

Education report Initiatives for schools 2021-2022

The Virtual School (VS) supports schools and settings in Gateshead in a number of ways:-

- Providing advice to schools and settings on issues that children and young people in care may have in regards to their education.
- Providing focused training on trauma informed practice
- Ensuring that those pupils who require it have additional support to help them successfully access education.
- Providing one to one tuition
- Supporting schools with PEPs and the processes involved.
- Monitoring educational progress and achievement.
- Offering schools an experienced education support worker to work with children who require additional support.

Current focus in schools.

Virtual Reality Trauma Training for schools

The extended role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) – **to support the education of all children who have or have had a social worker**, has provided the Virtual School with additional government funding (which has been extended for a further year) and has challenged the VSH to support schools to improve outcomes for this cohort of children. The VSH aims to try to make schools the best they can be in managing and meeting the needs of children who have experienced Trauma in their lives. as we know such trauma can have a detrimental effect on a child's behaviour and overall functioning, in particular the child's ability to access and make progress in education. This cohort of children includes not only children in care but all those who have or have had a social worker.

The VS has embarked on a comprehensive training programme for all schools and colleges and their staff. The training is based on real life experiences through Virtual Reality Technology. We are working collaboratively with ANSTER, the company providing the VR headsets and supporting evaluation and care studies.

It is the aim of the VSH to train everyone who works with children in care, children in need or children on a child protection order. The aim of the training programme is to reach ALL staff, including teachers, assistants, front of house staff, care takers, technicians etc and senior leaders to help enable all schools, ranging from pre schools through all phases up to further education colleges to become more Trauma informed and develop good practices and approaches in meeting the needs of this vulnerable group of children therefore enabling children to be more successfully included, have fewer exclusion from school or managed moves and be encouraged to increase attendance, engage in learning and become more successful.

To date, training has been delivered to all practitioners in Early years Pre school settings, four secondary schools, three primary schools, Gateshead College and Newcastle college, service leads including social care.

The programme will continue from September 2022 to March 2023 and will include all primary schools, children homes. It is hoped to include Foster carers, Adopters and social care teams if time and funding allows.

A first user report (Kingsmeadow school) is available at the link below. Evaluation of the programme is ongoing.

https://doc-04-1o-docs.googleusercontent.com/docs/securesc/rlan2rq25e4mrqmgs8ke1jg7oolgbn0v/7rj5i19dc6bm7h1lqr7acjihh7v8dnc6/166171860000/13806152296473015298/13348429125702548992Z/1-9kWDcPAjsiBt2zG1_QqnJSogoUjEw7E?e=download&uuid=9f37dcc8-7b78-4b0d-af8a-ee52bcf12254&nonce=nv25djd9fkj0&user=13348429125702548992Z&hash=710de14s73bu4at1ssg70v5i3ssec6t1

VS Education support workers

The three VS Education support workers currently have caseloads. Cases are identified via PEPs or referrals are submitted from schools and social workers. Children and young people who are having difficulty with school attendance or accessing education are offered a case worker who will support the young person to successfully access education whether it be for academic subjects i.e Maths and English and Science or a more broad approach to learning. A close supportive approach to develop behaviour for learning is a priority.

The VS support workers have a range of skills including counselling, therapeutic support, cognitive behavioural therapy and learning support. They have an education background and are experienced in working closely with schools and school staff.

Education Enrichment Programme (EEP)

This was developed by the VS before and during Covid but was limited in its offer to the children in care. Since September 2022 the programme has been operating twice weekly in partnership with Simonside Activity centre in South Shields and is a very successful programme.

Referrals to the programme come from schools and social workers who feel that an alternative approach to learning or wider life experiences will help encourage the young people to re engage with more formal learning.

The activity programme includes a range of water sports such as Paddle boarding, kayaking, power boating and indoor sports such as climbing and archery and outdoor activities such as walking and cycling. The aim of the programme is to help develop a range of skills and experiences where the young people learn trust, independence, team working, sharing, cooperation and social interaction. These are all personal skills that can be transferred to other walks of life, in particular, school.

