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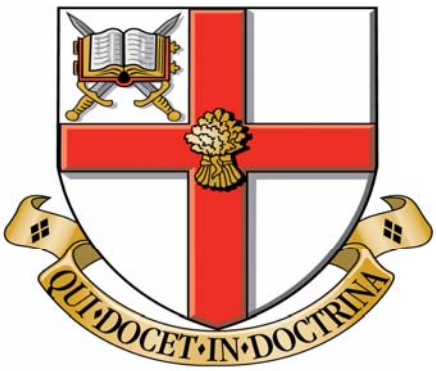

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Liverpool's approaches to tackling the educational attainment gap between mainstream pupils and Looked after Children (LAC)

Michael Maher

June 2010

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Abstract

In October 2006 the Government Green Paper; '*Care Matters: Transforming the lives of Children and Young People in Care'*, outlined its proposals for the creation of Virtual Schools for Looked after Children (LAC) by setting out a radical package of proposals for transforming the lives of Children in Care (CiC). They noted the educational attainment gap between CiC and the wider school population was widening, leading to poorer life chances and much bleaker futures for children that had been looked after.

The concept of the Virtual School (VS) has provoked much interest in England and Europe. The initial successes of the pilot LA(s) has meant that the programme is to be rolled out nationwide, albeit to claims that the Government's efforts are once again directed at symptoms rather than causes. However one thing is evident, and that is the political will to do the right thing.

This dissertation examines the approaches to tackling the educational attainment gap between LAC and their mainstream peers. It investigates the deeper theoretical relationships required to tackle a holistic approach in developing a clearer strategy to assist the main driver as a concept of the VS. Liverpool's performance will be measured against its closest geographical, demographic and statistical neighbours.

In conclusion recommendations will be offered to enhance the life chances for the future LAC of Liverpool.

Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed: Michael John Maher

Date: 13th May 2010

Table of Contents

Page No.

Abstract……..... 3
Declaration…….....… 4
Table of Contents…… 5
List of Tables……... 8
List of Figures…….. 8
List of Charts…..…….. 8

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research……. 9
1.1.1 Strategic background…...……...… 9
1.1.2 Operational background……. 10
1.2 Research question……... 12
1.3 Justification for the research…….. 13
1.4 Methodology ……..……. 14
1.5 Outline of the chapters.…….……. 16
1.6 Glossary of Terms……... 17
1.7 Summary……. 18

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction……. 19
2.2 Looked after Children contextualised……. 19
2.3 The 'cultural environment' of the home…….…… 21
2.4 Carer Matters Agenda……..……..…… 22
2.4.1 The Virtual School Theory……..……... 22
2.4.2 The importance of designated teachers……..... 24
2.4.3 The importance of care placement stability……..... 26
2.4.4 Motivational Theory……..... 30
2.4.5 Stakeholder Theory……..... 33
2.3.6 Joined Up Government (JUG) Collaborative Working……. 36
2.4.7 Leadership Theory……..... 38
2.5 Summary……. 40

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction…… 43
3.2 Research philosophy..……. 43
3.3 Research strategy…… 44
3.3.1 Justification for the paradigm and methodology…… 44
3.3.2 Rejected methods……... 45

3.4 Research design……. 46
3.5 Research processes..…… 49
3.5.1 Interviews……... 49
3.5.2 Questionnaire……. 50
3.6 Ethical considerations…… 50
3.7 Summary……. 51

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction……. 52
4.2 Secondary data……...…… 52
4.3 Analysis of respondents / non-respondents……..... 53
4.4 Findings for each research question…… 54
4.4.1 Research Aims……... 54
4.4.1.1 Aim 1……. 54
4.4.1.2 Aim 2……..... 55
4.4.1.3 Aim 3……. 57
4.4.1.4 Aim 4……. 58
4.4.2 Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) questionnaire / survey…….. 58
4.4.2.1 VSH Question 1…… 58
4.4.2.2 How well does your VS support LAC in these key areas..... 59
4.4.2.2.1 VSH Question 3, part i…….. 60
4.4.2.2.2 VSH Question 3, part iii……..... 62
4.4.2.2.3 VSH Question 3, part.iv…… 62
4.4.2.2.4 VHS Question 3, part viii…….. 63
4.4.2.3 Has LAC attainment improved…….…… 64
4.4.2.3.1 VSH Question 4, part i…….. 64
4.4.2.3.2 VSH Question 4, part ii…...…….. 65
4.4.2.3.3 VSH Question 4, part iv……..…….. 66
4.4.2.3.4 VSH Question 4, part v……...…….. 67
4.4.3 The Future of the Virtual School……... 68
4.4.3.1 VSH Question 6…….…….. 68
4.5 Summary……. 69

5. Analysis and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction……. 70
5.2 Critical evaluation of adopted methodology……...……..... 71
5.3 Analysis / conclusions about each research objective (aim)……... 72
5.3.1 Aim 1…….. 72
5.3.2 Aim 2…….. 74
5.3.3 Aim 3…….. 75
5.3.4 Aim 4…….. 75
5.3.5 Cultural home environments…… 77
5.3.6 Leadership…….. 80

5.4 Analysis/conclusions about the research question……..... 80
5.5 Overall conclusions……. 81
5.6 Limitations of the study…….. 82
5.7 Opportunities for further research……... 82
5.8 Summary……. 82

6. Recommendations

6.1 Introduction…….…… 83
6.2 Recommendations……...…… 83
6.3 Summary……. 83

Bibliography 84

List of Appendices

Appendix i - Initially request fro help pro-forma……... 91
Appendix ii - Liverpool's contextual Neighbours……... 92
Appendix iii - VSH Questionnaire / Survey……. 93
Appendix iv - KS2 L4+ English Results Trend……... 95
Appendix v - KS2 L4+ Maths Results Trend…….. 96
Appendix vi - KS4 (5+A*-C) GCSE Results Trend..... 97
Appendix vii - KS4 (5+A*-C) GCSE Results Trend……... 98
Appendix viii - KS2 L4+ 2009 English Results & Gaps……... 99
Appendix ix - KS2 L4+ 2009 Maths Results & Gaps…….. 100
Appendix x - KS4 (5+A*-C) GCSE Results & Gaps…… 101
Appendix xi - KS4 (1+A*-C) GCSE Results & Gaps……. 102
Appendix xii - KS2 L4+ 2009 English Gap Trend……... 103
Appendix xiii - KS2 L4+ 2009 Maths Gap Trend……..... 104
Appendix xiv - KS4 (5+A*-C) GCSE Gap Trend…… 105
Appendix xv - KS4 (1+A*-C) GCSE Gap Trend……..... 106

List of Tables

Page No.

Table I - Educational attainment gap by KS2, Level 4+, English..... 11
Table II - Educational attainment gap by KS2, Level 4+, Maths……..... 11
Table III - Educational attainment gap by KS4, 5+ A*-C GCSE…..... 11
Table IV - Stability of care placement of LAC……..... 27

List of Figures

Figure I - Mazlow's (1971) hierarchy of needs pyramid mapped to LAC. 33
Figure II - Stakeholder Mapping (Adapted from A. Mendalow 1991)….. 35
Figure III - Conceptual Model…….. 42
Figure IV - Design Model…… 48

List of Charts

Chart 1 - Children in care by category of need……... 20
Chart 2 - VHS Survey, response rates…… 54
Chart 3 - VHS Survey, Q2, part v…….. 55
Chart 4 - VHS Survey, Q2, part vi…… 56
Chart 5 - VHS Survey, Q3, part v…… 57
Chart 6 - VHS Survey, Q5, part iii……. 58
Chart 7 - VHS Survey, Q1……. 59
Chart 8 - VHS Survey, Q3, part i……... 60
Chart 9 - VHS Survey, Q3, part iii……. 61
Chart 10 - VHS Survey, Q3, part iv…… 62
Chart 11 - VHS Survey, Q3, part viii……... 63
Chart 12 - VHS Survey, Q4, part i……... 64
Chart 13 - VHS Survey, Q4, part ii…….. 65
Chart 14 - VHS Survey, Q4, part iv…… 66
Chart 15 - VHS Survey, Q4, part v..……... 67
Chart 16 - VHS Survey, Q6……. 68
Chart 17 - Liverpool's Attainment Gaps Trend……... 72
Chart 18 - Liverpool's KS2, English Trend…… 75
Chart 19 - Liverpool's KS2, Maths Trend..…….. 76
Chart 20 - Liverpool's 5+ A*-C GCSE Trend…… 77
Chart 21 - Liverpool's 1+ A*-C GCSE Trend…… 78

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the research

1.1.1. Strategic background

This dissertation will critically evaluate the performance of Liverpool City Council (LCC) in attempting to close the education attainment gap between its Looked After Children (LAC) and their mainstream peers.

Central government policy in this area was initiated by Frank Dobson in 1998, the then Labour Secretary of State for Health, when he introduced the 'corporate parent' philosophy under the 'Quality protects agenda', with his suggestion that local councillors should ask themselves, "Is it good enough for my child?".

Following the death of Victoria Climbie, and the subsequent Inquiry by Lord Laming in 2003 the government launched their "Every Child Matters" (ECM) initiative which set out five key outcomes or goals for every child[1]. It is under this policy that LAC were first highlighted for special assistance, and that Local Authorities (LAs) in England were viewed as needing specialist help and guidance in how they place and deal with children in need.

In October 2006 the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Alan Johnson, launched the Green Paper, 'Care Matters: Transforming the lives of Children and Young People in Care' which set out a radical package of Government proposals for transforming the lives of children in care, acknowledging that; *" The life chances of all children have improved but those of children in care have not improved at the same rate. The results is that children in care are now at greater risk of being left behind than was the case a few years ago – the gap has actually grown".*

(Care Matters: Transforming the lives of Children and Young People in Care, 2007)

[1] Every Child Matters 5 Outcomes;
Be healthy, Stay safe, Enjoy and achieve, Make a positive contribution and Achieve economic wellbeing

In 2008 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), currently the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), published a White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change', which progressed the majority of the Green Paper proposals with added determination to improve the quality of life for children in care. The paper also reiterates many of the concerns which had already been identified in "Quality protects" and expands the age old pedagogy that is the importance of education.

1.1.2. Operational background

All LA(s) have a duty of care to these children, taking then into care for their own protection and wellbeing. Unfortunately the majority of these Children in Care (CiC) do not receive a good quality learning experience whilst in care. CiC are the most transient group, unlike their mainstream peers they move from care placement, home and school more regularly which has a strong negative affect on their educational attainment. (Ward, Munro and Dearden, 2006) Additional to this they have a 25% more chance of having Special Educational Needs (SEN), 28% of CiC compared to 3% all children have a statement of SEN, compounding the negative impact on their attainment. (DCSF, 2008)

In the primary phase of key stage 2 LAC are significantly less likely to achieve the expected national level 4 in English or maths. In 2009 only 43 per cent achieved level 4 in English and 43 per cent in maths, the corresponding figure for mainstream pupils was 78 per cent in English, 78 per cent in maths, an attainment gap in both subjects of some 35 per cent. (Table i, ii) By the end of key stage 4 the gap had significantly increased, only 21 per cent (LAC) achieved the expected level at GCSE of 5+ A*-C, the corresponding figure for mainstream pupils was 74 per cent, an attainment gap of some 53%. (Table iii)

Key Stage 2 Level 4+ English				
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
National	*79.0%*	*80.0%*	*81.0%*	*80.0%*
Liverpool	77.0%	77.0%	80.0%	78.0%
LAC	39.0%	53.0%	57.0%	43.0%
Gap	-38.0%	-24.0%	-23.0%	-35.0%

Table I: Educational attainment gap by Key Stage 2, Level 4+, English

Key Stage 2 Level 4+ Maths				
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
National	*76.0%*	*77.0%*	*79.0%*	*79.0%*
Liverpool	74.0%	74.0%	77.0%	78.0%
LAC	39.0%	55.0%	38.0%	43.0%
Gap	-35.0%	-19.0%	-39.0%	-35.0%

Table II: Educational attainment gap by Key Stage 2, Level 4+, Maths

Key Stage 4 - 5+A*-C				
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
National	*59.2%*	*62.0%*	*65.3%*	*70.0%*
Liverpool	54.1%	58.3%	66.1%	73.6%
LAC	11.0%	15.0%	16.0%	20.6%
Gap	-43.1%	-43.3%	-50.1%	-53.0%

Table III: Educational attainment gap by Key Stage 4, 5+ A* - C GCSE.

These poor educational foundations leave the LAC pupils clearly disadvantaged and lacking the life chances afforded to their mainstream peers. Many LAC will proportionately never return to education, be unable to secure employment and more likely adorn the inside of a police cell than their mainstream peers.

The DCSF (2006) devoted a whole chapter (5) in its 'Care Matter: Transforming the Lives of Children and young People in Care', called 'A first class education'. To combat such negative antecedents a number of important, quite radical, tweaks were introduced to improve the CiC's educational attainment chances. Local authorities were provided with the power to instruct schools, even if they were oversubscribed, to admit CiC. It was

generally accepted that these children should not, unless it was clearly in the child's interest, be moved from a school in years 10 and 11 (end of key stage 4 important years). Offering free entitlement to transport if the child has to move care placement. Resource schools that take CiC so that they can offer 'excellent personalised education' to the child to focus on developmental areas of their education. And crucially the establishment of the 'Virtual' head teacher, to support schools in their work with CiC.

The 'Virtual' school rubric consisted of three major milestones to support LAC;

1. All LA(s) to have appointed a senior officer or 'Virtual School Head' (VSH) to track the schooling of every child in care, ensure that appropriate additional targeted provision is in place for them and promote continuity of schooling.
2. All schools having a designated teacher to work with each LAC to plan to raise their attainment and respond to their needs.
3. Schools to implement personalised one-to-one support for every child in care through individual tuition wherever appropriate. (DCSF, 2006)

1.2 Research question

Liverpool's approaches to tackling the educational attainment gap between mainstream pupils and Looked after Children (LAC).

The objectives of this research project are to determine;

1. To assess the impact of the Virtual School (VS) system in Liverpool.
2. To assess the impact of assigning a designated teachers to LAC pupils.
3. To examine Liverpool's LAC placement policy in terms of its stability of placement and overall outcome success.
4. To compare the performance of LCC against other local authorities using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques.
5. Establish conclusions and recommendations based on the above.

This dissertation will examine the strategic and operational outcomes which have emerged from LCC adopting the government ideology of the VS, and indeed if the educational attainment gap has been either positively or negatively influenced by its introduction. It will examine the statistical movement as a result of the policy in terms of Liverpool's performance against its peers, being Statistical Neighbours (SN)[2], the Core Cities (CC) and North West Local Authorities (NWG), (Appendix ii) by evidencing their performance as published in the Achievement and Attainment Tables (AAT) available at; http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performancetables/. In concluding this paper it is intended to make recommendations on possible measures to improve the role of the VS and it's strategic function. These recommendations may range from strategic management processes to actual teaching practices and processes.

1.3 Justification for the research

Contemporary government fascination with performance and the multitude of National Performance Indicators (NI) has created a regional culture akin to, "*back seat driving….hands off control" (Carter et al, 1989).* The implementation of the Virtual School and the statutory targets that resulted, are at best an imperfect instrument of control, they involve a much resented degree of unwanted back seat control on the part of central government without providing a greater degree of central control over services. Over 50 per cent of these NI(s) are concerned with school children and Social Care, encompassing both worlds of attainment and LAC. The most important and high profile of all the NI(s) is the 5+ A*-C GCSC (Including English and maths), nationally accepted as the Gold Standard of secondary educational achievement in the UK. However in the latest figures to emerge from Liverpool nearly 55.7 per cent of mainstream pupils did not attain this expected level, and they are in deemed in educational circles as "normal". LAC pupils are, even though they are in many ways more vulnerable and considerably more

[2] Statistical Neighbours: A model used by the DCSF to benchmark the progress of LA(s) that have a number of significantly similar characteristics. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STA/t000712/index.shtml. Liverpool's statistical neighbours can be found in (Appendix ii)

deprived than their peers, are still benchmarked to the same expected levels. Hence the governments comparatively new obsession with gap analysis, examining the gaps that develop between groups of similar cohorts of pupils'. It is generally accepted that this is not a benchmark of comparative performance and unrepresentative for the LAC cohort, but it is currently the only proxy available.

1.4 Methodology

This research is an exploratory study, "what is happening: to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (Robson, 2002). Attention being on the causal relationship between low educational attainment for LAC pupils and the increasing attainment gap with their peers.

The mixed method approach will be employed as cited by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003);

The Descriptive Approach – this will allow the validation of historical data, publications and journals available to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the topic. Key documents and qualitative studies that have been undertaken to determine the current thinking in this area will be examined. Both Primary and Secondary research will be employed.

The Positivist Approach – using quantitative statistical analysis. The various data sets that will be analysed will include;

- DCSF contextualised data profiles for LAC and Mainstream outcomes.
- Current DCSF literature "Green Papers" and "White Papers".
- DCSF historical data archives for relevant LA(s).
- Publications of interested groups, i.e. Care Matters Partnership.
- Academic publications with particular relevance to topic.

Progress from this descriptive approach will be the exploratory (interview) research dealing with the pastoral explanations why LAC pupils don't achieve their potential as well as their peers. The research aims to examine the cause and effect of underachievement in the LAC vulnerable group.

To support this strategy the following data collection methods will be employed;

- A literature review will be undertaken to establish a knowledge of the subject, the Departmental White Papers, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' and 'Care Matters: Transforming the lives of Children and Young People in Care', being pivotal.

- Semi-structured interviews will be undertaken. These will be interviews to investigate the current practices and procedures within the LA, giving consideration as to the impact of the White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' recommendations. It will also examine the practices and procedures of colleagues in Liverpool's statistical, demographic and geographical neighbours.

- A questionnaire will be completed. This research technique is to be used to ascertain the views of the membership of the North West Statistical Benchmarking Group (Appendix i) in relation to their experiences of implementing the Government's White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' recommendations, with a view to gaining strategic and operational knowledge of their experience.

- Configuration Management - The data collected would be processed to PRINCE2 standards. All intelligence collected from all source and methods would be validated and remain secure, confidential to ensure data protection procedures and legislation obligations are adhered to.

