

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 JULY 2019

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF MEDWAY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director of People – Children and Adults Services

Author: Sarah Hall, Virtual Headteacher

Summary

This report outlines the work of Medway Virtual School (MVS) which is the team led by the Virtual Headteacher (VHT). The report provides an update regarding the actions that are being taken to improve the educational attainment for Medway looked-after children.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a specific duty to promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated. The authority must, therefore, give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of those children.

2. Background

2.1 Medway Local Authority has a duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked-after children (LAC). Looked-after children have often had difficult pre-care experiences before becoming looked after. The role of Medway's Virtual Headteacher (VHT) and the wider Virtual School team is to ensure these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential and be the educational advocate that parents are for others. Medway Virtual School (MVS) also provide advice and information to parents of previously looked-after children.

2.2 The purpose of MVS is to fulfil the statutory duties outlined in the February 2018 guidance "Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children - Statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018"¹. Importantly the team also support the work of Medway Council's Corporate Parenting Board, which is made up of elected members.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

The Corporate Parenting Board is an important role for the Local Authority in championing young people's needs particularly in creating a culture of young people achieving their potential especially in respect of educational attainment.

- 2.3 This team is located within Social Care - Provider Services which reports directly to the Deputy Director, Children and Adults. A key priority of the team is to ensure that the educational achievement of children looked after by the authority is seen as a **priority** by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare so that our children and young people achieve more, including partners such as schools.

3. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

- 3.1 A key statutory document that underpins this work is the Personal Education Plan (PEP) for young people. A high quality PEP will record what is working well and the next steps for improvement, it will also capture the aspirations of the pupil and consider what needs to be in place to secure these goals.

3.2 Effective PEPs:

- are a 'living', evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's experience, progress and achievement;
- inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child's wider care plan;
- linked to, but not duplicate or conflict with, information in any other plans;
- identify developmental and educational needs (short and longer term) in relation to skills, knowledge, subject areas and experiences;
- detail any support that is required or ongoing from mental health specialist support services;
- include SMART short-term **AND** long-term targets, **including progress**;
- identify actions, time scales, any additional resources;
- include behaviour management strategies;
- highlight access to effective intervention strategies;
- record expected outcomes and evidenced outcomes;

- 3.3 The PEP should track the actions being taken and the impact these have over time in closing the gap in the attainment of children in care.

- 3.4 There are statutory timelines for undertaking PEPs, these documents are reviewed termly in line with DfE statutory guidance² and these documents are reviewed three times a year. The MVS provides advice and guidance. The team are also available at every stage of the young person's progress to support the social worker and school staff. MVS prioritise attendance at PEP reviews during pupils' years of transition (KS2-KS3, KS4-KS5) alongside engaging with all schools who have a Medway looked after child on their roll. Attendance at a PEP may also be requested at any time following an invitation from the school, foster carer or social worker. This might be following a change (e.g. school place, social worker) or to consider how strategies used in one environment can be adapted for a different environment (such as between home and school).

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

3.5 There is also the opportunity to discuss any additional requirements that may be needed in order to support the young person. MVS also manage the use of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+). This is additional Government funding provided to help **improve the attainment of looked-after children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers**. It is important that interventions supported by pupil premium should be evidence-based and in the best interests of the child, however, it is not a personal budget for individual children and the VSH and schools attended by the pupils manage the wider use of funding for the benefit of the cohort. The cohort changes over the year, as children become or cease to be looked-after. In order to help plan for this MVS prepare a monthly summary to show the broad distribution of pupils, year group, special educational needs (SEN) and the movement into and out of care, enabling the MVS to track individual young people and their progress through the care and education system.

4. **Medway's Virtual School (MVS)**

4.1 Medway Virtual School consists of:

- Virtual Headteacher
- Virtual Deputy Headteacher
- Virtual School Officer
- Virtual School Practice Support Officer

4.2 MVS promotes the educational achievement of Looked after Children and previously looked after children, through a range of strategies including training (general and bespoke) advice and guidance to schools, social workers, foster carers and other professionals across Medway Council. This is in addition to tracking and analysing data and information. It also undertakes project work with pupils during the school holidays to broaden their learning experiences and encourage participation in new activities, promoting self-confidence and raising self-esteem.

