance, bringing the overall attendance in June 2009 to 88%. It is now at 89%. In June 2009, 68% of Looked after Children had attendance of 90% and above, while in June 2010 the percentage with attendance of 90% and above had risen to 75%. The number of Looked after Children with 25 or more days' absence from school was 18 in June 2009 compared to 16 in June 2010. When this figure is adjusted to fit attendance returns criteria, it will be 10% compared to the national average for Looked after Children of 11.9%.
- 3.4 This improvement is despite a rise in the number of Looked after Children with fixed term exclusions (11 by June 2009, 15 by June 2010) and the number of days lost through exclusion (71.5 by June 2009 and 92.5 by June 2010).
- 3.5 There has been one Permanent Exclusion which is being taken to an Independent Appeal Panel. The statutory guidance tells us that before a permanent exclusion, "every practicable means" must be taken to avoid it and that exclusion should only be "an absolute last resort" for Looked after Children. One of the grounds for the appeal will be that the school did not do enough to support the child prior to the exclusion.

4. ATTAINMENT

- 4.1 Each looked after child should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) from one month of becoming looked after. The **Personal Education Plan** is at the core of the work we do as it brings together the key people with responsibility for the education of our Looked after Children and requires them to set SMART targets and improvement strategies to support the young person's progress.
- 4.2 The (PEP) is the responsibility of the social worker. However, effective PEPs require an in-depth knowledge of how schools work the ability to measure progress and understand the factors that lead to good progress. The Virtual School has therefore taken the lead for many of the PEPs, with a rise of 20% in the numbers chaired by them. This has led to considerable improvement.

- 4.3 Certain changes have been made to the PEPs such as, for example, the requirement that they are completed according to a timeline in keeping with the rhythm of the academic year and be written up within two weeks of their being completed. The result was that by the end of the first term of 2009/2010, a first PEP had been recorded for 79% of Looked after Children compared to 68% for the same period in 2008/2009.
- 4.4 In addition, the way in which the audit is done has also been changed so that there are two types of audit; one merely checks to ascertain whether the PEPs have been done on time but a second is an in-depth audit of quality. By May 2010, the percentage of PEPs chaired by Virtual School Teachers had risen to 85%, of which every one addressed the important issues and produced effective decisions.
- 4.5 We continue to develop a system which will help us track the progress of all our Looked after Children with the support of the integrated children's system (ICS). Fortunately, RaiseOn Line has just become available for Virtual Schools and we will be making good use of this to gather more exact data about our young people's progress in order to decide where best to target our support.
- 4.6 In 2009 there was a marked improvement in the attainment of our young people at Key Stage 4, compared with 2008. Unfortunately, because of the way in which the data is currently compiled, progress is not always obvious. For example, unlike mainstream schools, our figures contain data for young people with disabilities who may not have the capacity to take any examinations at all as well as for young people who may be dis-applied because of their special educational needs and young people in Young Offenders Institutions. In addition, if a young person ceases to be looked after by the 30th September after they have taken the examinations, then their data does not count. Comparison with the data of mainstream schools is therefore not possible.
- 4.7 The figures below include all young people who were in Year 11 in either May/June 2008 or 2009. Two of these young people were no longer looked after by the following September and so did not count in the reported figures but I have recorded them here.

KEY STAGE 4

End of Key Stage 4	2008 (21 LAC)	2009 %	National LAC %	Expected 2010 (18 LAC)
5+ A* - C including English & Maths	5%	14%	10%	22%
5+ A* - C (any subjects)	5%	29%	15%	39%
5+ A* - G	33%	38%	49%	50%
1+ A* - G	42%	52%	71%	72%
Other Qualifications	10%	5%		28%
Did not sit any examinations	48%	42%		5.5%
With a statement of SEN	19%	33%	28%	22%
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	57%	33%		11%
Children with Disabilities	5%	14%		5.5%
In Young Offenders Institutions	0	14%		0

4.8 NOTE: The collection of data for the 2010 cohort will be gathered in a different way by the Government. .

KEY STAGE 2

End of Key Stage 2	2008 <u>7 LAC</u> - 21 subjects	2009 <u>11 LAC</u> - 33 subjects	LAC Nationally	Target 2010 <u>2 LAC</u> - 6 subjects
% of children with Level 4+ in English	71%	45%		50%
% of children with Level 4+ in Maths	71%	36%		50%
Number of Level 4+ in English, Maths and Science	71%	48%	46%	50%
Number of 2 levels of progress in English, Maths and Science	17 (81%)	26 (79%)		100%
With a statement of SEN	14%	0	28%	50% (SLD)
Unaccompanied Minors	0	9%		0

KEY STAGE 5

4.9 Of this year's **Year 12** Looked After Children, 63% are in some form of education or training including AS Levels, GCSEs, BTEC courses, ESOL courses, vocational courses etc., 18.5% are in Young Offenders' Institutions (YOI), and 18.5% are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). One young person who engaged well with an Apprenticeship is now NEET through no fault of his own as the Apprenticeship was not properly organised. It is hoped that, as the Apprenticeship programme develops, more apprenticeships will be made available for young people who have Entry Level

Skills (below GCSE level) and these are the young people most in need and the current programme does not address this group.

