

Decision Maker: Children, Education and Families PDS Committee

Date: 14th September 2021

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: Bromley Virtual School Annual Report 2020/21 – 6 month update
'A Trauma-informed Approach to Teaching Children in Care'

Contact Officer: Sally Kelly, Headteacher of the Bromley Virtual School
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Chief Officer: Janet Bailey
Director of Children, Education and Families

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

1.1. To provide the Scrutiny Committee with a regular update on the performance of the Virtual School for children in care and children previously in care currently adopted or cared for under a Special Guardianship Order. This is an interim 6 month report and so wont include all information found in the full annual report

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1. The Committee note and comment on progress made towards the actions indentified in the Corporate Parenting Strategy as laid out in the outcomes and evaluation section of this report.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

- 2.2. Summary of Impact: COVID has dominated the year, affecting progress and attendance for our young people. However we have been able to support our young people well. The new headteacher and team are developing well together. A new advisor has been appointed in March and already having an impact on the Key Stage 4 cohort, we are able to be more proactive with a more manageable case load.
 - 2.4. GCSE and A level results 2019/2020
 - 2.5. Predictions for 2020/2021.
 - 2.6. We have developed our monitoring and tracking of attendance and progress for our young people. This has been linked more closely with pupil premium allocations and with PEP quality.
 - 2.7. Progress continues to be made has been made with the quality and effectiveness of PEPs. It demonstrates increased professional curiosity about the school lives of children and ambition for their future. These plans provide a starting point for the provision of intervention and challenge by the Virtual School.
 - 2.8. The Virtual School is developing the work brought about by the demands of increased statutory duty imposed by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. We are also well developed with plans for further new duties starting in October 2021, promoting the education of all children and young people with a social worker.
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Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable
 3. Budget head/performance centre: N/A
 4. Total current budget for this head: £ N/A
 5. Source of funding: N/A
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
2. Call-in: Not Applicable

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: N/A

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): All Bromley children in care.

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Not Applicable

3. COMMENTARY

3.1. The Purpose of the Virtual School

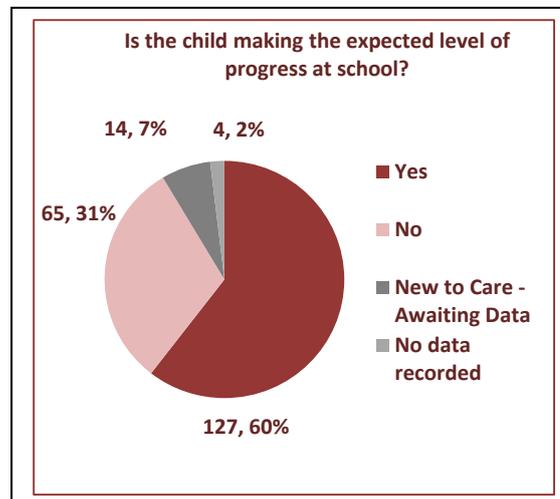
- 3.1.1 The role of the Virtual School is to promote the best educational outcomes and raise attainment of all children looked after (CLA) by Bromley, and those that have been placed in our schools by other authorities. The children we look after are being educated across many different schools and local authorities. The Virtual School therefore has a powerful role in tracking their progress as if they were in a single school: combining expert school leadership with being the best of parents. Our key question every day is “Would it be good enough for your child?”
- 3.1.2 Bromley Virtual School works on the following four core, crucial, statutory areas of responsibility:
- To make sure that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of all children we look after.
 - To ensure that all CLA have a robust and effective PEP and monitor the use of the Pupil Premium grant where a child is eligible.
 - To champion the educational needs of CLA and care leavers across the authority and those placed out-of-authority.
 - To champion the educational needs of those children who were previously CLA and are now adopted, or in a Special Guardianship arrangement, or on a Child Arrangement order.
- 3.1.3 This report provides a 6 month update on the the activity and impact of Bromley Virtual School from September 2020 to February 2021.
- 3.1.4 Data contained in this report is for children who were in the care of the LB Bromley for the academic year 2020/21 and includes internal data for all children. It would usually include external outcome data from 2019/20 validated in the Statistical first release in December of 2020, although this data is not available for last year.
- 3.1.5 Due to the impact of COVID19 much of the data usually available will not be available or comparable with previous academic years. We have measured impact in other ways wherever possible and given an overview as to how the impact of COVID19 on our children’s education has been mitigated.
- 3.1.6 During this academic year we have appointed a new education advisor to work alongside our current Key Stage 4 advisor to ensure we can be more proactive going forward. She started in February 2021 and is extremely experienced so has hit the ground running.
- 3.1.7 COVID19 Response:
Most PEPs have continued to be online. We were able to get into some schools during the autumn term. However during the spring lockdown most returned to virtual only. Visits to schools have only taken place where absolutely essential. Our education support worker has been monitoring attendance daily to ensure that those who have had to take absence from school because of COVID have had the support they need to carry on working at home.

