



Annual Report
on
the Work of the Virtual
School

April 2014

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1. Background and current National Profile on the Attainment of Looked After Children

- 1.1 Ensuring that Looked After Children (LAC) receive a high quality education is fundamental to improving their life chances and future success as active and emotionally and economically secure adults.
- 1.2 Nationally, numbers of Looked After Children have increased by 9% since 2007 and despite seeing improvements in educational outcomes since 2000, progress has been at a slow rate and significantly lower when compared with the rest of the school age population. The Department for Education Statistical First Release in December 2012 showed that, in the academic year ending in the summer of 2012, only 14.6% per cent of looked after children who have been looked after for at least a year achieved five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 58.1% per cent for non-looked after children.
- 1.3 Like previous governments, the current administration has made narrowing of the gap between the achievement of looked after children and that of other children and young people a high priority. Everyone involved in the life of a Looked After Child can do more to support them to succeed in education and reach their full potential and overcome the structural barriers which exist in education hindering their overall progress.

2. Statutory Duties on Local Authorities as Corporate Parents

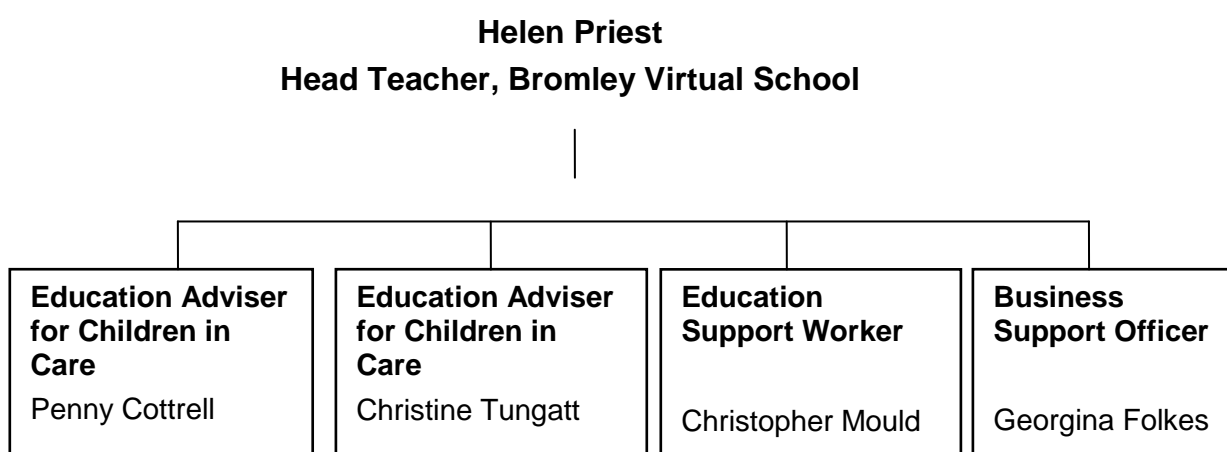
- 2.1 In March 2010, the government published 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities'. This guidance makes it clear that the duty of a local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them includes a particular duty to promote the child's educational achievement. In April 2011, the revised legal framework for looked after children came into force and the government also responded in detail to the Select Committee Report on looked after children.
- 2.2 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations came into force in 2011 and outlined how local authorities should seek to ensure, as an integral part of care planning, that all looked after children are supported to achieve educational outcomes that are comparable to those of their peers.
- 2.3 Improving educational outcomes and ensuring that young people have access to education, employment or training post statutory education is one of the strategic priorities in Bromley's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2014-16.

3. The Work and Impact of the Virtual School

3.1 Bromley Virtual School: Development and Service Delivery 2013/14

3.1.1 The Bromley Virtual School (formerly the Children in Care Education Service) was formed in September 2013. The Role of Virtual School Head Teacher is held by Helen Priest, whose former job title was Specialist Education Adviser for Children in Care

3.1.2 The Virtual School organisational structure chart is shown below.



3.1.3 During the 2013 calendar year, there was a complete change of personnel in the Virtual School. A period of recruitment and staff induction has taken place and the new team is working well and making an impact on the backlog of work as well as tackling new tasks and reviewing practice.

3.1.4 All of the roles within the Virtual School are now permanent and share the core responsibility to contribute to raising the attainment and improving the life chances of Looked After Children. The Education Advisers provide specialist support for Looked After Children with Special Educational Needs and those with additional needs. They ensure that children are in appropriate educational placements that that they are adequately supported. The Education Support Worker is responsible for monitoring and tracking attendance and exclusion of Looked After Children and supporting social workers and foster carers of children in KS4 to ensure that plans for transition to post 16-provision are in place.

