

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee: Safeguarding and SEND Sub-Committee - for Information	Dated: 01/07/2025
Subject: City of London Virtual School	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes 	Diverse Engaged Communities Leading Sustainable Environment Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N/A
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services
Report author:	Debby Rigby Headteacher of Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker Department of Community and Children's Services

Summary

This report provides Members with information about the developmental work taking place for children and young people through the City of London Virtual School. The Virtual School Development Plan, attached as Appendix 1, provides detailed information about current activity, successes, challenges and plans.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report and Virtual School Development Plan, attached as Appendix 1.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Virtual School promotes and supports the education of all children in care, those who have been previously looked after and those living in kinship care arrangements. As part of its extended duties, the school also supports children who have a social worker or who have had a social worker in the past – known as Children with a Social Worker Ever 6. This includes Care Leavers until they are aged 25 years. Of current young people aged 18 to 25 years, 95% arrived in the UK as refugees or asylum seekers and spoke little or no English on arrival. All unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people have had a disrupted educational journey, with almost all receiving very little formal education after the age of 12. Bespoke planning ensures access to needs-led learning, including English speaking, reading and writing.

Current Position

2. Over the past 12 months, children and families, in receipt of Early Help services also access the school for support and advice. This is part of an evolving programme that aims to support children and their families at the very earliest opportunity.
3. Various Virtual School projects take place throughout the year to enhance and enrich the education of children and young people in all Virtual School cohorts. The school provides educational resources, technology and additional tuition to help raise attainment.
4. Of the current 20 children and young people aged up to 18, who have a social worker, seven have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and one receives support for special educational needs and Disability (SEND). One of our young people, aged 18+ has an EHCP, and another two young people receive special needs support. A small group of our 18+ young people have emotional and mental health conditions that impact severely on their ability to engage in formal learning and/or work. The number currently on roll in all cohorts is 87, plus Children with a Social Worker Ever 6 and children who were previously looked after. Cohorts change as children move away from the City or no longer require the Virtual School, but approximately 90 children and young people are supported at any one time.
5. The Virtual School acts as a conduit between Education and Social Care teams and works with partners inside and outside The City of London Corporation, to support children, young people and their families. The Virtual School team work to ensure smooth educational transitions, provide additional tuition and play therapy, and have supported families with applications for EHCPs.
6. The Virtual School collects and monitors school and college attendance and educational progress and success. The school collects daily attendance of its cohorts through ASSET (Advanced Statistical System Evaluation Tool). This

system has been extended this academic year, to also include all City children with SEND who have an EHCP, so that attendance can be monitored, and support provided immediately, by the Education Welfare and SEND teams.

7. The Virtual School provides information, advice and guidance regarding schools, colleges, universities, apprenticeships, training and employment. The Virtual School works with education providers, social workers, key workers, parents and carers to support applications and engagement. The impact of this is to keep the numbers for those not in education, employment and training to a minimum and to encourage and support young people to realise their ambitions into further and higher education and/or the world of work.
8. Working with the Early Help team during the school holidays, Virtual School staff have delivered activity programmes, including sport, resilience, wellbeing, cookery, art and drama classes. Children with SEND and those with social workers, have been encouraged to attend the holiday activities, with additional staff engaged to increase pupil/staff ratios, so that activities can be fully inclusive. These sessions have been well received by families, and all feedback has been positive, with many families asking for sessions in every school holiday.
9. The Virtual School works in partnership with health services, particularly the Looked After Children (LAC) Nurse and Health Spot (a health service for young people), so that young people can access services swiftly and avoid lengthy absences from education, training and employment. As part of its engagement and healthy schools programme, the Virtual School has a football team that meets in Shoreditch, with a City staff/student tournament planned for 3 July 2025. The school football kit has been sponsored by a local tuition company.
10. The Virtual School works with City Open Spaces to provide forest school education to children and young people and with The City of London Boys School to provide enrichment opportunities for young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers and/or care experienced. The school runs trips to the theatre and university open days and accompanies young people to careers fairs. The school finds and funds a wide variety of courses and training that lead to employment, and works with schools, that City children attend, to reduce exclusion. The school endeavours to increase school staff understanding of the challenges faced by children and young people who have, or who have had, social care involvement in their lives.
11. The Virtual School is currently funding a year of training for all staff working at The Aldgate School, to increase knowledge and understanding of how trauma can affect learning and behaviour. This course promotes inclusivity, and staff feedback to date, has been positive. A full evaluation of impact will take place in July 2025. Additional schools, where City children attend, have been invited to receive training from September 2025.
12. The Virtual School runs an apprenticeship project with Partnership for Young London and currently has four apprentices studying Business Administration

and Youth Work. One of the apprentices is a City care leaver and a fifth apprentice will start in July 2025.

13. The Virtual School celebrates the achievements of its pupils in two ceremonies per year. One for all City young people in the Autumn, and in July, The City of London Virtual School hosts a Pan London Shining Stars Ceremony, where two young people from each London borough are chosen for exceptional educational achievement and are presented with certificates, prizes and trophies.

14. Current priorities as set out in the School Development Plan are to:

- work effectively with an increasing number of partners and services
- reduce the number of care experienced young people who are NEET
- embed all extended duties and include a new cohort of children in kinship care
- increase access to the arts and sport
- provide successful education and enrichment projects for identified groups of children and young people

15. Future priorities include:

- restructure of Virtual School staffing to move from a school term time service with overtime to a 52 week permanent service
- School Development Plan 2025/2026 – young people, families and all partners' views are being sought for next year's plan
- Families in the City – the headteacher sits on the development board to ensure that Virtual School cohorts of young people are promoted and considered within any further developments, particularly the Family Hub
- Universal Youth and Play Steering Group – the Virtual School is represented on this group, to look at contracted services and how they meet the future needs of children and young people in The City of London, this will ensure that Virtual School cohorts are provided with services that promote their educational opportunities
- Mentoring Project – the headteacher has sat on the mentoring project steering group to help shape a Pan London mentoring service for care experienced young people and young people with SEND. Once in place, this service will increase support for care experienced children and young people

Options

16. The Virtual School has embedded the extended duties of its work and has a temporary working arrangement that ensures that support is available for young people and partner services throughout the year. This will continue until the school is restructured and moves from a permanent school term time only service to a 52 week service.

Proposals

17. The Virtual School will continue to promote the educational achievement and attainment of all of its children and young people. An independent school improvement partner will continue to meet with Virtual School staff six times a year, to quality assure the work taking place and chair the Virtual School Advisory Partnership, a group that meets termly, to provide support and challenge.

Key Data

18. There is no data related to this report.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

19. There are no strategic implications directly related to this report.

- Financial implications – N/A
- Resource implications – N/A
- Legal implications – N/A
- Risk implications – N/A
- Equalities implications – N/A
- Climate implications – N/A
- Security implications – N/A

Conclusion

20. The City of London Virtual School continues to meet its statutory duties by promoting the educational achievement of care experienced young people. The City of London Virtual School has embraced the additional duties agenda and supports all children and young people with a social worker, including those who have had a social worker in the past six years.

21. The School Development Plan provides detailed information about the work of the school and the impact of activities. An Annual Report is produced at the end of every academic year, providing information about cohorts, school attendance, academic progress, courses completed, and qualifications achieved.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Virtual School Development Plan

Debby Rigby

Headteacher of Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker
Department of Community and Children's Services

T: 07941072737

E: debby.rigby@cityoflondon.gov.uk