3.3. Educational Outcomes

3.3.1 Progress measures for all children:

Progress measures are collected twice per term for each pupil. There is a data drop once per term at the end of the term, collected by Welfare Call. Progress data is also collected once per term when the PEP is reviewed. We have included data from the end of spring term 2021. However, due to the lockdown schools were unable to properly assess pupils so we need to be wary about interpretation of this data.

3.3.2 The table below shows numbers of CLA making expected progress or better in school. This includes all CLA age 5-15 at the spring data drop, irrespective of how long they have been looked after. Only 65.31% are making expected progress compared with 82% at the same time last year. This is partly reflective of the lost time in school. However, as stated before we must take care with this data. Schools have been providing this information – but their assessments are not secure – even with those pupils who were in school – they were not being taught or assessed in the same way.



3.3.3 Key Stage 4 cohort

3.3.4 2019/20 year 11 cohort. Normally the Key stage 4 outcomes published in the annual report are provisional and then DFE tables are published through the statistical return in December. This interim report would be the place to share the confirmed data. Unfortunately because of the unusual arrangements with teacher assessed grades very little has been published through the statistical return. We do know that those achieving achieving 5+ in English and Maths GCSE nationally was 10.9% and 18% for Bromley (CLA 12mths+). Attainment 8 score was 21.4 nationally and 18.6 for Bromley.

3.3.5 The following analysis of our whole year 11 cohort at the end of the spring term 2021

	2020 Reporting cohort of 28 pupils (provisional)	2019 Reporting cohort of 31 pupils	2018 Reporting Cohort of 20 pupils	2017 Reporting Cohort of 19 pupils
5 at grade 4 and above incl. English and Maths	21% (6 pupils)	29% (9 pupils)	15% (3 pupils)	26% (5 pupils)
5 at grade 4 and above	25% (7 pupils)	29% (9 pupils)	20% (4 pupils)	26% (5 pupils)
5 GCSEs	46% 13 pupils	45% 18 pupils	65% (13 pupils)	47% (9 pupils)
1 GCSE	71% (20 pupils)	58% (18 pupils)	80% (16 pupils)	84% (16 pupils)

Support has included one to one tuition in Maths and English and attendance at PEPs by the Virtual School to ensure CIAG (Careers information advice and guidance). Students rated amber or red have had support from “Fresh Start” which offers more intense CIAG support to ensure all have appropriate post 16 destinations. For those on red the support is more sustained over the summer term, and where necessary the summer holidays for example offering mentoring / further learning for that young person. This data includes all children currently in year 11.

3.3.4 Statistical cohort predictions year 11:

The following are the predictions for the current year 11 statistical cohort.

	Number of children	% of total cohort	notes
Number in cohort	46		
SEN	22	48%	
EHCP	12	26%	
Green	24	51%	Young people we are confident have solid post 16 choices and will be EET.
Amber	14	30%	Those young people who have needed support but with support are likely to be EET.
Red	9	19%	Young people who need further support and are likely to be NEET without this.
predicted to get E L4+	17	37%	Cautionary note on all predictions due to covid19. Schools are struggling with assessments of levels due to the amount of time students have spent home learning.
predicted to get M L4+	18	39%	
predicted to get E L5+	10	22%	
predicted to get M L5+	8	17%	
Predicted to get E and M L4+	17	37%	
Predicted to get E + M L5+	5	11%	
Post 16 destination to a L3 course	14	30%	

3.4 Post-16 Young People

3.4.1 Our vision is that all young people over 16 who are looked after or care leavers will be engaged in education, employment, or training (EET) commensurate with their ability and aspirations, and be making significant progress towards recognised career ambitions.

3.4.2 With post 16 we also monitor attendance at college weekly on top of attending PEP meetings.

This gives early indication of any potential issues. If there is a danger of a young person begin withdrawn from their course we will advocate for them and help them to find a new course if necessary. All NEET children and young people have regular contact from the VS with opportunities and guidance. Those stuck will be referred to the NEET panel.