1.5 Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chronological background to the ideology and an introduction to the field of study, outlining the current situation within LCC, its local aspirations and national obligations, particularly in regard to the Care Matters Agenda. (CMA)

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Examination of the theoretical thinking around the establishment of the Virtual School system as a tool for raising the educational attainment of the LAC cohort.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Information concerning the research paradigm adopted and the techniques employed by the researcher to deliver the required outcomes.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Based on the techniques employed in the previous chapter's methodology, the findings will be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 – Analysis & Conclusions

All the data collated and presented in the previous chapter will be analysed and evaluated, conclusions will be drawn and evaluated aback to the research aims and where appropriate further research identified.

Chapter 6 - Recommendations

Dependant on the research outcomes from the data analysed in Chapter 4, and the subsequent conclusions drawn in Chapter 5, this chapter will offer recommendations either strategic or operational in nature to add value to the chosen topic.

1.6 Glossary of Terms

- AAT - Achievement and Attainment Tables
- AEP - Alternative Education Provision
- CiC - Children in Care
- CC - Core Cities
- CMA - Care Matter Agenda
- CYPP - Children And Young People's Plan
- DCSF - Department for Children, Schools and Families
- DfES - Department for Education and Skills
- ECM - Every Child Matters
- GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education
- KS1 / KS2 / KS3 / KS4 - Key Stage Results
- JUG - Joined up Government
- LA - Local Authority
- LAC - Looked After Children
- LACES - Looked After Children Education Services
- LCC - Liverpool City Council
- LGiU - Local Government information Unit
- NWG - North West Group
- OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education
- ONS - Office for National Statistics
- SENCO - Special Educational Needs Coordinator
- SIP - School Improvement Partner
- SN - Statistical Neighbours

- TCRU - Thomas Coram Research Unit
- VS - Virtual Headteacher
- VSH - Virtual School Headteacher

1.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the research question and aims of the study. The research has been justified and methodology outlined. Research limitation have been noted and expectations outlined. The Literature Review chapter will examine the published intelligence from both national and local arenas.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the current thinking around the areas addressed in the research question, namely, the effectiveness of the Care Matters Agenda (CMA) recommendation of utilising a Virtual School (VS) system in attempting to raise the educational attainment of Looked after Children (LAC). Literature has been sourced from research funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Department for Health, The Care Matters Partnership, Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) and the North West Statistical Benchmarking Group (NWSBG).

Electronic sources from the following websites have also been consulted; Google Scholar, Emerald, NEXUS, Key to Success, Social Care Networks, DCSF, OfSTED and the website for Local Government information Unit (LGiU).

Further insight will be derived from literature relating to Motivational Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Joined up Government (JUG) Theory, Organisational and Strategic Management ideology and the concepts of Leadership as a strategy.

2.2. Looked after Children contextualised

As a democratic nation we pride ourselves with our advancements in terms of society, good schools, hospital, law and order. However the evolution of our moral code for protecting our vulnerable children has only relatively recently become a priority. Prior to the Poor Law of 1563, many children that would today be labelled ‘looked after’, would probably have died from disease, malnutrition or from adult abuse. The more fortunate children would have been sentenced to a desperate existence in the ‘poor house’. The days of Oliver Twist and ‘Faganism’ were actually not that long ago.

Today society directs considerable more resource for the needs of our children and even more to those that are vulnerable, neglected or abused. For the children that have been removed into public care, the outcome of what begins as a benign act of society too often

turns into a disappointing, desperate life of uncertainty, loneliness and insecurity. If preventative measures are not taken then it becomes a negative theme in the child's life, influencing their adulthood, increasing long term instability and social exclusion (Jackson, 2008) and truncating their potential. Most LAC never return to education, are unable to secure employment and much more likely to adorn the inside of a police cell than their peers. This element of tomorrow's socioeconomic problem, pertaining to LAC, and all its relational social problems is preventable, today.

A common misconception about today's children and especially LAC is that they all belong to marauding inner city gangs where the electronic tag is worshipped and the local pastime consists of pensioners terrorism. This concept is at best media-fuelled propaganda, and at worst a localised minor social problem. The reality is that the majority of LAC are in public care through no fault of their own, victims of circumstance, unfortunates of accident, but mostly 63%, survivors of abuse and neglect. Chart 1 below is a representation of the LAC category of need as at 2005 in England.

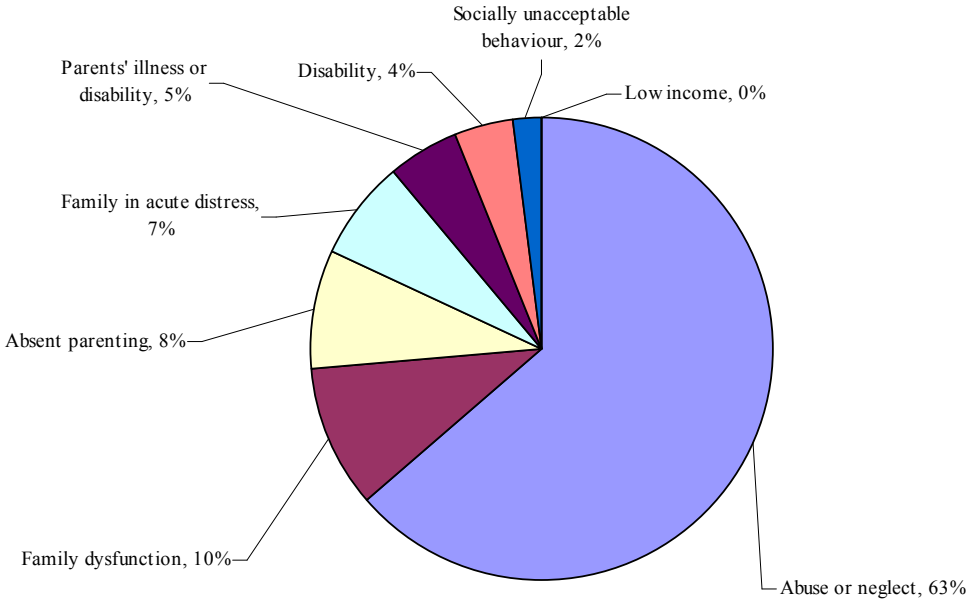

Chart 1. Children in care by category of need (Office for National Statistics, 2005)

2.3. The 'cultural environment of the home'

There is a wealth of research evidence (Pilling and Pringle, 1978; Mortimore and Blackstone, 1982) that what has be called the 'cultural environment of the home,' characterised by traits such as level of literacy, the parents' involvement with their children in intellectually stimulating activities, and their interest in the aspirations for their children's education, strongly correlates to school attainment. Essen and Wedge (1982) examined the relationship of three different variables which connect to this theory of the 'cultural environment': the parent's own educational level, the father's occupation and the parents' aspirations for their children's further education. If these variables are positive and embedded into the family psychic then research has shown it to have a positive effect on the child's own educational attainment.

Further research by the DCSF indicates that where the home is not 'educationally orientated' there is a causal relationship to educational under achievement. Children living in a home-learning environment, particularly early on, where children and adults learn together can lead to positive child behaviour, promote general well being and raise educational attainment. (Sylva, et al., 2004; Sammons et al., 2007) Indeed there is a substantial body of evidence that links the association of lesser availability of adult time, and therefore less intellectual stimulation for the child to poorer school attainment. (Nisbet, 1964; Lindert, 1977; Leibowitz, 1977; Zajonc et al., 1979).

At any one time in the UK there are nominally 60,000 children (900 in Liverpool) in public care, accepted as the OC2 cohort [3]. Their 'cultural environment' has to be provided by the Local Authority (LA), and it is the LA's responsibility, as recommended in the 2007 DCSF White Paper, "Care Matters: Time for Change', to be their 'Corporate Parent'. The LA is responsible for the establishment of an environment where LAC can grow, develop and be at ease in an adult influenced environment. Therefore it is essential that the LA provides all its LAC within a secure cultural environment as it has long been

[3] OC2 Cohort, DCSF;

Definition: Children looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 30 September.

recognised that secure attachments made early on in the child's life are essential to normal child development. (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Bentovim, 1991)

Extensive research (Rohner, 2004, Rohner, 2005, Barna, 2007, Steinberg, 2004 and Kohn, 2005) has shown that successful parenting is based around good and bad parenting characteristics. Research undertaken by Cameron and Maginn, (2008) presents holistic criterion on the spectrum of published data on this subject. Their '8 Pillars of Parenting' were matched to the ECM 'Change for Children' outcomes. This model advocating the parental home-school support not only increases educational outcomes but would also reduce pupil exclusion and promotes attendance. (Webb and Valliamy, 2004)

2.4. Care Matters Agenda

2.4.1. The Virtual School Theory

Definition i): Virtual School for Looked after Children

A Virtual School is a reference to a local authority's organisational model for promoting the educational progress of its school age looked after children. The children can be in different schools, even different LA(s)but a Virtual School Head will be concerned with the progress of each child and will work with schools and other stakeholders to improve their attainment and outcomes. A virtual school does not therefore have a statutory basis. It is a concept and an organisational model. (Liverpool VSH, 2010)

LAC have long been recognised to be at a disadvantage in terms of their educational experiences and outcomes (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). The DCSF have introduced a range of measures in attempts to raise educational attainment and therefore enhancing the prospects for future employment, personal and family fulfilment. However, the reasons for the lower attainment of LAC are complex, including family background, pre-care

experiences, instability and shortcoming in the care environment, low expectations and poor communication between stakeholders. (Harker et al, 2004; Comfort, 2007).

The concept of the 'virtual' school has its origins in the United States in the 1950's, in England it was introduced after the DCSF published its Care Matters White Paper in 2007. With a 'Virtual School Headteacher' (VSH) responsible for driving up the performance of schools in relation to CiC in every LA there was an opportunity to give an individual the strategic overview for all the CiC at a local level. The VSH role could bring a coordinated approach to working with CiC across the authorities, and vitally could exchange and promote good practice with their VSH colleagues.

Research has established that a real benefit of the VS has been the psychological impact that its had on the CiC. Many LAC involved in the VS do not have the secure cultural environment afforded to their peers, highlighted by Pilling and Pringle (1978). Therefore the substitute VS environment becomes an important therapeutic environment in that it promotes the achievement and attainment in the pro-social development of the child. There are two important benefits of this kind of positive educational experience; Firstly, building up powerful resilience factors for the child, and secondly, acting as a source of stability when everything else in the child's life was uncertain. (Kendrick, 1998)

The importance of education, as a force for positive change in the lives of these children, has also been highlighted;

'each step of the educational ladder is associated with improvements in health, employment, income, housing, family life, he absence of addition problems and lower risks of involvement with the criminal justice system." (Jackson and McParlin, 2006)

Liverpool has played a major part in developing the original VS concept. Subsequently other LA(s) have adopted the model and between 2007 and 2009 the DCSF piloted a scheme involving 11 LA(s) to see whether a VSH in each local authority assisted in improving attainment outcomes for LAC. As a result of the pilot and the evaluation of it, the DCSF wrote to LA(s) in December 2009 with this statement; '*The Secretary of State's letter of 6 December to all Directors of Children's Services following on from the Care*

Matters stock take made explicit that one of our expectations is that every local authority will appoint a suitable Virtual School Head (VSH) for looked after children by Easter 2010. Authorities are therefore required now to appoint a VSH – and by implication there is a 'virtual school' of the LAC school age cohort.

2.4.2. The importance of designated teachers

All VS(s) appoint a 'designated teacher' for CiC. Having a teacher who understands the needs of CiC, takes responsibility for their attainment, analyses data and identifies their learning needs, and puts in place appropriate teaching and learning provision, can dramatically improve their education, this quote from a designated teacher defines that;

*"Flexibility is the key, we never give up on them – we just keep trying different approaches" (*Care Matters Stock Take Report, 2009)

All children sitting in a classroom misbehave, but when the CiC do so they do so against a private backdrop of trauma and in many instances what would be considered life shattering experience. Experience that would dilute their willingness to make it to school, sit down, open a book and get on with school work. Often a teacher interprets this behaviour as a personal challenge to their authority and inevitably spirals into a cycle where it becomes more difficult for the teacher to maintain a their professional attitude and their patience, tolerance and flexibility towards that child erode. Paradoxically, from the LAC's position, this more authoritarian management technique by the teacher is seen negatively and the teachers control efforts are seen as 'unfair' or 'personal', the cycle continues and the efforts to maintain control in the classroom are met with yet more disruptive behaviour from the now revolting LAC. (Cameron et al., 2009)

Miller (2003) offered that the behaviour of children and young people in school was influenced by their levels of their perceived controllability. If teachers view difficult and challenging behaviour as being within the child's control, then they are more likely to be sympathetic to the child's needs, more tolerant and more supportive to the child. Therefore helping teachers to see clearly what underpins such behaviour by children in

public care becomes a particularly important task for supporting professionals like teachers, care workers and psychologists.

Obviously sharing a deeper knowledge of the negative effects of a child rejection, abuse and neglect are indeed work for professionals, but the introduction of a designated teacher to LAC can be crucial in forming the secure relationship that the child needs. The National Children's Bureau has also produced a booklet for teachers to enable them to understand the process of attachment and how secure and insecure attachment can effect the education of all children, let alone the CiC. More importantly these teachers need to know that any dysfunctional early relationships the child has had can significantly effect the growth of the child's prefrontal executive functions, such as their memory, narrative ability, emotional representation and their overall state of mind can all be limited or indeed damaged. All these areas to a child are crucial for scholastic achievement and social adjustment, proportionately lacking in most LAC. (Grieg et al., 2008)

Within a CiC context, it is worth noting the following underpinning theory;

"The more secure children feel, the more time, energy and inclination they have to seek understanding and make sense. Whereas fear constricts, safety expands the range of exploration. His is why the social, emotional and cognitive development of abused and neglected children is so heavily compromised. They don't feel safe; they rarely relax. Fear for these children cam be so endemic that exploration is weak, anxious and sporadic" (Howe, 2005)

2.4.3. The importance of care placement stability

In defending themselves against abusive and neglectful parenting or multiple care placements children develop psychological defences to cope with the anxiety and distress. This can impair their ability to relate to others in the future (Howe, 2005). Care placement instability also reduces the child's ability develop lasting relationships (Leathers, 2002) and may exacerbate future patterns of attachment. These multiply placed children are less

likely to establish intimate relationships with future carers and more likely to keep future carers emotionally distant. Ultimately these coping techniques and disruptive behaviour lead to placement breakdown, more placement instability and additional emotional rejection and stress. Placement instability lead to short term relationships, historical ignorance and subsequent cultural denial, all of which may amount to greater confusion and a lack of social identity (Coleman, 1987). Research has established that young people that experience higher levels of placement instability inevitably have the poorest levels of achievement in terms of employment, social relationships, financial control and housing (Biehal et al., 1995). This difficulty in adjustment is one of the key factors which impacts on the outcomes of LAC in terms of both social skills and educational attainment.

Children on average experience placement like change, (Definition ii) three times before adulthood (Moyers and Mason, 1995). Research has revealed that over a quarter of LAC have a corresponding level before their first birthday (Ward, Munro and Dearden, 2006) and it is not unusual for LAC to experience three placements in one year. (DCSF, 2006)

Definition ii): Looked after Children and their Care Placement

The term 'looked after' has a specific, legal meaning, based on the Children Act 1989. Under the Act, a child is looked after by a local authority if he or she;

- *Is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, [Children Act 1989 Section 20 and 21], or*
- *Is subject to a care order [Children Act 1989 Part IV]*

LA(s) can provide children with accommodation under a wide range of circumstances ranging from;

- *As the result of an agreement between the local authority and the child's parents or guardians that being accommodated would be in the child's best interest*
- *The child having been remanded to the care of a local authority by a criminal court*
- *Because the child is helping the police with their enquiries*

- *The child has been placed for adoption, and the local authority is acting as the adoption agency*
- *The child is subject to a police protection order*

SSDA903 guidance 2009-10 Version 1.0 Issued January 2010 [4]

Liverpool's 2008/09 level of placement instability is currently running at 14.4 per cent, its demographic statistical neighbour data is represented below. (Table. iv)

Statistical Neighbour	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
England	*13.7*	*12.9*	*12.6*	*11.8*	*10.7*
Gateshead	12.2	12.6	16.1	10.7	12.0
Halton	14.5	14.3	10.1	9.3	7.0
Hartlepool	16.9	12.8	17.2	13.1	8.4
Hull	16.0	16.6	13.9	13.7	11.3
Knowsley	14.1	15.2	12.6	7.5	6.9
Liverpool	14.2	12.5	15.0	15.1	14.4
Middlesbrough	11.7	12.5	11.3	11.2	12.4
Newcastle	15.9	10.6	9.0	9.5	13.5
Salford	11.8	11.8	8.4	10.2	8.2
South Tyneside	10.2	8.3	13.5	13.0	15.8
Sunderland	7.4	13.8	12.8	10.8	10.2

Table IV: Stability of care placement of Looked after Children: (DCSF-SSDA903, 2009)

As well as emotional stresses, frequent multiple placements also impose a whole range of other problems. Moving home and having to establish a relationship with a new carer may also result in separation from family, school change, loss of contact with friends, relocation to a new geographical area. Many of these changes may cause distress to children, these stresses can have a considerable negative impact on the child's educational functionality.

[4] SSDA903 guidance 2009-10 Version 1.0 Issued January 2010, http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/datastats1/guidelines/children/returns.shtml

Placement instability needs to be considered both within the wider context of child's past and with reference to the multiple levels and types of change they experience. Jackson and Thomas (1999) identified the importance of equal consideration of the child's continuity of contact in terms of education, health care and care placement stability.

There is a growing interest in Europe, researched by the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) (Petrie et al., 2006) in Denmark, France and Germany, for the potential for social pedagogy[5] for informing ways of working with children. The TCRU has examined the role of social pedagogy as a professional, theoretical and policy framework for working with LAC. In England this model would be focused on the Care Matters, 'at the edge of care' children, by supporting families before entering out-of-home care.

