

# Children and Young People's Partnership Board

**Item  
4.2**

**DATE**

28 November 2008

**TITLE OF PAPER**

'The Way Forward' – A Virtual School For  
Looked After Children

**WARDS** All

**Summary**

The Government Green paper, 'Care Matters':  
Transforming the Lives of Children and Young  
People in Care (Oct. 2006) sets out the  
Governments vision for improving the life  
chances of children in care. This paper sets out  
the proposal for action in Hammersmith &  
Fulham.

**CONTRIBUTORS**

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Headteacher of Virtual  
School for Looked  
after Children (pilot)

**Recommendation(s):**

To set up 'A Virtual School for Looked After  
Children' in Hammersmith and Fulham.

## **1. The Way Forward**

### **1.1 Background**

In Hammersmith and Fulham in 2007 only 13% of children in care attained 5 A-C's GCSEs compared with 62% nationally, and only 65% of children in care achieved 1 A-G GCSE's compared with 99% nationally. Whilst these results compared favourably with our statistical neighbours they represent severe underperformance in this vulnerable group of learners.

1.1.2 The long-term outcomes of children in care are also devastating.

1.1.3 They are overrepresented in a range of vulnerable groups including those not in education, employment or training post-16, teenage parents, young offenders, drug users and prisoners.

1.1.4 Many children in care currently have a poor experience of school: they tend to be in lower performing schools, be moved round between schools too often, and receive insufficient support within school to flourish.

1.1.5 The Green Paper sets the responsibilities for how local authorities will extend their responsibilities as corporate parents and with schools, to secure the very best education for these children. The commitment is that every child in care is in a good school, and is given the support they need to make the most of being in that school.

1.1.6 It is proposed that there will be A 'Virtual Headteacher' in every local area responsible for driving up the performance of schools in relation to children in care

### **1.2 Creation of a Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Virtual School (and therefore the virtual school head) is not a "teaching" institution. It is a model by which the authority can provide services and support for the education of children in care and a constructive challenge to those providing the services. It remains the case that education provision for children in care should be taken to mean a full-time place in a local mainstream school unless the circumstances of the child – such as their particular special educational needs – make this provision unsuitable, in which case suitable alternative provision must be found.

### **1.3 Governing Body**

The Virtual School will have a Governing Body with representatives of the LA and pupils. The Governing Body will encompass full representation required. e.g corporate parent, support services, Children's Services, Virtual School Improvement Partner, Headteacher representative.

- 1.3.1 The head will work directly **with the Governing Body, School Improvement Partners, school teachers, designated teachers and social workers**, to raise the attainment of children in care, reduce absence, tackle the need for exclusion and ensure that provision meets their learning needs.

#### **1.4 The Virtual School for Looked After Children**

- 1.4.1 There would be a Headteacher of the Virtual School. The head will be a member of the School Improvement Service.
- 1.4.2 The Virtual School Head will need to be able to work both strategically and operationally, in the case of individual children or groups of children, across the authority and with schools in the authority.
- 1.4.3 Contractual terms of employment would need to reflect the need for this post holder to be available throughout the year and not term time only. Young people, being looked after, are often seeking school placements for the new term during school closure times.. The Headteacher of the Virtual School would need to be available to work with social care partners securing school placements at the same time as young people are placed with carers. This occurs throughout the year.

#### **1.5 School Staff**

- 1.5.1 The Virtual School would have a **staff room** with a number of qualified **teachers with Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA's)**. There are opportunities for training HLTA's to work alongside qualified teachers to carry out the range of tasks and duties, maximising resources, hands on intervention and support, and availability of staff.
- 1.5.2 Each teacher (with support staff) would be responsible for a designated number of children. The number would depend on available resources.
- 1.5.3 One proposed model would be a school where there is one teacher and member of support staff responsible for 60 children. The school staff would consist of a Headteacher, 4 teachers and four HLTA's and administrative support.
- 1.5.4 Presently there are 2.3 fte teachers and a part time TSO in the LAC Education Team.
- 1.5.5 In addition to the Headteacher post, this represents an increase of 1.7 fte teachers and 4 HLTA's.
- 1.5.6 Other education staff in other Social Care departments would also be members of staff in the Virtual School and managed by the Head of the Virtual School.
- i. In the Adolescent Team this would include the Connexions PA, and the Education Support Worker.

- ii. Similarly the teacher in the Treatment Foster Care Team would be a member of the school staff, whilst providing educational input into the Treatment Foster Care Team.

Additionally:

- iii. **Nurses** carrying out health assessments and meeting the health and well being needs of LAC will be a members of the school staff. They will be managed by the Head of the Virtual school, whilst receiving clinical supervision from health care professionals.

