

Appendix 1

Virtual School - Peer Review Action Plan



Overview

The Virtual School underwent a peer review in September 2022 carried out by the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH). The NAVSH national business process for peer challenge in Virtual Schools builds on LGA methodology and includes triangulation of findings.

There were four area of scope:

1. How well does the Middlesbrough Virtual School, as part of the wider Children's Services and the Local Authority work with external partners, specifically schools, to improve outcomes for children in their care?
2. How effective is the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process in supporting children's progress and do the quality assurance (QA) arrangements lead to continuous improvement?
3. What steps have been taken to ensure the Virtual School Head and the Virtual School champion all children with a social worker to fulfil the extended duties? How strong is partnership working between the Virtual School and Children's Social Care in Middlesbrough?
4. Are the Virtual School's current arrangements for tracking, monitoring and supporting children who have been excluded, are without a school place or are on part-time tables effective in ensuring these children are accessing appropriate and quality education?

Monitoring and Oversight

The actions within this plan will be tracked and monitored as set out below:

1. The Virtual School Head will meet monthly with the Head of Access to Education to review in detail all aspects of the plan and agree actions where changes or amendments are required due to changing circumstances.
2. Key performance indicators will be taken from the plan and added to the score cards that are presented monthly to the Director of Education and Partnerships (RB) and the Director of Children's Services (RF) in their respective performance clinics, allowing Directors oversight of the improvements as they develop.
3. The Virtual School Head will present a summary report of progress against the plan to the Virtual School Governing Body at its six weekly meetings, facilitating the appropriate governance, support and challenge.

Virtual School Peer Review Action Plan January 2022

How well does the Middlesbrough Virtual School, as part of the wider Children's Services and the Local Authority work with external partners, specifically schools, to improve outcomes for children in their care?					
Consideration	Action	By whom?	Due / RAG on track	Progress / RAG completion	Anticipated Impact
<p>Work with North East and national Virtual School Heads (VSHs) in collaboration with National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) to create a regional / national Child Looked After (CLA) dashboard.</p> <p>Note: Middlesbrough Virtual School started to develop a shared data dash board with Redcar & Cleveland Virtual School prior to the Peer Review. We plan to develop this work further.</p>	Share the Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland (R&C) dashboard at North East Virtual School Heads (VSHs) meeting.	VB and JJ (R&C VSH)	Nov	Complete. 5 Local Authorities were keen to meet to progress a regional dash board.	<p>Sharing data locally and nationally will help the VS to bench mark performance and help identify common areas of concern. These can be addressed collectively, perhaps by sharing resources and achieving economies of scale. The result will be an improved service for children and better value for money.</p> <p>Evidence of impact will ultimately be a fall in exclusions and an increase in achievement.</p> <p>Exclusions to have fallen from an average of 15 children per month (autumn term '21) to 10 children per month (autumn term '22).</p>
	Arrange to meet with 5 local VSHs from neighbouring Authorities and Welfare Call Ltd.	VB and JJ (R&C VSH)	March 22	Date arranged (March 22).	
	Create joint dash board.	VB and JJ (R&C VSH)	June 22	Trial the dash board by March 22 Launch June 22	

Further consideration regarding the way data and the accompanying narrative can be more nuanced to evidence the effectiveness of the Virtual School (VS).	Create a head line data report that incorporates “churn”.	VSH	Oct 22	Monthly report produced and shared with Director (RB).	Senior leaders need data to inform strategic decision making. By improving the accuracy of data reporting better decisions making will result. A monthly report produced and shared with Director (RB).
	Complete case studies and incorporate them in the VSH annual report.	VSH	Oct 22	Complete	Case studies will help leaders and stakeholders to fully understand the effectiveness of the VS’s work, as well as helping to identify further possible improvements in the operating model. These improvements will support the overall aim of continuous improvement in the quality of service delivery. One case study to be presented at each Governing Body meeting.
	Strengthen case study narrative to provide a richer understanding of the impact for the child	VSH	March 22	New template design completed and will be used going forward.	
Hold schools to account for whole school outcomes for children	Create a school’s score card with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance data • Exclusion rates • Academic outcomes 	Virtual School (VS) Data Analyst	Dec 22	Complete	Professionally challenging schools to improve their performance is a key aspect of the VS’s work. Effective challenge is made possible

