Report to :	**EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD**
Date :	27 March 2018
Reporting Officer:	Bob Berry, Assistant Director, Learning
Subject :	**THE WORK OF TAMESIDE VIRTUAL SCHOOL**
Report Summary :	The following report outlines the role of the Virtual School in Tameside and shares the priorities for the summer term 2018
Recommendations :	That the board note the content of the report
Links to Sustainable Community Strategy :	The report supports three elements of the Community Strategy - Prosperous, Learning and Supportive Tameside.
Policy Implications :	There are none arising from this report.
Financial Implications : (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	There are no financial implications arising from this report.
Legal Implications : (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	It is important that the Local Authority ensure that they fulfil all their statutory obligations in relation to the education achievement of looked after children.
Risk Management :	There is a risk of our looked after children not achieving their potential if statutory functions are not carried out.
Access to Information :	The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Amanda Aylward, Virtual School Headteacher
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	🌐✉ e-mail: amanda.aylward@tameside.gov.uk

1   BACKGROUND

1.1   It is a statutory responsibility of every local authority to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. The Virtual School helps the Council to discharge this responsibility and promote the progress and attainment of young people in care by supporting and challenging the educational settings they are in to ensure they can achieve outcomes comparable to their peers. The Virtual School reports its work to the Tameside Corporate Parent Group and members include elected members and senior officers of the Council.

1.2   The Virtual School Team is a small team consisting of:

Headteacher:	Amanda Aylward
Specialist Intervention Teacher:	Sarah Hall
Finance and Information Officer:	Philip Allen
SEND Caseworker:	Hecabe DuFraisse

1.3   Currently, the service is recruiting an Education Welfare Officer who will work to monitor the attendance of our Looked After Pupils.

2   DATA

2.1   The latest LAC in figures (as of 6 March 2018) are:

Looked After Children	610
Eligible for a Personal Education Plan	437
Number attending in borough schools	334
Number attending out of borough schools	103
Number with EHCP	74

2.2   Pupils eligible for a Personal Education Plan are those in compulsory education, early years or post 16 education. Children who are placed out of borough are often placed due to specific needs or challenges not all of which will be educational. The out of borough placements are more likely to cater for children with more complex needs and be of a residential nature. This can lead to more issues as the service is unable to offer support and training in the same way as it can for in borough schools.

2.3   Attainment Data 2016-2017

	Virtual School			
EYFS	**In borough only**	**All LAC**	**All pupils in Tameside 2017**	**National 15/16***
Cohort	<10	-	3083	
% of EYFS LAC achieving a GLD	44%	-	66%	N/A
Phonics				
Total number of Y1 Phonics LAC	20	24	3038	
Percentage of Y1 Phonics LAC working	40%	46%	69%	N/A
KS1				
Cohort:	14	19	3136	
Percentage at Reading EXS+	57%	63%	72%	50%
Percentage at Writing EXS+	64%	68%	65%	37%
Percentage at Maths EXS+	64%	68%	72%	46%
KS2				
Cohort:	24	28	2745	
Percentage at RWM EXS+	29%	29%	60%	25%
Average Progress in Reading	-1.6	-1.3	-0.2	-0.5
Average Progress in Writing	-0.8	-1.1	0.3	-1
Average Progress in Maths	-0.8	-0.7	0.2	-1.3

2.3 As can be seen in the table above, the Tameside primary age cohort in 2016/17 did well when compared to national data.

Group	All pupils	LAC National 2016*	National all pupils 2017
Cohort	**43**		
Attainment 8	**22.9**	22.8	46.4
Progress 8	**-1.44**	-1.14 (-0.64 state funded only)	-0.03
% 9-4 in Eng & mat	**14.0%**	17.5%	64%
% 9-5 in Eng & mat	**9.3%**	-	43%
% Any pass	**74.4%**	-	97%

* figures for grade 4+ in E&M and Ebacc grade 4+ in E&M are based on A*-C in E&M in 2016 and are not a direct comparison

2.4 Our secondary cohort compared really well with the national average but attainment remains a focus for the Virtual School.

