



National Association of

Virtual School Heads

Looking after learning

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Virtual School Peer Review in Nottingham City.

Feedback session –

Lead Peer: Paula Sumner - AD Leicestershire

VSH: Helen Moxon –VSH Derbyshire

VSH: Sally Kelly – VSH Bromley

Diagnostic Manager: Alan Clifton - former VSH

The Process

- Outline brief from Notts City
- Application of NAVSH national business process for peer challenge in Virtual Schools (builds on LGA methodology, includes triangulation of findings)
- Receive and undertake background reading/document review/data review
- Agreed a timetable
- One and a half days interviews on line, during which we talked with over 50 people, including leaders, managers, partners, practitioners and Councillors.
- Prepare and deliver a presentation, drawing on over 80 identified strengths and areas for consideration
- Written report (within 15 working days)

NOTE

- This was not an inspection – our aim is to provide you with information to support your continuous improvement
- We can only report on what we read and heard
- In addition to the pre review reading we only spent two days in direct contact with colleagues in Notts City along with partner agencies.
- This is a snapshot at a moment in time
- We are sure that much of what we report will be familiar to you.

Scope

You asked us to consider:

- How effective is the Virtual School structure? Do the roles and responsibilities of staff enable the team to meet statutory duties to monitor, track, report and support the education of children in care?
- The Virtual School has recently implemented the ePEP. What are the potential benefits for children in Care and partners? Will the ePEP support effective, efficient and quality PEP completion for the authority's children in care?
- The Virtual School intends to change its arrangements for the distribution and monitoring of PPP; will the new arrangements enable the Virtual School to ensure its children in care are receiving funding timely and appropriately. Will effective systems be in place to enable the Virtual School to monitor the effective use of PPP to improve attainment, progress and emotional wellbeing for its children in care.
- Are the Virtual Schools 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, with minimal delay and drift?

What you told us continued

We all try to keep children at the same school. We want them to be as stable as possible.

The Virtual School team has provided excellent support during lock down.....in fact it has been easier to get their involvement.

Jasmin is an inspirational leader!

It is more beneficial to have a direct team (VS) to work with for social workers and foster carers. We know who to go to

The PPP attached to the ePEP will hopefully drive performance

The VS are very determined ..a bit like rottweilers some times

What you told us

The VS are fab

The whole Virtual School team are strong advocates for our children

Feel really supported by the Virtual School team – previously only supported during a crisis.

For children of school age in alternative provision we are setting them up to fail if we expect a smooth transition to an FE College

The unlock project is raising aspirations at KS4. I hope it can be sustained

Over-arching Observations

- There is evidence of strong and effective leadership from the VSH.
- There is a clear aspirational vision and analytical use of data.
- The Governing Body, Chaired by the Leader of the Council, with the membership including significant partners, sends a strong message on the importance of Corporate Parenting.
- The provision for UASC through NEST is strong and a strength within the local authority
- At an appropriate time look to further strengthen your published training programme with high profile conferences and multi –agency involvement. Social Care and VS as joint presenters
- Developing partnership between early years team and virtual school

How effective is the Virtual School structure?

Strengths

- Well resourced dedicated team who are well motivated.
- There are established specialisms within the team
- Partners spoke enthusiastically about the members of the team they worked most closely with. This included schools, FE providers and internally with social care.
- The line management of the VSH is unusual – it works and the VSH has strong working relationships with senior leaders across CYPS. However, working directly to an AD (education or social care) with monthly meetings with both might be helpful to formalise the strong informal working relationships.

How effective is the Virtual School structure?

Areas for Consideration

- The VS is mainly funded through DSG and this funding source may be difficult to sustain into the future. Are there contingency plans?
- Revisit involvement of the VS team based on data. When do you get directly involved in case work including those placed out of authority? How do you respond when lobbied by schools or social care colleagues?
- Ensuring staff in EY and Post 16 are enabled to meet statutory duties (transitions)
- Can more be done for the most able in your cohorts?
- Might it be helpful to create a SENCO from within current resources to help align with EHCPs and to develop links with SEND services (in and out of area)

Will the ePEP support effective, efficient and quality PEP completion for the authority's children in care?

Strengths

- The VS has absolutely made the correct decision in moving from a paper based PEP to an electronic system.
- Partners highlighted the quality of the design of the ePEP (will assist with analytics)
- The multi –agency training programme around the introduction of the ePEP has assisted with a successful transition.
- Partners universally commented that the ‘new’ system was better.