Denmark, France and Germany all have a greater proportion of children looked after away from home (in care) than England. In continental Europe diverse measures are available to support young people and families to prevent out-of-home placements. Research in these countries has highlighted the potential for therapeutic approaches informed by psychology and family therapy, where part-time placements, respite and shared-care arrangements were used as an alternative to full time care placements.

Indeed these European models do generate higher levels of educational attainment. Pedagogical approaches from Denmark highlight their successes in that 6 out of 10 children in care progress to further education compared to the UK where the corresponding figure is 6 out of 100, clearly game-changing solutions are required. The key being that social workers and social pedagogies worked alongside each other, adapting and changing roles in a dynamic model as required, with a steep gradient on professional child psychology. Exemplars modelling short-term and part-time placements in Germany where weekday residential settings are closed at weekends, the children return home. Parents are allowed to visit during the week in an attempt to encourage

[5] Social pedagogy can be understood as 'education-in-the-broadest-sense'; its theory and practice is focused on everyday lives, working through relationships, and emphasising individual rights and participation in decision-making, and the development of the whole child. More can be found at http://www.socialpedagogyuk.com/ (TCUR)

family bonding and joint work with parents and children. In Denmark, respite provision is extended so that the children can have flexible access to the same respite provider for up to 21 consecutive days, and in Denmark, France and Germany open-access emergency accommodation is available where any young person can self-present.

Differentiated options of placement were also researched in Europe. Foster placement is seen as the preferred option in all countries, but residential care was more readily considered in France, Denmark and Germany rather than in England. Residential care was being used as an intervention to assist need rather than substitute the family home. This model indicated a graduated range of approaches to placement meeting the heterogeneity of children's needs. (TCRU, 2006)

The family based foster care model is also used on the continent, but it is weaved with other social and educational elements. Residential boarding schools are sometimes used in Denmark to accommodate children outside the care system, models of professional foster care, where carers have a professional social pedagogy background have been successful in Denmark and Germany. The 'Opholdssteder' model in Denmark is an exemplar of this professionalism (social pedagogy) approach with a home-like environment for children whose needs were unlikely to be met by foster carer provision, but who required a less intensive model of intervention than prescribed by full state residential care.

Community-based institutions in Denmark, France and Germany are used to ensure continuity of provision whilst maintaining the young persons involvement in existing social networks; school, college, friendships, whilst accessing part-time or respite provision alongside full time care. Therapeutic institutions for children with significant emotional and behavioural difficulties, providing part-time and full-time provision are just beginning to be used in England but have long been established on the continent.

The research conducted by the TCRU had revealed a range of European care models that could be adopted in England. The diverse context of the care population in England, as mirrored by society itself in terms of contextual factors and socioeconomic make-up,

coupled with the rising re-entry rate into the system suggests the need for more nuanced understanding of the care approach that is currently the case, and the more diverse models of placement, including part-time, respite and shared care arrangements, forming a continuum of planned and purposeful interventions should be explored.

2.4.4. Motivational Theory

Needs theorists suggest that people have needs for certain results or outcomes, and they are driven to behave in ways that satisfy these needs. (Alderfer, 1969; Mazlow, 1943; Murray, 1938). The two main theorist in the 1940(s) were Mazlow with his 'hierarchy of needs' approach, and Alderfer, with the Existence-Relatedness-Growth (ERG) theory of human motivation. These approaches suggested an ascendancy of needs, once one motivating factor was satisfied the individual progressed up the motivational pyramid to a subsequent need. Therefore the basic security needs such as food and housing need to be met before the individual can consider their social and affinitive needs. Once these needs are satisfied they can progress they can then look to meet their personal need for ego satisfaction and self actualisation. Mazlow's pyramid corresponds laterally to the psychological and security needs in Alderfer's ERG model, and evidence of their theories were also reflected to some extent in McGregor's (1960) X and Y theory, however Hertzberg's 'two-factor' theory (1966) argued that motivational satisfaction and dissatisfaction were not untiringly related.

In order to progress the life chances of LAC and indeed the progression of society itself, governments have to consider holistically the motivational theory Mazlow presented. Not only should government policy consider meeting the basic need levels of the pyramid, but also the higher needs too. (Fig. I) Graduated policy for Corporate Parenting and Social Care, needs to be geared to meet the lower and higher order of needs, developing the needs such as belonging, love and affection and above to self-actualisation and the child achieving their mental, physical and social potential. (Fig. I, & explanation)

At the operational level, meeting the primary needs of LAC could present the opportunities that carers need to breakthrough the psychological barriers between them and the child they are caring for, affording them the chance to subtly personalise care in a way that can accommodate a way of communicating, with additional trust and progress can then be made in building a stronger relationship. As a foundation this progress can then be transferred to the school setting, where the child can develop a sense of belonging which is very difficult to cultivate. (Goodnow, 1993; McNeeley et al., 2002).

The growth of this sense of belonging is more essential in the development of the LAC and much more of a human need on Mazlow's hierarchy, that they need to satisfy. Indeed if the to not satisfy this need in the school setting they tend to veer toward the cliques and gangs to meet it;

"Increasing evidence shows that when adolescents feel cared for by people at their school and feel like a part of their schools, they are less likely to use substances, engage in violence, or initiate sexual activity at an early age." (McNeeley et al., 2002)

The VS, underpinned with ideology of Mazlow's pyramid, contextualise the concept of child poverty, not just in the sense of economic poverty but of poverty of aspiration and self-belief. Interventions initiated by the concept of the VS are pivotal in tackling this national issue of intergenerational deprivation, as research indicates that the majority LAC are derived from disadvantage of this type. One of the most valuable outcomes from the VS has been its ability to support the LAC in formulating dreams and giving them the support and means to make these dreams a realty. (Care Matters Partnership, 2009)

Contemporary theorists present a differing view to motivation, a view that resonates through many strands of this research. The concept or idea that deemed excellent educational establishments are '*transforming'* pupils seems to some, utopian. Indeed it is argued that these schools are creating opportunities for their pupils, successfully managing a cultural environment that stimulates opportunity and encourages their pupils' to apply their latent talents to take advantage of those opportunities. This ethos, to an extent underpinned in the VS concept, is captured best by one of these modern theorist;

"*We don't motivate people, we awaken the latent talent already within those people who work with (or for) us ….by providing opportunities that justify their choosing to invest in us their most precious resource: their time, their emotions and themselves"* (Peters, 2005)

Mazlow's Pyramid Extended Model Explanation Fig: 1

The yellow boxes

Represent the lower end "basic" needs of people that current LAC policy addresses, examples being accommodation, food, security and health.

The green boxes

Represent the higher end "advanced" needs of people that current are not addressed for LAC, examples being love, self esteem, self actualisation and ultimately potential realisation.

The adoption, and extension, of Maxzlow's pyramid is an attempt to illustrate the extended effort and additional support required, using a strategic graduated approach, that holistically encapsulates all the facets of need required by living in a LAC environment and not just limiting LAC to the base small line but adding value to their lives by extending the effort to the dotted line as seen below.

If these children are to achieve corresponding levels of potential achievement in terms of academic success and social standing as their mainstream peers then they need the corresponding level of support afforded to their peer.

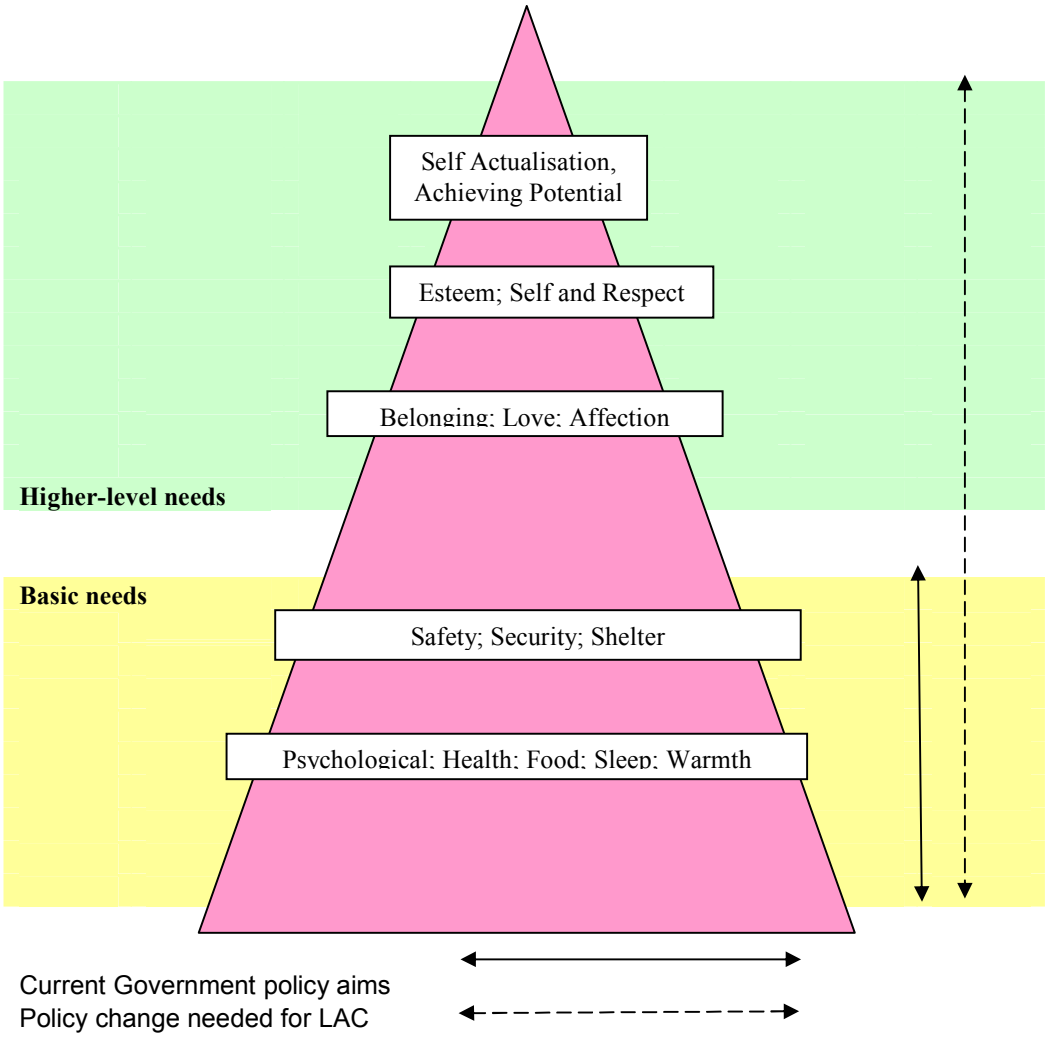

Figure 1: Mazlow's (1971) Hierarchy of needs pyramid mapped to LAC

2.4.5. Stakeholder Theory

The corporate governance framework provides the formal requirements and boundaries within which stratagem can be developed. It is within these governance frameworks that networks of people, working independently, co-produce public services. (Hufen and Ringeling, 1990; Rhodes, 1997; Kicket et al., 1997; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Stoker, 2004) However consideration must be given to understanding the expectations of these

different groups of people (stakeholders) that are involved and attention must be paid to their propensity to seek influence over the organisations purpose and strategies, after all corporate governance stake holding insists that those with a material interest should have some role in running that organisation. (Prabhakar, 2003) Stakeholders are those individuals or groups who depend on the organisation to fulfil their goals and on whom, in turn, the organisation depends. Very few individuals have enough influence or power on their own to influence policy and it usually only occurs because individuals share expectations with others by being part of a stakeholder group.

Research from Nwankwo and Richardson (1996) suggest that stakeholder mapping necessitates the process of identifying all those people who are likely to have an interest or stake in the successful completion of a mutual benefiting project, and classifying them in relation to the power they hold and extent to which they are likely to show interest in supporting or opposing a particular strategy. The key people as indicated by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Service (C4EO) in 2009 are represented below;

- Looked-after children and young people
- Foster, kinship and residential carers, kinship carers
- Education based staff; including teachers in different kinds of schools, tutors and designated teachers, pastoral support staff and special educational needs coordinator (SENCOs)
- Virtual school heads
- Looked-after children educational services or teams (LACES)
- Social workers
- Specialist front line professionals
- Policy makers

Having identified and classifying the key stakeholders, Campbell, Stonehouse and Houston's (2002) adoption of Mendalow's (1991) model immediately ranks the

stakeholders ability upon two factors, power and interest. Power refers to the stakeholders ability to influence the strategic lead and interest freeing to its willingness to influence the strategy. Mendalow's (influence = power x interest) formulae remains a constant for the mapping of stakeholders. (Fig. 2)

The actual power/influence a stakeholder yields also depends upon which segment they are positioned in the matrix.[6] Stakeholders with both high power and interest the VSH could expect considerably more clout than a stakeholder that has less power and interest. Clearly the acceptability of VS strategies to key players in segment D is of major importance. Often the most difficult issues relate to stakeholders in segment C, usually institutional players, that are mostly passive but can block adoption of new strategy quite effectively. Stakeholder in segment B are usually community groups and can influence policy by lobbying more powerful stakeholders and can advance their importance by becoming key players.

This power in the individuals (or groups) ability to persuade, induce or coerce others into following certain courses of action must not be underestimated. (Johnson et al., 2002)

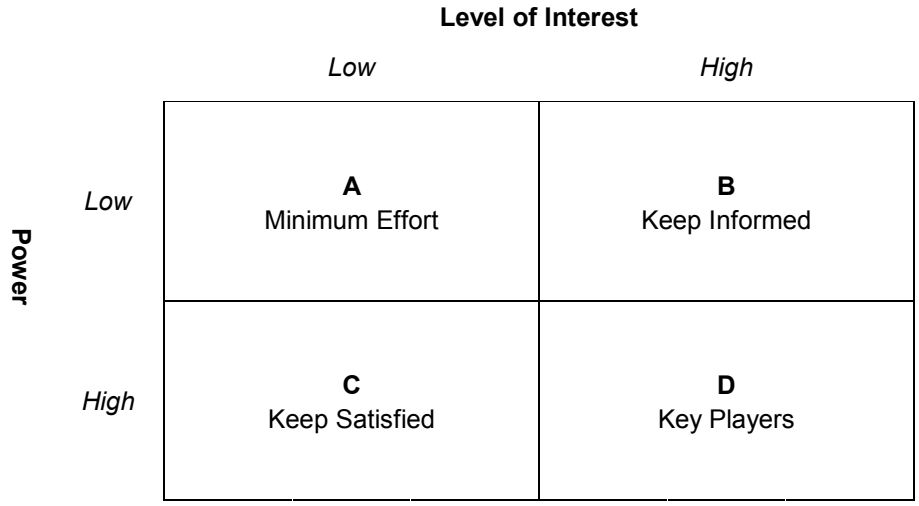

Figure 2: Stakeholder Mapping (Adapted from A. Mendalow 1991)

[6] Source: Adapted from A. Mendalow, Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Information Systems, Cambridge, MA, 1991.

2.4.6. Joined Up Government (JUG) / Collaborative Working

Joined up government (JUG) has featured prominently in the New Labour's agenda. Thematic partnerships comprising of interested cluster groups, with dissimilar political and operational values have replicated the dysfunctional local government silo effect. (Davies, 2007) JUG is a phrase which denotes the aspiration to achieve horizontally and vertically co-ordinated thinking and action, (Pollitt, 2003) However theory can be much different operationally. Thematic partnerships comprises of many interest groups, dominated largely by local government, with peripheral cluster groups that generally go with the strategic flow, a traditional *'hub and spoke'* model of collaboration.

The more strategic players tend to lock their horns with rival operational/political values and in so doing so generally make sure that it is their priorities are advanced strategically, essentially this promotes the silo effect that JUG was supposed to be tackling. The DCSF method of squaring the circle was to emphasize the importance of performance evaluation, hence the performance indicator, in theory an opportunity for government to retain firm control over geographically disperse departments by exercising a strategy of 'hands off' rather than 'hands on' control' put succinctly;

"They involve a much-resented degree of unwanted 'backseat driving' on the part of the government without, as yet, providing a greater degree of central control over services" (Carter quoted in Mc Kevitt & Lawton, 2004)

Contradictory to this cycle, and parallel to the bureaucratic paradox that it is necessary to centralise to decentralising (Perrow, 1977), delegating legislation to the regional bodies responsible for LAC in the piloted VS system has worked. (DCSF, 2009) There is strong evidence that strategies and programmes which adopt a holistic and joined-up approach and deal with the range of obstacles and negative influences that are holding these CiC back, rather than single-issue interventions, are the most effective. (DCSF, 2008) Research by the DCSF has indicated that its CMA has enabled stakeholder groups to develop strong partnerships between carers, LACES staff and specialist agencies.

Having the designated teacher as a point of reference for all agencies concerned has effectively wrapped a bespoke team around the LAC involved to ensure a holistic approach to support. (DCSF, 2009) The VSH and designated teachers ensure effective and timely collaborative work between key professionals, they have regular dialogue with social workers and LA staff, in and out of care plan meetings, making sure there is synergy when supporting the LAC. A multi-constituency or multi-stakeholder approach to effectiveness is thus warranted. (Bluedorn, 1980; Connolly et al., 1974) Indeed an evaluation of one particular VSH considered them to be exceptionally good at getting people from different backgrounds to talk to each other;

"What the VSH has been able to do is build the kind of relationships with all those potentially disparate groups (elected members, LACES teams, foster carers, school attendance officers) into something much more coherent around the child" (DCSF, 2009)

Liverpool has played a major part in developing the current VS model, and a major player in the collaboration with local agencies and central government to spearhead the VS model nationally. However choosing Liverpool to illustrate the way in which LA(s) nationally have successfully collaborated with the private sector and central government as a model of JUG to some may be deemed misplaced. In the mid 1980's it would have been difficult to find a locality in England where relationships between the local authority, local business leaders and central government, were so bad. To contextualise, the local Militant Tendency Party had control of the city from 1983, Margaret Thatcher had just won her second term in No. 10, and the local private sector were seen to be turning their back on the city with a huge withdrawal of capital and investment from the whole of the Merseyside business area.