2.5 This data is for pupils in attendance at the Virtual School in 2016/17. Figures may differ slightly to those soon to be released (28th March) due to national data being a snapshot in time. A full comparison will be provided at a future meeting and reported to the Corporate Parenting Group.

3 PERSONAL EDUCATION PLANS (PEPS).

3.1 A Personal Education Plan is formulated and updated following a termly meeting held with the young person in their school setting with their social worker, carers and any representatives from agencies who may also be supporting them. The purpose of the PEP is to ensure the young person has a voice that is clearly documented around their educational aspirations and where they feel they are achieving well or may need some additional support.

3.2 The format of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) for our young people has recently been redesigned to make it more data rich and user-friendly. It requires clear evidence of how

Pupil Premium+ funding is allocated to improve the educational outcomes for the young person and the impact this is having.

3.3 All PEPs are read and quality assured by Head of Virtual School. If they do not demonstrate an appropriate amount of information or suitable interventions, the service will contact the school and challenge the information inviting them to revisit provision for the young person.

3.4 For some time, the data for returning PEPs has been low but it is now improving for in borough schools as illustrated below:

	2017/18			2016/17		
	Term 1	Term 2*	Term 3	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
In borough	75%	37.50%		67%	79%	72%
Out of borough	40%			46%	40%	49%

*Still receiving documents

3.5 Part of the reason for the low return rates has been the lack of clarity around process and systems and clearly, work needs to be done with out of borough schools to ensure PEPs are completed but this is more difficult as distance can be an issue as well as establishing relationships with staff in schools. Increasing PEP completions has been a focus for the service and the Head of Virtual School is leading the work to ensure we meet a target of 100% by Autumn term 2018. This is being done by:

- Redesign of PEP document to make it more user friendly (**Appendix 1**)
- Closer partnership working with Heads of Services for LAC and Child Protection
- Training for Designated Teachers
- Training for Social Workers
- Improved tracking data reports created

4 PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS FUNDING

4.1 For the 2017-18 financial year, there is a notional allocation for looked after children of £1900 per pupil. This funding is available for all looked after children who have been in care of at least one day in year groups Reception to 11.

4.2 The Head of the Virtual School is responsible for distributing the Pupil Premium Plus payments to schools and academies. This means that the schools who have LAC pupils on roll from other local authorities will receive the funding from the 'corporate parent' authority for the child.

4.3 The Head of the Virtual School is responsible and accountable for making sure that there are effective arrangements in place for allocating Pupil Premium Plus funding to benefit looked after children. Pupil Premium Plus must be used to improve outcomes and close the gap as identified in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) in consultation with the Designated Teacher for the school. How the funding is to be spent will be discussed during the child's Personal Education Planning meeting but must be used efficiently and effectively. Pupil Premium Plus funding is allocated on a termly basis following submission of an updated PEP.