- 4.10 Of this year's **Year 13**, 77% are in some form of education, employment or training with 23% NEET and none currently in YOI.
- 4.11 Of the current Year 12 and 13, approximately 15% are likely to progress to university which is above the national average of 11% for Looked after Children.
- 4.12 Currently, all Looked after Children in Years 12 and 13 are entitled to support from The Virtual School. However, this is not sustainable due to staffing levels and so The Virtual School will, in future, support only those who are in some form of education or training according to need up to the age of 25.
- 4.13 The Virtual School and The Independent Support Team are currently developing protocols on working jointly to support older Looked after Children.
- 4.14 Many Looked after Children tend to return to their home borough once they are aged 16 and over. However, many still have to rely on out-of-borough education or training. For those who have English as an Additional Language needs yet who are capable of GCSE, AS and A' Levels, The Virtual School is very grateful to St. Charles College for committing itself to taking them and to providing for their needs as this is a unique local offer.
- 4.15 Key Stage 5, which is proposed to become statutory within the next 4 years, provides a number of complex challenges and The Head of the Virtual School has been leading a cross-borough group in order to make recommendations on ways in which transitions between Key Stages 4 and 5 and during KS5 can be supported such as, for example, having a Designated Person in 16 – 19 educational provision who takes responsibility for Looked After Children and promotes their progress.

5 SUPPORT WITH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

- 5.1 The Royal Borough's Looked after Children form an extremely diverse cohort. Like Looked after Children everywhere, the majority have been traumatised in some way by their experiences so that a much higher proportion than children in general have mental health issues, learning and behavioural

difficulties. They attend many different types of schools, both day and residential mainstream and specialist, as appropriate to their needs. While The Virtual School tries to provide support to all RBKC Looked after Children, regardless of where they live it is difficult to offer extra-curricular activities to those out of London.

5.2 The funded Personal Education Allowance (PEA) is £500 per Looked After Child from Reception to Year 11 and is spent according to certain PEA criteria. It is supplemented by The Royal Borough so that the money can stretch to include those in education beyond Year 11. The money is used according to need and is used for group activities as well as for individual children.

5.3 Below are some of the ways in which it has been utilised in order to improve outcomes for our Looked after Children.

Personal Subject Tuition:

5.4 The cost for tuition is approximately £40 per hour, inclusive of VAT. We normally offer a block of 10 hours. For those 16 and under, the lessons take place in the foster home with the carer or other adult designated by them present. We use two agencies and only tutors who are fully qualified teachers and who are expected to write a lesson report on what they taught, the response of the child and what progress they are making. However, the most reliable assessment will come from the child's in-school teachers and the results of tests and public examinations.

5.5 Although we will consider individual tuition for any young person who needs and will accept it, priority is given to those at the end of key stages and taking public examinations. For example, some secondary schools enter children for GCSEs before Year 11 so we would, of course, offer them tuition. Some of our Looked after Children in Key Stages 2 and 3 are also benefiting from the 1:1 Making Good Progress tuition.

5.6 Unfortunately, there are some young people who would benefit from tuition but who refuse it, or accept and then do not turn up for their lessons. If a young person missed two sessions without good cause and without the lesson having been cancelled 24 hours in advance, we end the sessions. On the other hand, much of the tuition works very well. In a recent email, an AS Level Psychology student, who had asked for tuition very much at the last minutes, said, *"I must say she has been great and much help at short notice. I would like to say thank you for giving me this type of help and I*

hope this will carry on in the near future."

Teaching Assistant Support

- 5.7 As many of our Looked after Children, because of the traumas they have suffered, have behavioural difficulties, we use a significant amount of our education budget to provide teaching assistants to support them in the classroom. Approximately 10% of our Looked after Children have had Teaching Assistant (TA) support this academic year.
- 5.8 The TA will spend anything from a day to five days per week in school assisting the young person in the classroom, supporting them with their behaviour and engagement in learning. They will work closely with the teacher and, if the teacher wishes it, they may withdraw the child to work on a 1:1 basis with them. While the Virtual School Casework Teacher will have formal management of them and receive weekly reports, usually either the SENCO or the Designated Teacher will have day to day in-school management.