Collaboration was not on the agenda, indeed during this period the City Council explicitly rejected all Conservative Government initiatives that included any private sector involvement, it advocated a policy of large scale public sector revenue expenditure whilst pursuing a policy of capital expenditure cuts through a combination of creative accounting and illegal budget setting. (Parkinson, 1985)

Against this backdrop, if Liverpool can be shown to have embraced the ideology of JUG and collaborative working as a valuable concept, as indeed it has under New Labour and a different leadership in the city since 1997, it would serve to underline the significance of the trends that can occur when the concept is considered to be of real value.

2.4.7. Leadership Theory

Leadership is typically defined by qualities and behaviour deemed as personal traits such as, honesty, trustworthiness, being competent, indeed there are over 1,500 other characteristics. (Bass, 1990) Leadership theorists (Stoddill, 1974; Hogan, 2000) agree on a consensus that Leadership is as cited by Edwards et al., 2002;

'Using our personal power to win the hearts and minds of people to achieve a common purpose'

Progressing the concept of Leadership into the public sector, research suggests that the individual must have a special mix of characteristics, including;

*'Integrity, vision, the ability to inspire others, a deep awarene*ss of self, courage *to innovate and an instant and impeccable sense of judgement'* (Brosnahan, 1999)

Further research has identified several forms of *'bad Leadership'* traits acknowledging the dark side of human nature and how it effects leaders and their followers; being incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular and evil, to name a few cited by Kellerman. (2004) Dark side tendencies are counter productive and interfere with a leaders ability to build cohesive teams and cause team members to exert less effort towards goal success. (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Dotlich & Cairo, 2001)

Dark side personality traits are much more likely to develop during times of stress, during crises or managers are comfortable and fell able to let their guard down, as they do in many LA settings when they feel professionally entrenched and to a large extent institutionalised in their role. (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Dotlich & Cairo, 2001; Hogan & Curphy, 2004) Central Government, keen to promote the vision and values underpinned

in their 2001 Cabinet Office Performance & Innovation Unit (PIU) report "*Strengthening Leadership in the Public Sector"* places this type of leadership at the core of Labour's modernisation agenda. Research underpinning the requirement for a "*strong, inspirational leader"* as a successful business unit pre requisite. (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Peters & Austin, 1985) Consequently for the VS' to be successful game-changing solutions, a strong, inspirational Head Teacher, needs to be in position.

Quantitative research linking leadership to student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003), along with references to further individual quantitative studies (Silins & Mulford, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999) validate the importance of quality leadership, as requested by the DCSF under the CMA. Further research has highlighting the need for quality leadership, especially in schools facing challenging circumstances, as many VS face themselves. (Gezi,1990; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998). Leadership seems to be especially important in schools that need it need it most, where the order of the day come around to theories on transformational approaches to school leadership. (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005)

One can not theories about excellent leadership without reviewing its obvious dependency on motivational theory, suggesting that leadership is less a specific set of behaviours than it is creating an environment in which people are motivated to produce and move in the same direction as the leader. (Horner, 1997) by creating the right environment, one where people want to be actively involved, feel engaged, committed to succeed, leaders are able to influence and direct the activities of others. Hertzberg's, *'Hygiene Factors'* (1964), Alderfer's *'Manifest Needs Theory'* (1969), Vroom's, 'E*xpectancy Theory'*, (1964) and Locke's *'Goal Setting Theory'* (1968), all underpin the overarching theory that it is the followers themselves that causes them to act.

Leadership is therefore not only the processes and activities of the person in the position of leader, but also the environment this leader creates and how the leader responds in this environment towards the particular group of people being led. This would correlate to a perfect match as it is indeed the most vulnerable children that fall into these categories and would benefit most from a leadership led environment such as the virtual school.

Indeed there is research evidence that what people expect of other people strongly influences their behaviour (Livingstone, 1969) People, especially children, tend to do what they believe is expected of them, a phenomenon known as the *'Pygmalion Effect'*, first demonstrated in pupils' performance as a result of their school teachers' expectations. (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) Effective leaders since have attempted to harness this Pygmalion effect to increase the performance of their followers. (Locke et al., 1981) This notion adds resonance with particularly relevant to the needs of LAC as noted,

"Self-esteem is a powerful motivator and source of great inspiration". (Goodwin, 1998)

2.5. Summary

This chapter has given a holistic view of the characteristics of LAC, the attempts by central government to narrow the attainment gap, and progressed arguments for the facilitation of the research aims. A conceptual model has been developed around the accepted theories of motivation, joined up government, stakeholder mapping and strategic and operational leadership.

Initial findings are that the inception of the VS is believed to be a move in the right direction, and that the concept is a sound one. However progress to date has shown that it will require a graduated approach to deliver real success.

The following chapter will detail the research methods used in this dissertation to aggregate statistical and narrative intelligence.

Conceptual Model Explanation (Fig. 3)

The yellow boxes

These are the strategic elements that drive the theory, the classical approach to strategy underpins this theory, authorities have presented that the rational process of deliberate calculation and analysis, designed to maximise and maintain long-term advantage. (Ansoff, 1965, 1991; Porter, 1985, 1996)The ideology of he VS is to support the LAC, give them a stable environment to live and learn in, this correlates to assisting them to achieve and maintain the competitive advantage referenced by Porter.

The strategic lead came from the DCSF CMA, but the vehicle to support this strategy has been the creation of the strangely termed virtual school, and most LA(s) in England have, or soon will have, a model to bridge their LAC educational attainment gap.

The blue boxes

These are the key operational elements of the model to ensure that the VS achieve its intended goal. It is the belief of the researcher that attention to these key areas is vital to the success of the strategy as a whole. The model has a classical approach in that it follows the traditional strategy driven approach (inputs) weaved into an operational theatre (outputs)at the delivery stage.

Due to the importance of timely intervention and strict time lines presented here and embedded in the literary review, time is of the essence for these children, indeed early interventions are crucial, and with that in mind there must not be can any gaps between strategic decisions and actions,(Cohen et al; 1976) there must be no place for strategic drift of any kind. (Johnson and Scholes)

I believe using this model would build a strategic base so that the operational needs of the LAC can be addressed and with the built in accountability from internal school mechanisms, ensure that they can achieve the much needed 'leg up' they require.

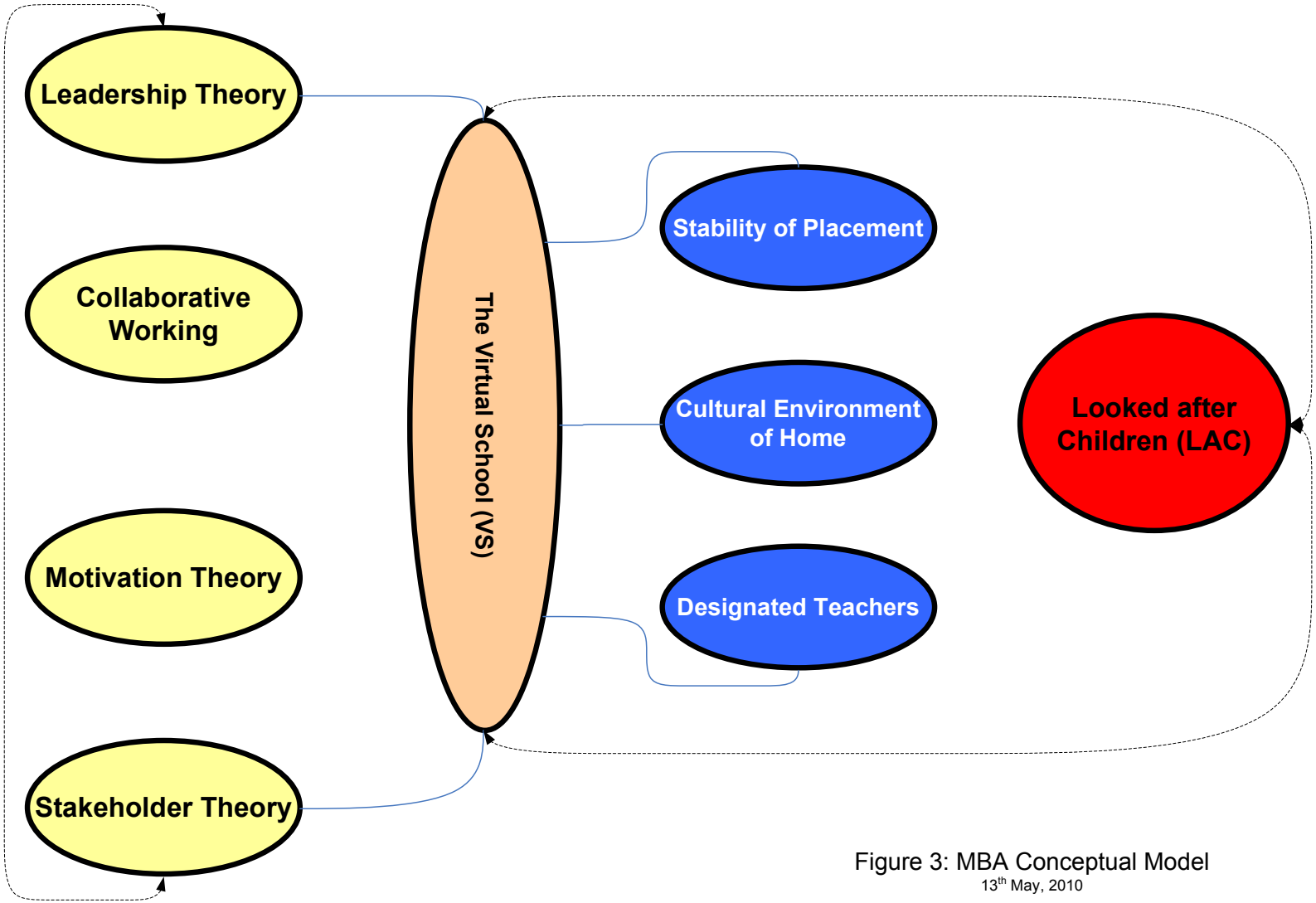

Figure 3: MBA Conceptual Model
13th May, 2010

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methods employed by the researcher to progress the research question outlined in chapter one underpinned philosophy, strategy, data collection methods employed and ethical considerations made.

This research is an exploratory study, "what is happening: to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (Robson, 2002). Social and educational phenomena increasingly use the mixed methods approach to research design. (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) The choice of using a mixed method approach was influence by the literary review at the beginning of this research, and facilitates several advantages over other research techniques.

For the researcher the value added component of using this mixed method approach was identified during the literary review stage of this process, and realised in a reflective phase some time afterwards. The opportunity to attend a Virtual School (VS) conference, where the UK pioneering professionals that developed the VS concept in England, where conducting a 'fit for purpose' review on the VS system.

Attendance at this review provided the researcher an opportunity to conduct unstructured interviews in order to get a real feel for the key issues. The benefits gained from these interviews was tangible, and the increased levels of confidence in the subject area immeasurable. Post conference a more focussed and pointed questionnaire was developed for quite senior, and a subsequently more expectant, audience.

3.2 Research philosophy

The overarching philosophical approach for this research project will follow the pragmatism paradigm. It has been quite clear to the researcher from the literary review that the study would progress in terms of a continuum rather than an opposing 'for' or 'against' argument. As noted by Tashakkori and Teddlie in 1998; '*at some points the*

knower and the known must be interactive, while at others, one may more easily stand apart from what one is studying".

Buchannan et al., 1998, advocates the *"learning from your experience"*, approach which corresponds with the researchers attendance at the 'fit for purpose' review of the VS strategy. Audience consideration was vital, in a sensitive environment, unstructured discreet face-to-face '*conversations'* were employed at this juncture as oppose to semi-structured interviews, which were used on Liverpool's VS staff, because essentially it was the interviewees' perceptions that guided and controlled the direction of the interview. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Ghauri et al., 2005; Robson, 2002)

Ethical consideration also came into play when considering the stakeholders and vulnerability of the primary intelligence on such socially disadvantaged, politically volatile cohort. Additional consideration also had to be given to the professionalism and commitment of the people working in this extremely stressful and emotionally demanding environment. (Anthony and Parker, 1998)

3.3 Research strategy

The research strategy undertaken for this dissertation is a mixed method approach. By incorporating intelligence from both quantitative and qualitative sources, it has been possible to link possible casual relationships from published national data and evidence from participants on their perceptions, experiences and interpretations of cultural / environmental practices in an attempt to influence and potentially challenge these relationships. The adopted strategy is indeed an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. (Saunders et al., 2009)

3.3.1 Justification for the selected paradigm and methodology

In order to address the research question both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection will be employed, this facilitates flexibility in terms of the sequencing, sequencing between semi-structured interview, questionnaire and informal interviews.

The mixed method approach also increases the possibilities of identifying patterns of association and possible causal relationships between low educational attainment, in this case specifically the looked after cohort, and measures of school processes in contributing to the fluctuations in this educational attainment gap.

The performance answers to the research question are largely in the public domain and presented in chapter 4 of this paper. However the mixed method approach lends itself to flexibility, several data collection techniques were employed to underpin these tangible results, unstructured interviews or 'conversations', open interviews with colleagues in Liverpool's VS and a VS orientated questionnaire was developed.

This research strategy was not restricted to Liverpool, to examine any statistical movement in isolation would be erroneous, therefore Liverpool's performance has been benchmarked against particular groupings, its Statistical Neighbours (SN), Core Cities (CC) and North West Local Authorities (NWG). (Appendix ii) All these different sources of data could then assist in revealing patterns and possible relationships between Liverpool and the other groupings, effectively ranking it to other local authorities in terms of its contextually similar socio-economic, political and geographical neighbours. This process of analysing data is consistent with documented research. (Dey, 1993; Miles et al., 1994; Yin, 2003)

3.3.2 Rejected methods

Structured interviews were rejected because they are predominantly focus on collecting quantifiable data. (Saunders et al., 2009) Unstructured one to one interviews, or rather 'conversations' were preferred to one to many interview when interviewing delegates at the VS conference. Primarily because each LA was at differing stages of implementation of the VS and processes and experiences would have varied to such a degree that it would have made group discussion difficult. Due to time restrictions on the day a number of these one to one interviews were revisited at a more convenient time over the telephone, this method was considered to be the best option due geographical barriers.

Focus groups whose participants would be invariably rich sources of information, (Kruger and Casey, 2000) were rejected because there would have been difficulties in accurately recording interactions between multiple participants, (Carson et al., 2001) due to the emotive nature of the subject and the facilitation limitations of the researcher.

3.4 Research design

In order to undertake the research question both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection will be employed in a mixed model approach to assist flexibility in terms of the sequence of intelligence gathering and the qualitative strand.

The quantitative strand of the research involved three components;

- An analysis of national data sets, from the DSCF published data site at; http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performancetables/, on primary and secondary schools performance was conducted to identify the LA(s) that were improving over the four year period since the implementation of the virtual school concept. The analysis was based on published data and benchmarked in to SN, CC and NWG groupings. (Appendix ii) The data analysed indicated the LA(s) average for its mainstream pupils, its LAC cohort and corresponding attainment gap for the following Key Stages;
    - Key Stage 2 English Level 4+
    - Key Stage 2 maths Level 4+
    - Key Stage 4 GCSE 5+ A* - C
    - Key Stage 4 GCSE 1+ A* - C
- An information gathering pro forma, (Appendix i) was produced and presented to the North West Benchmarking Group on 10, December, 2009. The pro forma was also e-mailed to all SN, CC and NWG colleagues with strategic responsibility over the VS in their respective grouping.
- An electronic visual basic spread sheet questionnaire was presented to the North West Benchmarking Group on 10, December, 2009 and e-mailed to all

SN, CC and NWG colleagues with strategic responsibility over the VS in their respective grouping.

The qualitative strand involved two components;

- Unstructured face-to-face interviews '*conversations',* with a number of heads of the virtual schools in the salient benchmarking groups, to ascertain the practices identified by them as important in their improvement efforts.

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Liverpool's VSH and key staff to progress those issues that were most significant to them in relation to the research aims and objectives and aspects identified as important in the literary review. Interviews with key staff also progressed the concepts identified in the literary review in connection to the conceptual model, particularly insights from staff on school leadership, leadership motivation and collaborative working.

Qualitative data was deliberately limited to a relatively small participation group in an attempt to keep research focus and in scope. (Fig. 4)

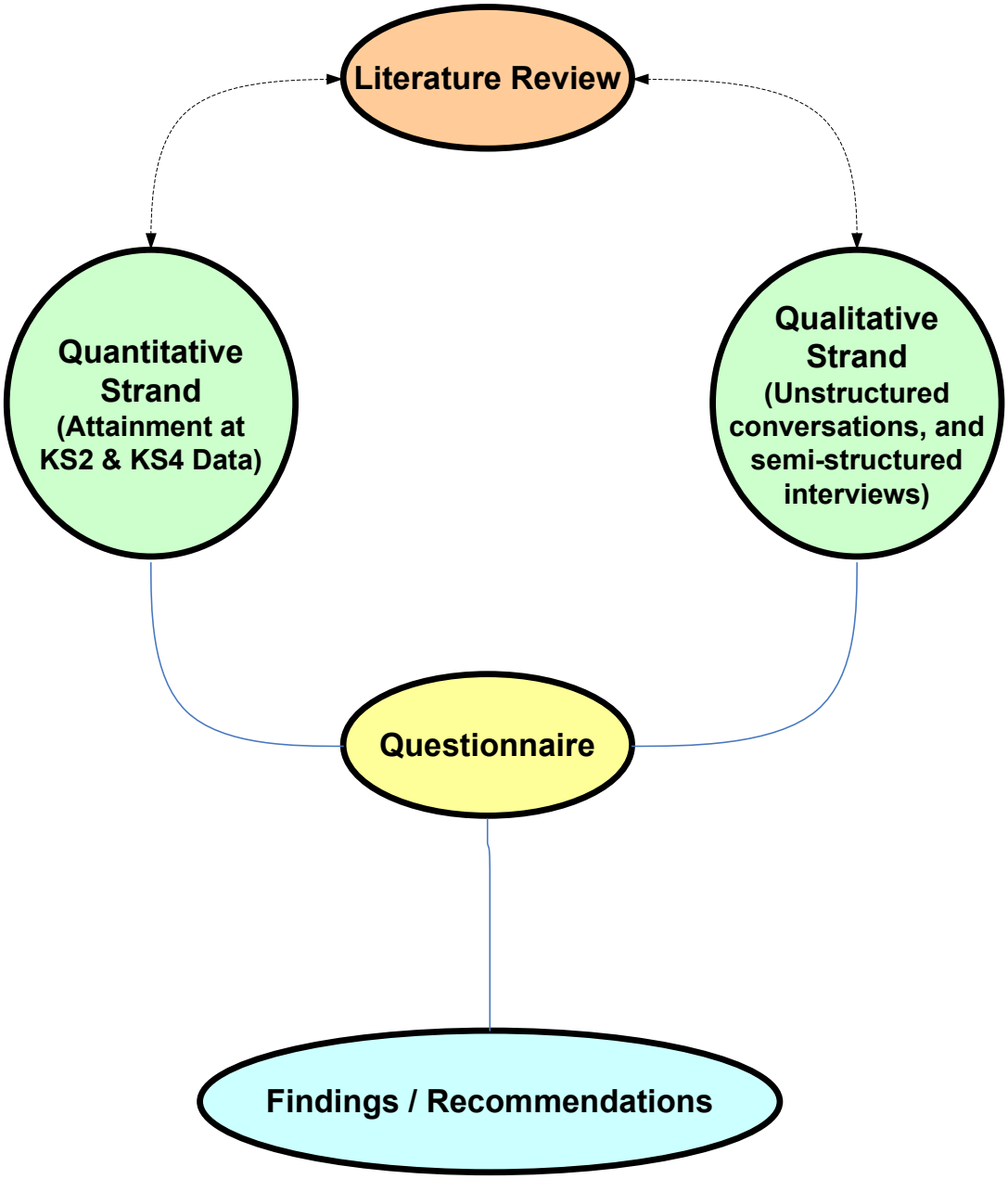

Figure 4: MBA Design Model
6th April, 2010

3.5 Research processes

3.5.1 Interviews

The initial step in this research was the data collection pro forma sent to the relevant benchmarking groups, not including Liverpool in all three groupings, with twenty one in total; SN = 11, CC = 8 and NWG = 7. These are the LA(s) with characteristics that are deemed more socio-economically, politically and geographically closer to Liverpool then other LA(s) in England. Therefore the presumption by the researcher was that these LA(s) would have more similarly characteristic experiences with the virtual school.