4.4 Many schools are very imaginative in their use of Pupil Premium Plus funding to help LAC pupils close the gap for example, using alternative provision at a farm to engage pupils in outdoor learning and building relationship; schools have commissioned Lego therapy for some of our younger pupils; engaging 1:1 mentors to provide bespoke emotional support in schools and 1:1 tuition for English and Maths booster sessions
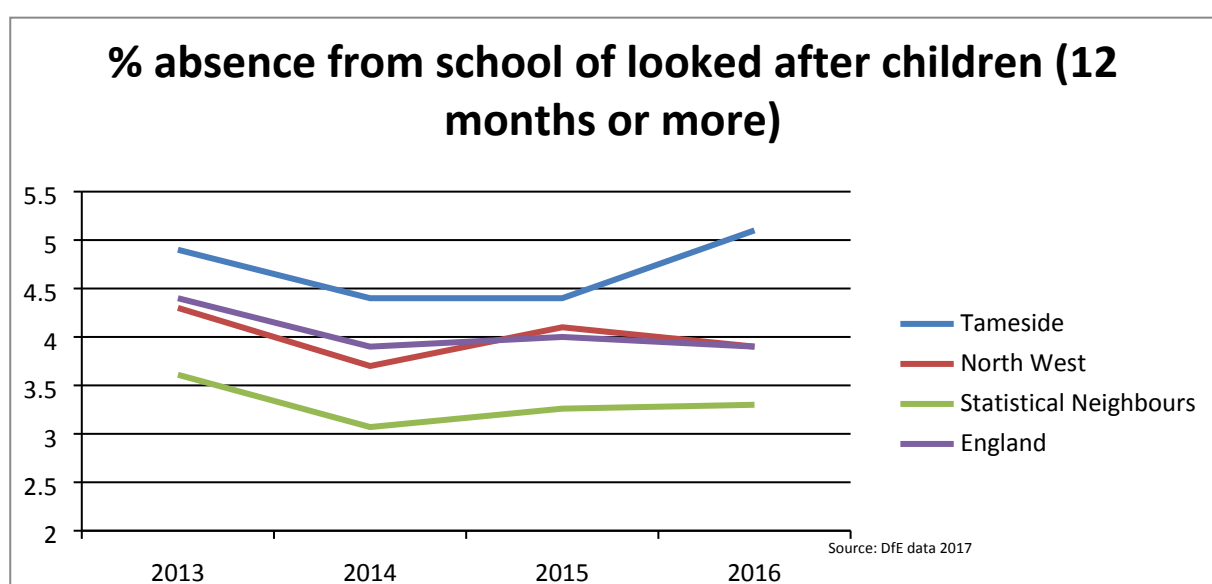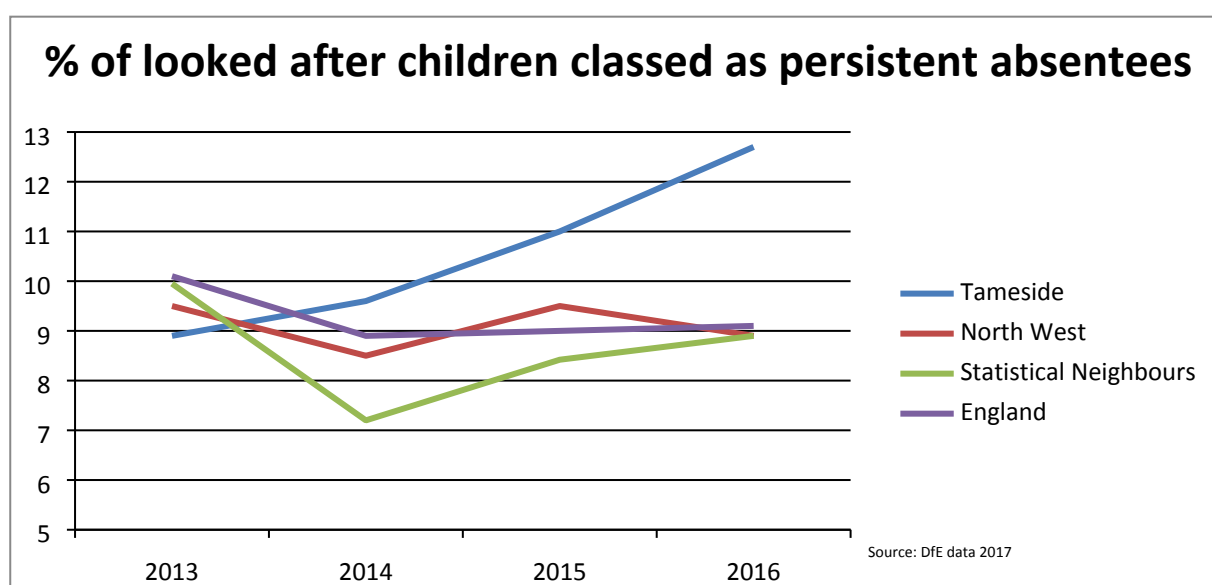
4.5   For 2018/19, Pupil Premium Plus funding will increase to £2,300 per year per pupil.

5   TRACKING OF ATTENDANCE

5.1   The current tracking of attendance for LAC is not as robust as the service would like it to be and it has identified this as an area for action in the summer term.

5.2   There is no question that improving attendance of our LAC pupils has to be a focus. The most recent national data shows that persistent absence and overall absence amongst our pupils is increasing and this needs to be addressed. Persistent absence is now defined as pupils missing 10 or more per cent of their own possible sessions. This changed from 15% before September 2015.