	For every school with Children Looked After (CLA) on roll.				when accurate, clear data is available. The score card process will encourage schools to carry out effective self-evaluation, and put in place bespoke strategies for improvement. In turn these will support improved outcomes and experiences for children.
	Present score card findings to schools and jointly plan the required improvements.	VSH and Head of Access to Education (A2E)	May 22	VSH to meet individually with Heads (or in Trust clusters) to review their score cards.	Each secondary school Head to be presented with their score card termly.
	Invite high performing schools to share best practice and support those who need to improve.	VSH and Head of A2E	June 22	VSH to support this peer support programme and facilitate as required. Progress to be reported to the Virtual School Governing Body and to the Governing Body of each participating school.	Sharing best practice is an effective and efficient way for schools to achieve rapid improvement. This model will support improvement in schools' performance in all aspects of their support for looked after children, including attendance, inclusion, progress and attainment. Two examples of shared best practice to be recorded each term.
VSH to attend Headteacher Forum meetings	Secure HT buy in for planned improvements.	VSH	From Feb 22	VSH to attend regularly as appropriate.	School Headteacher 'buy in' to the processes described in this plan is essential if they are to change their models of

					<p>operation and their buy in is more likely to be achieved if they have a strong professional relationship with the VSH and regard the VSH as having 'authority' with the LA.</p> <p>Evidence of impact will be found in closer working relationships leading to a fall in exclusions and an increase in achievement.</p> <p>Exclusions to have fallen from an average of 15 children per month (autumn term '21) to 10 children per month (autumn term '22).</p>
Reduce the reliance on the Virtual School	<p>Deliver Designated Teacher (DT) training to empower schools:</p> <p><u>Planned DT forum topics:</u> Supporting School Transition 23rd March 2022</p> <p>Supporting Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) 11th May 2022</p>	Virtual School Deputy Head (VSDH)	May 22	<p>Completed to date: The Role of the Designated Teacher Sept 21 Child Centred Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Personal Education Plan (PEP) quality assurance (QA). October 21 Adoption Tees Valley – Previously Looked After (PLAC) October 21</p>	<p>Providing a comprehensive training programme for teachers and school staff will give them the skills to put in place the changes necessary to make schools more supportive of the needs of looked after children.</p> <p>Impact will be evidenced by a fall in exclusions and an increase in achievement.</p> <p>Exclusions to have fallen from an average of 15 children per</p>

				Attendance and Exclusions November 21 Attachment in Schools January 22	month (autumn term '21) to 10 children per month (autumn term '22).
How effective is the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process in supporting children's progress and do the QA arrangements lead to continuous improvement?					
Provide external PEP QA Scrutiny.	Invite school based Designated Teachers (DTs) to complete PEP QA.	VSH	Dec 21	COVID pressure in schools has prevented DTs from completing the training and carrying out PEP QA. This should be further explored in the Spring with DTs.	The PEP document is the key action driver within schools. Higher quality PEP documents which more accurately identify the specific learning needs of the child and set out strategies to address them, as well as explaining how all stakeholders will support the child's learning are there for essential. Dynamic and systematic quality assurance allows the VSH to both track the quality and identify where improvement is necessary. By involving a range of stakeholders in the QA process not only is their understanding and support for the PEP process solidified, but they can bring their individual knowledge and expertise to help improve the PEP process further and
	Invite R&C VSH to QA PEPs.	VSH	May 22	R&C VSH and Middlesbrough VSH have agreed to QA each other's PEPs. PEP QA frame works have been shared. Operating protocol has been agreed. PEP QA to be completed and reports shared by May 22.	
	Invite Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to QA PEPs	VSH	March 22	IROs to receive training in Feb 22 and start to QA in March.	
	Launch the Foster Carer (FC) handbook.	VSH	Feb 22	Handbook created and will be given to	