Revision Classes

- 5.9 The 5 GCSE and A' Level students whom we sent to the Wellington College Five Day Residential Revision courses in 2009 having done well in their examinations, this year we doubled the number with a mixture of GCSE and AS Level students. The students found they were worked extremely hard and they learned a great deal, both educationally and socially.
- 5.10 In addition, thanks to the work and funding of the borough's Aim Higher Co-ordinator, Exscitec set up three days of revision during the Easter holiday at their new laboratory in Imperial College. The revision days focused on Maths and Science at GCSE and Maths and Physics at AS Level and were for both RBKC Looked after Children and those of Westminster, so that they would be cost effective.

Volunteers

- 5.11 This year, in addition to paid tuition and revision classes, The Virtual School has been using volunteers from The Rugby Portobello Trust. This has proved an excellent service with a number of our older Looked After Children benefiting, and has ranged from a volunteer supporting a 16 year old unaccompanied minor, who had never been to school and was illiterate in her own language, with learning to read, a medical student teaching chemistry and maths to a GCSE student and a former head teacher supplementing the knowledge of two AS Level maths and statistics students.

Saturday School

- 5.12 Saturday English classes have continued through the year for unaccompanied minors who do not speak fluent English. The three hours of ESOL/GCSE English tuition are held in classrooms belonging to the Pupil Support Services at their base in Colville Primary School and run by two qualified and experienced ESOL teachers, one of whom is an English Consultant. Despite it being Saturday morning and the constant weekend disruption to the tube lines, we have a core group of about 14 students ranging from Year 8 to Year 13. As well as improving their English, the classes give the students the chance to get to know and socialise with each other and also give the Head of the Virtual School the opportunity to get to know the students personally and raise their aspirations.

Homework Club

- 5.13 The challenge with the Saturday English Classes is to get the older students living in hostels to attend. A number of these students are having difficulty in progressing educationally because of their English language skills so when the Connexions Personal Advisor for Refugees and Asylum Seekers proposed setting up a Homework Club to support the young people in Westway Hostel, the majority of whom do not have fluent English, the Virtual School took the opportunity to support by paying for the teaching assistant.

Aimhigher Associates

- 5.14 The Aim Higher Reaching Up Project having coming to an end, this year The Virtual School participated in Aimhigher Associates. This scheme was set up to provide undergraduates from London Universities to support students in school. However, this would not have worked for us, so we altered the scheme to meet our needs, with a mixture of group meetings and e-mentoring.
- 5.15 At the group meetings, the undergraduates' main brief was to develop a relationship with the students in order to motivate them and raise their aspirations at the same time as goal setting, action planning, study skills, revision and exam techniques. The undergraduates introduced the young people to learning web-sites and the UCAS site. Between the face-to-face meetings, the undergraduates and Looked after Children communicate through a secure e-mentoring programme.
- 5.16 In July there will be a final meeting of all concerned which will incorporate a review and assessment of how the scheme has worked.

Summer Schools

- 5.17 Carrying on from the successes of those who attended last year's summer schools, when it was made possible for the borough's Looked after Children to attend, even if they did not live or attend school in the borough, we now have more young people accessing these schools which perform an excellent function in raising aspirations, increasing motivation and inspiring confidence as well as being intellectually stimulating and great fun.
- 5.18 This year a group of our AS Level Looked after Children attended a Study Skills course at King's College in February and two young people who were taking GCSE Italian without attending classes attended master classes at the University of Westminster. This summer, a number of our young people will be attending Design Camp at which they will have a choice of workshops in designing and making scooters, fashion items, musical instruments, puppets and a garden! In addition, we will have several young people attending a variety of residential and non-residential summer schools at Imperial College run by Exscitec in subjects ranging from chemistry (for solving crime), to space science, to robotics, to mathematics and more.

Extra-Curricular Activities

- 5.19 The Virtual School continues to extend its students through extra-curricular activities such as theatre trips. This year these have included Jack and the Beanstalk, Oliver, Cinderella on Ice, Circle du Soleil, The Lion King, Grace Jones, Saturday Spectacular and more. The Virtual School Saturday School took its students to The London Museum to give them a little background on the vast history of their adopted city and to St. Paul's Cathedral, which greatly impressed them.
- 5.20 The Education Officer, who is now part of The Virtual School, set up a 5-day robotics programme with Royal Holloway University over the Easter holiday, which was very successful and is beginning a new project with The Foundling Museum which will both seek to educate our young people in the lives of Looked after Children of the past and create works of art which they will present in an exhibition.

Rewards

- 5.21 With so many of our Looked after Children making a fantastic effort to overcome the barriers to their progress, both personal and academic. The Virtual School believes that the celebration of success, especially through rewards, is essential. It continues to reward good attendance at school and at Saturday School through certificates and book tokens.