5.3   The persistent absence rate for all children in state funded provision using the new definition is 9.8% in Tameside; 10.8% in the North West; 11.79% in statistical neighbours and 10.5% across England.

% of looked after children classed as persistent absentees

Source: DfE data 2017

% absence from school of looked after children (12 months or more)

Source: DfE data 2017

5.4   The service is commissioning a new data package which will track all our young people in a "live" data system so that at any time we will know exact figures and be able to raise

concerns with schools in a more timely way. The aim is for this to be in place for the new academic year and it is expected to have an immediate impact.

5.5   The service is recruiting an Education Welfare Officer this term with a specific brief to track and improve attendance of our pupils which will need a multi agency response to have an impact.

6   MONITORING OF KEY GROUPS

6.1   The service has identified several key groups, those being:

- Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Year 6 and 11 pupils
- Pupils attending the Pupil Referral Service
- Out of borough educational placements

6.2   There is a weekly meeting with the SEND team and Virtual School to monitor LAC pupils with SEND. This allows the service to ensure that pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan are having their needs met appropriately through their plan and also pupils who have additional learning needs are being assessed appropriately and put forward for an EHCP if one is required.

6.3   The service ensures that Year 6 and 11 pupils have additional tracking in preparation for their SATS and GCSE examinations. Additional funding can be made available for tutoring, revision materials or laptops for pupils in these key groups upon request and evidence of need. Tracking is done through weekly Virtual School team meetings.

6.4   There is a monthly meeting with the Principal of the Pupil Referral Service to ensure vulnerable students are receiving a quality alternative education with appropriate support. There are also discussions around reintegration work to ensure pupils can move back to mainstream places and be appropriately supported.

6.5   The service has also identified further key groups to be tracked:

- **Independent specialist provisions attached to children's homes**. The service needs to ensure that the expectations and the quality of academic work being delivered in these provisions is as good as it can be and this work is planned to begin on this area in the summer term.
- The service intends to identify a **high achieving student cohort** and Higher Education programmes to be developed in conjunction with colleagues in local universities.
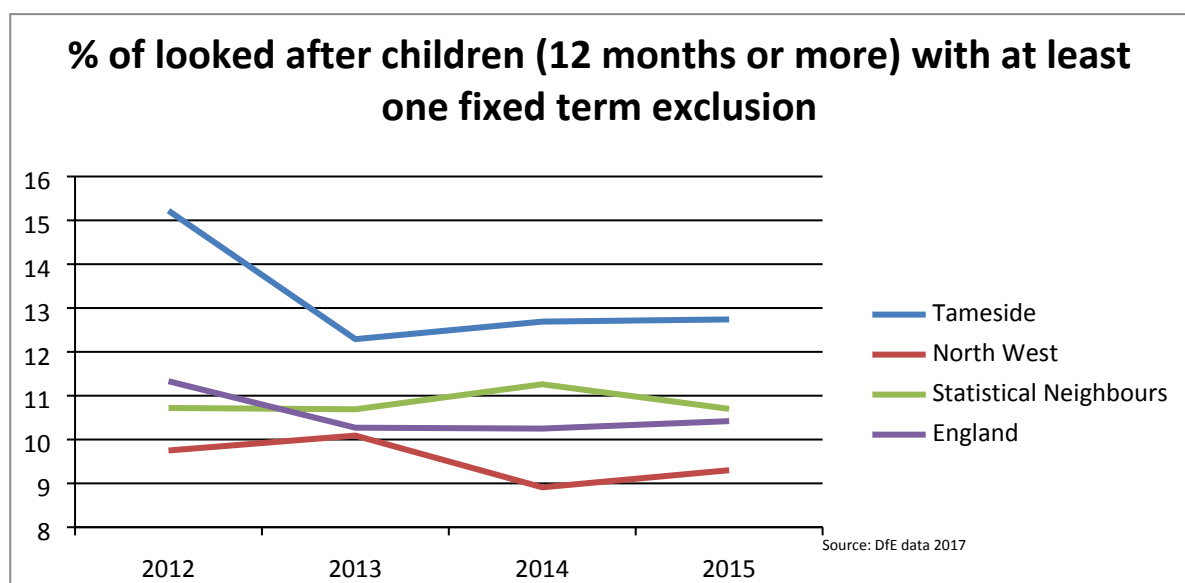

7   EXCLUSIONS

7.1   Whilst the level of permanent exclusions is a concern in the borough, there have been no permanent exclusions of LAC pupils this academic year.