4.3 The capacity within the virtual school has changed significantly over the last 9 months. In order to maximise the impact of its work the team actively seek out and develop effective partnership working in order to respond to requests for support and or advice. Key activities include improving the quality of PEPs so that targets are clearly identified and measurable and that interventions are evidenced based and appropriate. This is done through training, advice and support for those involved in this process.

4.4 Young People in care have complex needs which often stem over extended periods of time. The support that is placed around a young person in care often results in an improvement in their circumstances. However, there are times when a young person becomes un-settled even when accessing additional support. In these instances the MVS works in close partnership with all professionals to review and consider what other strategies and support could effectively be put in place to support the young person so that learning opportunities are not lost and they retain an element of consistency and routine in their lives.

4.5 MVS work with a range of multi-agency professionals both internally and externally. This is vital in securing improved outcomes for children and ensuring opportunities for improvement are created and not missed. The team utilise a range of strategies to support and promote good practice in other

services that work directly with looked after children. This could be bespoke training, attendance at professional meetings, signposting to other support services, particularly the work of the youth service, or working together to provide a wider offer. For example recent work with the Libraries team has developed into an offer that provides an opportunity for children and foster carers to access the library resources in a different setting and participate in a range of outdoor activities to develop strong family links. Earlier in the year the team secured the opportunity for secondary aged pupils, along with carers, to attend a performance of "Chelsea's Story" as part of the wider work in raising their understanding of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

- 4.6 One of the key aspects of MVS is the provision of advice and guidance. All young people are different and the needs of our young people are varied. The team's advice to those that have adopted children has to be as readily available to them as it is to colleagues and other professionals with whom MVS work. This includes how to choose the right school, what additional support is available and how can any gaps in learning be addressed. It is through quickly establishing good working relationships, informed advice, raising awareness, constantly improving practice that will secure improved outcomes for these young people.
- 4.7 Most of our pupils are educated in Medway schools. There are some young people attending Kent schools as this is often their nearest school. Any briefing or training opportunities offered to Medway schools are also made available to Kent schools that are providing an education to our children.
- 4.8 The annual report regarding the educational attainment of looked after children, which was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in January 2019, includes data from a small cohort of pupils. It is because the cohort is small that some data is redacted at publication. Appendix 1 includes information within the annual report of the VHT that does not require redaction.

5. MVS Improvement Plan

- 5.1 The current MVS Improvement Plan, Appendix 2, has provided the framework of the actions of MVS within this academic year.
- 5.2 Accelerating rates of progress is at the centre of the improvement plan and in order to achieve this pupils need to be 'ready to learn'. The foundations for this are rooted in school and pupils feeling safe so that they can respond to the learning opportunities that are available to them. This means that it is important that MVS continue to support social workers, school staff, carers and parents in securing the right school and to provide training for school staff so that children and young people thrive and achieve their aspirations.
- 5.3 The results in national assessments such as SATs and GCSE are published nationally. A pupil's performance in these assessments are influenced by a number of factors such as length of time in care, attendance over time, changes in placement and/or school and the educational options available to them. For each pupil progress is discussed and recorded on the termly PEP so that action can be taken to support the pupil in making progress in their educational attainment.

