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TO: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING
DATE: 1 AUGUST 2013

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL
2012-2013
Director of Children, Young People & Learning**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To note the Annual Report of the Virtual School.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 To **NOTE** and **APPROVE** the Annual Report on the work of the Virtual School

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3.1 To review the progress made by the Virtual School from April 2012 to March 2013.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None considered.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5.1 The LA has established a Virtual School with a remit to ensure that looked after children receive appropriate education and achieve well. The attached report covers the period for the financial year 2012 – 13 and includes a description of the work undertaken by members of the Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) team under the leadership of the Assistant Virtual School head. The Assistant Virtual School head reports to the Chief Adviser, who is the nominated Virtual School Head for the LA.

5.2 The report has been written to describe the work of the Virtual School and the impact of the service on looked after children.

Supporting information

Annex 1 Annual Report on the Work of the Virtual School (April 2012 – March 2013)

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

6.1 Not Required

Borough Treasurer

6.2 Not Required

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 Not Required

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.4 None identified.

Other Officers

6.5 None identified.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 None.

Method of Consultation

7.2 Not applicable.

Representations Received

7.3 Not applicable.

Background Papers

7.4 None

Contact for further information

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Looked After Children

Annual Report of the work of the Virtual School

April 2012 – March 2013

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1. Vision and Values

1.1 The vision for the Virtual School for looked after children in Bracknell Forest is that of an educationally inclusive school in which the teaching and learning, achievements, attitudes and well-being of every young person matter. We strive to ensure this shows not only in their performance, but also in their ethos and willingness to realise their potential despite having experienced difficulties. This does not mean treating all pupils in the same way. Rather it involves taking account of pupils' varied life experiences and needs.

1.2 The work of the Virtual School can be encapsulated in our mission statement:

'MAKING EVERY DAY COUNT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'

In terms of educational achievements we strive to ensure:

- Good progress is made by all looked after children based on their starting point
- Needs are identified in order to match resources to those needs and are tailored in a personalised way to help looked after children meet and potentially exceed their personal targets
- We have the most up-to-date data on each looked after child's progress and attainment, including National Curriculum levels where appropriate
- That schools and we have good tracking systems in place
- A culture exists where looked after children participate in positive activities
- Attendance rates are high and given priority by schools
- Looked after children have good access to further and higher education, training and employment.
- All those working with and supporting looked after children have high aspirations for their success

Our aspirations are to:

- Improve the education attainment of all looked after children in Bracknell Forest to become closer to that of all children in Bracknell Forest.
- Provide opportunities for looked after children to participate in LAC reviews, PEP meetings and other processes which enable them to give their views.
- Promote a positive culture which encourages looked after children to have high expectations of themselves and to achieve their full potential.

1.3 These are achieved through close working with schools, both within Bracknell Forest and beyond involving the designated teachers in schools, members of the LACES team, the Assistant Virtual School head and the Chief Adviser.

2. Role of the Virtual School Head

- 2.1 The role of the Virtual School head is set out in the LA's Policy and Procedures for the Education of Looked After Children (2011). The Coalition Government has indicated that they plan to introduce legislation as soon as Parliamentary time allows to make the Virtual School Head a statutory post with responsibility for discharging the existing duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of their looked after children, wherever they are placed.
- 2.2 The core purpose of the role is to be relentless in driving up improvements in the educational progress and attainment of all children looked after by their authority, including those that have been placed in schools in other authorities. They also have an important role in working in partnership with virtual school heads in other local authorities to support the educational progress of children who are looked after by other authorities but attending a school within the Borough. As looked after children are being educated across a large number of schools, the virtual school head has a significant responsibility to track their progress as if they were in a single school.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

In Bracknell Forest this role is allocated to the Chief Adviser for Children, Young People and Learning who has delegated a range of responsibilities to the Assistant Virtual School Head. The Looked After Children Education Support (LACES) team are aligned within the virtual school to deliver key aspects of the service in schools both in the borough and those in other local authorities. The three key areas of responsibility of a virtual school head for which they should be accountable are:

- To champion the educational needs of looked after children across the authority and those placed out-of-authority.
- To make sure that there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of looked after children.
- To ensure that all looked after children have a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP) and access one-to-one support, including personal tuition where appropriate.