7.2   There have been some behaviours which may have resulted in a permanent exclusion but the service has established a close relationship with the Pupil Referral Service where we work together to ensure a Looked After Child is not permanently excluded if at all possible. This is due to potential complex issues for a looked after child which we do not want to exacerbate with another rejection of a permanent exclusion.

7.3   The PRS and Virtual School work together to ensure that appropriate provision is put in place immediately for our young people. We have pupils who are in alternative provisions

where they are concentrating on completing their GCSE work but really cannot cope with working in larger environment, pupils who need a more active or vocational education route or in exceptional cases we have tutors commissioned to go into children's homes to ensure they are still receiving some education specifically tailored to them.

7.4 Working with the SEND team is another way in which we avoided a permanent exclusion for pupils. The SEND team worked closely with the service to identify when respite learning may be appropriate enabling an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment to take place quickly through a place at a specialist provision prior to finalising an EHCP. Collaborative working between services is the key to young people being placed in appropriate provisions.

7.5 Where there has been a one off incident which may have resulted in a permanent exclusion some secondary schools are working closely with me to look at alternatives that don't undermine their usual behaviour policy but takes into account the crisis period the looked after child may be living through. These have included successful managed moves, respite time from the school (short period of time at an alternative provision where behaviour issues can be looked at intensely), additional mentoring time funded by the Virtual School within the school setting, joint school placement with a midweek respite alternative provision, partnership working with Tameside College.

7.6 The level of fixed term exclusions for LAC pupils who have been looked after for a period of at least 12 months is high as shown in the table below:


7.7 The new Education Welfare Officer postholder will have a brief to monitor levels of fixed term exclusions and to flag up schools that exclude pupils at a high rate to the Virtual School team. This will lead to work with the schools to address the issues underlying the need for fixed term exclusions.

8 PUPILS WITH SEND

8.1 The Virtual School has a designated SEND case worker for Looked After Children. This role ensures that there is no drift or delay in gathering evidence or necessary paperwork for our Looked After Children when applying for an EHCP. We have currently 74 LAC who have an EHCP which is 16.9% of the LAC pupil population, a much higher percentage than in the total Tameside pupil population where the figure is 1.6% and an England average of 2.8%.

8.2   The graph below shows that the percentage of LAC pupils in Tameside with an EHCP is low compared to other comparator authorities.