	Cohort number	Numbers with EHCP	Currently EET	Completing a L3 qualification
Year 12	47	20 (43%)	36 (77%)	12 (26%)
Year 13	51	13 (25%)	36 (71%)	9 (18%)

- 3.5.3 Once again we used our successful partners “Fresh Start in Education” during the spring and summer terms and provided intensive independent careers advice and guidance support to year 11 students making choices about post-16 progression. 90% of CLA started year 12 with a secure place in a sixth form or college in September 2020. This is up on 2018 at 82% which was an 11% increase on 2017. Of the 22 (most likely to be NEET) who engaged with “Fresh Start” over the summer, 15 are still in their college place as of November 2020.
- 3.5.4 In total in 2019/20 we had 22 care leavers enrolled in higher education L4+ courses. We had 8 care leavers who started an undergraduate course in 2020. In September 2021 we have 6 young people who have applied to university and are on track to get the required grades. We have one other young person who is undecided and is also looking at apprenticeships.

3.6. Regular Attendance at School

- 3.6.1 Regular attendance at school is vital to help children achieve and get the best possible start in life. Good attendance is a protective factor for CLA and academic achievement is the key to a successful and productive adult life and breaking the cycle of neglect and life in care.
- 3.6.2 The Virtual School utilises a service provided by “Welfare Call” to monitor attendance at school and alternative provisions daily by an individual phone call to check every child is at school. The carer is contacted if there is an unauthorised absence and the allocated Social Worker is notified. Attendance reports are reviewed at weekly Virtual School team meetings, identifying children at risk, and appropriate strategies discussed with the network. Due to COVID19 and lockdown we are not able to benchmark attendance or compare in the same way to previous years.
- 3.6.3 In autumn term when children were back at school they were sent home if there were cases identified in their bubble or isolating if they had symptoms. To monitor this we had an attendance report sent daily to inform of “x” marks. The education support officer then notified the social worker and education advisors. The officer also spoke to the carer to ensure the child had what they needed to access work at home / online. All our young people were provided with laptops if they didn’t already have them in the summer term 2020. Schools had developed their online offer by this point, so most pupils were able to work well at home.
- 3.6.4 During the spring term lockdown, the government expected schools to allow looked after children to attend school every day. However, the offer from schools was not the same as when schools were fully open because of staffing and the need to run both online and in person provision. Most pupils were simply attending in small groups being supervised to access the online lessons. Some pupils really benefitted from the smaller class sizes and less busy schools, and having supervision was helpful to them engaging. However, some pupils felt that it was “stigmatising” to be in school (as everyone would know they were looked after).

There was a professional discussion with school, carer, social worker, and the Virtual School to ensure that if a child was not attending school that it was the best decision for them.

3.6.5. COVID19 absence September to December for statutory age pupils.

Reason for COVID absence	Number of pupils	% of cohort
Self-isolating	33	16%
Part time table*	9	4%
Symptoms	2	1.8%%
School /year group closure	25	12.3%
Total	69	33.8%
COVID absence for more than a school week**	12	5.9%

**this was mainly in September as many schools had a slow reintegration back to full time.*

*** the majority of pupils have only had one to three days off school whilst awaiting a test result for themselves or someone in their bubble*

3.6.6 During the autumn term 33.8% of our children had at least some time off due to a COVID19 related issue and 5.9% had at least a week off school due to this. Every child had a laptop and all schools were set up to deliver virtual learning where children needed to isolate.

3.6.7 Attendance this academic year compared to last two years.

Attendance	Sep – Mar 2019/20	Sept – 22nd June 2020-2021 (including spring lockdown as absence)	Sept – 22nd June 2021 - academic year 2020-2021 (not counting children working from home in Spring lockdown as absent)
Number of CYP (5-16)	196	215	215
All CYP (5-16)	91.90%	82.7%	93.3%
Primary	96.90%	89.3%	97.6%
Secondary	89.30%	78.8%	90.7%
KS1	93.50%	89.1%	96.7%
KS2	97.60%	89.5%	97.9%
KS3	94.50%	85.9%	96.2%
KS4	84.50%	73.2%	86.1%
SEND without an EHCP	93.10%	83.0%	96.9%
EHCP	93.40%	87.5%	94.3%
Unauthorised Absence	3.50%	1.6%	1.8%
Persistent Absence	20.40%	54.9%	25.1%

3.6.8 Unsurprisingly attendance at school has been affected by COVID19. Attendance up to June (this was the only available figure) was 82.7% compared with last year's figure of 91.9%. However, this is partly because the DfE directed that any children looked after should be in school during the spring term when all the other children were at home. Many of our young people did go to school during that period. However, for some young people they were actually best served by working from home. There was a network discussion about every young person to decide whether they should be working in school or from home. However the DfE guidance meant that any looked after child at home would be marked "authorised absence" rather than "X or session not counted". We calculated the attendance figures if all of those children who were marked absent were marked "X" as their peers and this time the attendance figure is 93.3% - actually higher than last year.