Develop the skills of Foster Carers and Social Workers to confidently set and deliver SMART targets, leading to a more holistic approach.				delegates at the VS conference on 11 th Feb. Distribution to all Foster Carers will follow (March 22). Fostering Manger to promote FC handbook.	overall quality of the PEP documents will be driven up. Foster carers and Social Workers have a crucial role to play, as they know the child best and can bring unique insight into the target setting and action planning contained within the PEP.
	Work with the Principal Social Worker (PSW) to plan the development and improvement of Social Workers (SWs) understanding of SMART targets and SMART target setting.	VSH	May 22	As part of the improvement journey SWs have an extensive programme of training available. SMART targets will be incorporated into this and the VS will continue to support SWs and FCs contribution to SMART target setting at PEP meetings.	PEP quality to improve from 55% good or better Jan '22 to 75% good or better by Jan '23.
Early identification of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).	Support school to become 'attachment aware and trauma informed' via the 'Providing Rich Opportunities For Looked After Children in Middlesbrough' (PROCLAIM) project by creating a 'PROCLAIM' action plan.	VSH / Educational Psychologist PROCLAIM strategic group	June 22	The Strategic Group has been created and the vision and aims agreed. The programme will be show cased at the VS conference in Feb 22.	Schools are keen to improve and develop their ability to respond effectively to the needs of children who have suffered trauma. The PROCLAIM project will help them to develop their skills, resulting in fewer exclusions for CLA.

					<p>Jan '22 two secondary school have signed up. By June 22 all secondary schools to be signed up and actively engaging with the programme.</p> <p>Exclusions to have fallen from an average of 15 children per month (autumn term '21) to 10 children per month (autumn term '22).</p>
	Design a Looked After Child Rapid Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Assessment Policy.	VSH	March 22	<p>Draft policy created in partnership with SEND colleagues.</p> <p>Trial period will run until March '22, when, following amendments, it will be formerly adopted.</p>	<p>For a child with SEN an EHCP helps to ensure they get the support they need. The process of gaining an EHCP usually takes at least 20 weeks. We aim to reduce this to a maximum of 15 weeks for all CLA requiring assessment. In order to achieve this we need to provide accurate progress data for each child to help clarify their level of additional need.</p>
	Use termly progress and attainment data to identify possible SEND needs.	VSH	March 22	<p>Autumn term Progress Data Return to be completed by Feb 4th.</p> <p>RAG of progress and triage Key Stage 4 (KS4) 14th Feb</p> <p>RAG of progress and triage of KS2 21st Feb</p> <p>RAG of progress and triage of KS3 28th Feb</p> <p>RAG of progress and triage of KS1 7th March</p>	<p>By September '22, no CLA to wait longer than 15 weeks to be granted an EHCP following assessment.</p>

				RAG of progress and triage of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 14 th March.	
<p>What steps have been taken to ensure the Virtual School Head and the Virtual School champion all children with a social worker to fulfil the extended duties: How strong is partnership working between the Virtual School and Children's Social Care in Middlesbrough?</p>					
Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for VS staff.	Ensure funding is available.	VSH	Dec 21	£1,000 per PA training allowance ring fenced from PPP grant.	Better trained officers will support improved services being offered to schools and children.
	All PEP Advisors (PAs) have a CPD plan	VSH/ VSDHs	Dec 21	All Pep Advisors (PAs) have a CPD plan, regularly reviewed at their 6 weekly 1:1s.	100% of PEP Advisors to have completed their bespoke CPD plan by February '23.
Stakeholders have limited knowledge of the extended duties.	Host a South Tees wide conference to raise awareness.	VSH	Feb 22	On track, 200 delegates have booked a place.	Conference feedback to be at least 85% positive, with regard to stakeholders understanding of the extended duties of the VS.
Create a Child With Social Worker (CWSW) data set.	Create a system whereby key data relating to CWSW is generated and interrogated monthly.	VSH	April 22	Attendance data system already in place. Exclusions data system being developed – due April '22. Progress data system being developed – due April '22.	Strategic oversight of the school progress of CWSW can only be achieved if accurate data is available. Data reports to be readily available monthly by May '22.