% of looked after children who have a statement of SEND/EHCP

Source: DfE data 2017
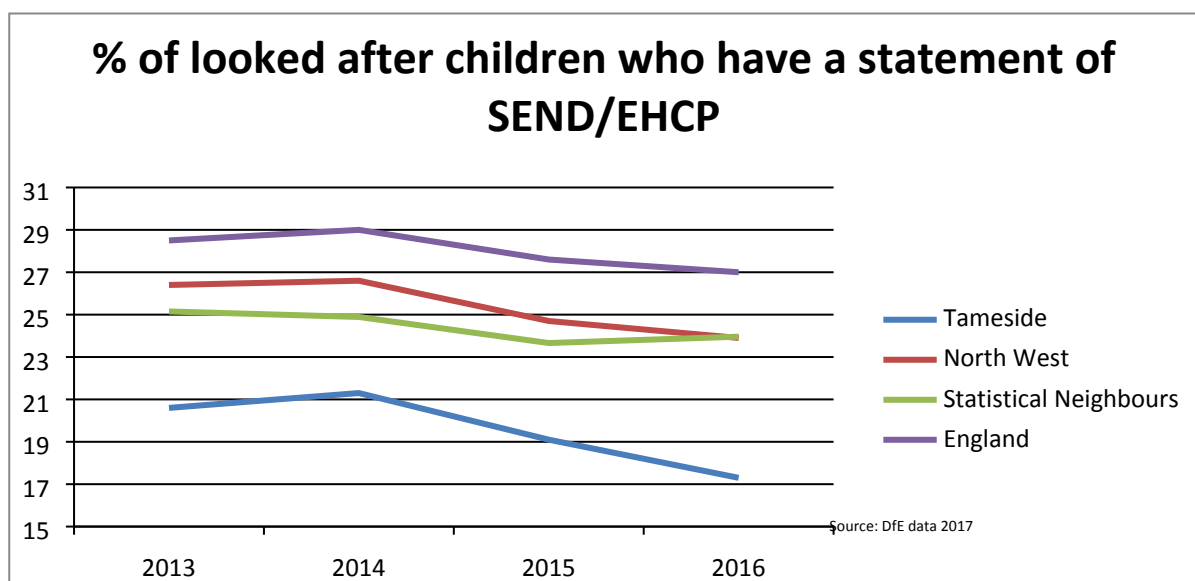
8.3   This appears to mirror a finding from the local area self assessment of children with SEND that was conducted in 2017. This identified a potential under identification of need in the borough as the number of pupils with an EHCP is significantly lower than may be expected.

8.4   In order to address this for our LAC pupils, since September 2017, the Virtual School has introduced an SEND triage system for children when they become Looked After. An email is sent to the current school and Tameside SEND service as soon as we are alerted that a child has become LAC to see if there are any current or past SEND or whether there is some suspected undiagnosed SEND. This information is shared in a twice monthly meeting with Virtual School Head, SEND Caseworker and SEND Manager to triage the information and ensure that the young person does not progress through their journey within the care system with any undiagnosed Special Educational Needs.

9   **COLLABORATIVE WORKING**

9.1   The service is dependent on a multi-agency approach to ensure that our looked after pupils make the progress they should in school. Staff within the Virtual School are involved in the following networks:

- Member of Tameside Association of Secondary Headteachers – enables networking with secondary Heads with particular reference to LAC pupils and to keep up to date with latest developments and changes in the secondary phase
- Attendance at fortnightly placement panel meetings with children's social care – ensures education is considered when a child moves placement
- Attendance and contribution to Schools Child Protection Network – there is often an overlap between the safeguarding lead and the designated teacher in schools so this is a good opportunity to contribute to this forum
- Attendance at all North West Regional Virtual Heads Meetings – ensuring a network of colleagues and providing training opportunities for Tameside designated teachers
- Greater Manchester Higher network – providing opportunities from a network of Universities for our learners including Manchester University, MMU, Salford and Bolton Universities.
- BookStart reading programme – to ensure new literacy opportunities provided to schools are prioritised to LAC

- Member of National Virtual Head teachers Association – to be aware of National updates including legislation
- Attend the DfE national Boarding School partnership – a new opportunity that has arisen that will share information from a pilot in the South of England in conjunction with the DfE
- Attend Adoption Panels as appropriate – collaboration and professional development with children's social care
- Report to the Corporate Parent Group – a comprehensive report by the Virtual School to council leaders is provided at every meeting to ensure effective governance for the Virtual School
- Attend LAC care leavers apprenticeships and work experience meetings – regular collaboration with these colleagues to ensure opportunities for LAC are prioritised and appropriate
- Positive Steps – regular meeting with the area's information, advice and guidance provider to ensure Key Stage 4 LAC are on appropriate pathways and receiving correct guidance for post 16 opportunities

10   PRIORITIES FOR SUMMER TERM 2018

10.1   The Virtual School has identified the following priorities for summer term 2018:

- To ensure the number of completed PEPs increased to meet a target of 85% working towards 100% by Christmas 2018 through direct work with schools and social care colleagues
- Focused tracking of Year 6 and Year 11 pupils to ensure appropriate targeted support for pupils sitting SATs and GCSE examinations is identified and provided
- Improve attendance rates for looked after pupils through commissioning of attendance monitoring data package and recruitment of Education Welfare Officer

11   RECOMMENDATION

11.1   That the board note the content of the report