4. Work and Impact of support (educational) for Looked After Children from the Bracknell Forest Virtual School

We are aware that looked after children constitute a group in the sense that they may share common experiences as a result of having been taken into Public Care, but that they are also individuals and members of other groups. We will take this into account when planning to meet their needs and avoid any action that may lead to stigmatisation. The Assistant Virtual School Head works closely with the LACES team to:

- Ensure high aspirations are maintained by teachers when working with looked after children which are reflected through their planning, pupil level target setting and assessing progress. This stems from collaborating with schools to ensure that they know which children are looked after and make sure that there is a personal educational plan (PEP) for all looked after children and one-to-one support where appropriate. PEPs are arranged and completed within 20 days of a young person coming into care and formal PEP meetings

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are held twice a year. The views of the young person and their respective foster carers are recorded as part of the PEP process and used to inform future planning.

- Ensure looked after children are consulted during the PEP process about the information recorded about their personal circumstances and are made clear that this is in order to help them. The nature of this conversation depends upon the age and level of understanding of the young person.
- Seek opportunities to enable looked after children participate in positive activities. The Virtual School works with relevant professionals to ensure PEPs are accurate and are subject to a rigorous audit and evaluation process for compliance and quality with impacts and outcomes that are followed up. In conjunction with School Advisers, we challenge schools and others when appropriate to improve the quality of the PEP and promote faster progress on actions agreed. These are done through meetings and discussions with clear expectations of the quality of educational provision for looked after children. In addition to this schools are supported to include raising attainment for looked after children in their school improvement plan.
- Ensure the LACES work closely with social workers to address communication issues and relevant conversations take place in a timely manner. The development of this professional relationship is also evident through representation on the Life Chances Team. Co-chaired by the Assistant Virtual School Head, the multi-disciplinary Life Chances Team has been an effective facilitator in addressing education concerns with other teams and take appropriate steps. Looked after children causing concern are “red/amber/green” (RAG) rated identifying areas of concern that the virtual school follows up with teachers, social workers or other professionals (as appropriate).
- Ensure that the Virtual School is also represented on the Edge of Care Panel and multi-agency Care Leavers Team meeting. This allows for other agencies to have a clearer understanding of educational needs and that these are clearly represented during placement planning and discussing particular cases.
- Ensure that the LA maintains an accurate record of the location, educational progress and attendance of looked after children in our authority, including those whom we look after but are placed in another authority. Schools are robustly challenged where concerns arise. Social workers are supported to consider the educational needs of looked after children when a young person comes into care or when taking decisions about moving placements. Where moving placements is absolutely essential, a new placement is found which enables continuity of schooling.
- Promote inclusive schooling and ensure that carers are able to communicate with Designated Teachers should they want to discuss any relevant matter – even if the young person is placed there temporarily. They are updated on the range of study support and out-of-school opportunities such as homework clubs, sports clubs, careers guidance, etc.
- Implement measures that enable looked after children to make good progress based on their starting point such as by ensuring that they are able to access

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one-to-one tuition where appropriate. Currently (February 2013), 20 looked after children (which constitutes 26% of school aged looked after children) receive one-to-one tuition (national curriculum subjects up to year 13 – 17 up to Year 11 and 3 at Year 12 and 13) and 5 are receiving additional music lessons to develop their skills in using particular instruments. In addition to this, extra teaching assistant time has been arranged to address attachment concerns of a primary school aged looked after child. This has enabled the pupil to feel more confident in their schooling experience, forge healthy and positive relationships with their peer and teachers and has begun to show progress in their reading and writing skills where he is now able to read independently and has developed a secure pencil grip.

- Assist Bracknell Forest looked after children to acquire a range of qualifications which is a reflection of our efforts to prepare them for life beyond their school age.
- Identify needs in order to match resources to those needs and are tailored in a personalised way to help looked after children meet and even exceed their personal targets. A range of extra-curricular opportunities are identified and arranged (occasionally out of school hours) which are aimed at building the young persons self-esteem and encourage them to realise their potential in relevant areas. This could take on the form of drama/music classes, sporting activities, cooking lessons etc. In turn, a number of these young people are now looking to pursue further education courses to consolidate their knowledge in their chosen field and explore a professional career in the future.
- Monitor school attendance rates on a monthly basis and work in partnership with relevant education welfare officers, social workers and carers to address any emerging concerns in a timely manner. Bracknell Forest looked after children have a positive history on school attendance and this is closely monitored for any young person causing concern.
- Ensure that, when a looked after child is assessed to be falling behind, suitable opportunities such as one-to-one tuition, additional class based support, after school homework clubs and intensive exam preparation opportunities are made available.
- Ensure that, where a looked after child is not able to attend school (even temporarily) alternative packages are discussed and put in place as a matter of urgency to address their educational needs. This entails a learning component (relevant to pupil needs) and a teaching venue. A range of sites are easily accessed through close links with colleagues across the borough and arranged for this purpose which are conducive for learning.
- Residential placements for looked after children are determined following a review of their educational provision. The Virtual School considers such proposals following a feasibility analysis of the needs of the young person and educational opportunities available to them to enjoy, progress and achieve in line with their abilities.
- Support for looked after children going through to be adopted has been a particular area of development. The LACES team look to ensure there is a smooth transition between the phases and plans are in place to address any