3.1.5 With the exception of the Business Support Officer, all staff in the Virtual School attend PEP meetings when there are concerns about the stability of a school placement or the failure of a child to meet expected levels of attainment.

3.2 The Objectives of the Virtual School

3.2.1 Bromley Virtual School Statement of Purpose

Bromley's Children in Care, regardless of their location, deserve the best start in life. Enabling them to secure good educational outcomes is key to ensuring that their dreams and aspirations can be realised. As Corporate Parent, Bromley Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people in care have access to high quality education provision and timely and appropriate support when it is needed. Securing good educational outcomes for children in care will enable them to live economically independent, successful and fulfilling adult lives.

The Bromley Virtual School works strategically across the local authority and in partnership with schools and other agencies, in order to improve standards of achievement for this group of children and young people, whether they are placed in Bromley or far from home.

Vision

To ensure that Bromley's children and young people in care have access to high quality educational provision and achieve at a similar level to all other children and young people.

Objectives

- to ensure that children and young people looked after the LB Bromley have access to appropriate, high quality education provision
- to champion high academic expectations, working with social workers, carers, designated teachers and Head Teachers to ensure every looked after child has an ambitious and challenging personal education plan
- to track and monitor the academic progress of children and young people in care, ensuring they are making progress in line with National expectations, by maintaining effective monitoring and recording systems
- to monitor the education provision and expectations for children, especially those with disabilities, who are working below the level of assessment and/or age-related expectation
- to provide training that will raise awareness of the importance of education for children in care, inform of changes to statutory guidance, provide clarity of roles and responsibilities for key professionals and share good practice
- work with within the local authority and with partner agencies to ensure continuity of schooling for children in care

- to support and challenge schools and other education providers to promote stability and success for children
- provide additional, personalised support through access to advice and guidance, 1:1 tuition and additional resources whenever need is identified
- to celebrate success

Measurements of success

- Improved school attendance
- All children in care make progress in line with National expectations
- Reduction in disruptions to education through exclusion and unnecessary changes of school
- An increase in the number of children in care achieving 5 good GCSEs
- An increase in the numbers of children in care successfully making the transition into further and higher education

3.2.2 The main objectives of the Virtual School are supported by the Virtual School Development Plan (**Attached as Annex 1**), in which the first priority is to 'Ensure that all looked after children and young people make progress that is at least as good as all other Bromley children'. This will be achieved by implementing tracking and monitoring processes which allow us to measure the progress of individual children. Attainment at the point of accommodation is collected as a benchmarking exercise, by the collection of data the first Personal Education Plan (PEP) and from the National database. Regular collection of attainment data and educational targets allows us to measure progress, both against the national expectation of two sub-levels of attainment per year and against the child's own prior attainment.

3.2.3 A new pupil monitoring form is being utilised alongside the existing PEP. It requires the designated teacher to record current attainment as well as end of year and end of key stage projections. This information allows the Virtual School to ensure that target setting in the PEP is focused on academic targets and national curriculum attainment levels rather than softer targets frequently seen previously. The monitoring form also provides information about current interventions and support activities provided by school and links them to the use of Pupil Premium payments.

3.2.4 As a result of the difficulties experienced by children in care, it might be expected that the service provided by the Virtual School is highly individualised and, indeed, almost all of the work of the service is at individual child level reflecting, as it were, the concerns of the corporate parent. As with most services, the provision offered by the Virtual School can be loosely classified as universal or targeted support for the children, their carers, social workers and schools. Although not entirely comprehensive, a grid showing the core offer of the Virtual School can be found at **Annex 2**. In addition to the management and delivery of the services described in the grid are very many hours spent visiting schools and residential provisions and the

detailed telephone conversations often involving a degree of challenge directed towards the provider and frequently requiring negotiations over additional resources or requests for more detailed information.