The young people gain a range of qualifications not only in various sporting skills but also in a range of personal social development. The first successful, well attended award ceremony and celebration of achievement took place in July this year.

We have several success stories of Children in care who were at risk of Permanent exclusion from school or not attending, who, after regularly attending the programme have successfully re engaged with education and have seen a reduction in exclusions. Several have gone on to successfully gain GCSE's and entered further education.

The majority of Gateshead's secondary schools are wholly supportive of the programme and the VS has actively supported Furrowfield to develop their own enrichment programme.

Holiday Learning Programme – Big Red Bus

The VS has initiated a summer 2022 activities programme with the support of the Children's Rights Officer, and the Engagement Officer / Quality Assurance and Commissioning along with a number of young volunteers from the youth assembly. The programme takes place from a Vintage Big Red Bus that has been located at two venues in Gateshead and has welcomed a significant number of children and young people in care ranging from age 3 to 16 on board. It has been available for children in care to attend from a Tuesday to a Friday each week of the holidays. They have experienced a range of learning activities such as arts and crafts, outdoor sports and activities and water sports at South Shields (Fridays only)

Social worker in schools (SWIS) Pilot programme

(Contribution to this report by Christopher Walker - Team Manager/
senior Practice Supervisor for SWIS)

The Social Workers in Schools programme has aimed to embed social workers in secondary schools to reduce referral rates to children's social care (CSC) and reduce the numbers of Section 17 or Section 47 investigations, along with the overarching aim of reducing the number of children in care, and improving educational attainment. It is hoped that this will also promote better inter-agency working between schools and the children's social care system.

The SWIS pilot is currently operating in six secondary schools in Gateshead. The SWIS pilot has seen Social Workers becoming practice leaders in schools, modelling collaborative and relational approaches to working with families. The SWIS project aims to raise the profile of social work perspectives, knowledge, skills and values across the professional education sector. It is hoped to create multi-agency contexts in which families feel listened to, understood, supported and valued by the professionals working with their children. Social Workers will share their unique skill sets built on having to combine caring and compassion for parents with a relentless focus on the needs of the children

What Impact are we seeing so far.....

- Very strong relationships established between school and social work staff AND much better understanding of the thresholds and respected challenges of each other's work.
- Preventative work having a positive impact on children and their families.
- Social Workers becoming practice leaders in schools, modelling collaborative and relational approaches to working with children and families; this is a key motivation for us.
- SWIS has enabled social workers to share a trauma informed and systemic model of practice with our education professionals; this has allowed for the relationship with our educational partners to grow, allowing it to be more collaborative and curious.
- A joint awareness of individual contexts for children and their families and the ability to consider risks and whether any of the children and families within the community of the school are in need of further statutory support.
- Informal case discussions are now central to the preventative work that has been undertaken by the Social Workers in School; discussions at an early stage has allowed for threshold to be applied early on and support identified and referred to at a much earlier stage than we have seen previously.
- School staff are beginning to apply a more curious view of children's individual contexts and gaining an understanding of daily lived experience.
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Findings from the Social Workers in School Team

- **The power and value of relationships**

Multi-agency working "A Whole System Approach" is needed to truly enable a response to 'need' or 'risk'.

- **How schools are currently functioning and the vital role they play in safeguarding children**

In terms of how schools are functioning and their safeguarding role: Lockdown has been devastating for children seen as at risk.

The huge deficits in mental health support for children severely impact education and increase risks faced by children

Processes and school structures can be a barrier for whole-school trauma informed approaches to reach children day-to-day

It has felt at times that schools aren't set up to deal with the individual needs of traumatised children over time

- **The value of social work expertise in schools**

Schools have said that social work expertise is valuable for functioning schools. Almost all DSLs say they want more input and development from social workers.

Jean Thompson
Virtual School Head