possible issues. This takes on the form of ascertaining the needs of the young person, reviewing current arrangements and determining future support and allocation of resources. The PEP is a vital tool in recording these events. This is currently being developed to ensure no area is left unconsidered and is easily accessible by relevant agencies as a vital source of information.

5. Specialist support for schools

- Transition meetings are held as an expectation to review and discuss arrangements for educational provision. These occur at transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 (i.e. to discuss options at Key Stage 4) and then during Year 11 to consider Post – 16 options. Schools are supported to discuss any alternative curriculum options with relevant colleagues and agencies to ensure informed decisions are made and the young person and his/her carer are part of the planning process.
- Twelve transition meetings were held between January 2012 and February 2013 to determine next steps. Two of these were part of on-going discussions with relevant secondary schools for Year 6 pupils progressing to year 7. Eight were again part of a series of conversations with looked after children, Designated Teachers, teachers, social workers, foster carers, 6th form teachers/college tutors, Adviza worker (where required) to ascertain Post – 16 options and to ensure the best possible path for FE was determined.
- Continuous support is made available to young people to access further and higher education to ensure appropriate courses are selected and any concerns are addressed. They are actively encouraged and supported to access taster activities for further and higher education. Three looked after children have been supported in their visit to Bracknell and Wokingham College to discuss their options for FE commencing from September 2013. Similarly, young people are also supported in their plans for higher education where three pupils have been actively supported in visiting University taster days and completing UCAS applications for courses starting September 2013. Another pupil currently in college has decided not to pursue with HE and is being supported to seek a form of employment at the end of their college course in July 2013.

6. Professional development opportunities for colleagues working with looked after children

- We recognise that psychological trauma and lack of continuity in the lives of looked after children may lead to challenging behaviour in school. As a result, it is especially important to employ positive behaviour strategies in these circumstances. Schools are supported to make suitable training opportunities available for their staff in meeting these challenges and such expectations are discussed with Head Teachers to ensure their staff are considerate towards a child's sensitive needs. Currently, 3 primary schools and a secondary school are discussing training options for their staff with the LACES team and further opportunities are scheduled to be discussed at the Designated Teachers Forum (June 2013).
- Central training for School Governors is held where particular guidance is given to governing bodies on the statutory responsibilities towards meeting

the needs of children in care. Particular emphasis is placed upon the importance for a governor to have outlined responsibility in ensuring their school meets the needs for looked after children and are supported in meeting this through the provision of information and making support available for them.

- Designated Teachers in schools are supported in their role to attend training sessions organised by the LA and then to cascade this to school staff. Working with looked after children is also part of the formal induction process for newly qualified and appointed members of staff where they are provided with practical strategies aimed at raising an awareness of the common challenges faced.
- Designated Teachers have access to a Bracknell Forest publication, *“Supporting Looked After Children – A Guide for Schools”* and regularly refer to it.
- Designated Teachers Forum is to be held once a term to provide them with opportunities to network with other colleagues in a similar position as theirs and discuss relevant matters. Commencing from summer term 2013 and facilitated by the LACES team, Designated Teachers will have another avenue to channel their school development plans and identify relevant training needs. There will also be opportunities for other professionals such as Educational Psychologists, Adviza, youth offending workers, educational welfare etc to attend and share the nature of their work. Network meetings are expected to be a valuable way of building links and establishing consistency of practice.

7. Raising the profile and celebrating achievements of looked after children

- Annual updates on the attainment of looked after children are presented to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel. This raises the profile of the work of the Virtual School and the importance of meeting the varying needs of looked after children. Elected Members provide robust challenge on the attainment of young people and enable the Virtual School to influence and inform other service areas.
- The LACES team work in conjunction with multi agencies within the Life Chances Team to arrange an annual awards ceremony for looked after children to acknowledge and reward good progress made by them during the year. They are recognised across a range of categories including educational achievement, being involved, making positive changes, thinking of others, personal achievement and recreation. We recognise this as a time to celebrate that, despite their own difficult circumstances, these children and young people work hard, think of others, get involved and achieve great things. The awards ceremony is our opportunity to thank them for their hard work and to celebrate their achievements. This is attended by all professionals (from BFC) that would come into contact with them including the Mayor, Elected Members, Chief Officers and senior managers.