4. Challenges Faced by Bromley Virtual School

4.1 Monitoring, Tracking and Reporting of Attainment

- 4.1.2 As described, one of the key priorities for the Virtual School at the start of last academic year was to develop a more robust and secure system for tracking the attainment and progress of our statutory school aged Looked After Children. Over time, the collection of attainment data has developed from the annual collection of end-of-year national curriculum levels, which were recorded on spread sheets, to the more frequent and sophisticated collection of data showing projected attainment and progression that is in use today. The recording of this information, and the associated requirement to produce reports for a variety of purposes and audiences has continued to present a challenge, both in terms of human and time resources involved in the chasing of outstanding monitoring forms .
- 4.1.3 Bromley has developed capacity on its Integrated Children's System (ICS), Carefirst, for the recording of Early Years and Key Stage qualifications and has had a slightly modified version of the Pan London PEP created within Carefirst so that PEPs can be treated in the same way as other assessments. After an initial bedding-in period, we have seen a significant improvement in the standard of PEPs, all of which as quality assured by the Virtual School.
- 4.1.4 The creation of the Carefirst PEP has coincided with the development of more sophisticated system for recording and reporting attainment and progression data but, although an improvement on the previous system, it has not entirely overcome the on-going problems associated with reporting requirements and nor has it resolved the difficulties of the collection of the data from schools in a timely and efficient manner. We recognise, too, current systems only capture the data at a moment in time and in order to allow early intervention we need to have a live system that alerts us to concerns in respect of education immediately.
- 4.1.5 In recent months, as a result of the requirements of Virtual Schools, there have been significant developments in the data collection services available from a number of providers, both existing and new in the market. In December and January, as part of a business case for development of data capture for the Virtual School, a review of these providers was undertaken and it resulted in the extension of existing Welfare Call contract to include 'Track'. Welfare Call currently contacts every school of every Bromley looked after child every day to monitor attendance and exclusion. The Track element of the contract means that from June 2014, the daily calls will also collect 'live' attainment and progression data and will provide us with a reporting facility that is fit for purpose.

4.2 Other Challenges

- 4.2.1 Many children who become looked after do so with histories of multiple school changes and poor attendance. They may have missed whole sections of the curriculum and may have unidentified special needs as a result of not having been in school for sufficiently long for assessments to be undertaken. While there is an unquestionable expectation that the attainment trajectory for children who remain in foster care will rise, it is frequently the case that accessing education remains low on the child's hierarchy of need, taking a lower priority than social and emotional issues. Children who have experienced extreme neglect or domestic violence expend a lot of energy being hyper-vigilant or defensive in the classroom and may not be able to concentrate. They may have become young carers and be anxious about siblings or parents from whom they have been separated. For such children, it is not appropriate to assume a rapid improvement towards age-related expectations, but to recognise and praise small improvements. Sometimes, regular school attendance becomes a giant step forward. Working with partners in schools, it is important to achieve the right balance between raising expectations for children who are settling into foster care and recognising that they may have huge barriers to overcome before there are signs of improved behaviour and academic outcomes.
- 4.2.1 A higher than average proportion of last year's cohort had been moderately or completely disengaged during year 11. This figure had been impacted by the higher than normal number of young people that became accommodated at aged 15 plus. Many of the late entrants to the cohort were already refusing to attend their education provision and some had no identified school at all when they became looked after. Some young people, including a number who had previously been high achieving, experienced placement breakdowns or other serious disruption which caused them difficulties in engaging at any level. For some of our young people it is hard for them to focus on education. Most schools work hard to keep young people on track but, ultimately, academic targets are missed despite high levels of support.
- 4.2.3 The alternatives to school that are on offer are sometimes not suitable for looked after young people in crisis or for those with complex and challenging behaviour. For example, we had a small number of young people that had been the perpetrators of sexual assault against other young people. Maintaining these young people in any educational resource whilst at the same time safeguarding other young people, can present a significant challenge.
- 4.2.4 The impact of removal of GCSE Equivalence. Last year, a number of young people who might, in previous years, have achieved a number of GCSEs by virtue of having gained other qualifications which had GCSE equivalence now have no GCSE successes at all. It is not clear if this will have any impact on their future education, training or employability.

5. Virtual School Achievements

5.1 Increasing Support

5.1.2 The Virtual School is increasingly offering children and young people opportunities for engagement in aspirational or resilience-building activities with their foster carers. These range from visits to universities to drumming classes and opportunities to learn to play the ukulele. During the last 18 months, 17 young people and their foster carers have visited Cambridge University for taster days, either with a subject-specific focus or to provide a taste of university life. This year, we are planning a Gamelan drumming programme for younger children as well as theatre trips and other exciting activities. These activities represent an investment in the futures of our children and young people as fully contributing members of society. Following such a visit, one young person took pains to explain to workers that he now felt enabled, for the first time, to contribute to conversation about a recent visit to a theatre. Previously, he had found excuses to exclude himself from such discussions, having never been inside a theatre.

