

Nottingham City Virtual School

Peer Review

25-29 March 2021

Review Team

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Scope

- 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?

General Observations (strengths)

- 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 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

General Observations (strengths)

- Preparatory work for the peer review was extensive and immensely helpful in enabling the peer review team to focus its activity.
- The team received excellent co-operation and support throughout the process.
- It was evident to the team that all those we met online were interested in learning and continued development

Strengths

Area of Focus 1:

Effectiveness of the structure and roles

- The Virtual School Head provides strong and effective leadership for the Virtual School team.
- The team are dedicated and well-motivated to support the education and life chances of children and young people in care.
- There are well established specialisms within the team.
- Partners spoke enthusiastically about members of the team, this included schools and Designated Teachers, Further Education Providers and specialist 'Alternative Provision'.

Strengths

Area of Focus 1:

Effectiveness of the structure and roles

- The recent appointment of a Team Manager has provided additional support at a more strategic level for the VSH.
- The VSH has strong working relationships with senior leaders across CYPS.
- The Virtual School team is meeting all statutory responsibilities for those who are post LAC -providing appropriate support and guidance

Consideration Areas

Area of Focus 1:

Effectiveness of the structure and roles

- The Virtual School is mainly funded through DSG and this funding may be difficult to sustain in the future. It is important there are contingency plans to ensure the Virtual School team continues to be effective and thrive.
- Make more of data to inform practice. Use the data to influence decisions regarding direct intervention at a case work level.
- Consider a member of the Virtual School team acting as the 'school SENCO'

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Strengths

Area of Focus 2: Implementation of the ePEP

- Unequivocally the correct decision has been made to make obsolete a 'paper' version of the PEP and replace it with an electronic version.
- There is evidence of extensive research being undertaken before commissioning the ePEP system from Welfare Call.
- Partners spoke highly about the quality of the multi- agency training put in place to help all those involved to fully understand the capabilities of the new ePEP system.
- There is a strong administrative team who will be able to work with the new ePEP system to develop and use reporting systems to improve the compliance and quality of PEPs.

Strengths

Area of Focus 2: Implementation of the ePEP

- Social work colleagues appreciate when Virtual School team colleagues attend PEPs due to their education knowledge around target setting and being able to take a Lead role.

Consideration Areas

Area of Focus 2: Implementation of the ePEP

- The Early Years and Post 16 PEP completion and monitoring arrangements need to be strengthened.
- PEPs in all age cohorts should be completed termly.
- PEP reports can only be generated termly on the new system. This meant it was difficult to identify outstanding PEPs, and ones that are scheduled.

Consideration Areas

Area of Focus 2: Implementation of the ePEP

- Further guidance on who might Chair a PEP meeting and their role might be helpful as there appears an inconsistency in approach.
- Consider the development of a QA Framework for the PEP process.

Strengths

Area of Focus 3:

Arrangements for distributing PPP

- The Virtual School has a published PPP policy that is shared with all partners.
- The policy provides helpful advice on good practice and outlines approaches that can be effective in supporting children in your care.
- The Virtual School 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 commissioning educational provision so a child is not disadvantaged due to delays in securing provision. This support is commendable and is higher than most Virtual Schools provide nationally.

Strengths

Area of Focus 3:

Arrangements for distributing PPP

- The new ePEP system has been designed to generate impact reports on pupil premium, once fully implemented, reports will be able to consider intervention types and whether the child has subsequently met their PEP targets.

Consideration Areas

Area of Focus 3:

Arrangements for distributing PPP

- Consider how the Virtual School and local authority might celebrate the best practice in the use of Pupil Premium Plus.
- Once Early Years PEPs are included on the ePEP system it will be easier to consider the distribution of Early Years Pupil Premium Plus funding in line with all other children.
- The Virtual School Head should have a role in the distribution of Early Years Pupil Premium funding and the subsequent monitoring of impact.

Strengths

Area of Focus 4:

Arrangements for monitoring, tracking and supporting CiC.

- A number of services have been commissioned by the Virtual School to support the educational progress of children in care who lack motivation, are out of school or who are awaiting a school place.
- The commissioned services were very supportive and complimentary about the Virtual School and the members of the team.
- Delays in admission are considered in line with, but separate to, the In Year Fair Access (IYFA) policy. This approach is in line with statutory guidance which places children in care outside of IYFA approach.

Consideration Areas

Area of Focus 4:

Arrangements for monitoring, tracking and supporting CiC.

- How the Virtual School support those children placed out of area requires clarification. It is important children placed out of city receive equitable services.
- Consider how best to develop a consistent approach to analyse and use data available to track children who are excluded, out of area and without a school place.
- It may be helpful for the VSHs in the East Midlands to compare their systems and their impact in tracking the attainment and progression of those children placed out of area

Consideration Areas

Area of Focus 4:

Arrangements for monitoring, tracking and supporting CiC.

- Placement and school places should be planned at the same time whenever possible.

Main 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. Both areas require improvement.
- With the planned reduction in DSG support for the Virtual School, explore the most effective ways to maintain staffing levels for the benefit of children in your care.