
Education and Skills Alternative Delivery Model

Service Specification

Service name	The Virtual School
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1 Not used

2 Service overview

2.1 Introduction

The Virtual School is a team of staff whose role is to improve the educational achievement of Children Looked After (CLA) by the London Borough of Barnet. It is not a teaching institution but it brings together the information about individual looked after children and young people as if they were in a single school. This enables their progress to be closely tracked and monitored. As a result support and intervention can be targeted strategically, and the impact of actions can be measured.

It is responsible for:

- Tracking and monitoring the attainment and progress of Children and Young People Looked After (CLA) with a strong focus on ‘closing the Gap’ in attainment and progress between looked after children and their peers.
- Ensuring all CLAs have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is of high quality and that sets out the plans for supporting each CLA to achieve and progress in their education.
- Distributing CLA Pupil Premium funding to schools to support the implementation of PEPs.
- Supporting and encouraging schools, social workers and carers to make education a priority for children looked after.
- Ensuring schools are held to account for the educational outcomes of looked after children.

The Virtual School supports the following groups of CLA:

- Barnet CLA who are educated in Barnet schools
- Barnet CLA who are educated in other local authorities or independent schools
- CLA from other local authorities placed in Barnet schools*

*although these CLA are not technically Barnet CLAs, there is an expectation that advice and support will be offered to Barnet schools in collaboration with the Virtual School in the placing authority.

The main focus of the work of the Virtual School relates to CLA who are of statutory school age. However the Virtual School also has oversight of Early Years CLAs (the virtual nursery) and post 16 CLAs.

The Virtual School has the following posts:

- 1 Headteacher
- 1 Access and Inclusion manager
- 4 Caseworkers
- 0.5 Project Officer

The annual budget is approximately £406,460. In addition the Virtual School manages the distribution of CLA Pupil Premium payments to schools.

Currently on roll there are:

- 179 CLA of statutory school age, of which:
 - 114 are of secondary age
 - 65 are of primary age (including early years)
- Of these, 75 are placed in Barnet Schools and 104 are placed out of Borough.
- 98 16-18 year old CLA

The VS also has a more limited involvement with 282 CLAs aged 19-25, which mainly involved just tracking their activities. There is a legal requirement for Virtual Headteachers to be employed by the local authority. It is therefore proposed that the Virtual Headteacher will be employed directly by the council, with a reporting line to the council for employment-related matters. However, on a day to day basis the Virtual Headteacher will report to and be performance managed by the provider's Head of School Improvement or an equivalent post and the post-holder will performance manage the rest of the staff in the Virtual School. The Virtual

Headteacher is expected to have a termly meeting with the DCS to brief him/her on the progress of the Virtual School and to attend and participate in the Corporate Parenting Panel and other appropriate meetings.

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2.2 Service outcomes

The intended service outcomes are:

- To place CLA in outstanding or good provision wherever possible.
- To reduce fixed term exclusions of CLA to be a lower % than London and statistical neighbours
- To improve attendance to a higher percentage than CLAs on average for London and statistical neighbours (and, in particular, to reduce the persistent absence of CLAs).
- To assist CLA in all key stages to make expected age-related progress
- To intervene early to place CLA at in appropriate early years settings and to challenge and support the settings
- To continue to improve destinations of CLA in HE, FE and high level apprenticeships, traineeships and volunteering.
- To facilitate the reengagement of care leavers into education until they are 21. (25 if they are in HE or if they have an Education Health and Care Plan)

2.3 Service challenges

- The Virtual School is required to liaise effectively with Health and Social Care services.
- The roll is transient as children and young people move in and out of care.
- The children and young people have often been subjected to emotional trauma and sometimes physical abuse, which are significant barriers to learning for many.
- The achievements of CLA are significantly lower than those of their peers in Barnet. This reflects the national pattern.
- In addition CLA are more likely to be excluded from school and are more likely to be identified as requiring SEND support.
- The Virtual School has a new staffing structure and will be located in the Education and Skills service from 1 April 2015, having previously been located in Family Services (children's social care). New protocols and procedures will need to be developed to ensure that communication with Social Care is effective and efficient.
- The methodology we have developed to track progress uses direct contact with schools, personal education plans and secure electronic transfer facilitating swift and effective transfer of data to and from schools. This process is still in the early stages of

development with significant implications for training of teachers within and outside the borough and for the social care staff within borough.

2.4 Scope of the service

- Tracking and monitoring the attainment and progress of Children and Young People Looked After (CLA) with a strong focus on 'closing the Gap' in attainment and progress between looked after children and their peers.
- Ensuring all CLAs have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is of high quality and that sets out the plans for supporting each CLA to achieve and progress in their education.
- Distributing CLA Pupil Premium funding to schools to support the implementation of PEPs.
- Supporting and encouraging schools, social workers and carers to make education a priority for children looked after.
- Ensuring schools are held to account for the educational outcomes of looked after children.
- Promoting the well-being of looked after children.
- Strengthening management information systems to inform effective self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- Producing a strategic annual achievement plan and an annual report to stakeholders and being accountable for the Virtual School's impact and outcomes
- Responding effectively to the views and feedback from children and young people.
- Streamlining the collation of information about Barnet looked after children wherever they are placed and including children from other local authorities placed in Barnet and using this to promote understanding of the needs of looked after children.
- Contributing to the further development of effective leadership and governance structures that ensure that all services supporting children work together to improve the educational achievement of CLA
- Holding to account all those involved with the education of CLA.

