CAPITA

Raising educational attainment for children in care

Case Study **Calderdale Virtual School**

Capita One is helping Calderdale Council access a more complete picture of their 259 children in care so they can support them effectively.

Children in care have often experienced some incredibly complex challenges in their lives that can make it more difficult for them to make good progress in school.

Figures suggest that a child in care is around ten times more likely to have a statement of special educational needs and eight times more likely to be excluded from school.

As part of an initiative to raise the attainment of this vulnerable group, the government has introduced Virtual School Heads (VSH), appointed by local authorities to act as a champion for these children and monitor their progression.

> "Seeing a snapshot of a child's progress has been invaluable. It enables us to make much more informed decisions on what support they might need."
>
> *Sue Steven, Headteacher of Calderdale Council's Virtual School*

Calderdale Council has 259 children in care attending 96 different schools across the borough. Its VSH, Sue Steven, knows that having accurate data to hand is key to improving the life chances of every child.

Reducing the administrative burden
Sue and her team wanted to free up as much time as possible for staff to spend supporting looked after children in schools.

"We previously used spreadsheets and various software packages to record and analyse attainment, attendance and exclusion data on children in care. Staff had to spend hours gathering and inputting data to identify where interventions were needed to raise attainment. The progress of these pupils changes constantly, so it was a real challenge to keep the information up to date," she explains.

"We also lead on and manage personal education plans (PEP) for each child within the service and I was conscious that valuable data wasn't easy to share with the different departments and services that might need it.

"We wanted an IT solution that would simplify data management on those children the Virtual School had responsibility for, and support the council in fulfilling the government's requirements under the Virtual Head scheme."

Calderdale Council was already using One, and could see that the Virtual Schools Service package would meet their needs. The first of its kind, the software enables the authority to see an overview of its virtual school students alongside a regular cohort, week by week, through every stage of their education.

A spotlight on educational attainment and progress

Demonstrating progress
With the software in place, multiple sets of data on exclusions, attendance and attainment are now efficiently collected from schools both inside and outside the area.

Using this information, the council is able to shine a light on children's attainment before they went into care and ensure that their progress is measured realistically and accurately.

"Having more information on a child's school history helps demonstrate the considerable progress children have made – sometimes in simply returning to the attainment levels they achieved before their circumstances changed."

Invaluable Support

Sue and her team have found that being able to see a snapshot of a child's progress from when they first entered formal education has been invaluable.

> "As soon as a child starts to miss school, teachers, education welfare officers, social workers and healthcare professionals can immediately see what is happening."
>
> *Sue Steven, Headteacher of Calderdale Council's Virtual School*

"The new software is enabling us to make more informed decisions on what support vulnerable young people might need. Without the burden of having to manually chase attendance data, staff are able to support the practitioners out in the field. We are currently saving a day a week on chasing data and expect this to improve further."

Calderdale boasts significantly lower than national average absence figures for children in care and Sue believes Capita One's Virtual Schools Service package has an important role to play in this.

"The software acts as an early warning system so that the authority can intervene to nip attendance concerns in the bud before they become more serious.

"It also provides teams with important background information on a child's family too, such as where they live. This can have a far reaching impact on other services in contact with that child – statistically children living in certain postcodes are at greater risk of deprivation than their peers."

Calderdale's Virtual School was recently rated more favourably by Ofsted. This was a direct result of the insight gained from the data being gathered in One and the effectiveness of the interventions implemented to raise educational outcomes for those in care.

In the future

Calderdale has plans to build on its experience of supporting the educational outcomes of children in care.

"The team is currently developing the technology to track and evaluate how Pupil Premium funding is being spent to ensure that those children from less affluent backgrounds receive the extra support they need," Sue says.

"Overall the data we now have access to in One is helping us make more informed decisions for our children."

One Virtual School Service Package

- Meet legislative obligations
- Save time and costs
- All information is in one place
- Increases likelihood of improved outcomes for children in care
- Suite of business intelligence tools

To find out how Capita One can help your work with children in care please contact us on 01234 832150 or email info@capita-one.co.uk