5.1.3 The Virtual School invited a number of foster carers to take part in the pilot of a project designed to improve reading age and comprehension scores. Text Now is a reading programme in which foster carers are taught to become reading coaches. Once trained, carers commit to listening to children read for 20 minutes every weekday for 10 weeks. Children on the programme are given new books at the start of the programme as well as a 'pot' of incentive points. They are rewarded with additional points every time that they read these. Accumulated points can be used at any stage to buy books online from an 'amazon-type' Internet shop. Reading (word recognition) and comprehension age tests were undertaken on all of the children at the beginning and end of the project and the outcomes are very pleasing. Although foster carers initially found it challenging to set aside time to listen to reading in such a structured way, all reported finding it a rewarding experience. All but one of the starting children completed the programme and with one exception, all children made significant progress in reading age and reading comprehension age; the mean average gain in reading age was 9.2 months. Reading comprehension age improvement was even greater, with the mean average gain of 11.6 months. The smallest gain in reading comprehension was 6 months and the greatest a staggering 21 months. Even those children with smaller gains in word recognition made significant gains in reading for meaning.

5.1.4 The Virtual School funds a programme of targeted 1:1 tuition. Children in national curriculum year group 6 are offered 1 hour of literacy and maths combined in a single session each week for 20 weeks as they prepare for KS2 SATs. Students in Key Stage 4 are offered two hours per week for a similar period in both years. Generally, this tuition will be for English and Maths, though, occasionally, one subject is substituted for a science option. Offers of tuition are not always taken up by students, who sometimes find that tuition after school eats into too much of their personal time or who simply see the concept of additional school support as punitive rather than supportive. However, during the last year, the Virtual School saw its highest ever demand for 1:1 tuition.

5.1.6 The annual Celebration of Achievement of Looked After Children took place at the Warren on 15th November 2013. Over a hundred young people were nominated for achievements ranging from improvements in self-care skills to gaining an MSc. The event was well attended by the young people, their carers and social workers and by officers and elected members of the council. 60 young people were awarded certificates by the Mayor. As always, the evening was enjoyable, moving and great fun. We are grateful to the management and staff of the Warren for their support and for the free use of the facilities.

5.2 Academic Attainment

5.2.1 Because cohort sizes are very small, data represented as percentages can appear distorted although, because this the national reporting requirement, it is the only way that comparison can be made with national outcomes and statistical neighbour results. Wherever possible, we have shown outcomes as numbers of children as well as percentages.

5.3 Key Stage 1 SATs 2013 (age 7)

5.3.1 11 Bromley children in care ended KS1 in August 2013. Of these, 5 had been continuously looked after during the reporting period. For the purpose of this report, it is these 5 children that form the **reporting cohort** for academic year 2012/13.

5.3.2 3 children (66%) achieved level 2 in Reading, Writing and Maths
The remaining two children both have Statements of Special Educational Needs and are working below the level of assessment.

5.3.3 Key stage 1 achieving level 2 or above

| | | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------------|------|------|
| Reading | Bromley | 60% (3 of 5 pupils) | 57% | 66% |
| | National | 69% | 67% | 59% |
| Writing | Bromley | 60% (3 of 5 pupils) | 57% | 44% |
| | National | 61% | 57% | 53% |
| Maths | Bromley | 60% (3 of 5 pupils) | 57% | 66% |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | National | 71% | 71% | 63% |
|--|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|

5.4 Key Stage 2 SATs (Age 11)

5.4.1 15 Bromley children in care ended KS2 in August 2013. Of those 9 had been continuously looked after during the reporting period. These 9 children form the **reporting cohort**.

5.4.2 All but one of these children has made two or more levels of progress in English and Maths during KS 2 (8 out of 9 pupils). The child who has not made this progress is a severely disabled child, who is making progress below national curriculum levels.

5.4..3 Key Stage 2 achieving level 4 or above

| Indicator | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 | 2009 |
|--|---|--|---|---|---|
| N 99: Percentage of children in care reaching level 4 in English at KS2 | New combined Reading, Writing and Maths scores Bromley 66% (5 of 9 pupils) | Bromley 28% (2 of 7 pupils) National 64% | Bromley 50% (5 of 10 pupils) National 59% | Bromley 100% (5 of 5 pupils) National 54% | Bromley 40% (4 of 10 pupils) National 59% |
| N100: Percentage of children in care reaching level 4 in maths at KS2 | National Not available | Bromley 28% National 56% | Bromley 40% National 52% | Bromley 80% National 47% | Bromley 20% National 47% |

- **8(88%)** pupils made 2 levels of progress or more in English.
- **8(88%)** pupils made 2 levels of progress or more in Maths.