6. Latest information for the academic year 2018-19

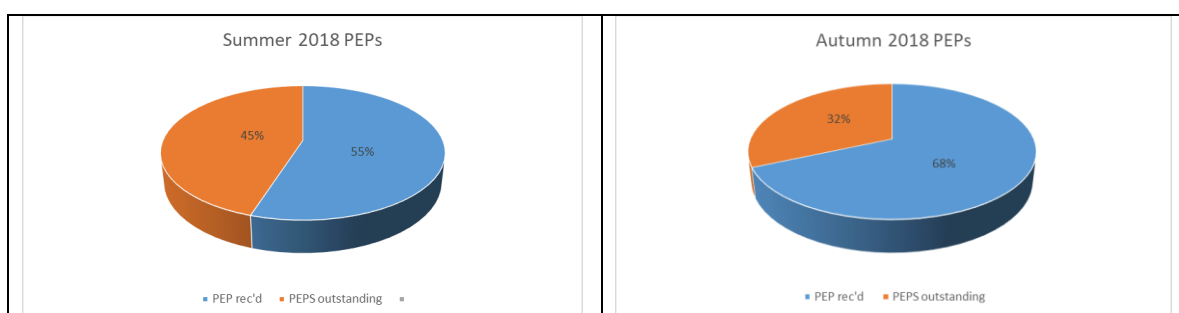
MVS profile

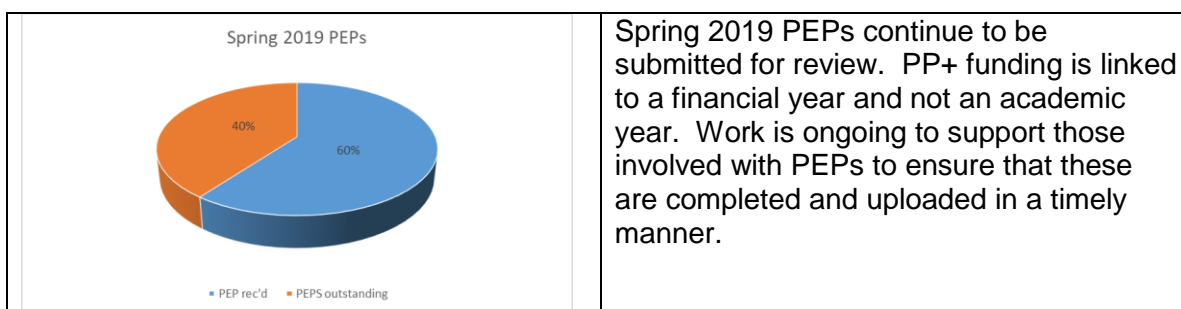
- 6.1 Data is key for the MVS to manage overall progress and highlighted areas of concern. To support this, a snapshot is taken each month of the changing school profile of MVS. The MVS headline information, as at May 2019, is detailed in the following table:

MVS 1 May '19	School aged pupils											
Phase of education	Primary School						Secondary School					
school year group	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
chronological age	age 4-5	age 5-6	age 6-7	age 7-8	age 8-9	age 9-10	age 10-11	age 11-12	age 12-13	age 13-14	age 14-15	age 15-16
Number of pupils in each year group (snapshot)	17	9	16	14	19	20	30	23	36	36	32	35