The researcher was given the opportunity to attend a *'The Future of Virtual Schools- Models, systems and approaches in raising educational attainment of vulnerable and looked after children'* conference, (21st January, 2010), where the UK pioneering professionals that developed the UK VS concept, where conducting a 'fit for purpose' review of the system in England. Many of the topics identified as important in the literary review would be presented, discussed and critically analysed at this venue. This was not only an excellent opportunity to gain valuable knowledge on the research area but a potentially valuable networking opportunity.

I did conduct unstructured 'conversation' type interviews at this conference in order to advance my knowledge base and research profile, indeed it was the interviewees' perceptions that guided and controlled the direction of the interview. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Ghauri et al., 2005; Robson, 2002) However there was an important secondary value obtained from these interviews, additional clarity and focus for developing a more challenging and statistically valuable questionnaire in relation to the research aims, objectives and aspects identified as important in the literary review. (Appendix iii)

Semi-structured interviews took place with Liverpool's VSH, Head of Strategic Intelligence and Senior Intelligence Manager to progress those issues that were most significant to them in relation to the research aims and objectives of the research brief and also aspects identified as important in the literary review. Particular consideration was given to the conceptual model presented in chapter two, progressing themes such as quality leadership, collaborative working, motivational strategies and stakeholder

consideration. The researcher believes that the interviewees responses could indicate relationships and in some way lend validation of the conceptual model itself.

3.5.2 Questionnaires

The questionnaire (Appendix iii) was designed so that each person was asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. (deVaus, 2002) The development of the questionnaire was a direct attempt to address the research aims, objectives and aspects identified as important in the literary review, (Bell, 2005; Oppenheim, 2000), and with consideration from the unstructured interview answers I created a self-administered questionnaire to be completed by my focus group. The questionnaire was emailed to the focus group as it was geographically all over England, on February 12th 2010.

The questionnaire comprises of seven sections and a total of twenty six responses were required. It is in excel format with visual basic background macros to facilitate user friendliness and data collection efficiency, a hidden sheet being used for aggregation of the data. The final question is open ended to facilitate the respondents' psychological need to elaborate or contextualise their previously answered questions in the series, this option would also become a rich source of quotations to further progress the aims and objectives deemed important in the literary review.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The unstructured 'conversations' conducted at the VS conference unexpectedly yielded the most heart rendering themes in terms of the pastoral results achieved from the concept of the VS. In focussing on the hard evidence for the effectiveness of the concept, it became clear that the real successes from the concept were the unintentional, and to the researcher largely unknown, pastoral progression made by the students'. Reporting on national indicators is one method of research, measuring the real life and sometimes real changing impact on the lives of one the most vulnerable sector of society in another. Therefore the researcher has taken a moral deontological view that the use of any unethical research would never be justifiable (Saunders, 2009) or utilised.

3.7 Summary

This research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection following a classic mixed model approach to study. The quantitative strand attempts to link possible casual relationships from published national data, and the qualitative strand attempts to challenge those relationships, from interviewing key VS personnel for their perceptions, experiences and interpretations of their working practices and environment. The collection of this data has enabled the researcher to holistically link the questions asked back to the to the research aims, objectives and aspects identified as important in the literary review.

The following chapter will provide outcomes and an evaluation to the questions asked in the literary review with a conclusion and opportunities for further research.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the findings of the research. The conclusions drawn from the research and the quantitative analysis from it will be presented in the next chapter. As presented in the previous chapter the research methodology employed was a mixed model approach to assist data sequence flexibility.

The primary data strand involved three components;

- Unstructured face-to-face interviews '*conversations',* with several Heads' of Virtual Schools in LA(s) from around England
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Liverpool's VSH, Head of Strategic Intelligence and Senior Intelligence Manager to progress those issues that were most significant to them in relation to the research aims and objectives of the research brief and also aspects identified as important in the literary review
- Questionnaires were completed by VSH's from Liverpool's socio-economic, geographical and demographic neighbouring LA(s).

4.2 Secondary data

The secondary data strand of this research involved several components, mainly DCSF funded papers and official government documents. An analysis of published regional and national data sets, in primary and secondary school performance was conducted to identify the LA(s) performance over the four year period, 2005 to 2009, or roughly since the opening of their virtual schools. The focus was on Liverpool's benchmarking neighbours in SN, CC and NWG groupings. All data was taken at the end of the key stage, and covers the current national indicator set. [KS2, English Level 4+; KS2 maths Level 4+; KS4 (5+ A*-C) and KS4 (1+ A* C)]. (Appendices iv - vii)

4.3 Analysis of respondents / non-respondents

All of the participants interviewed, at the future of the VS conference or at the semi-structured interviews in Liverpool, had strategic responsibility for the VS concept in their corresponding LA(s). Although the number of participants from this strand of the research was limited, it did yield the richest of intelligence in terms of research direction and focus. Indeed many of the participants gave focused and detailed responses to the questions posed. As the cohort in this strand was so small, the researcher was able to gather 100 per cent participation.

Consideration was given by the researcher to the likely busy schedule of the intended focus group of VSH, therefore questionnaires length was capped at just seven questions. However when broken down there the whole questionnaire aggregated to some twenty seven sub questions, which were relatively fully completed. Indeed of the participating LA(s) only a small percentage omitted to answer statistical questions in the National Indicator section. (Q.6)

In total twenty two questionnaires were sent to LA(s) identified in the literature review. Some LA(s) are in more than one grouping and all LA(s) returned as follows;

- Core Cities (n = 8 LA(s)) with 6 complete, 75.0%
    - Manchester and Nottingham did not respond
- Statistical Neighbours (n = 11 LA(s)) complete, 100.0%
    - Middlesbourgh and Hull replies via email.
- North West Authorities (n = 7 LA(s)) with 5 complete, 71.4%
    - St. Helens and Sefton did not respond
- Overall completion rate was 85.7%
- Overall non response rate was 14.3%.

Chart 2 below is a representation of the return statistics for the VSH questionnaire.

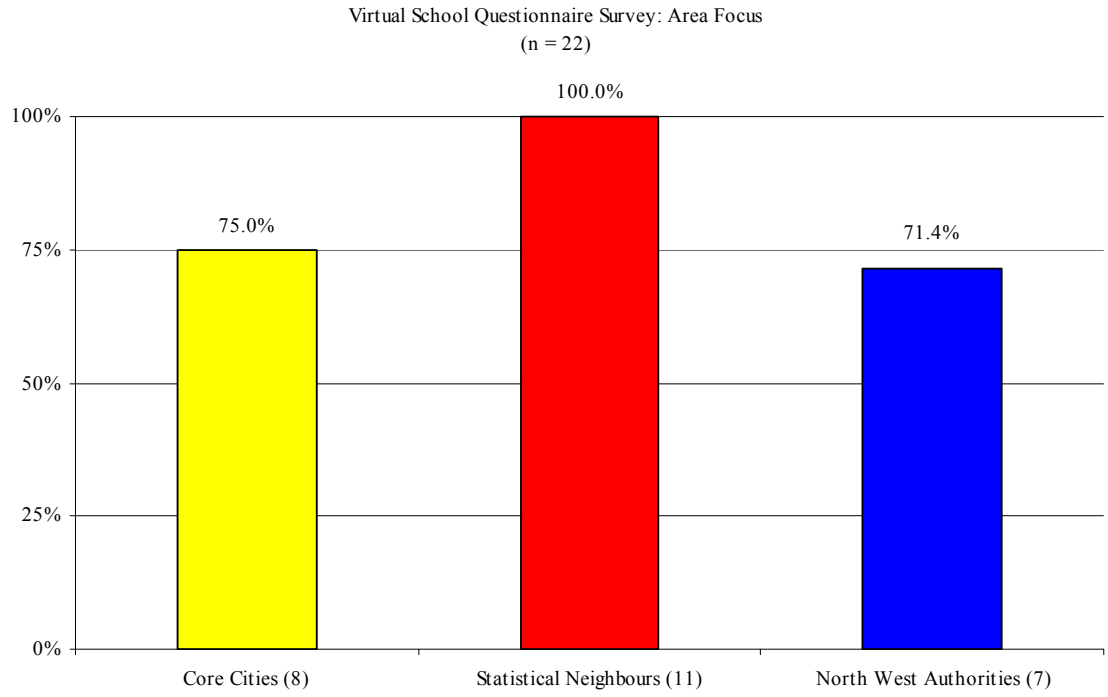

Chart 2: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4 Findings for each research question

An analysis of both the research strands seen a number of common themes emerge. The findings in relation to the research aims of the first chapter of this dissertation and questions thought relevant by the researcher are detailed in this chapter.

4.4.1 Research Aims

4.4.1.1 Aim 1: To access the impact of the VS system in Liverpool

Liverpool has had a virtual school since 2001, the national model is fashioned on this.

"Initially we reconstituted all LAC services to provide coherent support for them. A strong board of corporate governors was central to our VS strategy, and it is this VS strategy that drove a more rigid strategic management structure, more effective leadership and ultimately improvement in LAC attainment, relative of course to the national picture and before we had a VS. However it's not just about GCSE's, it's the notion of the VS that enables the kids' to achieve more, giving them the tools

they need!...In Liverpool the monitoring of LAC pupils' attainment is supported by a vastly improved analysis of pupil level data from Education, Social Care Services as well as better local authority collaboration. Well developed information sharing agreements with operational synergy between the LACES Team, VSH and Strategic Intelligence Team (SIT) exist now, they didn't before." (Liverpool's VSH, 2010)

Chart 3 below is a representation confirming that progress has been made in LA(s) data sharing protocols and monitoring of the LAC is strongly regulated.

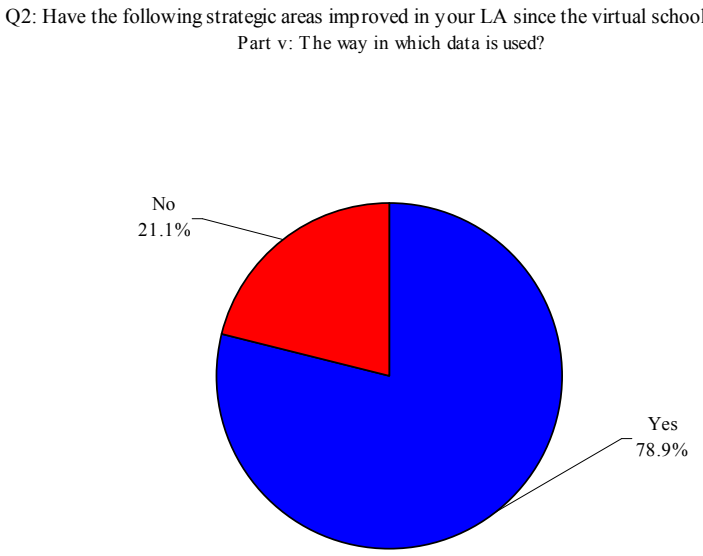

Chart 3: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.1.2 Aim 2: To access the impact of assigning a designated teacher to LAC pupils

A key feature in Liverpool's VS and to this research is the importance given to the assignment of a designated teacher to LAC pupils'. The causal relationship between collaborative working and improved LAC outcomes were presented in chapter 2 of

this research, the Liverpool VSH offered this extension to it*; "All Liverpool schools now have a trained, designated teacher for their LAC pupils'….a person who can act as a liaison point for social workers, LACES staff and other agencies".* This function of the VS model was overwhelming supported by evidence from the questionnaire, all other LA(s) used this strategic tool to holistically support their LAC pupils'.

Charts 4 below demonstrates the extent to which the VS has progressed in facilitating improved strategic linkage between key people involved with LAC pupils'.

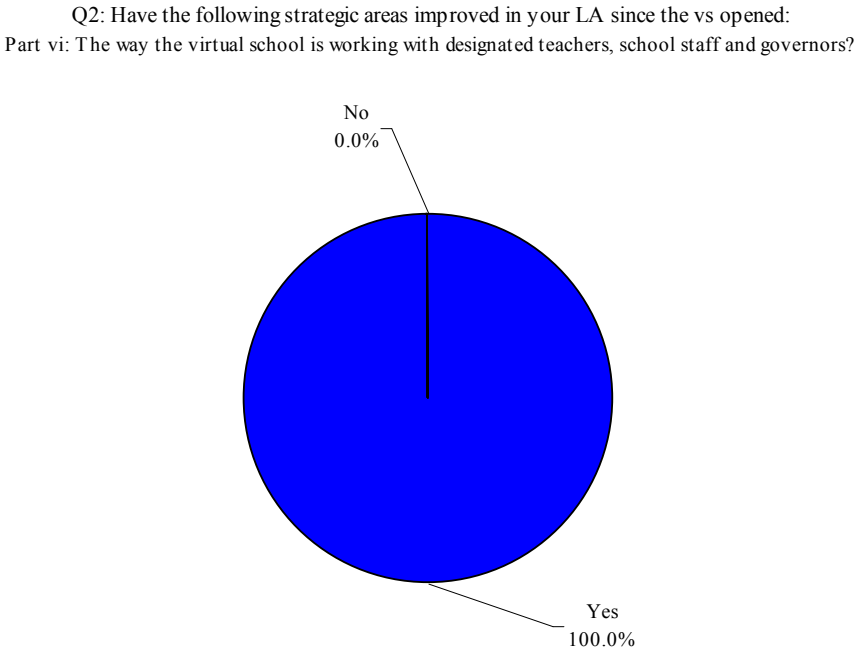

Chart 4: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

Charts 5 below expands on the extent to which the VS has assisted in improving their support of LAC, encouragingly 83.3 per cent agree that they support their LAC to a good or better level in their respective LA(s).

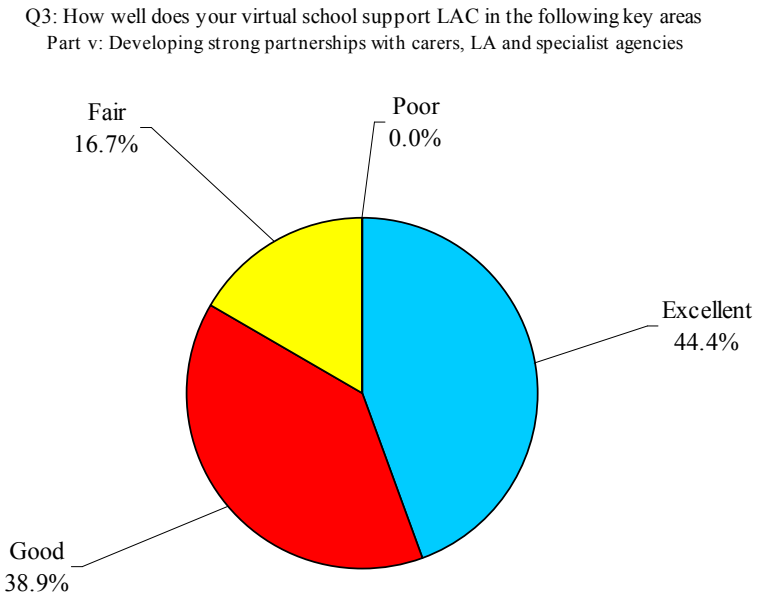

Chart 5: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.1.3 Aim 3: To examine Liverpool's LAC placement policy in terms of its stability of placement and overall outcome success

Liverpool's VSH agreed with established research that indicated that many variable factors contribute to the successful outcomes of LAC attainment. However underpinning it all must be, as identified in chapter 2 of this research, the stability of care placement, types of care placement, and pupil relationships because of care placements.

"The relationship between instability and poor attainment has been a real problem for the Liverpool's VS to overcome…so much so that stability of placement had to be given the highest priority in delivering a successful VS platform." (Senior Intelligence Manager for Social Care, 2010)

Chart 6 below demonstrates that stability of placements for 93.8 per cent of the participating LA(s) has indeed improved, with the exception of one LA, 6.3 per cent.

