

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

Committee/Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	02 October 2013
Title:	Ofsted Thematic Inspections of Virtual School and 2013 Children in Care Education Results (Provisional)
Reference:	5194
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1. Summary

- 1.1. Ofsted undertook a thematic inspection of the impact of Hampshire County Council's "virtual school" arrangements for improving the educational outcomes for looked after children (LAC) in May 2012. In effect this was an evaluation of the effectiveness of the whole of children's services in securing good education outcomes for LAC and was one of nine visits to local authorities across the country
- 1.2. The evidence gained from the visits subsequently informed the Ofsted report "The impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked after children" (Ofsted, October 2012, <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/tackling-educational-disadvantage-for-children-care-0>). This paper provides a short summary of that report and summarises Children's Services Department response.
- 1.3. Attainment of Hampshire Children in Care at Key Stage 2 (KS2) has improved in reading, writing and mathematics resulting in our best ever combined reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment at Key Stage 4 (KS4) has not improved as expected and is the same as in 2012.
- 1.4. It should be noted that these results are provisional and may be subject to change. Given the small numbers involved in each cohort any change in the cohort will have a significant impact on the data therefore these statistics need to be treated with caution. The DfE will return validated data to us sometime in December 2013.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. Nationally, and locally, the educational attainment of looked after children continues to be considerably worse than the attainment of the rest of the school-age population. To help improvement, many local authorities have chosen to appoint a virtual school headteacher (or someone with a similar title), often supported by a virtual school team. This followed an evaluation of the piloting of this approach in 11 local authorities. The virtual school approach is to work with looked after children as if they were in a single school, liaising with the schools they attend, tracking the progress they make and supporting them to achieve as well as possible.
- 2.2. "The impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked after children" examines the impact of virtual schools to support and improve the educational achievement of looked after children. The report draws on evidence from cases and from the views of carers; children and young people; professionals, including local authority managers and social workers; and representatives from schools, colleges and the voluntary sector in nine local authorities.
- 2.3. As one of the participating authorities we received verbal feedback on our practice from the inspectors and this was reported to the Care Matters Board in July 2012 in the paper "Ofsted thematic inspection of the impact of virtual schools – Hampshire". It was also reported to the Children and Families Advisory Panel in October 2012. The reports describe the inspection process.

3. Finance

- 3.1. Finance was not a specific feature of the thematic inspections.
- 3.2. There are no financial implications of the refocusing of the virtual school for the remainder of this financial year. However, it is subject to a zero based budget exercise, as part of the county council's "Transformation to 2015", in order to identify additional savings in the future.

4. Performance

- 4.1. Ofsted found that most outcomes were improving in the local authorities visited, although performance was variable from year to year. There was little evidence, however, that the gap in attainment between looked after children and other children was narrowing. Progress between Key Stages 3 and 4 was slower than during earlier Key Stages.
- 4.2. Financial constraints had resulted in several local authorities recently reducing the number of dedicated posts within the virtual school, raising concerns that continued improvement would be threatened.
- 4.3. The potential consequences of these cuts had not always been fully assessed, despite the acknowledged link between educational outcomes and other key outcomes for looked after children, such as placement stability and emotional well-being.

- 4.4. Corporate parents' depth of engagement with issues relating to the education of children in care was variable.
- 4.5. Clearly stated roles and responsibilities for virtual schools were not always evident.
- 4.6. Data management systems were of variable quality, which meant that some local authorities were not able to monitor and report on the progress of children and young people.
- 4.7. The resources of the virtual school were not always effectively targeted.
- 4.8. Inspectors saw evidence of very effective support involving the virtual school that not only made a difference to children's educational progress, but also often enhanced the stability of their placements and had a positive impact upon their emotional well-being.
- 4.9. The quality of personal education plans was variable. The best examples retained a sharp focus on educational attainment while taking into account emotional and behavioural issues. Targets were sometimes ill-defined and insufficiently tracked.
- 4.10 Children placed outside of the local authority area were less likely to receive good support from the virtual school.
- 4.11 Schools, other professionals and carers valued highly expert support and challenge from virtual school teams and from virtual headteachers who had strong leadership skills, the necessary 'clout' to be able to access resources and a high level of professional credibility.