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

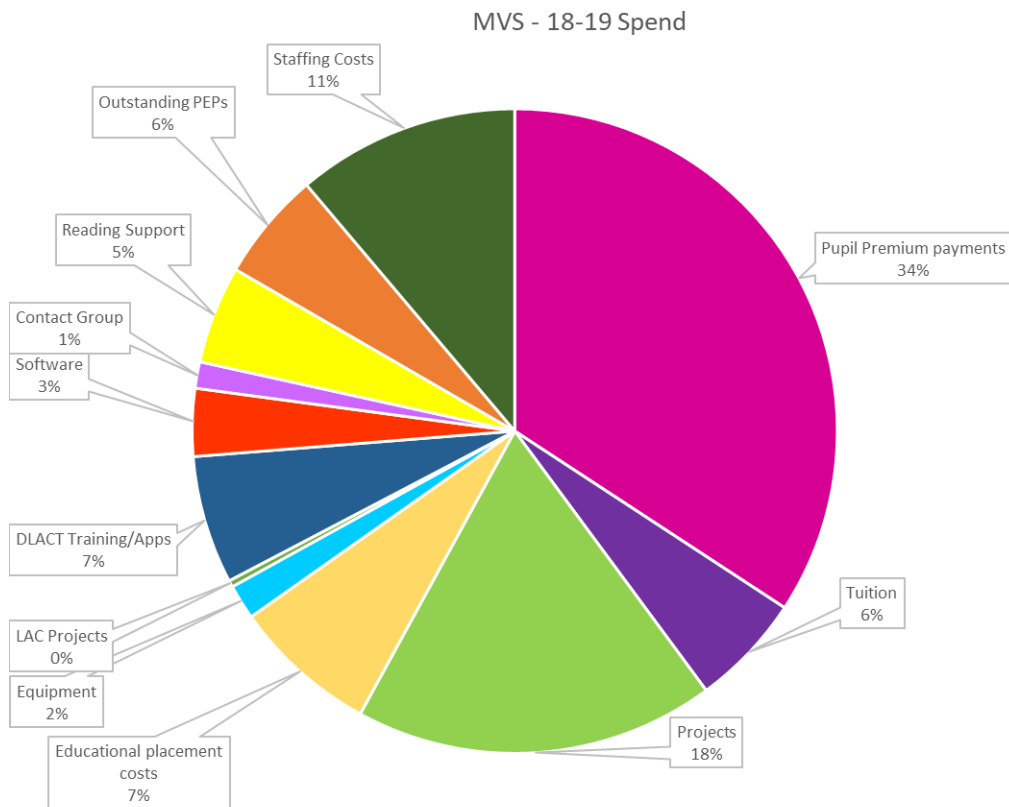
- 6.2 A revised system for tracking the progress against individual pupil targets in PEPs has been implemented at the start of the current financial year. This is analysed and used over time in order to inform training, the sharing of good practice and strengthen the cycle of improvement for young people.
- 6.3 In the last six months there has been an overall improvement in the time taken following a PEP meeting and ensuring the PEP document is available for review and resources allocated. Reports are now regularly run from Frameworkki to identify and follow up key documents and offer support where necessary. The provision of portable devices for social workers has also made a significant and positive impact as they can now upload and circulate completed PEPs at the end of individual meetings.
- 6.4 Tracking is undertaken regarding the completion of PEPs each term, covering the detail of the meeting and the completion of a PEP or the review of an existing PEP document. Whilst there have been measurable improvement, the charts below indicate the time taken for some documents to be available is a concern. The regular meetings with school, such as designated teacher for looked after children briefings, include opportunities to remind all those involved with the need to circulate completed documents as soon as possible so that applications for funding can be processed quickly and any areas of concern identified and responded to in a timely manner.





- 6.5 To help support social workers in PEP timeliness, this term (Summer 2019) a process has been implemented in response to notification of change of status to alert social worker and, where known, the school of the need to undertake a PEP. An improvement in timeliness has started to be seen as a direct result of this process. Where social workers have experienced difficulties, MVS have attended meetings, made contact with schools or, for LAC placed outside Medway, liaised closely with the local virtual school where appropriate.
- 6.6 As a result of ongoing training for schools and support for social workers the quality of PEPs continues to improve. The tracking of this is new this term (Summer 2019) and the quality of pupil targets are more outcome focused, to ensure they are SMART³. Additional training for schools, particularly in setting, tracking and evaluating progress in social and emotional aspects of development is ongoing and is expected to improve both the 'target setting' and the 'target getting' for pupils.
- 6.7 Other aspects of work include promoting training and includes a range of themes such as the education of those leaving care (immediately as a young person turns 18 years of age), the work with schools to engage teenagers who had poor engagement with education prior to coming into care, the emerging challenges in securing admission into schools outside Medway following a placement elsewhere and the provision of specialist education for those residing out of Medway.
- 6.8 In order to support the educational attainment of pupils, PP+ funding is available. In the year 2018-19 this was fully utilised and broad headlines are given in the chart below. All Medway Schools and Academies received funding to develop their work on understanding attachment. The majority of funding was directed to individual pupil level requests.