These results for Looked After children in Bromley match national outcome data for progression of Looked After children in KS2

5.5 Key Stage 4 Outcomes 2013 (age 16)

5.5.1 In the academic year 2012/13 the YR11 cohort was exceptionally small with 33 children in care ending the year in care. Of these, **19** had been continuously looked after for at least 12 months (to 31st March 2013) and these pupils form the **reporting cohort**.

5.5.2 GCSE outcomes

| GCSE Results | | 2013 Reporting Cohort (19 pupils) | 2013 All LAC Pupils (33 pupils) | 2012 | 2011 |
|---|----------|--|--|----------------|-----------------|
| 5 A*-C Including English and Maths | Bromley | 16% (3 pupils) | 18% | 11% (2 pupils) | 8.6% (3 pupils) |
| | National | 15.3% | Not available | 15.0% | 13.6% |
| 5 A*-C | Bromley | 21% | 27% | 22.2% | 25.7% |
| | National | 36.6% | Not available | 37.2% | 33.4% |
| 5A*-G | Bromley | 21% | 27% | 55% | 48.6% |
| 1A*-G | Bromley | 26% | 33% | 88% | 74.3% |
| Sat GCSE or equivalent | Bromley | 26% | 36% | 88% | 66% |

Of the reporting cohort:

- **16%** of pupils (3) achieved **5 GCSEs at A*-C** including English and Maths. **In percentage terms, this is above National outcomes for KS4 looked after children**
- **78%** pupils (15) in the reporting cohort have identified **SEN**:
 - 3** (16%) have Statements of Special Educational Needs.
 - 6** (32%) are at School Action Plus

6. Attendance and Exclusions

6.1. Attendance

6.1.1 Attendance data is collected daily, on behalf of Bromley, by Welfare Call Ltd. This data is reported to Bromley daily, weekly and termly. If a child is absent from school without authorisation, Welfare Call will telephone the foster carer to ensure that the

carer knows the whereabouts of the child. If the foster carer is unavailable or if they were unaware of the child's absence, Welfare Call will then notify the child's social worker. The Education Support Worker within the Virtual School monitors the daily and weekly Welfare Call reports and liaises with other members of the team on a daily basis as well as in weekly pupil monitoring exercises.

6.1.2 The key indicator for the reporting of pupil absence from school is persistent absence. Persistent absentees are defined as having around 15 per cent overall absence rate For 5 terms of absence data, this equates to 46 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised), or 23 days. This definition was introduced in 2011. Before 2011 it was 20 per cent, equating to 25 days). The percentage is calculated by dividing the number of persistent absentees by the total number of children with absence data.

6.1.3 Persistent absence for Bromley LAC (*all figures report persistent absence over 5 half terms*).

| Academic Year | 2012/13 | 2011/12 | 2010/11 | 2009/10 | 2008/09 |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Bromley | 8.2% | 6.0% | 10.1% | 8.2% | 6.0% |
| All outer London | 5.1% | 6.7% | 7.1% | 8.1% | 6.7% |
| All England | 5.0% | 6.0% | 7.3% | 7.8% | 8.8% |

6.2 Exclusions

6.2.1 Bromley has had no reported permanent exclusions of looked after children since 2008 and the number of fixed term exclusions has decreased year on year over this period. This is the result of increased levels of support offered to both individual pupils and their schools by the Virtual School and of improved collaborative working between the Service and colleagues in the Behaviour Service, SEN and Education Welfare and our local schools.

6.2.2 Permanent Exclusions have largely been avoided by managed moves (planned transfer to other maintained or alternative provisions). The decision to affect a managed move rather than allow a 'natural progression' to permanent exclusion and subsequent placement in a pupil referral unit is usually driven by two factors: (a) the reluctance to allow the pupil to have a permanent exclusion on their record and (b) the nature of pupil referral unit provisions and the mix of students already attending.

6.2.3 The expectation of the Virtual School is that children will remain in mainstream schools and that schools are challenged and supported to keep pupils on roll. Bromley provides both the challenge and support very well, often keeping children in school and allowing them to complete courses and take national examinations.