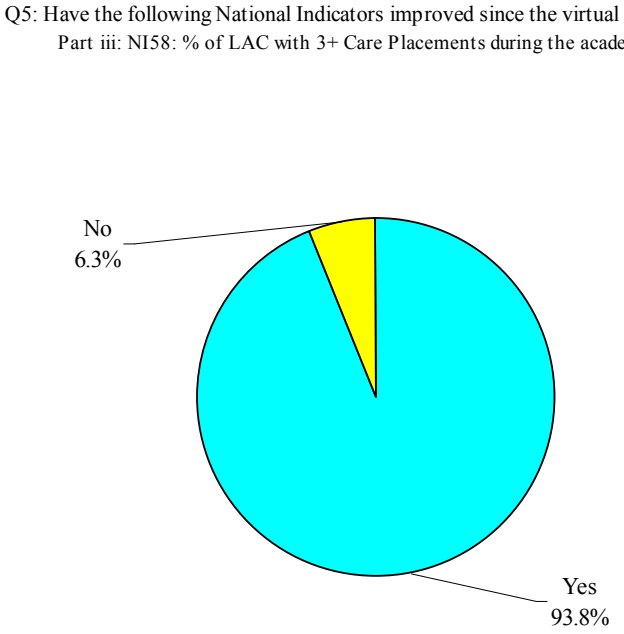

Chart 6: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.1.4 Aim 4: To compare the performance of LCC against other local authorities using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques

An analysis of published regional and national data for relating to schools' results was conducted to identify the LA(s) performance over the four year period, 2005 to 2009. A focus was on the benchmarked groups in SN, CC and NWG. All the data is at the end of the key stage and covers the relevant national indicator sets. [KS2, English Level 4+; KS2 maths Level 4+; KS4 (5+ A*-C) and KS4 (1+ A* C)]. (Appendix iv - vii)

4.4.2 Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) questionnaire / survey

4.4.2.1 VSH Q1: What is your professional background

This question demonstrates a strong operational reliance on senior educationalists in terms of leadership in VS. Indeed if one drilled deeper into the statistics one can see that only 10.5 per cent of the participating LA(s) VSH were from the '*other'* backgrounds, conversely, aggregated upwards 89.5 per cent were from educational /

teaching backgrounds. There is also a strong influence towards secondary sector backgrounds making up 21.1 per cent and 21.1 per cent were from the qualified teacher grouping. Further research would be required to establish their derivation.

Chart 7 below illustrates that there was no representation from social workers, senior social workers, special or interestingly primary head teachers backgrounds.

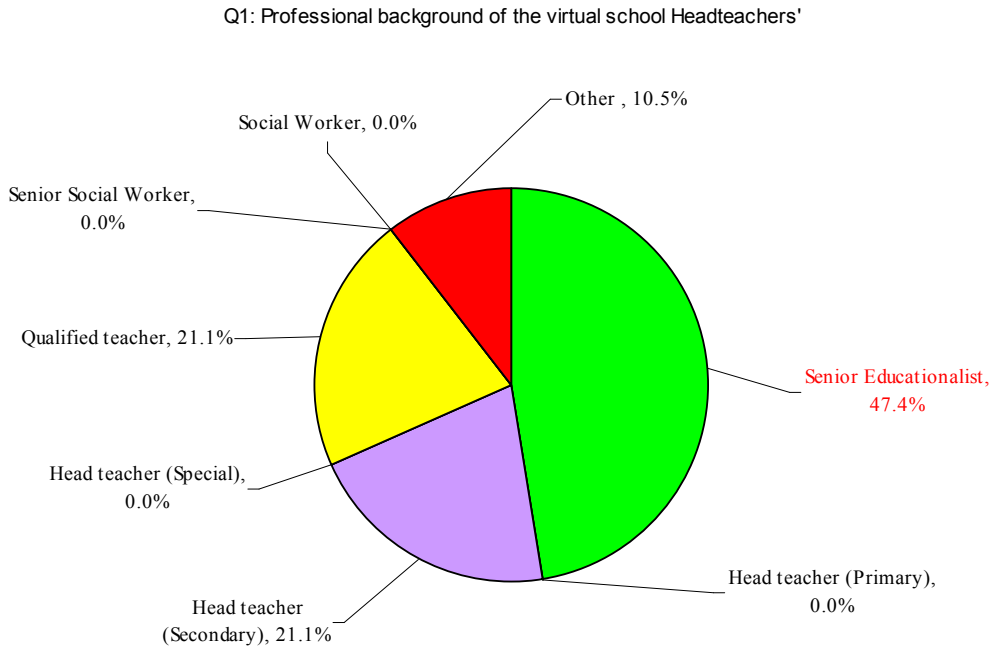

Chart 7: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.2 How well does your VS support LAC in the following key areas

4.4.2.2.1 VHS Q3, part i: Doing the things they do for all children but more so

LA(s), in this section, were asked to self rank themselves in terms of delivery on the DCSF's LAC key priorities, from the range, *"excellent, good, fair or poor"*, as categorised by OfSTED, the schools standards regulator.

Encouragingly no LA rated themselves '*poor'* for this question, although one LA made no response to this particular question. Reassuringly the span of replies does

indicate a level of honesty from the participating LA(s). Overall LA(s) were in agreement that LAC requirements were as important as their mainstream peers, but also gave an acknowledgement that they required additional help, possibly provided by their VS.

Chart 8 below highlights these findings in that there is a 82.4 per cent degree of support in for the additional support to LAC.

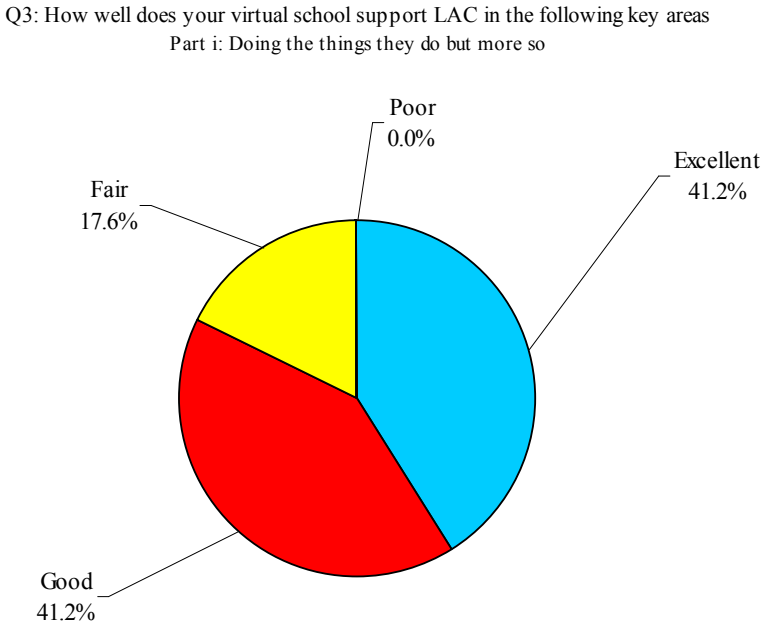

Chart 8: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.2.2 VSH Q3, part iii: Skilfully linking each child to a key person they can relate to

The following questions, represented in charts 9 and 10, related directly to the documented importance that secure, lasting relationships assist in accelerating LAC performance. Highlighted by some of the LA(s) was the need for emphasising that an in depth personal knowledge of the individual child was an essential factor in these types of relationships, underpinning the ideology of the allocation of a designated teacher to LAC.

Chart 9 below highlights these findings in that there is a 58.9 per cent degree of support in for this support area, encouragingly no LA(s) themselves as poor in this support.

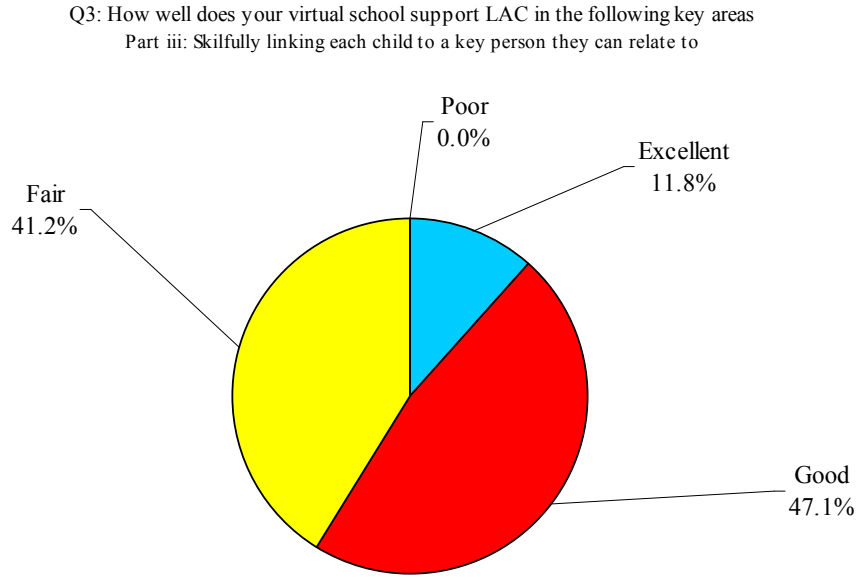

Chart 9: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.2.3 VSH Q3, part iv: Making it a priority to know the children well and build relationships

Chart 10 below indicates the importance placed on the findings in that there is a 64.7 per cent degree of support in knowing the LAC pupils' and building relationships with them. Encouragingly no LA(s) themselves as poor in this support.

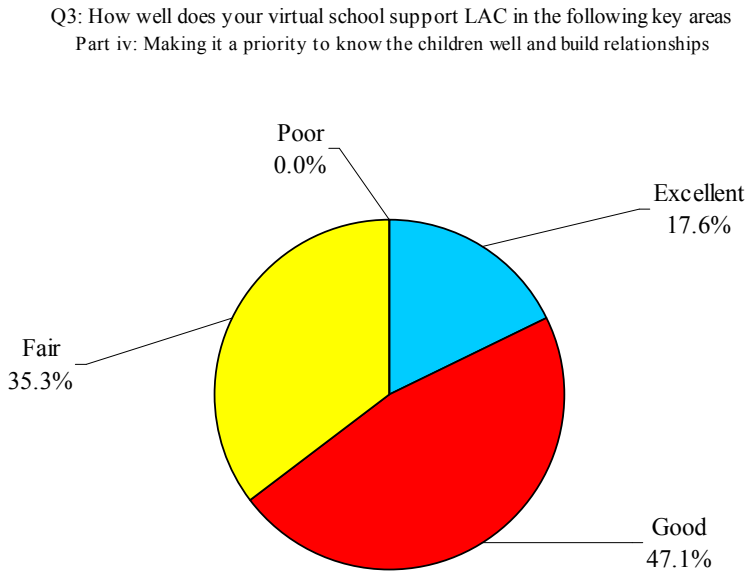

Chart 10: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.2.4 VSH Q3, part viii: Extending the horizons of each child

Liverpool's VS, opened in 2001 has extensive experience with the VS model, deemed the following question a crucial function in their VS.

"Expanding the horizons of LAC should be built in to the aims of any VS model, it should run parallel, and be given equal importance to DCSF milestones….as I said before it's not just about the GCSE(s)," (Liverpool VSH 2010)

Chart 11 below indicates the importance placed on the future lives of the LAC, 47.1 per cent agreed that their horizons should be extended, somewhat disappointingly 52.9 per cent are described as fair and again poor is at zero. This would correlate to the Liverpool VSH point that it is seen more important the longer the school is established and the LAC pupil, VS relationship develops.

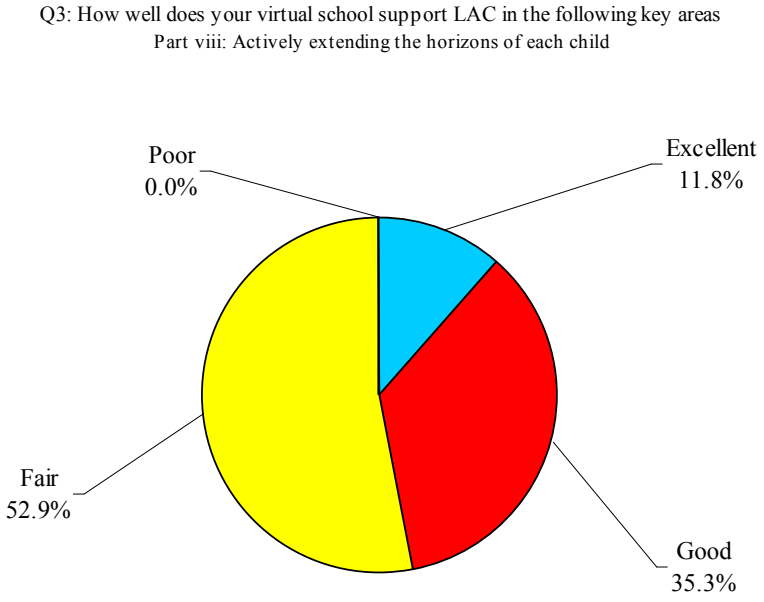

Chart 11: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.3 Has LAC attainment improved

4.4.2.3.1 VSH Q4, part i: KS2 % LAC pupils gaining L4+, English

Chart 12 below demonstrates that in all, except 2 LA(s) 10.5 per cent, nationally expected levels at key stage 2 results in English have improved since the opening of their respective VS, encouragingly 89.5 per cent report an improvement.

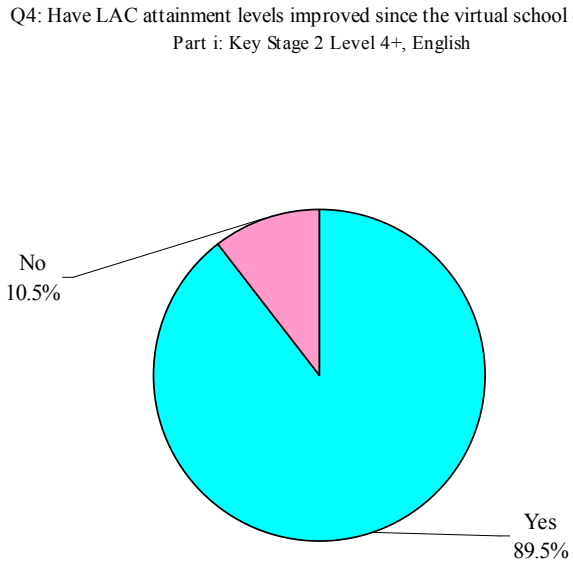

Chart 12: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.3.2 VSH Q4, part ii: KS 2 % LAC pupils gaining L4+, Maths

Chart 13 below demonstrates that in all, except 3 LA(s) 15.8 per cent, nationally expected levels at key stage 2 results in maths have improved since the opening of their respective VS, encouragingly 84.2 per cent report an improvement.

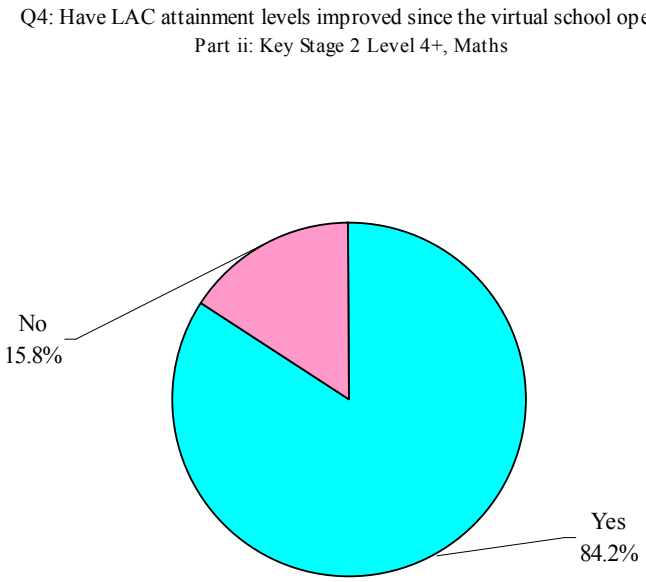

Chart 13: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.3.3 VSH Q4, part iv: KS4 % LAC gaining 5+A* - C GCSE

Chart 14 below demonstrates that in all, except 1 LA(s) 5.3 per cent, nationally expected levels at key stage 4 (5+ A* - C) results have improved since the opening of their respective VS, encouragingly 94.7 per cent report an improvement.

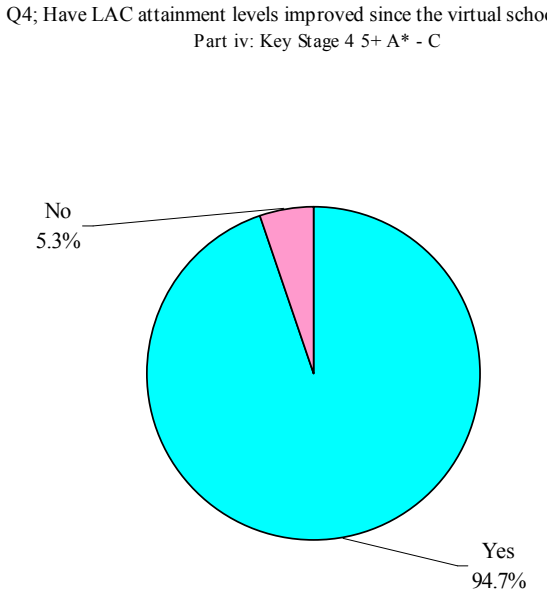

Chart 14: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.2.3.4 VSH Q4, part vi: KS4 % LAC gaining 1+A* - G GCSE

Chart 15 below demonstrates that in all, except 4 LA(s) 21.1 per cent, nationally expected levels at key stage 4 (1+ A* - C) overall pass rate results have improved since the opening of their respective VS, disappointingly only just over three quarters 78.9 per cent report an improvement.