³ SMART - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely.



6.9 A key area for recent development has been working differently with the Medway schools who on average, have at least 6 pupils that are within the remit of the virtual school. This has been through the development, by each school, of funded action plan for the whole cohort (recorded as 'projects'). This has provided greater flexibility in responses at a school level through a school based plan. Initial feedback from schools has been very positive and review meetings are scheduled to inform planning for next academic year.

In year achievement of pupils

6.10 Three times a year schools are requested to submit the current attainment and progress of pupils. Key dates are end of Autumn, Spring and Summer term. The current focus on securing more rapid progress will ultimately impact on the attainment of pupils. For the attainment gap between our children in care and their peers to close their in year progress must be at least good as the vast majority of their peers are making good progress.

6.11 In the year 2017-18, Medway young people achieved improvements across Reading and Maths at KS2 but reduced in Writing at KS4. However one of the key measures and indicators for these pupils is the progress they make. Medway's progress 8⁴ value remained above national. It is important to note that with such a small cohort of pupils, measures are volatile and the proportion of LAC who have a special educational need or disability, are

entitled to free school meals and depending on the type of school they attend (i.e. Pupil Referral Unit/Grammar) will heavily impact the results.

- 6.12 The Summer 2018 data capture included responses from a very small number of schools. In the Autumn term of 2018-19 this increased to around 50% and in Spring 2019 this increased to 80%. It is also important to note there is a high degree of accuracy in Medway Schools regarding teacher assessment and this is triangulated through MVS ongoing involvement in the statutory assessments and moderation at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- 6.13 The monitoring and analysis of in year progress is used to shape the focus of support and allocation of pupil premium+ funding. It is the rate of in year progress that impacts on the overall attainment of pupils. In year analysis to date has led to focussed funding for reading in primary schools. Through reading and associated extension of vocabulary and comprehension pupils are in a position to write more effectively and interpret mathematical word problems.
- 6.14 It should also be noted that almost half of the pupils linked to Medway Virtual School have identified SEN needs and receive as a minimum additional support in school. Around 1 in 4 pupils have an EHCP.
- 6.15 The needs of our children vary greatly. There is a growing understanding in schools of the impact of trauma, attachment and the behaviours that can be displayed and how these could and should be managed. Provision of resources, funding for training and direct training through MVS and in partnership with other teams is underway, however the impact of this is not yet being seen in the in-year outcomes for pupils. Reviews are being scheduled with schools in regard to use of funding and evidence of changes in practice following training. In the first instance improvements will be seen in behaviour logs and overtime as pupils engage more fully in their opportunities for learning then progress will improve which, in turn, will impact on attainment.
- 6.16 Recording of unauthorised absence and exclusions is through the looked after call portal. Recent training for wider teams has meant that this information is also now readily available to the attendance service, Inclusion team and the Pod support Officers (PSOs) based in the area teams. Reporting will be through updates to Corporate Parenting Board in regarding to attendance, exclusions, progress and attainment within a context of a changing cohort with different needs.

In year progress (Spring 2019 data)

- 6.17 Due to the statistically small number of pupils and the distribution of their progress in each subject this has been redacted however the headline outcome regarding pupil progress is below.
- 6.18 Pupils need to make much better in year progress. There are many factors that impact on their progress and 'cohort' data does not always fully reflect the challenges that have been faced by pupils and the extent to which targets have been met.

- 6.19 Key actions are outlined in the current plan to secure improvements. Relationships with Medway Schools are improving and in the last year good links have been made with virtual schools across England. These links not only support the sharing of practice but Medway now has a presence when working as part of a wider network, often with the DfE, to consider key challenges and search for solutions.