However, when a student is experiencing multiple fixed term exclusions, there is a judgement to be made about the value of continuing to make them attend a provision in which they are extremely unhappy and are not engaging (or are being purposely being disruptive) and then removing them to a new provision in which they can make a new start. Both options present challenges and both carry the risk of a poor outcome.

6.2.4 Fixed term exclusions of looked after children have been reducing consistently since 2009. This represents a reduction both in the number of days and in the number of pupils experiencing exclusion. This trend is not borne out among our statistical neighbours, most of whom saw an increase in the numbers of fixed term exclusions in 2011.

6.2.3 This table shows fixed term exclusions from 2009 to 2013:

| | no. days total FX | no. pupils represented | Bromley Schools | Other Schools | total schools |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2009/10 | 232 | 33 | 9 | 21 | 30 |
| 2010/11 | 134 | 24 | 9 | 13 | 22 |
| 2011/12 | 126 | 23 | 11 | 12 | 23 |
| 2012/13 | 91 | 13 | 5 | 6 | 11 |

6.2.4 48 of the 91 days of exclusion in 2012/13 were for a single pupil. This demonstrates both the challenge of keeping pupils in school and the success of the collaboration between the Virtual School and other schools. It also highlights the complexities of the assertion that school stability is paramount. While the reluctance of the child's school to permanently exclude was evident and laudable, despite high levels of support and considerable joint working between professionals, the accumulation of his exclusions strongly suggested that the provision could no longer meet his needs. Reluctantly, the decision to move him was made.

7. Looking Forward – the New Challenges

7.1 In addition to the on-going work to improve the quality and timeliness of PEPs and develop recording and reporting mechanisms, the Virtual School faces two new major challenges in 2014. These are the creation of a local protocol for the management, delivery, use and monitoring of the Pupil Premium under new guidance published in March this year; and the creation of new support pathways for looked after children in Bromley with the implementation of Education, Health and Care Plans and the new (as yet draft) statutory code.

7.2 Changes to Pupil Premium Arrangements

- 7.2.1 There is a significant change in arrangements for Pupil Premium for Looked After Children from April 2014. The overall amount of Pupil Premium for LAC will be based on numbers of LAC aged 4-15 with a mid-year revision to account for additional children and a notional £1900 per child.
- 7.2.2 The Department for Education Conditions of Grant 2014-2015 states *'The grant allocation for Looked After Children must be managed by the designated Virtual School Head -in the authority that looks after those children to be used for the benefit of the looked after child's educational needs as described in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). The Virtual School Head should ensure there are arrangements in place to discuss with the child's education setting – usually with the designated teacher – how the child will benefit from any pupil premium funding. The local authority is not permitted to carry forward funding held centrally into the financial year 2015-2016. Grant held centrally that has not been spent by 31 March 2015 will be recovered.'*
- 7.2.2 Unlike in previous years, there is no requirement for the authority to pass a set amount of funding onto the school. Instead the money must be managed by the Virtual School to be used to improve outcomes as identified in the Personal Education Plan in consultation with the designated teacher. Criteria for the distribution of this funding and the tools for monitoring outcomes will need to be created and time and human resources allocated this task.

7.3 The Implementation of Education Health and Care Plans

- 7.3.1 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans) are being implemented during 2014. They are being prepared instead of the current 'Statement of Special Educational Needs' for the children with high levels of education and health needs and can be requested if the child or young person is in a mainstream setting and their needs require a high level of support to enable them to access the curriculum. They will be required for all children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities who are placed in special school settings. The new plans will be from birth to the age of 25 and will be reviewed regularly in response to changing needs. They will have a focus on outcomes for the child or young person and local services will work in a multi-agency way to ensure they are straightforward and recognise the support that is required and the aspiration families have for their child.
- 7.3.2 The Virtual School is working closely with professionals from SEN and Disability Services to identify pathways to assessment for looked after children who are identified as a priority group in the new, draft Code of Practice. This work is recognises and is consolidating existing good practice in which the process of Personal Education Plans contributes to the identification of previously un-recognised Special Educational Needs, changes to known needs or concerns about the suitability of provision.
- 7.3.3 Much of the current practice will remain unchanged but the way that assessments are undertaken and the plans are drawn up will be different and the Virtual School

will play a vital part in training and supporting education and social care professionals during the implementation phase. During the late Spring and Summer of 2014, the Virtual School will take part in a series of meetings during which a selection of cases will be presented to identify criteria for rapid conversion from Statements of SEN to EHC plans.