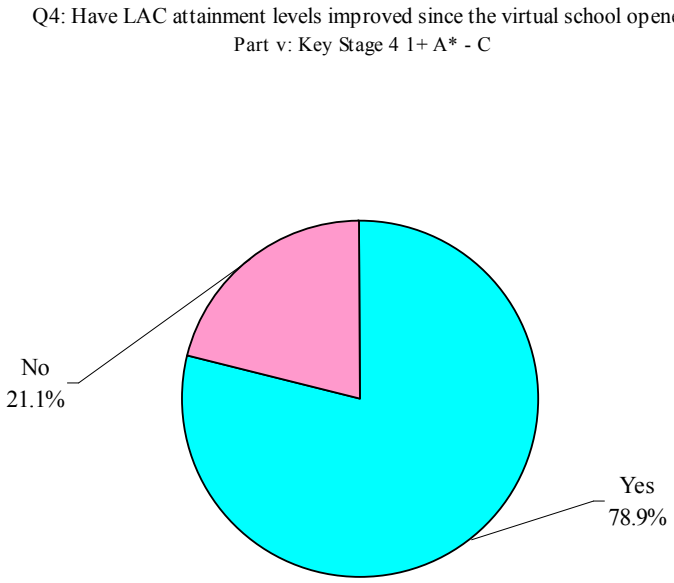

Chart 15: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.4.3 The Future of the Virtual School

4.4.3.1 VSH Q6: Do you believe that the concept of the VS is sound and should remain a constant?

As a final thought, and a psychological incentive for the LA(s), the above question was posed at the end of the survey. Ultimately, for self preservation reasons, one would have thought and subsequently was the case, that all LA(s) would answer '*Yes'* to this question. Additionally however it was intended to allow the LA(s) a final opportunity to justify their continuing existence and the researcher deliberately followed this question with an open ended box for free type, many of the LA(s) took advantage of the opportunity and some of the quotes will be presented in chapter 5.

Chart 16 below illustrates that 100 per cent of LA(s) that participated believe the VS concept to be sound and should remain a constant.

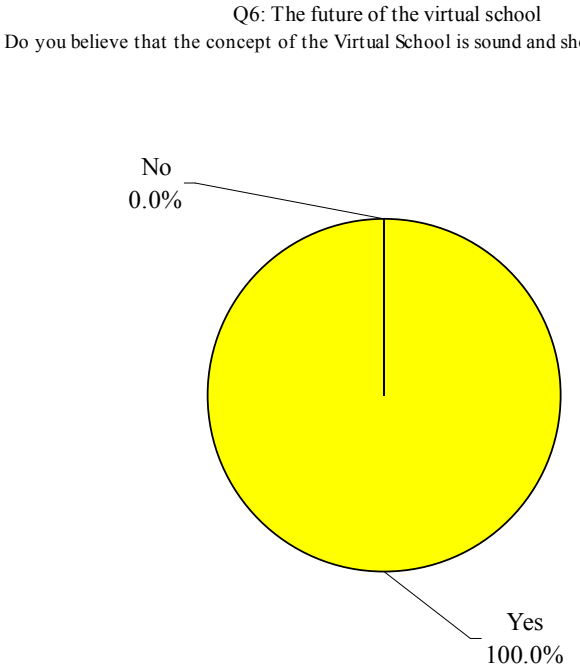

Chart 16: VSH Questionnaire statistics, April 2010

4.5 Summary

Liverpool's contextually neighbouring LA(s) were approached to complete a bespoke questionnaire and share their VS experiences in relation to the research aims and aspects identified as important in the literary review. Running parallel to this, Liverpool's VSH, LAC and educational strategic leads were also approached to share the same VS experiences. This process has provided the opportunity to gather data from a number of quality sources and benchmark it.

Opportunistically the chance to gather the views and experiences from national experts came in January 2010. Finally the national data set for LAC from the 2008/09 Academic year was published on 6th April 2010, allowing the researcher to complete the secondary strand analysis.

Once all the research strands were triangulated common themes began to emerge. This chapter has analysed the findings and related them back to the research aims deemed important in the literary review. Chapter 5 will attempt to draw conclusions from these findings and present them.

5. Analysis and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Having gathered the information for this research, the data has been analysed and presented in Chapter 4. From this analysis conclusions will be drawn, related back to the research aims and aspects identified as important in the literary review as well as any emerging themes identified from the primary and secondary research strands. In conclusion there will be an assessment of the limitations of the research, and opportunities for further research.

5.2 Critical evaluation of adopted methodology

An exploratory approach was undertaken to guide this research, using both descriptive and positivist data collection techniques. This approach was deemed flexible enough by the researcher to accommodate the distinct types of questions sought in the research aims. In the first strand national data sets were analysed from the DCSF website, these quantifiably answered the initial concept; *"Is there an attainment gap between Looked after Children and their peers?"* However statistics, unless you have a statistical awareness or know the data being analysed intimately can only offer a basic *'Yes"* or *"No"* answer. Thus the second strand of 'conversation' interview techniques and semi-structured interviews in an attempt to contextualise the national data sets in developing a more holistic view, as data contextualisation does lend to opposing interpretations.

The use of these 'conversation' interviews was an opportune bi-product from attending the, '*Future of Virtual Schools…'* conference. It enabled the researcher to get a feel for the key issues facing LAC, and due to the researcher's own knowledge gaps the interviewees' perceptions controlled the direction of the interview. However the benefits gained from these interviews was immense, increased levels of confidence in the subject area and the delivery of a more focussed survey for the research.

In hindsight, attending this conference so early in the research process did create issues. With having limited subject knowledge it would have been advisable to attend

the conference later on into the project with a better grounded knowledge of the topic. Indeed much more would have been filtered from the issues discussed, and more effective interpretation of ideas would have been gained, it was akin to a baptism of fire.

Another bi-product from the conference was the production of the VS questionnaire. The focus and the information that the researcher filtered from the day, did produce a far better quality questionnaire than would have been produced. Unfortunately this lead to participating LA(s) assuming a higher knowledge threshold and subsequently, follow up emails and phone calls had to be made by the researcher to backfill the knowledge gaps that had appeared; gaps in terms of jargonised phrases used and specific references to known publications or phrases that were unknown to the researcher at that time.

The use of semi-structured interviews followed a similar path in that it was the interviewees' knowledge that controlled the interview. The interviewees were Liverpool's VSH, Head of Strategic Intelligence and the Senior Intelligence Manager for Social Care. This semi-structured format did lend itself to flexibility and gave the researcher the opportunity to spend extra time on particular areas of difficulty but it was indeed a good source of subject knowledge and yielded many paragraphs in the process

The use of a questionnaire was deemed the best way to gather the data required for analysis from the LA(s) that the DCSF deems Liverpool's peers. However there were several disadvantages to collecting data in this fashion, primarily inconsistencies in submission, some LA(s) submitted their return within a week, others required several reminders and other did not submit. Interestingly one LA sent an email so comprehensive that it must have took twice as long to type than completing the questionnaire, although this did yield quality insight to their VS experiences.

Interpretation of the survey questions was a disadvantage to using this method, even though over 80 per cent of them were Yes / No answers. It is the researcher's contention that if the target group analysed certain questions too much then the questionnaire became in places simplistic. The juxtaposition of varying levels of

interpretation and simplicity emerged during this strand of the analysis. One VSH commented with abstraction and subsequently answered completely all the questions;

" I can't answer many questions…. I am doing much work at a strategic level to get things in place but its not there yet so "yes"/ "no" answers don't work for me!"

The final disadvantage to using this method was the vulnerable position it left the researcher. Several chase up calls and emails had to be sent in order to accrue data quantitative mass. Indeed a high level of psychological vulnerability developed when no submission was forthcoming from the researcher's own LA, this unanticipated development took several attempts to engage with colleagues.

In summary the most effective method of data collection was the DCSF national data sets. This view may well have changed if the researcher had attended the conference later in the process, or indeed the semi-structured interviewee base was increased to engage a wider focus group. The issues developed from the questionnaire could possible have been eliminated by better questionnaire construction, and all difficulties met during the research process would certainly have been milder if the researcher's grounded knowledge of the subject area had been better from the outset.

5.3 Analysis / conclusions about the Research Objectives (Aim)

During the course of the research, it became apparent that information gathered from the published national data sets (Appendix iv - xv) was not reflected in the questionnaire submissions or the feedback from the semi-structured interviews. Below are the main findings identified as important in the literary review from the research questionnaire.

5.3.1 To access the impact of the Virtual School system in Liverpool

The DCSF, Central and Local Government and various interest groups, as identified in this research, all concur that; *"Raising the attainment of LAC …to narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers".* (DCSF, 2006)

The current trajectory for LAC educational achievement indicates progress, responses made by Liverpool's VSH sustain this argument and there is correlation that the VS system has had a positive impact. Although closer inspection reveals that the data does fluctuate, both annually and between key stages. Further it could be argued that the low benchmark used as a starting point, across all the key stages, was intrinsically flawed as any improvement would have been deemed significant.

Chart 17 below is a representation of the DCSF published data, showing the attainment gaps at expected levels[7] at KS2 and KS4 between Liverpool's non LAC pupils and its LAC pupils. This is the raw data which the VS concept has impacted on. A more comprehensive summary is in the appendices. (Appendix iv - xv)

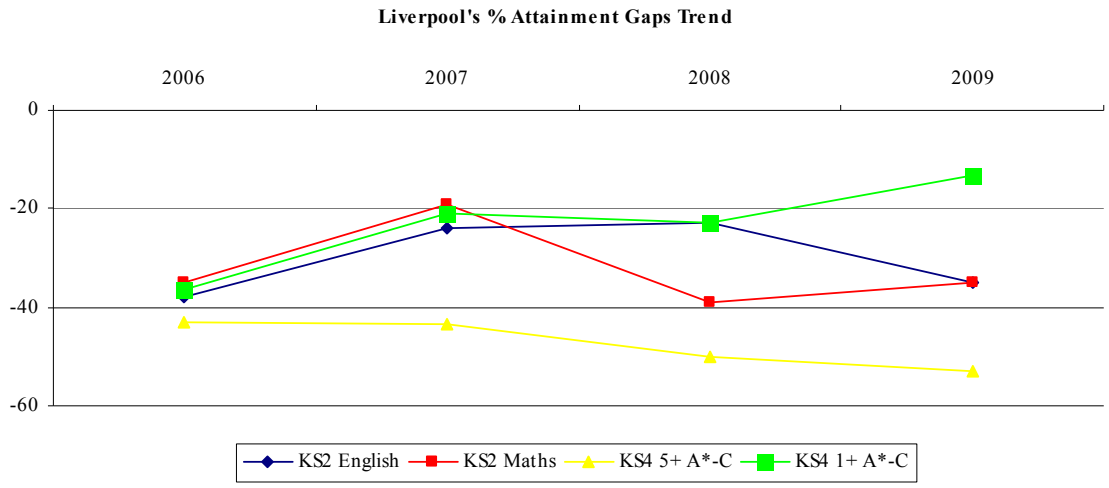

Chart 17: Liverpool's Attainment Gaps Trend (DCSF AAT, April 2010)

The research responses and interviews demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the VS across the stakeholder groups. However there is also evidence that different groups and individuals with these groups wanted different and sometimes contradictory things from the VS. As with all pilot strategies, differing priorities, expectations and aspirations have to be balanced in order of stakeholder importance, therefore no one model can please all the stakeholders equally all the time. So expectations and therefore interpretations from the stakeholder groups did vary substantially.

[7] The National Curriculum sets standards of achievement in at each key stage (KS) and subject for all pupils. At KS2 most eleven year olds are expected to achieve at least Level 4, at KS4 (GCSE) most fifteen year olds are expected to achieve at least 5+ A*-C GCSEs, the Gold Standard must including English and maths

The tracking and educational progress of LAC has emerged as a strong theme from this research, this derivates straight from the DCSF Care Matters Agenda as a *'Core Function'* requirement of any opening VS. Indeed there is strong evidence that LAC attainment has moved into a positive trajectory, due to the interplay of initiatives, increased inter agency professional engagement and a higher regional profile. The VS Liverpool has been particularly successful in engaging with LAC through multiple inter agency collaborations to a level where they are harnessing potential active LAC engagement. LAC self sustainability in terms of engagement is important. This would resonate throughout the system, children at the edge of care, leaving the care, and potentially a further research area of development.

5.3.2 To assess the impact of assigning a designated teacher to LAC

As presented in Chapter 4 this function of the VS model was overwhelming supported by evidence from the questionnaire, all other LA(s) used this strategic tool to holistically support their LAC pupils'. However an important emerging theme from the interviews was how LAC approached the notion of a designated teacher. The pupil / teacher relationships and intensity of those relationships was indeed surprising. Correlation to LAC deficiencies in terms the 'cultural environment' (Pilling and Pringle, 1978; Mortimore and Blackstone, 1982) cited in the Chapter 2, and the reversal of Cameron's theory of bad behaviour due to lack of contact and teacher engagement underpin this. The designated teacher being personally responsible for the day to day monitoring, workload and accountability of the LAC's, would naturally lead to an intimate relationship of dependence with the LAC and naturally the development of a strong personal bond.

This strong emerging theme underpinned the notion of a designated teacher, and one of the greatest impacts emerging from the research was the promotion of 'soft' outcomes such as confidence and self esteem, presented in Chapter 2 with Mazlow's lateral psychological benefits due to motivation skills. The key to successful relationship building lies in flexibility. The concept that there is a finite allocation of motivational support which ends when the child enters adulthood has become blurred,

this type of support function indeed would see the designated teacher, when applied to idealistic LAC specifications, transform into a designated friend for life.

5.3.3 To examine Liverpool's placement policy in terms of its stability of placement and overall success

Detailed analysis of the established research has indicated that many variable factors contribute to the successful outcomes of LAC attainment. However underpinning it all must be, as identified in chapter 2 of this research, the stability of care placement, types of care placement, and pupil relationships because of care placements. According to the responses of the research questionnaire, presented in Chapter 4, there is strong evidence that the stability of placements (93.8 per cent) in participating LA(s) has indeed improved, with the exception of one. (6.3 per cent)

DCSF data presented in Chapter 2 demonstrated the stability of care placement of LAC in England over a five year period, the data presented showed a degree of volatility on a regional and national level. However research would suggest that there is a causal link between the instability of care placement and low educational attainment. Indeed the research is overwhelming, children that are in a stable, secure home environment, placements or with kin families, achieve better and integrate themselves better at school, making this a priority to narrowing the attainment gap

5.3.4 To compare the performance of LCC against other local authorities using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques

An analysis of DCSF published data sets for LA(s) results was conducted to identify the LA(s) performance trend over the four year period, 2005 to 2009. The main focus being on Liverpool's demographic, statistical and geographic neighbours.

Nationally there were 43,200 children who had been looked after continuously for at least twelve months by English local authorities. This has been a decrease of 1 per cent from 2008. Of these children 32,300 were of school age and therefore engaged with the national curriculum. It should be noted that many LA(s) still do not either track or publish their LAC data sets hence the gaps in the data presented below.

- **Key Stage 2 English** (Appendix iv)

Nationally 46 per cent of LAC aged 11 in 2009 achieved at least level 4 at ks2 English. This is the same percentage as in 2008. 80 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved level 4, the corresponding percentage for 2008 was 81 per cent. There is a national ks2 attainment gap of -34 per cent. The national ks2 English level 4+ attainment gap has closed by 2 per cent since 2006.

In Liverpool 43 per cent of LAC achieve level 4 in 2009, a decrease of 14 per cent from 2008. 78 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved level 4, the corresponding percentage for 2008 was 80 per cent. There is a local ks2 attainment gap of -35 per cent. The local ks2 English level 4+ attainment gap has closed by 3 per cent since 2006. (Appendix xii) Chart 18 represents this attainment trend between 2006 and 2009.

Liverpool consistently performs below all its benchmarked demographic, statistical and geographic neighbours. (Appendix viii)

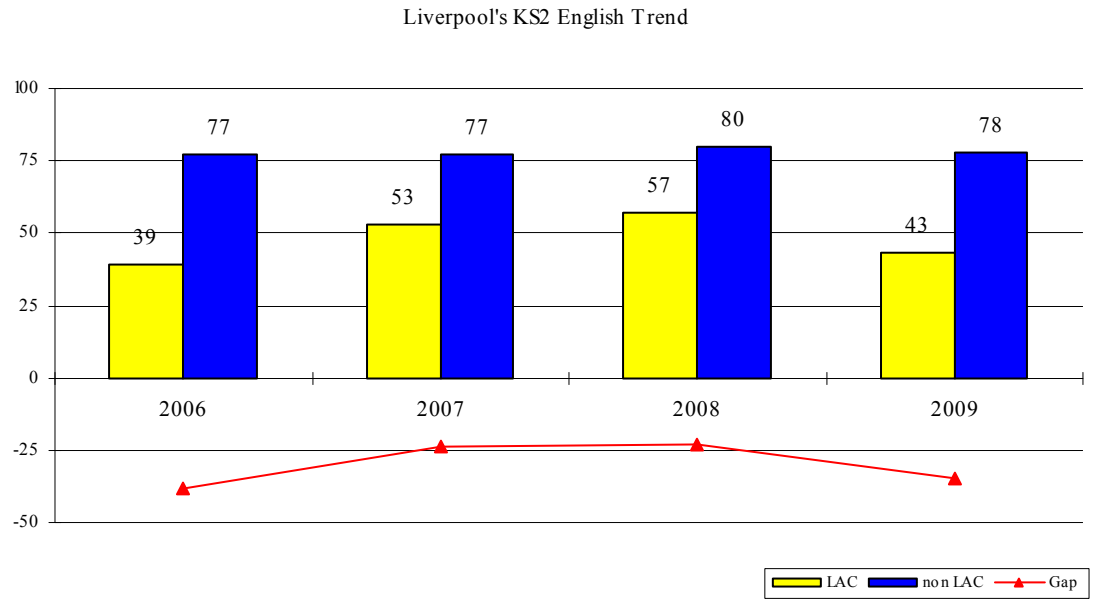

Chart 18: Liverpool's Key Stage 2, English Trend (DCSF AAT, April 2010)

- **Key Stage 2 Maths** (Appendix v)

Nationally 46 per cent of LAC aged 11 in 2009 achieved at least level 4 at ks2 maths. This represents 2 per cent improvement on 2008. 79 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved level 4, the corresponding percentage for 2008 was also 79 per cent. There is

a national ks2 attainment gap of -33 per cent. The national ks2 maths level 4+ attainment gap has closed by 2 per cent since 2006.