Key actions

- 6.20 In order to support enrichment activities we have run sessions during the term breaks (February, Easter and May 2019) in partnership with Chatham Historic Dockyard and Rochester Cathedral. To date these have focused on pupils that will be transitioning to Secondary school within the next 2 years. This is a certificated programme and pupils exhibited their art work at the end of each event. Alongside this all Y6 pupils have been invited to participate in one of 2 transition projects in August 2019.
- 6.21 There is a significant focus on supporting pupils in getting ready to learn. This means that the additional support, such as through social and emotional interventions, school based counselling does not directly impact on outcomes in academic subjects such as Maths and English immediately. In order to provide additional support in this area we have worked closely with the Libraries team to strengthen links with foster carers and schools. In addition to the use of focussed and appropriate resources, 'family activities and family days' have been arranged that support family learning and promote the love of reading. This will provide further opportunities for children in care to become more familiar with every day engagement in community services and be encouraged to explore new texts which in turn, further develops their skills in reading.
- 6.22 Priority actions included the processing of old PEPs, payments to schools and developing systems and procedure. More needs to be undertaken with the development of policies now that there is a greater understanding of the practice in place and issues faced. This approach has helped establish better working relationships with the wide range of professionals in education, health and social care.
- 6.23 Monthly profile of the school has been developed and continues to be refined; key headlines are discussed at the monthly meeting.
- 6.24 A governing body has been established, going forward membership will include headteachers and other professionals and will be operational at the start of term in September.
- 6.25 Training has been commissioned and delivered for schools. This has targeted a wide range of school staff from newly qualified teachers, senior leaders and governors to teaching assistants and family support workers. Regular briefings for designated teachers have been established which also provide the opportunities for workshops, surgeries and considerations for further training.
- 6.26 Links with other virtual schools and authorities who have children resident in Medway and attending Medway schools have been established so that schools are further supported when working with other agencies. The

educational outcomes of these pupils is included in the internal and published Medway data set for all pupils.

- 6.27 Support for social workers continues to develop and the location of MVS in Provider Services and the area teams has ensured that this is more effective.
- 6.28 On-going work with other teams, particularly Inclusion, Admissions, AASSA service and educational psychologists has meant there is a much greater understanding of the needs of these children across Medway Council. Work with key heritage partners has also developed so that children can access other areas of learning (as detailed above).
- 6.29 MVS are quickly involved in the discussion around any child or young person that is looked after and at risk of exclusion. This is not yet as established when a change of school is being considered. A process is being developed through which the voice of the child alongside the views and considerations of the wide range of professionals is considered to enable the social worker, acting as the corporate parent, to make an informed decision.
- 6.30 More recently MVS have begun to attend the weekly Access to Resources Panel (ARP) and are readily available to support colleagues and other professionals and attend multi-agency meetings where MVS involvement is required.
- 6.31 Where possible opportunities are taken to engage pupils and families in additional learning and other opportunities through working with the library team, national research projects and providing advice and signposting to all those working with carers and families. We are in the early stages of our involvement in a research project with the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: Reading Together: Improving Reading Outcomes for Children in Care, focussing on children aged 7-9years. The recent meeting with Libraries has brought together an opportunity to work with 0-5 year olds and reading over 4 sessions. Not only will this be available for foster carers but it is expected that this too will be an offer for care leavers with children of this age.

Priorities, limiting factors and remaining challenges

- 6.32 A key question raised during the consideration of any action or project to be undertaken is 'how will this impact on educational outcomes for children in care'. The gap in attainment between children and young people who are looked after and their peers will only close if their rates of progress is accelerated and is accelerate to the extent it is 'more rapid than their peers'.