3.6.9 The Virtual School monitored attendance daily – if any child stopped attending school there would be a phone call home that day to check on their welfare, and whether they needed any support to continue working from home.

3.7. Exclusions

There have been NO permanent exclusions of any looked-after children so far in 2020-2021. Due to COVID19 it is difficult to make any of the usual analysis of fixed-term exclusion figures. However we have looked at the September 2020 to March 2021 window.

	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
Total no. of days lost to fixed term exclusions	6	11	22	32	38	46	52
Fixed term exclusions from school for children who will have been in care for 1+yrs at 31 st March	4	5	10	11	11	13	16
Children with a fixed term exclusion from school for children who will have been in care for 1+yrs at 31 st March	2	3	6	6	8	10	13
No. of permanent exclusions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Exclusions - year to date	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Total no. of days lost to fixed term exclusions	9	13	25	30.5			45.5
Fixed term exclusions from school for children who will have been in care for 1+yrs at 31 st March	7	9	12	16			22
Children with a fixed term exclusion from school for children who will have been in care for 1+yrs at 31 st March	6	7	9	12			13
No. of permanent exclusions	0	0	0	0			0

3.7.1 In 2019/20 16 young people had a fixed term exclusion and this represented a total of 52 lost days from school. We have seen an increase in exclusions this year. This is definitely related to the disruption that children and schools have faced. Some of our children have struggled with uncertainty and the change in schools – in particular going from being in a small group or at home during lockdown to being back in a busy school again. The pupil premium has been used to put in interventions to support the young person to develop their emotional regulation.

3.8. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

3.8.1 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to maintain PEPs for every school age CLA up to the end of the school year in which they turn 18 (i.e. the end of year 13). The PEP must be reviewed at least termly, or at any time of significant changes to placement and/or education provision. Social Workers are jointly responsible along with school Designated Teachers for writing, reviewing, and taking actions written into the PEPs.

3.8.2 The table below shows number of PEPs against eligible CLA through the academic year.

<i>Personal Education Plans (PEPs)</i>		<i>2018/19</i>	<i>2019/20</i>	<i>2020/21</i>
Autumn Term	Cohort	205	188	203
	Completed	94%	89%	94%
	Authorised	80%	77%	67%
Spring Term	Cohort	216	207	214
	Completed	78%	85%	96%
	Authorised	31%	93%	90%
Summer Term	Cohort	210	223	
	Completed	96%	55%	
	Authorised	90%	88%	

CLA PEP report from CareFirst and those statutory school aged children looked after for 28+ days.

3.9. Pupil Premium Plus Funding for CLA Financial Year 2020/21

3.9.1 We have changed the distribution system for pupil premium plus.

Previously schools claimed money in advance at the beginning of the financial year This makes it very difficult to link to PEP targets and need and meant there was little evaluation of impact. The new system means that schools will get £400 automatically each term as long as either the child is making expected progress at school and that there is a quality PEP on the system. If they are not making progress we would scrutinise the PEP to ensure that the pupil premium is being used to support the child to make expected progress. If there is no PEP on the system this will be chased up. Schools can apply for further funding where there is need. This system has been welcomed by professionals because it has reduced admin and means they can be sure of their funding. Most importantly it is part of our constant monitoring cycle for pupil progress and PEP quality which means that we can pick up issues with our young people more quickly.

Full analysis of 2020/2021 will be included in the full annual report.

3.10. Children Previously Looked After and new duties

3.10.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed significant new statutory duties on the role of the Virtual School Headteacher, extending it to include promoting the interests of children who have been adopted or who are in long term care permanent arrangements (under an adoption, Special Guardianship, or a Child Arrangements Order). These responsibilities came into force in September 2018.