5. Ofsted's Recommendations

- 5.1. Ofsted made several recommendations. They recommended that local authorities and their partners should:
 - Ensure that corporate parenting and governance arrangements are sufficiently able to support the virtual school while robustly holding it to account.
 - Ensure that a thorough risk assessment of the potential impact on children's outcomes is undertaken before decisions are made to reconfigure support services for looked after children's education, including reducing the capacity of the virtual school.
 - Ensure that the virtual school's roles and responsibilities are clear and that effective data management systems are in place to help target support to those children and young people who need it most.
 - Ensure that the educational progress of individual children is closely monitored as soon as they become looked after, so that the impact of care upon educational outcomes is more accurately measured and understood.
 - Implement robust protocols for the educational support of children placed outside of their own local authority area and monitor those arrangements closely; so that senior managers and corporate parents can be assured that the progress of those children is not compromised.

- Consider whether the virtual school's scope should include young people aged beyond the current statutory school age to ensure that the support needs of young people entering further and higher education are met.

Ofsted also recommended that the government should:

- Consider whether corporate parents' continued prioritisation of the education of looked after children should be protected by a statutory requirement on local authorities to establish and maintain suitably robust virtual school arrangements.

This recommendation has been taken forward and is encapsulated in clause nine of the Children & Families Bill currently working its way through Parliament.

6. Hampshire's Response

- 6.1. In light of the Ofsted report and our 2012 results the Senior Inspector Inclusion, who is also the Headteacher of the Virtual School, reviewed the practice of children's services, including the virtual school, in terms of improving the educational outcomes of LAC. A paper was presented to Children's Services Department Management Team (CSDMT) in December 2012 that summarised the findings of the review and proposed several different ways forward. CSDMT decided that we would continue to operate within the current budgets but refocus the work to the virtual school more tightly on challenging and supporting schools, social workers and carers to act in order to improve educational outcomes.
- 6.2. Immediately following the CSDMT paper the Senior Inspector Inclusion undertook additional research into the practice of the most successful authorities including the two top performing authorities, Warrington and North Tyneside. This was done through semi structured phone interviews to a set of common questions that had been sent to the virtual school head teachers in advance. This showed that much of what we do they also do but it also showed that there are lessons to be learnt.
- 6.3. This research identified the following key themes:
 - The most successful local authorities ensure that there is an unswerving focus on improving the educational outcomes of children in care and that key personnel are not distracted from this by competing priorities such as whole school improvement.
 - Resources, including staff, are configured in such a way to enable the virtual school to engage in challenging and supportive dialogue with schools and social workers to ensure they act to improve attendance at school, to improve progress and attainment. Follow-up is also prioritised.
 - Data systems are used efficiently and sufficient resource provided to maintain the data quality. This enables the virtual school to target their interventions to

support children and their challenging and supportive conversations with schools and social workers.

- The most successful virtual schools identify those interventions required by individual children and then either provide them or ensure that the school provides them via the type of dialogue described in bullet two.
- In those geographically and numerically large local authorities personnel and resources are organised into area teams. The teams have clear and unambiguous foci, related to outcomes and targets, unencumbered by competing priorities, and team leaders are held accountable by the virtual Headteacher for their performance.

