

Request by Schools Forum 18.05.16 for further explanation of arrangements for distribution of Pupil Premium Plus grant 2016-17

The Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) for looked after children and post-LAC children was introduced for the first time in the 2014-15 financial year at an amount of £1900 for each eligible pupil. The Children and Families Act in the same year gave the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) statutory powers to manage the grant allocation to be used for the benefit of the education achievement of all pupils on their virtual roll. This has statutory force and there is no requirement for the Virtual School Head to give the money to schools or to pass the full £1900.

Northumberland's strategic MALAP (Multi agency looked after partnership) is chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care and acts as the governing body of the Virtual School. The MALAP holds the Virtual School Headteacher to account for the impact of the Pupil Premium Plus and has ratified the arrangements for the distribution of the PP+ for 2016-17.

Northumberland schools, academies and alternative providers will know that for the first two financial years the Virtual School did allocate the full £1900 to the education setting where each eligible pupil was on roll, dependent on the completion of a Pupil Premium Plus agreement in the PEP which was signed by both Headteachers. It is known through the regional Virtual School Headteachers' network that Northumberland was the only local authority Virtual School in the region to allocate the full amount. Schools who have looked after pupils belonging to other local authorities will also know this based on the level of funding they have received in previous years.

Review of the impact of this funding for the first two years has informed the arrangements for this third year.

The use and impact of the PP+ has been closely monitored in Northumberland through the Pupil Premium Plus agreement. Two thirds of the grant was used to fund academic targets which accelerate progress in English and maths, and usually involved providing one to one tuition. The second largest area for expenditure was to support emotional needs. Overall the funding is generally used to support interventions already in place, with less evidence that 'something different' was introduced because of the PP+ grant.

The level of accountability required by schools through the PP+ agreement has enabled the Virtual School Headteacher to make sure funding reaches pupils who most need it. As well as allocating the grant according to targets in the PP+ agreements during both financial years funding reached looked after pupils not eligible (ie who came into care during the financial year or who had not been in care for as long as 6 months), pupils who left care during the year but who still have significant gaps in their achievement compared to their peers, looked after pupils progressing into school sixth forms, looked after pupils who required interventions costing more than £1900, pupils who needed costly alternative programmes or changes of school placement and were not followed by other sources of funding. On occasion the funding has been dispersed with only the signature of the Virtual School Headteacher to ensure that support and intervention can begin or continue without delay. The Virtual School was also able to invest in mobile learning devices and a Thrive attachment training programme for Designated Teachers of Looked After Children.

Arrangements for 2016-17 have changed so that the funding can have greater impact. Like a Headteacher of a 'regular' school, the Virtual School Headteacher has to consider how the funding can be used holistically to benefit all looked after children, which might not mean using it as a kind of personal allowance.

By top slicing the grant the Virtual School can plan expenditure during the year to meet identified needs for all looked after children, instead of spending reactively what remains in the final quarter of the financial year.

The amount of £400 per eligible pupil will be retained by the Virtual School in 2016-17 to fund:

- an Education Psychologist dedicated to the Virtual School (equivalent of 2 days per week all year);
- continued roll out of the Thrive attachment training programme;
- English and maths tuition as part of a Virtual School Pathways Provision for persistent absentees;
- fund development of the role of an Information and Guidance Adviser for looked after children becoming care leavers (recommendation from Ofsted SIF inspection February 2016).

Northumberland Virtual School's regional neighbours will continue to devolve the PP+ funding as in previous years, for example North Tyneside will top slice £500, Hartlepool will top slice £900, Gateshead will top slice £500, Newcastle will disperse £1266 initially and the final third when schools evidence impact.

To ensure that there is no shortfall in provision for looked after children, schools are encouraged to have discussions about the level of funding for each pupil at the PP+ agreement stage of the process which has Virtual School Headteacher oversight.

The National Association of Virtual School Headteachers is commissioning research into how the fund is used in different local authorities to maximise impact. Arrangements may well change in the future based on the outcomes of this research and review of the impact of the funding for 2016-17 in Northumberland. The Virtual School Headteacher will publish details of expenditure and impact in the Annual Report 2016-17. The arrangements are in accordance with the DfE's *Pupil Premium Conditions of Grant* and *statutory roles and responsibilities of the Virtual School Headteacher*.

Please be assured that arrangements have been revised to promote improvement and will be continuously reviewed. The arrangements preserve the flexibility in the use of the grant which is crucial if we are to respond positively and effectively to the needs of individual pupils and individual settings as and when they arise.

Sincerely, Jane Walker
Virtual School Headteacher