

Children's Corporate Parenting Board – 27th July 2023

Report of the Corporate Parent Board

Dudley Virtual School Post 16 Programme

Purpose of report

1. This report covers the work carried out by the Virtual School integrating the DfE Pilot Project with the existing offer to inform future developments.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:

That the Children's Corporate Parent Board have a summary of the development of the Post 16 offer from the Virtual School.

Background

3. The Virtual School were awarded a grant from the DfE for the Post 16 pilot to develop an offer over the academic year of 2022 – 2023. This aimed to create a strategic platform for the enhancement of educational provision and help inform the wider 'system' to refine processes, offers and interventions for the CiC cohort. It will also provide potential for supporting the wider needs of vulnerable groups including Children with Social Workers and those with SEND. This would contribute towards:

- Raising the profile of CLA/CLs in FE by strengthening close working relationships.
- Improving the attendance of young people in FE.
- Better supporting the delivery of Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
- Identifying models of good practice used by LAs across the country.

The proposed model for Dudley was to work in partnership with both Dudley and Halesowen Colleges and forge connected links with training providers to ensure learning, training and employment pathways are available for all Post 16 children in care (CiC). This programme was to ensure that each individual was supported by, subject to need, a range of enhanced development offers including:

- Pastoral support
- Creative Mentors
- Post 16 Professionals Forum (College, Social Care, Health, Family Solutions,)
- Mental Health First Aid Lead/DSL
- Academic Tutors

The Post 16 workforce was to be supported by a range of initiatives including:

- The Virtual School Designated Teachers offer has integrated Post 16, apprenticeships and university pathways into its calendared training programme.
- Post 16 Professionals Forum will ensure that greater consistencies of approaches are achieved enhancing the access to, and progression through the full range of courses.
- An established CPD programme for the wider Virtual School team to develop a good understanding of Post 16 courses and training.
- A Post 16 Workforce Conference.

Sub-Headings

4. The Post 16 cohort needs to be considered over a three, and sometimes four-year period. There are a number of young people who take longer to navigate their Post 16 pathway due to such issues as mental health problems, changes in educational placements during secondary education, breakdown of residential placements etc – all adversely affecting the continuity of their education. This can, and does lead to disengagement, underachievement in outcomes, a lowering of aspirations and enrolment on inappropriate courses.

The programme that has been boosted by the DfE Grant has strengthened the work between the Virtual School and the two colleges of Dudley and Halesowen. This has included direct discussions between the individual Principals, their Senior Leadership Team (SLT) leads, key staff and the Virtual School Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher.

The introduction of the Post 16 Professionals Forum has involved:

- SEND representation
- Skills Training
- Juniper Training
- Providence
- Country Treks
- Connexions
- Colleges (In & Out of Borough)

This group has allowed a wider understanding around identifying the lack of provision and who is available to pursue the courses. It has helped to identifying training needs and has been able to focus on Transition (Year 11 to 12, 12 to 13, 13 to 14), clarified the agreed processes for the distribution of the Post 16 Bursary. Furthermore, it has allowed a more consistent approach to the 40-day rule, helping progression routes to be identified.

The review and refinement of the current workforce allowed an expansion of the mentoring available to the young people in college settings. There are 51 CiC in total attending Dudley College. The 11 Dudley students are linked directly to a Mentor and this was made available to CiC from other Local Authorities. This has made an enormous contribution to the stability of those learners. The close partnership of the work with the virtual school means there have been regular and thorough discussions about young people's needs. This too has created more effective links with Carers, Social Workers and the Young People and put in support based on need and to maintain the stability of engagement with the programme. The Virtual School and Mentor have agreed a format of reporting which allowed all services to record and support each other in maintaining the student engagement with their chosen subjects including Maths and English. This has been different from previous mentor engagement with the Virtual School leading and monitoring the issues, the outcomes, and the sharing of information with other professionals and recording in PEP documents, the elements that need support. This has ensured that the retention at Dudley College this academic year was 100%.

There are 61 CiC in Halesowen College. They have a slightly different pastoral system from Dudley, and there has been an increase in those personnel being invited to PEP Meetings.

The 'Smashlife' programme launched with 7 young people (5 Dudley, 2 from other VS). The programme has grown over the weeks with 35 young people engaged to date. This has raised awareness of Social Worker, participation and across the college teams.