Priorities	Limiting Factors
<p>Secure accelerated progress for children and young people (all phases of education); <i>challenge, support and provided CPD to ensure children and young people are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>in the right school,</i> • <i>receiving the right support</i> <p><i>and can</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>respond well to the opportunities offered to them so that they make good or better progress</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • placement moves requiring school changes • time taken to secure admission to a new school • belongings regulations for those with EHCP and living outside Medway • time taken following an Ofsted Inspection for publication of report - if a school changes Ofsted

	<p>category a risk assessment may be required to consider any further support for pupils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capacity to support care leavers / education and training
<p>Improve the quality and impact of PEPs so that these are meaningful documents that make an effective contribution to the wider care plan of each individual through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Training for staff (1-1, team)</i> • <i>Implement tracking for completion of PEPs</i> • <i>Improved quality and effectiveness of targets</i> • <i>involvement in induction and ongoing training – area training, foundations of practice, 1-1 support</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity for ongoing support given increasing demographics across Medway.
<p>Improved attendance and reduced exclusions so that pupils spend more time receiving quality first teaching</p> <p><i>secure early intervention to support pupils and schools through attendance and participation in targeted PEP discussions; ensure any early signs are acted upon to address attendance and behaviour input into School Support Group (SSG) for every child that is looked after (Medway or other) / SGO / previously looked after cross team group now established and meet and identify monthly the NEET, at risk of NEET once 16 (e.g. those who are choosing not to attend school)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involvement of MVS at early alerts • MVS / social care capacity to challenge any authorised absence • different admission arrangements for every local authority, emerging issue with communication with some Kent schools • full consideration of education (including specialist provision) at time of placement • changes in placement resulting in requirement to change school (distance)

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Provision of resource	The majority of staffing costs are met through pupil premium + funding. Spending plans beyond 2019-20 will be set at the next Spending Review	Continue to upskill teams across the council and partners to understand the needs of and champion the outcomes for looked after children
Current information systems used by the education services and social care are different and are not linked	The potential for information held on the different systems is not always the same or complete, for example if an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has been issued to a looked after child resident in another local authority	Where discrepancies are found the relevant teams are notified. Systems team and IT will be fully involved in planning for ePEP

Support for care leavers	Within this year there has been additional focus on supporting the education of care leavers which has stretched the capacity of MVS	Partnership working established with leaving care manager, data team and information and guidance team to maximise opportunities for advice and support and avoid duplication
Capacity within the MVS	Provision within the virtual school has been significantly enhanced this year however this follows a period of time where there was reduced staffing -only 1 member of the team – who was also new role to role	Maximise opportunities for partnership working, develop more resilient systems and practice to avoid any drift or delay at times of change
Placement stability	Stability of placements within a national context of shortage of placements and subsequent challenge when trying to secure admission to school	Partnership working with Admissions, SEN team and other virtual headteachers to minimise any time out of school
Access to appropriate support	Access to therapeutic support in school, through the health service alongside the national recognition of mental health needs and the availability of support; without which pupils find remaining in school far more challenging	Close liaison with lead designated nurse, specialist education provision, inclusion team and schools to maximise support and training opportunities for staff to support pupils

8. Implications for Looked After Children

8.1 All aspects of the work of MVS directly link to improved outcomes for looked after children or care leavers.

9. Financial implications

9.1 Funding for Medway Virtual School in 2018-19 was drawn from £40k higher needs funding, £30k grant funding for additional responsibilities with the remainder drawn from pupil premium + grant.

9.2 There are no specific financial implications as a result of this report however funding for pupil premium+ will be part of the consideration in the next spending review.

10. Legal implications

10.1 Amended s22 of the Children Act 1989 to require every local authority to make sure that its duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children is properly discharged.

10.2 The Statutory Guidance February 2018 also sets the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under 23ZZA of the Children Act 1989 (added by section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017) to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children. Local authorities are required to appoint an officer employed by the authority, or another authority, to make sure that its duty to promote their educational achievement is properly discharged.

11. Recommendation

11.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

Lead officer contact

Sarah Hall, Virtual Headteacher, Medway Council,
Tel: 01634 338566 Email: sarah.hall@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – MVS Annual Report academic year 2017-8

Appendix 2 – 2018-19 action plan

Background papers

Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local authorities” February 2018

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>)

Key Corporate Parenting principles outlined in The Children and Social Work Act 2017:

(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted>)

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 – Regulation 10, avoidance of disruption in education.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/959/contents/made>