1.5.7 All Virtual school staff will be a part of the continuing professional development programme in the school.

1.5.8 The Governing Body of the Virtual School will ensure that the performance of teachers and the head teacher is managed and reviewed in accordance with the regulations and the school's performance management policy.

1.5.9 The head of the school would:

- work in partnership with Social Care Managers and Team Leaders to promote and manage collaborative working between LAC Social Work teams and Virtual School staff to secure appropriate school placements at the same time as carers are identified.
- ensure the educational input from the Virtual School meets the needs of the young people in other Social Care departments.
- there would be opportunities for flexible working between the Virtual School and the staff in other Social Care teams when there is capacity.

## 1.6 The Head of the Virtual School

1.6.1 The Head of the virtual school would have ultimate responsibility for raising the attainment of children ensuring that all children and young people progress by:

- **Curriculum** - Teachers need to ensure LAC pupils have full access to the National Curriculum and particularly to the new 14-19 curriculum. As well as opportunity to study for GCSE's ,pupils need access to the new apprenticeship/diploma lines and other vocational pathways and personalised learning packages where they will have opportunity to achieve an externally accredited qualification.
- **Monitoring** the educational progress of all children in care who are being educated within their authority, including those who are placed in their authority wherever the setting (school and 14-19 further education settings), as if they were attending a single school.
- **Collecting and Analysing data** on the attainment of children in care, their learning and development needs, and the services provided to them is a vital part of work to improve the education of children in care.

1.6.2 There are three statutory children in care targets that authorities will need to consider for their 2008/2009 cohort:

- Achievement of level 4+ English at key stage 2;
- Achievement of level 4+ Maths at key stage 2; and
- Achievement of 5 A\*-C GCSE (including English and Maths) (or equivalent) at Key stage 4.

1.6.3 The Head of the Virtual School is the best person able to co-ordinate the collection of data from Social Care teams, designated teachers and School Improvement Partners. Analysis of data will help identify support and direction for learners. It will provide benchmarks from which to assess progress, comparison to other authorities and ways of identify actions for raising attainment.

1.6.4 Data on looked after children can sometimes be fragmented across services. However there is scope to interrogate 'framework'i to produce effective information and data to inform specific actions and interventions.

1.6.5 At individual child level it will be important to measure the child's *progression* and ensure that they are, through their personal education plan (PEP), set short, medium and long term educational goals that are both ambitious and have a clear description of how they will be achieved.

1.6.6 Amongst other factors, the Virtual School Head, with school staff, will analyse data on:

- attainment at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and GCSE
- the progression of children in care
- special educational needs
- the wider educational needs of children in care
- attendance
- exclusion
- education, training or employment status at end of Year 11
- access to extended services
- Working alongside school improvement partners, to support and challenge schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and provision for children in care. In particular working with school heads and designated teachers
- Working across the local authority, and with its partners, to ensure high quality support for the education of children in care to remove the barriers to their learning
- Offering professional advice and direction to ensure all learners are 'aiming high'.
- Targeting individual pupils with extra support, tuition, resources, and expertise.

1.6.7 The Headteacher would be supported by **officers and members in Hammersmith and Fulham Council**, linked to individual, small groups of

pupils, tracking their progress, offering both challenge and support to ensure 'their young person is aiming high and achieving'.

## **1.7 Creation of a teaching team with direct responsibilities and contact with the child.**

### 1.7.1 Responsibilities would include:

- They would be the first point of contact for the child, the school, and the social worker in relation to educational matters. Teachers in the Virtual School would be available to offer support and advice to carers seeking school placements when they first come into care on transfer to a new care situation. The teacher will provide professional support to ensure the school will meet the child's needs and provide the rigour and challenge for the child to succeed.
- Direct teaching by teachers in the Virtual School.
- Supporting and promoting targeted support through direct grants and centrally promoted initiatives. The Aim Higher Project where there is collaborative partnership between LAC team and local Universities is one excellent example.
- Promoting inclusion through raising awareness and expectations,
- **LAC SEN.** There are additional requirements and barriers to learning for children who have special educational needs.
- Attendance at Annual Reviews. A teacher or HLTA should attend every Annual Review.
- Transition reviews for Y6 and Y11 transfer are a priority.
- Should the Annual review and the LAC review be carried out together? The teacher in the school could attend the Annual Review and withdraw for the LAC review where more sensitive home issues may be discussed.
- All day schools/special/residential placements should be visited by a teacher before a placement is agreed.
- When a pupil is discussed at the SNAPT panel there should be an up to date report from the social worker and the LAC teacher. The most recent PEP should be available.
- The child would be able to contact the teacher directly through a school network website with e-mail.
- Attendance at transition reviews.
- Monitor progress and challenge the school to set robust targets.
- Monitor attendance.
- Hands on support in the initial school placement
- A school visit at least once a year by a teacher or support staff.
- All PEPS should be monitored by the responsible teacher to ensure targets set are challenging
- Offer advice to parents seeking mainstream placements
- SEN- liaise with IPS over placements
- Teachers should have a designated number of LAC pupils they are responsible for. They should be in regular contact with the school and review educational progress and attainment.