3.10.2 We currently have a member of staff who is on a temporary contract completing these duties

3.10.3 A recent DfE announcement that Virtual Schools will have further new duties from October 2021. These duties are to “promote the education of all children with a social worker”

3.10.4 Due to the two sets of new duties and extra funding we are seeking to recruit a permanent member of the leadership team to have oversight on these two sets of new duties. We will also be seeking to appoint a new advisor to deal with the extra casework.

3.11. Addressing Key Challenges Going Forward in 2020/21 - an update so far

3.11.1 Challenge 1: Improve persistent absence for statutory age children

- Reduce persistent absence by half to no more than 10%.
- Improving placement planning so children are not out of school if placements break down, or when initially coming into care.
- Better oversight for those out of school through Placement Panel.
- Improved oversight by education advisors and welfare officers through monthly meetings and daily extranet.
- Ensuring continuous monitoring and support for COVID19 related absence.

Unfortunately the persistent absence figures have been affected by the pandemic and it would be futile to make direct comparisons with other years. However our monitoring of attendance has tightened over the period of the pandemic with someone monitoring absence every day and calling foster carers and liaising with Social Workers and schools. Children have had fewer unauthorised absences than ever.

3.12.2 Challenge 2: Improving outcomes for children with SEND

- Join up meetings with SEND to take place monthly to forward plan and proactively plan for placement changes, school changes, and for COVID19 related issues.
- Better tracking and faster outcomes for those requesting assessment or needing plans finalised.
- Join up of EHC plan review and PEP review.
- Develop a programme of training for social care professionals, SEND, and school staff.
- Develop a regular consultation programme with Educational Psychology staff.

Joint meetings have taken place and have proved useful. We have now invited the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Care Leavers to join some of these meetings. For next academic year SEND will have a single point of contact for SEND and this/these staff will join the monthly meetings. The consultation programme with the Educational Psychology service has been well attended by staff and useful to the team supporting our young people. The EHC plan review is ongoing and will be completed over the summer holiday.

3.12.3 Challenge 3: Improving outcomes through supporting the transition into care, to new placements, and out of care to adulthood

- Develop “new in care” policy for the Virtual School; including pen portraits and first PEPs.
- Track referrals for new placements and ensure CSC and the Virtual School join up.
- Ensure all year 6 children in care and those post-CLA have secondary school choices and priority.
- Embed post-16 PEPs until education is complete.
- Complete a review of Pathway Plans to look at education element.
- Use of graduate intern to develop “aspiration” project.
- Over 90% of children in Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding school provisions.
- To develop the role of the post-CLA advisor.

The new in care policy is being developed and will be in place by the end of the summer holiday. Practice has improved, staff are notified more promptly and the expectation around getting a “pen portrait” on the child in the first few days is now clear. Notifications on placement changes are built into the new “Liquidlogic” system. The Virtual School is being involved in Pathway Plan training in July with the Leaving Care Team.

3.12.4 Challenge 4: Improve quality of PEPs, particularly better target setting, use of SDQ's and more accountability for Pupil Premium

- Introduce SDQ questionnaires once per year, collating before the spring term PEP.
- Include the SDQ scored in the monitoring sheets completed by schools and the PEP forms encouraging discussion of how the child might be supported with the Pupil Premium as a result.
- Introduce half termly leadership PEP audits and an annual multiagency PEP audit, measuring quality of target setting, capturing young person's voice, and the use of Pupil Premium.
- Develop a programme of training for Social Workers, school staff, and other professionals as necessary.
- Use of graduate intern to improve quality of 1:1 tuition.
- Recruit to secondary post to increase capacity to have oversight on all children.
- Manage the transition to Liquidlogic data management system.
- Ensure COVID19 issues are picked up through PEP authorisation.
- Embed new structure and oversight role for education advisors.
- Improve the quality and oversight of 1:1 tuition.

The lead up to the Liquidlogic changeover has gone smoothly and it is anticipated it will not affect PEP compliance performance figures this term. SDQs were successfully introduced in the spring term with over a 75% return. Those who did not complete were chased up and have been happening over the summer term. Training has been taking place; which various social care teams, AYSE and new staff and going forward is built in as mandatory training in the new staff induction programme. The graduate intern has not started on the aspiration project due to having to be redirected to support with issues around the pandemic and increased need of tuition.

4 IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

See Section 2.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific policy implications arising from this report.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

7 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific personnel implications arising from this report.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

9 PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific procurement implications arising from this report.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Not Applicable
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Not Applicable