Will the ePEP support effective, efficient and quality PEP completion for the authority's children in care?

Areas for Consideration

- Early Years and Post 16 PEP arrangements could be strengthened and completed termly and should be prioritised to move the ePEP system
- The term Pathway PEP can be confusing. Our understanding is they are still separate documents in Notts City.
- Emphasise to partners that a PEP is statutory for all children in care from as soon as they start provision in the early years to post 16 until the age of 18. It is good practice to maintain planning for those in year 13 until the end of their examination year.
- Social Work teams and FE providers both indicated that PEP reports could only be generated termly on the new system. This meant it was difficult to identify outstanding PEPs, and ones that are scheduled. This may be a key to improving compliance.
- Consider the development of a QA Framework: e.g. multi agency team dip sampling of quality from aged 2 to 18. (VS, IRO, DT SW)
- Consider and confirm in guidance who will chair a PEP as there appears an inconsistency in approach, encourage all to complete preparation work for the PEP in advance

Are effective systems be in place to enable the Virtual School to monitor the effective use of PPP to improve attainment, progress and emotional wellbeing for its children in care.

Strengths

- The VS has a published policy that is shared with all partners. The new policy was developed in consultation with schools
- The policy provides helpful advice on good practice that may be effective in supporting children in your care.
- Schools are aware of the allocation of £500 per term and the process for receiving additional funding. (not allocated to independent schools)
- The VS has a generous and pragmatic view to supporting those awaiting a school place, whether this is within or outside of the local authority. Funding is provided for educational provision so a child is not disadvantaged due to delays in securing provision. (within authority delays are considered in line with, but separate to, the IYFA policy)
- Further strengthening VS representation when placement decisions are made by the local authority, so with the exception of emergency placements, education and social care are considered at the same time. This applies equally when a child has a EHCP.
- Key services are commissioned including EP time and tuition.

Are effective systems be in place to enable the Virtual School to monitor the effective use of PPP to improve attainment, progress and emotional wellbeing for its children in care.

Areas for Consideration

- The recording of the impact of PPP on the ePEP is less accessible than was previously the case with the paper model. We are aware this will be remedied this April which enable for better strategic planning of spending
- At an appropriate time it is worth considering how the VS and local authority might celebrate the best practice in the use of PPP. It could take the format of an ‘award’s evening’ or part of ‘Big it up’ It may be in the format of a report to the GB and Corporate Parenting Board. Encouraging entries to national awards is also worthy of consideration.
- Early years PEPs should be in line with all other looked-after children as soon as a child is in provision. As with other age groups look to link the EY PEP to accountability and the distribution of funding.
- Thinking strategically about the spend of EYFS funding – eg providing specialist speech and language services.
- Consider how Post-16 learners are supported

Current arrangements for tracking, monitoring and supporting children who have been excluded, are without a school place or are on part-time tables.

Strengths

- A number of services have been commissioned by the VS to support the educational progress of children in care who are out of school or who are awaiting a school place namely: Westbury; Intensive Support; Teaching Personnel and Children in Care Regulated Services
- The move to welfare call, their data suite and analytics summary provides the opportunity going forward for more detailed tracking and reporting.
- The Intensive support team have a flexible approach to working outside of Notts City an example was provided of work in Derbyshire.
- In comparison to other virtual schools the commissioned services worked with Notts City VS were described as being more involved in knowing the young people.

Current arrangements for tracking, monitoring and supporting children who have been excluded, are without a school place or are on part-time tables.

Areas for consideration

- When tuition has been provided, acknowledging the cost implications, it may be helpful to maintain contact for a short period when a young person is attending school once again.
- In liaison with the care leavers social care team more might be done with transitions. Is there VS contribution to the Notts City 18-25 plan to support young people into ETE
- Review and clarify arrangements for children placed out of county and ensure they receive equitable services
- Look to develop a **consistent** approach to analyse and use the data to track those children who are excluded/out of area/without a school place – linked to attainment and progress. (Derbyshire)

Key Recommendations

- Ensure arrangement for post 16 young people and Early Years in your care are as strong as all other cohorts.
- Ensure there is a balance between compliance and quality of PEPs as you move through this transition period.
- With the planned reduction in DSG support for the Virtual School team in future years – Explore the most effective ways to maintain staffing levels for the benefit of children in your care.

What happens next

- There is now a chance to reflect on our conclusions
- We will produce a draft report for the authority to comment on within 3 weeks
- The final version will be agreed and issued
- The council needs to provide feedback to people who contributed to the review

Thank you