The project has run across ten sessions covering the following areas:

Session 1 - "Getting to know you"

Session 2 - "It's you against you"

Session 3 - "Prada or Primark" The importance of budgeting

Session 4 - "Music and Me" - "How music saved me" – Talk from Matt

Session 5 - Cooking on a budget

Session 6 - "Using your past as fuel" - "Proving the doubters wrong"

Session 7 - "The world of work"

Session 8 - The Great Outdoors - The importance of OUTDOORS on your mental health

Session 9 - Evaluation - Self Reflection - Giving Back

Session 10 - Talk from another care experienced person

This programme has enabled a lot of learning across the whole system, with a strong reflection around not what was expected, being the most intensive learning curve on what staff thought they knew and what they actually learnt. There were a number of key strands emerging from the young people's engagement with the programme including:

- Our YP don't want to be given any special concessions.
- CV's could be much better but they feel they lack direct evidence of skills.
- Basic Knowledge of being able to deal with life skills issues e.g. cars (buying, insurance, maintenance).
- Interview skills/confidence and making the most of the opportunity to impress employers.
- Building up and evidence my learning.
- Where does my food come from? (allotments)
- How to plan and cook on a budget we managed 8 meals for £20 that were healthy and nutritious, freezable, energy efficient, tips and hacks.
- Knowing and Understanding:
 - cuts of meats and fish and how to cook them.
 - getting a bargain/smart shopping.
 - Introduction to a whole range of vegetables and fruits.
 - how to buy seasonally.
- Banking, ISA's, APR, Savings
- How to upcycle furniture, making soft furnishings, repurposing, making my home clean, attractive and safe. Flat pack – how to.
- Managing friendships, keeping my tenancy safe, reconnecting with family
- Cheapest travel and how to plan a journey travelling safely travel insurance.
- Education planning my next steps (life long learning).
- Community Mapping - hobbies, clubs, local groups, sports opportunities
- De-escalation techniques, dealing with trick social situations, going out and keeping safe.
- Being a 'Good Parent' skills set in basic childcare, reality of being a parent roles and responsibility and costs.
- How to complete forms effectively knowing how to seek help and guidance.
- How do we convey what we have learnt and share with people who can help us?
- Coping with leaving care and the pressures that seem to come together with our educational journey timelines.
- Increasing knowledge and engagement with the adults that support us as corporate parents.

It is this learning that has enabled the Virtual School to help develop the offer. This has resulted in a number of key initiatives being planned and delivered.

One young person has been engaged in two information films, professionally recorded and produced. One of these films was entirely under his direction and has been featured in professional development conferences.

The Virtual School also hosted a Post 16 Conference for professionals across the phase at Halesowen College with over 80 delegates signed up. This featured keynote presentations from Steve Russell and Lisa Cherry.

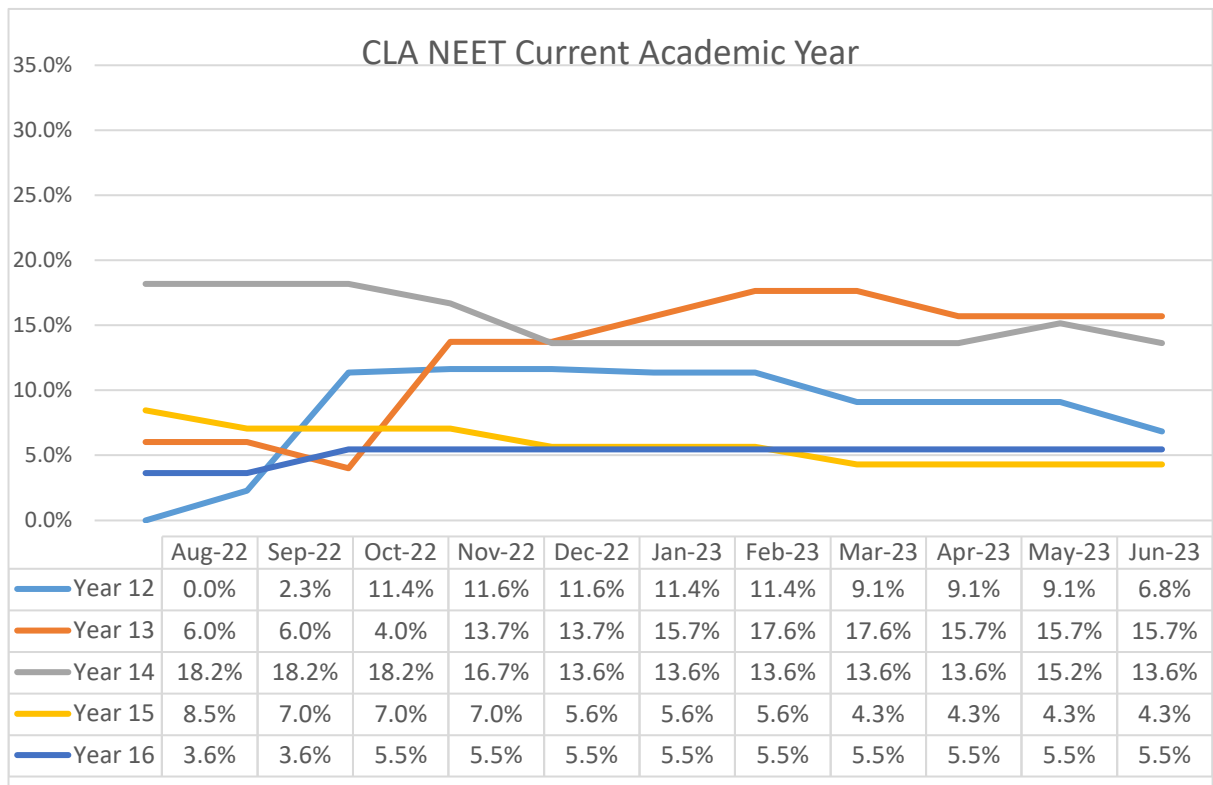
A further area has been the '*I want to be*' event held on the 18th July 2023 at Dudley College. This pilot event engaged over 50 young people and their Carers/Teachers. The event provided a number of learning areas including:

- An event for Year 8 upwards where young people saw a range of jobs that are available.
- Engagement with employers including DMBC outlining what jobs are in their business/directorates and illustrating them with anonymised journeys to current roles.
- Reflective of jobs available across world of work.
- Allowing the young people to spot a career that really attracts them, encouraging them how to explore a journey within the area with school, connexions, career advisors colleges and training providers. What do they need in their GCSE's, Further Education, Higher Education and Apprenticeships?

The event was supplemented by an introduction to Unifrog to link with exploring and planning what job, next steps, understanding what is needed to achieve this.

Furthermore, the programme integrated a wider Celebrating Success event hosted by the Lord Mayor of Dudley. This was very successful where graduates came for an evening to collect, a framed inspirational poem, a silver key donated by Sir John Timpson and the Area Manager in a jewellery box and a gift voucher. Interestingly all the graduates who received an award were in employment in Public Services. It was a wonderful celebratory evening and next years is planned provisionally for Thursday 21st March 2024 subject to confirmation and it will be extended to celebrate other achievements in education. Timpson have given a commitment to support this next academic year.

The work continues to support NEET Figures to remain low.



The programme has integrated a re-engagement programme to support young people in care who are either NEET or in danger of NEET, providing short courses that lead back into College/Training.

5. This section must:
- Detail any consultation and any representations made.
 - Set out any alternative options considered and rejected.
 - Include any known conflicts of interests declared by any Member or Officer who is involved in the decision.
 - Be clear about the improvement and outcomes that a decision is seeking to achieve (quantified from the current baseline if possible). These could be outcomes for the people of Dudley or in financial efficiency (or both).

Finance

6. There are no financial implications to this report.

Law

7. Corporate Parenting Boards exist in accordance with the provisions of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out Corporate Parenting Principles for local authorities. A local authority in England must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people mentioned in subsection (2), have regard to the need:

- a) To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people.
- (b) To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- (c) To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- (d) To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- (e) To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- (f) For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- (g) To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

(2) The children and young people mentioned in this subsection are:

- (a) Children who are looked after by a local authority, within the meaning given by section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989.
- (b) Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A (2) of that Act.
- (c) Persons aged under 25 who are former relevant children within the meaning given by section 23C (1) of that Act.

Risk Management

8. There are no risks directly arising from this report.

Equality Impact

9. There is no specific decision required which will have an impact in terms of Equality.
10. This report pays due regard to the Equality Act 2010.
11. This report refers directly to the benefits for the Children in the Care of Dudley over 16 years of age.

The programme has directly engaged in the development of this programme and have consistently been consulted to plan the future offer.

The young people have been directly engaged in the promotion and development of a number of elements of the programme.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

12. There are no HR/organisational development implications to this report.

Commercial/Procurement

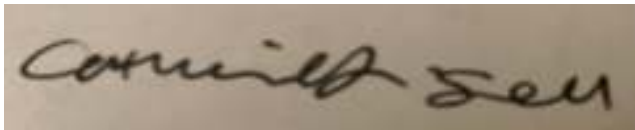
13. There are no Commercial/Procurement implications to this report.

Environment/Climate Change

14. There is no impact to environment or climate change arising from this report.

Council Priorities and Projects

15. The contents of the report relate to the key council priorities outlined within the Children's Services Directorate Plan.
16. There is no impact on wider Council and Borough activity and projects.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light brown background. The signature appears to read "Cornelia Sen".

Director of Children's Services

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Appendices

None