- There needs to be a rapid response to children who need support. What systems can we put in place to achieve this - website.
- Extend the training for social workers, foster carers, and designated teachers for LAC in schools.
- Facilitating primary carers' knowledge of the school system and how children learn so that they can provide support and encouragement.
- Offer direct tuition in school, home or alternative venues
- Offer individual tuition from teachers outside the team
- Interim teaching and support for LAC pending identified school placement
- Initial Literacy and/or Numeracy assessments and reviews where there are concerns regarding progress or underachievement
- Advice, guidance and specific recommendations regarding appropriate intervention and to inform planning and provision
- Support at meetings, for example LAC reviews and meetings within school
- Advice and support to pupils, foster carers, care staff and other agencies regarding transition at Key Stages e.g. Year 6 to Year 7 and post 16 Liaison with key agencies
- Pre Ofsted advice to schools
- Multi-agency training on all issues relating to LAC
- Training, advice and support to foster carers, residential care staff in supporting the educational attainment of LAC
- Telephone help line for advice, support and rapid response to requests from designated teachers, social workers, foster carers and any other agencies working with LAC
- The team should be able to prioritise pupils for early intervention and at Key Stages/ Year groups using of Traffic light system – RAG. This involves close multi-agency working and close liaison with Social workers, Primary carers, and schools via their LAC Designated teachers.
- Attendance monitoring primarily through 'Welfare call'. . Priority would be given to:
  - minimising time out of school,
  - improving attendance,
  - improving school stability,

## **1.8 School Council**

- 1.8.1 There will be a school council where pupils' views can be heard and represented. One web based organisation is myschool.org where a Virtual School site can be set up where there is exclusive access for pupils, teachers and the whole school community. There is a message board, pupils can talk to each other and teachers can be contacted directly. A School network site will not only allow children and young people to contact each other but will also be a means of contact between the designated teacher and the child. There can be a rapid response to a young person needing help Additionally there will opportunities for developing a virtual learning environment to support learners and carers.

## 1.9 Statutory reviews

1.9.1 Resources could be deployed more efficiently if the **PEP** and **LAC** review were held on the same day. It would not be appropriate for all partners to attend both meetings. There would be opportunities for this to be managed and staff to withdraw where it is not appropriate they attend.

### 1.9.2 Personal Education Plans (PEP)

A fundamental part of the care planning process for children in care is their personal education plan (PEP). The PEP is part of the statutory care plan and forms the basis for discussion between the child, carers and school about his/her educational needs. All children in care have a PEP covering their record of achievements, identification of their educational and developmental needs, clear attainment targets and long-term aspirations. It should set out what is needed to ensure the progression of each child or young person in care.

1.9.3 When a child comes into care it is the responsibility of the social worker to ensure that the PEP process has been initiated. However, the involvement of the designated teacher in the design and delivery of PEPs is crucial to ensuring it meets children and young people's learning needs, that appropriate teaching and learning strategies are identified and that it is implemented by the school.

1.9.4 How can we improve the educational input into PEP? The virtual school head has an important role in working with social workers and designated teachers to ensure that PEPs are high quality and meet the needs of children in care. A teacher for the Virtual School will attend all PEP meetings.

1.9.5 PEPs need to be used proactively as a tool for developing and implementing an appropriate education package for a child in care.

## **2. Comments of Head of Legal Services**

- 2.1 The creation of a virtual school for looked after children assists the Council in fulfilling its duty under Section 22 of the Children's Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children.

## **3. Comments of Director of Finance**

- 3.1 The cost of this initiative is not clear from this paper but is likely to be in excess of £600k. Following an agreement in principle to establishing the virtual school a fully costed options paper with identified funding is required with input from CHS Accountancy before the decision to set up a virtual school is finally agreed.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000** **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Description of Background Papers</b>	<b>Names/Ext. of Holder of Files/Copy</b>	<b>Department/ Location</b>
1.	Care Matters	Patricia des Angeles x 5784	ChSD
2.			