

**Report to Early Years, Children & Youth Panel
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Virtual Schools Update

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Background

- There are currently 101 children in the care of Bath & North East Somerset in Reception to Year 11. There are 90 young people/care leavers aged 16-20.
- The Virtual School was set up in September 2009 and built on the good work of the Education Coordinator for Children in Care. There are three members of staff: the head (0.8), the education coordinator (0.8) and an administrative assistant (0.6). The Virtual School exists to help fulfil the statutory duty on the Local Authority to promote the education of children in care.
- Each child in care has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is reviewed every six months.
- Schools receive the Pupil Premium to support the education of each child in care. This will be £900 in the financial year 2013-2014
- Ofsted judged the education for children in care in Bath and North East Somerset to be 'good' in the January 2012 inspection.

The national picture

Last autumn two significant national reports were published concerning the education of children in care:

- An All Party Parliamentary Report
- A survey report of Virtual Schools by Ofsted

Both concluded that children in care still needed more support to make progress in schools. Ofsted inspectors saw evidence of very effective support involving virtual schools 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. The All Party Parliamentary Report made 90 recommendations - the key ones are listed overleaf.

The key recommendations from both reports were as follows:

1. Put Virtual School Heads on a statutory footing

The government has announced its intention to do this.

2. Virtual School Heads should retain responsibility for care leavers from the age of 0–25.

This is a good proposal but it will have significant implications for capacity, training and quality assurance.

3. Introduce a Pupil Premium Plus – a larger amount for children in care

We would welcome this - our schools very good at using PP for the specific needs of individuals.

4. Personal Education Plans should be reviewed three times a year

We prefer to review PEPs of complex cases more frequently, rather than a blanket requirement to review all PEPs three times a year.

5. More educational training for carers

We have extended our training for carers this year with a carers' conference with South Gloucestershire

6. Greater weight should be placed on education in initial social worker training. Teachers should receive greater training to improve their understanding of and ability to manage issues such as trauma, attachment and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

We are providing more training for social workers and are developing the Attachment Aware Schools programme with Bath Spa University.

8. Build upon the Designated Teacher model in schools by promoting a Designated Member of Staff in further and higher education

Local colleges provide good support to care leavers but this is not always the case nationally.