7. 2013 Results

- 7.1. The 2013 results are provisional and may be subject to change. Given the small numbers involved in each cohort any change in the cohort will have a significant impact on the data therefore these statistics need to be treated with caution. The DfE will return validated data to us sometime in December 2013.
- 7.2. The results relate to the OC2 cohort of children who were in care for 12 months continuously up to the 31 March 2013 and compares their attainment with previous years. We will be able to compare our results with those of statistical neighbours and the national average following the DfE release of "Outcomes for children looked by local authorities in England, as at 31 March 2012" later this year.
- 7.3. There were 25 children in care in the Key Stage 1 (KS1) OC2 cohort. This is four more children than 2012, four fewer than 2011 and two above the seven year average.
- 7.4. The proportion of children attaining Level 2+ in Reading (80%) has increased by 13% on 2012 and is our highest to date. This should place us slightly above the national average. Results in writing (60%) increased by 8% on 2012 but remain below our previous high of 61.9% in 2011. This should place us broadly in line with the national average. Results in mathematics (80%) increased by 4% on 2012 but remain below our previous high of 81% in 2011. This should place us slightly above the national average. The number of children attaining level 2+ in all tasks has increased to 60% our highest result to date.
- 7.5. There are 40 children in the KS2 OC2 cohort; this is the same as 2012, five more than 2011 and three lower than the seven year average. Overall 67.5% of the cohort are recognised as having SEN and 17.5% of the cohort have a statement of SEN. This is down 5% on 2012.
- 7.6. Of the 40 children; 62.5% attained level 4+ (L4+) in reading (up 5% on 2012), 52.5% attained L4+ in writing (up 5% on 2012) and 60% attained L4+ in mathematics which is broadly in line with 57.5% attained in 2012. 20 children (50%) attained L4+ in all 3 subjects an improvement of 20% on 2012. This is our best "combined result" ever; however, we are likely to be no better than in line with the national average.

- 7.7. There were 107 young people in the KS4 OC2 cohort. This is our largest cohort to date with 22 more than 2012 and 18 more than the seven year average. The proportion of the OC2 cohort that attained 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English & mathematics) 9.2% was the same as in 2012. This was an increase on 2011 but remains below our high in 2010. These results are not good enough and will place us below the national average.
- 7.8. The proportion of children and young people with statements of SEN in each cohort had increased significantly in the period 2010 - 2012. This increase was sustained in 2013. Overall 81 (75.5%) young people were identified as having a special education need including 36 out of 107 young people (34%) with a statement of SEN.

8. Future direction

- 8.1. We have refocused the work of all virtual school staff.
- 8.2. The development officers now work 0.8 full time equivalent (fte) as area leads for the virtual school. They continue to work with the Senior Inspector Inclusion to use the data to track the education progress and attainment in order to intervene with schools and Children's Services Department (CSD) colleagues to challenge and support them to prioritise their work with LAC to improve education outcomes and to do whatever it takes. The area leads lead area teams consisting of up to three education welfare officers (EWOs), a manager vulnerable children, an education support worker and two virtual school inspectors (0.4 fte each).
- 8.3. The managers vulnerable children continue to ensure that all LAC have a suitable education. In addition they work with the area lead analysing performance data to identify schools they are to visit in order to challenge and support the schools to improve educational outcomes of LAC.
- 8.4. The virtual school inspectors work with the area lead analysing performance data to identify schools they are to visit in order to challenge and support the schools to improve educational outcomes of LAC. Crucially they will follow up to ensure that all actions have been completed.
- 8.5. The EWOs work with the area lead to prioritise the LAC they will focus on in order to improve their school attendance. They will also discuss the strategies and interventions that they have used and future actions.
- 8.6. The education support workers will continue to work to the direction of the managers vulnerable children usually with schools where the education placement of a LAC is in danger of breakdown
- 8.7. We will continue to review our arrangements and make any necessary changes. In so doing we will also note that in the 12 month period up to May 2012 the provision Hampshire Children's Services Department (CSD) make in terms of the education of children in care, some times referred to as the virtual school for children in care, was inspected four times by Ofsted. Initially this was through the inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children, then through the fostering and adoption inspections before finally undergoing a thematic inspection itself. Each inspection, where education

was judged or commented on, noted that the education of children in care was good. We are recognised as being well led and that we have good systems and processes in place. We know that we need to be more effective and that to be more effective we need to improve the working together of people from different backgrounds; this is improving but we are not yet where we need to be.

- 8.8. Finally, there is recognition even in the best authorities that it is extremely challenging to secure good educational outcomes for looked after children and that standards are hard to sustain. They are given to fluctuation from year to year related to the needs of individual children. Hampshire, nevertheless, has made substantial progress in the outcomes being achieved by looked after children in recent years but there is still a distance to travel, especially in secondary schools.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1. It is recommended that CFAP note the contents of this report.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes/no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes/no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes/no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

NB: If the 'Other significant links' section below is not applicable, please delete it.

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

1.1. No specific impact as a consequence of this report.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. No specific impact as a consequence of this report.

3. Climate Change:

No specific impact as a consequence of this report.

How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?