Are the Virtual School's current arrangements for tracking, monitoring and supporting children who have been excluded, are without a school place or are on part-time tables effective in ensuring these children are accessing appropriate and quality education?

Reduce fixed term exclusions (FTE).	PROCLAIM project – As described above	VSH	As above	As above	Exclusions to have fallen from an average of 15 children per month (autumn term '21) to 10 children per month (autumn term '22).
	Work with Social Care, SEND and the Inclusion Team to strengthen the Exclusions Policy.	VSH/ SEND Manger	April 22	Draft Exclusion Policy completed. Consult with schools on the draft policy. Publish the policy following the consultation and subsequent amendments.	
	Create a joint mission statement with schools to support vulnerable children.	VSH/ Head Teachers	June 22	Draft completed. Feedback gathered from the Outwood schools. Plan to consult more widely, seeking views from all Heads'. Agree the mission statement with all schools and publish.	
	Review exclusion data with each secondary Head and agree targets for reduction in the number of days lost for looked after children.	VSH	May 22	Use the individual school score cards as a starting point for these strategic conversations.	
Oversight of all Children With a Social	Increase capacity in the Children Missing Education (CME) team to enable data	Head of Access to	Dec 21	0.4 full time equivalent (FTE) moved from VS Team to CME Team to	Aim is to ensure that children with a Social Worker receive

Worker (CWSW) on a part time tables.	gathering from schools to be more robust re. Pupils Missing Out On Education (PMOOE).	Education (A2E)		add capacity and to enable an accurate baseline to be set of the number of CWSW who are not receiving their full entitlement to education.	the appropriate amount of education. Currently we do not have a robust data set to enable a baseline to be set, so establishing this is key.
	Create a joint understanding of educational risk factors across the service area.	VSH	Dec 21	Complete	
	Create a dashboard to identify CWSW at risk of not receiving their full educational entitlement.	Head of A2E	May 22	Dashboard created by Feb 22 Trial version to be tested by April 22 Launch dashboard by May 22	
Develop a deeper understanding of 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET) churn.	Create a NEET score card to capture churn.	NEET Clinic Chair (Hazel Clark)	May 22	Template in production.	The scorecard will enable us to have a better understanding of the NEET population, and hence be better equipped to target support and intervention. NEETs to fall from 26% in Jan '22 to 21% by Jan '23.

Recommendations					
VS should look to further develop influence and standing externally. For example, through Headteacher cluster meetings and Headteacher strategic development days.	As described above in the various strategic actions with schools and stakeholders.				<p>School Headteacher 'buy in' to the processes described in this plan is essential if they are to change their models of operation and their buy in is more likely to be achieved if they have a strong professional relationship with the VSH and regard the VSH as having 'authority' with the LA.</p> <p>Exclusions to have fallen from an average of 15 children per month (autumn term '21) to 10 children per month (autumn term '22).</p>
Consider VSH's access to both Education and Social Care Directors/Heads of Service.	Review the effectiveness of the current structure annually.	RB / RF / TD	Aug 22	Review structure and determine effectiveness. Report conclusions to Virtual School Governing Body (VSGB).	An annual review will ensure the structures in place within the VS are the most appropriate to help ensure we meet the needs of young people as effectively as possible.
Review the data provided in the VS Annual Report.	Add an Executive Summary. Include additional key performance indicators (KPIs) and performance data.	VSH	March 22	Full report due for publication in March '22 will reflect this action.	Governors and other stakeholders need more detailed data to more accurately assess the effectiveness of the VS. Data should be used by Governors to provide greater challenge

					and support, and hence improve overall effectiveness.
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