8. Outcomes for LAC and Care Leavers (Academic Year 2011 – 12)

- During 2011/12, 78% of looked after children gained at least 1 or more GCSE A* - G grade with 7 out of 10 in the Year 11 cohort securing a qualification

which enabled them to access further education, and 2 moving onto apprenticeships. These results are on par with those from other Berkshire LA's for the same period.

- There were 5 pupils in the Key Stage 2 cohort of which 3 were not entered for their SATs exams due to being statemented and working below level 3 across assessed areas. The remaining 2 pupils secured level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics. There was a history of a range of issues that led to these young people becoming looked after which was a major contributing factor to their summer results. Since then, both pupils have continued to receive targeted support where one is now placed at a specialist unit. Both have focused IEP's and the LACES team work closely with their settings to ensure agreed targets are met.
- As a result of the collaborative work of the LACES team with other members of the Life Chances Team, there has been a 50% reduction in the number of education related issues for looked after children (source Life Chances Team annual report [2012 – 2013], 12 cases in January compared to 6 in December).
- Work with Bracknell and Wokingham College has resulted in a much closer working relationship and provision of courses accessible to looked after children in the last year of their compulsory education and beyond. In July 2012 one Care Leaver successfully completed a Degree in Sports Science. As at December 2012 Two Care Leavers are in the second year of Degree courses and a further 2 are considering HE options during their second year at college.

9. Predicted outcomes for LAC (Academic Year 2012 – 13)

- The 2012/13 cohort consists of 4 looked after children. 100% of the young people are expected to gain at least 1 GCSE A* - G grade. However, this is an estimate and final grades will be confirmed when issued.

10. Future Strategy and Challenges

At the beginning of March 2013 there were 104 children in the care of Bracknell Forest. Of these, 51 are educated in Bracknell Forest schools. In addition 61 looked after children from other local authorities are educated in our schools. When schools are analysing (and being held to account for) the progress of looked after children, all such children are included in the data.

Our priorities are to:

- Continue to closely monitor the educational progress of individual children as soon as they become looked after, so that the impact of care upon educational outcomes is more accurately measured and understood. This is however reliant on relevant schools responding to requests for data and updating the Virtual School on corresponding matters. Another aspect of this focus is to work alongside other professionals in accurately identifying learning needs – e.g. whether the special educational needs of a looked after child are overlooked or whether frequent moves are responsible for learning difficulties where assessments or support have been delayed.

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- Support schools in addressing the variable approach to the expenditure of the pupil premium. This is to be done by ensuring schools and associated professionals are aware on what the pupil premium can be used for to explore creative opportunities to enhance pupil attainment in line with their educational progress and that this is tracked accurately to measure the impact of the premium on educational progress and attainment.
- Implement robust protocols for the educational support of looked after children placed outside of our own local authority and monitor these arrangements closely, so that senior managers and corporate parents can be assured that the progress of these children is not compromised.
- In addition to the systems in place when considering placement needs for looked after children placed out of the local authority, current provision and accountability processes are being reviewed to provide young people with similar opportunities to enjoy, progress and achieve as those placed within the borough.
- Continue to review the effectiveness of PEP's and the accuracy of their content. This audit is to be shared at Designated Teacher's Forum to reinforce expectations around expected levels of progress and actions agreed to overcome any barriers to attainment.
- Continue to raise the profile of the needs of looked after children across the authority and spread effective practice, particularly in relation to improving behaviour and attendance, promoting stability of placement and school through admissions and school policies.
- Develop clear structures within the LACES team to encompass the educational aspect of the transition of a child being looked after to being adopted in partnership with other agencies across the LA.
- Work with others in local authorities and schools to ensure that measures are taken across the authority to promote positive behaviour, good attendance, and reduce exclusions, which in turn will lead to good progress and improved attainment.
- Working with schools to ensure they have a governor nominated for looked after children, including a remit to promote their educational excellence.
- Continuing to ensure that consideration for education is given when determining placements by colleagues.
- Stability within the LACES team is paramount in delivering core functions. This is to be reviewed in conjunction with services that are contracted externally to have an accurate view of their financial effectiveness and determine the best possible way forward to meet an increase in the number of children becoming looked after.

Kashif Nawaz
Assistant Virtual School Head
Bracknell Forest Council

March 2013