It also rewards effort, progress and improvement as identified through the PEP meetings and other reviews of our young people. The Virtual School is now seeking more ways in which to celebrate the academic successes of our young people, especially in the first part of the Autumn Term after the results have been published.

Other Resources

- 5.22 As well as using books and book tokens for rewards, The Virtual School also purchases revision guides and some academic books in order to support our young people. These are lent to the young people and returned when they no longer need them.
- 5.23 When the City Learning Centre was up-grading its stock, it very generously donated two mini-Mac computers to the Virtual School. In addition, we have purchased one PC. These computers are used by young people when they visit us, especially for coursework and research.
- 5.24 The Virtual School continues to use The Letterbox Club to promote literacy and numeracy skills and our primary teacher up-loads Word Shark and Number Shark on the computers of foster carers for use with our primary children.

Training

- 5.25 Enabling those with primary care for the education of Looked after Children to carry out their responsibilities in an effective and productive manner is key to ensuring the educational progress of children. The Virtual School has therefore continued with its work in this area during the year.
- 5.26 For **Social Workers**, the Virtual School ran a session at the Essentials Training on how it can support them in carrying out their duties in supporting the educational attainment of Looked After Children, with a direct focus on the Personal Education Plan, its organisation, process, SMART targets and follow up. We have also produced a selection of materials to support social workers.
- 5.27 Currently, The Education Officer and Head Teacher are visiting every social work team individually in order to revisit this work and to ascertain whether they feel they need further support. In addition, some new social workers have been referred to us shortly after having been employed by the borough and we have provided them with 1:1 sessions on our work and how we can support Looked after Children that they may have responsibility for.

- 5.28 **Foster Carers and residential care workers** are absolutely key in ensuring that our Looked after Children make educational progress and we have held two education conferences for them.
- 5.29 In January, we held an Education Conference in the Town Hall which was well attended by fosters carers, residential care workers, social workers and supervising social workers. The conference was opened by The Director for Family Services and a former RBKC Looked after Child who is now a barrister. We also had a most effective speech from a 22 year old who was also one of our Looked after Children on her experiences of being in care. During this conference we ran workshops on how to support Looked after Children with their home learning and invited those who support educational outcomes to demonstrate their services.
- 5.30 In April, this Virtual School together with that of Westminster, employed Exscitec to run another conference/training for carers, this time at Imperial College and focused specifically on how to support our Looked after Children's maths and science learning. The key speaker at this conference was Professor David Phillips, OBE, and President Elect of The Royal Society of Chemistry (who discovered the benefits of "blue light" in eliminating jaundice in new born babies. This was followed by a selection of workshops on "Kitchen Science", how to support with homework. This conference, too, was most successful and the feedback from foster carers was very good.
- 5.31 Since the role of the **Designated Teacher** became statutory in September 2009, support for Looked after Children has improved. All Designated Teachers are now required to have training and we will be providing accredited training for the Designated Teachers of all of the borough schools in the Autumn Term during a series of afternoon sessions at The Isaac Newton Professional Development Centre. The Care Matters Partnership has developed a guide book for Designated Teachers and is currently working with the staff of The Virtual School on the most effective ways of delivering the training.

Other Developments

- 5.32 In order to support the educational attainment of Looked after Children in our two residential children's homes, the Head of the Virtual School has written a Draft Education Policy, based on the Draft National Minimum Standards. This is currently being considered by Locality Social Work Team Managers and

will then be presented to staff and students of the residential homes. Once it has been finalised, a series of training sessions will be put in place for the residential care workers in order to further good educational outcomes for those young people in the homes.

- 5.34 The Virtual School website is being developed by The Education Officer and the Manager of the City Learning Centre and will be launched this September.
- 5.35 The Virtual School was shortlisted as a finalist by the Greater London Chronicle for an award in their Children's Services category and, though it did not win, an enjoyable evening was had at the Awards Ceremony.
- 5.36 The Virtual School has had its practice published by C4EO under the category of "Developing Practice" and this can be accessed at <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/vlpdetails.aspx?lpeid=108> by those wishing to read it.
- 5.37 The Virtual School made a bid to the John Lyons Charity for funding to assist with transition periods and the Head Teacher met with a representative from the charity. When he made his report, it was decided that the charity would look into providing assistance for Looked after Children in all the boroughs the charity supports. We must wait until July to know whether this support will happen and what form it will take.

6. Safeguarding

- 6.1 Engaging Looked after Children in Education, Training or Employment helps to ensure that they are not further disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Therefore the work of the Virtual School has to be seen in the context of not only the promotion of their educational attainment, but the contributions it is able to make to Looked after Children's welfare and safeguarding their well-being.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 A high proportion of our looked after children are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and we additionally provide respite care for children with disabilities therefore the development of

services will further address the equality of service provision to these specific groups.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to note the contents of the report.

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