The council has established a stakeholder **Challenge Committee** for the Virtual School to bring together representatives of the council (DCS, education and social care), the health service and schools. The committee's role will be to:

- Advise on the strategic direction of the school
- Hold the Head teacher to account regarding standards and outcomes
- Take an interest in the education and well-being of Barnet's looked after children and young people.
- Monitor and evaluate progress against the school's action plan
- Evaluate the impact of activity and intervention funded through Pupil Premium Plus (and the DSG?)

The provider will be expected to work with this committee as well as working with a co-ordinating group of officers from education and children's social care. The purpose of the **Service Coordination Group** is to:

- Review processes and systems to ensure that to the extent achievable through the exercise of Good Industry Practice they are fit for purpose, efficient and effective
- Identify barriers and blockages impeding the development of the VS and the swift placement of CLA in the educational setting that best meets their needs.
- Identify duplication across services and build collaborative relationships to underpin efficiency and effectiveness
- Actively promote knowledge sharing and understanding of different professional standpoints.
- Actively consider barriers to educational achievement and wider social and economic outcomes and work collaboratively to remove such barriers
- Explore operational issues and take a proactive approach to the elimination of problems
- Develop cross cutting strategic solutions so that services are able to work together
- Promote innovative planning across service boundaries.

The provider will also need to work in close collaboration with Virtual School headteachers and staff from other local authorities in whose schools Barnet Children Looked After are placed or who have placed their Children Looked After in a Barnet school.

3 Service requirements – FOR THE COUNCIL

Ref	Function	Service Requirement	Current key volumes or frequency requirements	Applicable service standards
VS1	Tracking and monitoring	Use reasonable skill and care to track and monitor the attainment and progress of Children and Young People Looked After	179 aged 5 to 16 and 98 aged 16-18	% tracked through all agreed measures
VS2	PEPs	To the extent that it is achievable using Good Industry Practice ensure all CLAs have a Personal Education Plan (PEP)	As above	Quality criteria for PEPs
VS3	Pupil Premium	Hold schools to account by controlling the allocation of pupil premium funding to schools. Distribute CLA Pupil Premium funding to schools to support the implementation of PEPs.	As above	Monitoring use of PP and impact on outcomes
VS4	Support and challenge schools	Support and challenge schools and other providers in relation to the education of children looked after with the aim of reducing the gaps in attainment and progress between Barnet children looked after and their peers. Support and challenge by checking and commenting on the quality of personal education plans and withholding pupil premium payments for less than satisfactory plans or if plans are not being appropriately implemented. To the extent that it is achievable using Good Industry Practice, check schools are tracking pupil progress on a termly basis and are setting regular targets and advise, if required, on	As above	Record of engagement with schools and resultant actions

		targets and on approaches to pupil tracking.		
VS5	Annual reporting	Produce an annual achievement report and action plan setting out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the attainment and progress of LACs and • evaluating achievement of individual and whole cohorts, with comparisons to available data for other LAs and nationally. • progress over the last year and plans for action to improve outcomes over the coming year 	Annually	Acceptance of report by the council
VS6	Management information systems	Develop appropriate management information systems and appropriate interfaces with social care, health, schools and other local authorities in order to improve tracking, self-evaluation and improvement planning	Ongoing	
VS7	Stakeholder challenge	Co-ordinate and report to the stakeholder Challenge Committee (or equivalent) on the items in its remit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategic direction of the school • Standards and outcomes for LACs • The education and well-being of LACs • Monitoring and evaluation of progress against the school's action plan • Evaluation of the impact of activity and intervention funded through Pupil Premium Plus • Reporting on the views of children and young people. Consult the Stakeholder Challenge Committee on the investment of the additional £50,000 of funding agreed by	Ongoing	

		the council and the Schools Forum in February 2015 and report back to the committee on how the funding is allocated.		
VS8	Co-ordination with Family Services	<p>Work with staff from children’s social care and other partner agencies through the Service Coordination Group (or equivalent) on the items in its remit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To the extent that it is achievable using Good Industry Practice reviewing processes and systems to ensure they are fit for purpose, efficient and effective • Identifying barriers and blockages impeding the development of the VS and the swift placement of LCAs in the educational setting that best meets their needs. • Identifying duplication across services and build collaborative relationships to underpin efficiency and effectiveness • Actively promoting knowledge sharing and understanding of different professional standpoints. • Actively considering barriers to educational achievement and wider social and economic outcomes and work collaboratively to remove such barriers • Exploring operational issues and take a proactive approach to the elimination of problems • Developing cross cutting strategic solutions ensuring that to the extent that it is achievable using Good Industry Practice services are able to work together 	Ongoing	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting innovative planning across service boundaries. 		
VS9	Admissions to schools	Work with the Admissions team and social work staff to identify appropriate schools for children looked after and to the extent that it is achievable using Good Industry Practice secure appropriate placements for individual LAC, making use of/advising on powers of direction where appropriate.	Ongoing	

4 Not used

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6 Key interfaces / Relationships

Interface	Details (please add details if there are any particular complexities or expectations)
CSG – finance, HR, IT	
Press Office	

7 Performance indicators

See spreadsheet: 'SKPI performance bands and list of all PIs - 15.9.15'.

8 Data room documents

File path on 4Projects

London Borough of Barnet > Education and Support Services > Education Services > Data Room > Service Information > Service Specifications > The Virtual School data room documents

Ref	Document name	Link or file name on 4Projects	Description

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