In Liverpool 43 per cent of LAC achieve level 4 in 2009, a decrease of 5 per cent from 2008. 78 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved level 4, the corresponding percentage for 2008 was 77 per cent. There is a local ks2 attainment gap of -35 per cent. The local ks2 maths level 4+ attainment gap has fluctuated but remained the same since 2006. (Appendix xiii) Chart 19 represents this attainment trend between 2006 and 2009.

Liverpool consistently performs below all its benchmarked demographic, statistical and geographic neighbours. (Appendix ix)

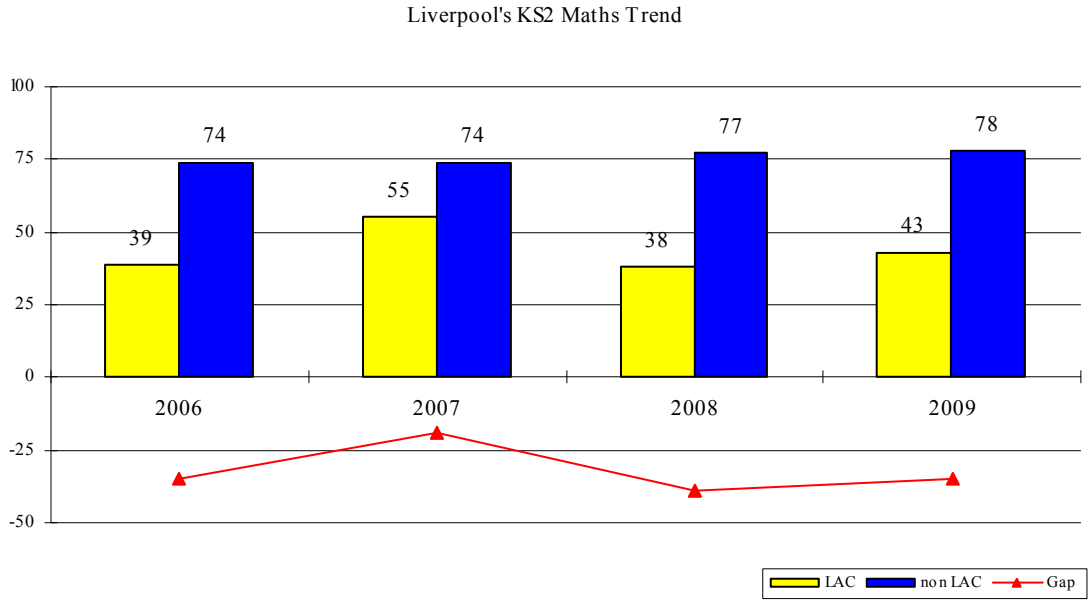

Chart 19: Liverpool's Key Stage 2, Maths Trend (DCSF AAT, April 2010)

- **Key Stage 4 (5+A*-C) GCSE** (Appendix vi)

Nationally 14.8 per cent of LAC aged 15 in 2009 achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE. This represents 0.9 per cent improvement on 2008. 70 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE., the corresponding percentage for 2008 was 65.3 per cent. There is a national 5+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap of -55.2 per cent. The national 5+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap has increased by 7.8 per cent since 2006.

In Liverpool 20.6 per cent of LAC achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE, an increase of 4.6 per cent from 2008. 73.6 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE, the

corresponding percentage for 2008 was 66.1 per cent. There is a local 5+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap of -53 per cent. The local 5+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap has increased by 9.9 per cent since 2006. (Appendix xiv) Indications here that the mainstream figure is increasing at a faster rate and the LAC are struggling to keep pace, hence the gap widening. Chart 20 represents this attainment trend between 2006 and 2009.

Liverpool consistently performs below all its benchmarked demographic, statistical and geographic neighbours. (Appendix x)

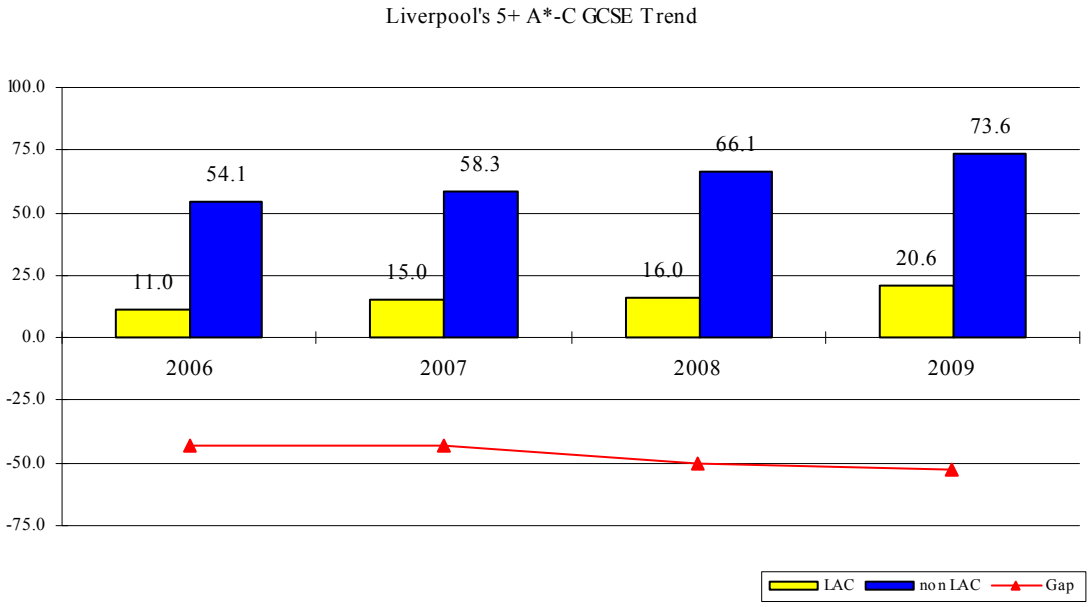

Chart 20: Liverpool's 5+ A*-C GCSE Trend (DCSF AAT, April 2010)

- **Key Stage 4 (1+A*-C) GCSE** (Appendix vii)

Nationally 68.2 per cent of LAC aged 15 in 2009 achieved 1+ A*-C GCSE. This represents 2.6 per cent improvement on 2008. 98.9 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved 1+ A*-C GCSE, the corresponding percentage for 2008 was 98.6 per cent. There is a national 1+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap of -30.7 per cent. The national 1+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap has increased by 3.9 per cent since 2006.

In Liverpool 84.1 per cent of LAC achieved 1+ A*-C GCSE, an increase of 11.1 per cent from 2008. 97.2 per cent of non LAC pupils achieved 1+ A*-C GCSE, the corresponding percentage for 2008 was 95.7 per cent. There is a local 1+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap of -13.1 per cent. The local 1+ A*-C GCSE attainment gap has decreased by 23.2 per cent since 2006. Indications here that the LAC figure have

progressed significantly since 2006, local progress in far quicker than the national rate and there is significant evidence to substantiate that the LA(s) drive that every LAC child should have at least 1 GCSE is evident. (Appendix xv) Chart 21 represents this attainment trend between 2006 and 2009.

Liverpool consistently performs below all its benchmarked demographic, statistical and geographic neighbours. (Appendix xi)

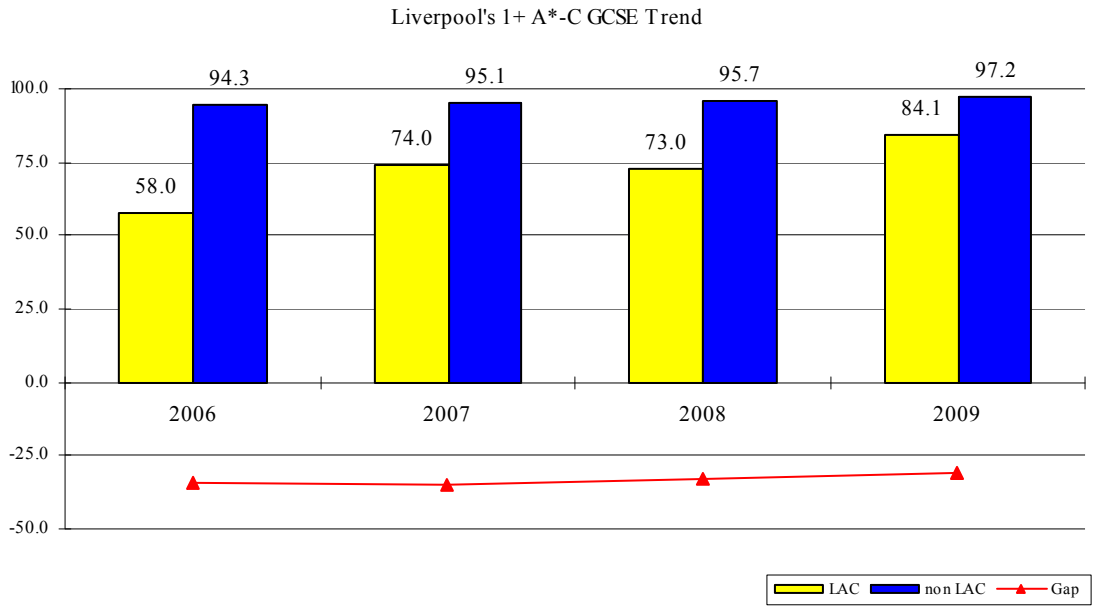

Chart 21: Liverpool's 1+ A*-C GCSE Trend (DCSF AAT, April 2010)

5.3.5 Cultural home environments

As presented in Chapter two, research has demonstrated that higher educational achievement is negatively associated with economic, social and non cultural home environments. Children growing up in these contexts perform on average less well than children born into more advantaged families. This becomes evident pre school and is exacerbated as pupils progress through the education system. A running theme through this research has been the evident link that where LAC are cared for in a positive, consistent and engaging environment akin to good parenting skills, it has a positive impact on the child's development on a personal and academic level. For LAC supportive family like relationships and secure placements in childhood resonate as sources of resilience in the face of social and economic disadvantage in adulthood.

There is also evidence that positive adult educational behaviour is important for the child's cognitive development. As many of the VHS referred to aspirations for the LAC are a key factor in their attainment success even more so than other parenting characteristics. Indeed recent government studies have demonstrated that positive parental inspirational influences may have a greater effect on national test scores than other variables such as health, values and involvement in learning. This would substantiate the inclusion of this element in the conceptual model being valid.

5.3.6 Leadership

There are statistically significant empirical and qualitative robust associations between VS heads' educational values, qualities and their strategic actions and improvements in school environments and pupils outcomes. This theme confirms and expand on the model of quality leadership presented in the literary review. From the research it was clear that the successful VSH is one that is good at creating vision and setting directions, can define teacher roles and responsibilities, develop teachers and pupils alike and ultimately manage good teaching and learning. This is all done within a school environment with effective communication, culture and above all trust.

There was no single model of the practice of effective, strong leadership. However, it is possible to identify a common repertoire of broad educational values, personal and interpersonal qualities, dispositions, competencies, decision making processes and a range of internal and external strategic actions which all effective VSH use on a daily basis. These strategies are underpinned by clearly defined values which focus upon promoting individual and social well-being and raising standards of achievement for their LAC pupils.

5.4 Analysis / conclusions about the research question

The research questions require a regional answer to a national debate. The aims of this investigation were to assess Liverpool's approaches to tackling the educational attainment gap between mainstream pupils and LAC. However it became apparent to

the researcher that this it had a far wide scope and had a resonance and implications way beyond LAC, schools and society.

Unbeknown to he researcher some LA(s) were not operating in a VS environment, although they were legally required to implement one in the near future. This did have an impact on the participating groupings and overall awareness of the system in those LA(s), and indeed the data collection process.

5.5 Overall conclusions

The amount of resource in terms of cost and time that the VSH has for the role varies a lot across LA(s). Some VSH(s) are full time and others have a much wider role and wear differing hats of responsibility. The relationship between the VSH, LACES and Strategic Intelligence Teams and the individual functions that they carry out is also crucial, but again this also varies considerably across LA(s).

The researcher made an initial assumption that with the appointment of a VSH came a VS, and this is a fair assumption to make. However one needs to explore deeper what such an appointment actually means. If it means that a VS needs to function, and what a VSH needs to do to carry out the role, as deemed by DCSF, then they need to be in place, as well the VSH themselves. But as this paper should have demonstrated it is not just about a person it is as much about the systems that are also required, not least the management and use of data which in itself can challenge existing protocols. The VSH needs a number of prerequisites and other essentials in place to function.

The VS concept facilitates the maintenance of a more secure education and contributes to the child's stability and emotional well being, there is also evidence from the research that there are direct correlations with improved educational attainment in VS schools, however it is far from conclusive and would require further investigation. However there was one theme that all participating LA(s) and all consulted papers and journals agreed upon, and was that is the VS concept is a sound one and its role has lots of potential and is worthwhile maintaining long term.

5.6 Limitations of the study

There are 152 LA(s) in England and only 20 of Liverpool's demographic, statistical and geographic neighbours were approached to participate in this research, therefore the research is not fully representative. Additionally not all the participating LA(s) have actually established their VS, consequently their responses, albeit valuable in terms of contextualisation, could be deemed speculative.

5.7 Opportunities for further research

As a result of the successful VS LA pilots the government has made it a legal requirement for all 152 LA(s) in England to operate a VS for their LAC. An extended study could be commissioned to establish the aims and objectives deemed important in the literary review of this paper and a more comprehensive research study completed.

5.8 Summary

This Chapter has analysed the research findings presented in Chapter 4 and extended several emerging themes from it. It has reviewed the effectiveness of the methods used in terms of data collection strands and discussed the limitations of research undertaken.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine Liverpool's approaches to tackling the educational attainment gap between LAC their peers. The previous chapters have identified the government's key driver to achieve this overarching aim and developed a more comprehensive conceptual model to enhance that concept. Later chapters have drawn findings and conclusions on the extent to which the concept had had an effect on LAC attainment in both a local and national context. This chapter, based on the findings, conclusions and the performance of the presented groupings will attempt to offer recommendations to achieving the aims deemed important in the literary review.

6.2 Recommendations

Recommendations to achieving the aims deemed important in the literary review are;

- The Virtual School should remain a priority for the LA, working strategically across services to tackle identified weaknesses and build on known strengths.
- The Virtual School Head should continue to develop a holistic approach to LAC education, keep a strong focus on raising educational achievement.
- Maintain the established communications strategy to ensure full stakeholder participation and facilitate stakeholder communication.

6.3 Summary

There are many critical factors that contribute to the improvement of the attainment levels of LAC. This research has identified that the concept adopted nationally and regionally is accepted to be working and validated by improvements in LA(s) performance would suggest that the progress trajectory is good. The adoption of the above recommendations is a call to maintain the status quo concerning the strategy towards LAC in Liverpool.

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Liverpool City Council
&
Chester Business School

I work for the Strategic Intelligence Team of Liverpool City Council and am undertaking a research project for my Masters in Business Administration (MBA), associated to Chester University.

I should be grateful if you would complete the table below with details of the officers with strategic responsibility for the following areas; Attainment Manager (Ideally key stage 4), LACES Manager and Virtual School Manager.

I will be contacting the named officers in the New Year to ascertain the impact of the DSCF's Care Matters Agenda on LAC attainment and their views on the effectiveness of the Care Matters proposals in attempting to bridge the educational attainment gap between mainstream and LAC pupils in their authority.

All the intelligence gathered will be aggregated remain confidential and the completion of the task will take no longer than 15 minutes (?). Returns to me by the mid / end of January 2010 would be ideal!

Any relevant advice, experience or assistance concerning the above strategic area would be most welcome and of course my finding, once published, will be circulated to all participating parties.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Please @mail this pro forma to mike.maher@liverpool.gov.uk or call me on 0151 233 2691 to discus.

Local Authority	
Attainment Manager name:	
Attainment Manager @mail:	
LACES Manager name:	
LACES Manager @mail:	
Virtual School Head Teacher name:	
Virtual School Head Teacher @mail:	

**(Please circulate to anyone in your LA that may have valuable experience to contribute to this research)*

Please email or fax this form to:
mike.maher@liverpool.gov.uk or send to;
Children, Families and Adult, Strategic Intelligence Team, Municipal Buildings, Dale Street, Liverpool L2 2DH

Liverpool's Contextual Neighbours

Demographic, Statistical and Geographical

Demographic (Core Cities = 8)

Birmingham

Bristol

City of Nottingham

Leeds

Liverpool

Manchester

Newcastle Upon Tyne

Sheffield

Geographical (NW = 7)

Halton

Knowsley

Liverpool

Sefton

St Helens

Wigan

Wirral

Statistical (Neighbours = 11)

Gateshead

Halton

Hartlepool

Kingston-upon-Tyne

Knowsley

Liverpool

Middlesbrough

Newcastle Upon Tyne

Salford

South Tyneside

Sunderland

Virtual School Questionnaire 2010

Local Authority	
DCSF Number	
Completed by:	
Position:	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

Background and assistance request!

I work for the Strategic Intelligence Team of Liverpool City Council and am undertaking a research project for my Masters in Business Administration (MBA), associated to Chester University.

In order to gauge the effectiveness of the Virtual School (VS) on bridging the educational attainment gap between Looked After Children (LAC) and their peers, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire in your capacity as the strategic lead in your Local Authority with responsibility for the Virtual School, and LAC Champion.

My dissertation is essentially looking to measure the impact of the DCSF's Care Matters Agenda on LAC attainment and your views, as VS professionals, on this measure, is invaluable.

All the intelligence gathered will be aggregated remain confidential. Completion of this questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes (?). Returns to me by the end February / mid March (or earlier) 2010 would be great!

Please feel free to add any observations, difficulties, advice or good practice in the end text box, all will be useful to my research.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Please return this pro forma to mike.maher@liverpool.gov.uk, print and post or call me on 0151 233 2691 to discus.

Question 1. What is your professional background:

- Senior Educationalist
- Existing Head teacher (Primary)
- Existing Head teacher (Secondary)
- Existing Head teacher (Special)
- Qualified Teacher
- Senior Social Worker
- Social Worker
- Other

Question 2. Have the following strategic areas improved in your LA since the Virtual School opened:

	Yes	No
Strategic leadership and planning	○	○
Strategic planning with other local authorities and their partners	○	○
Operational working with social care personnel within the local authority	○	○
Operational working with social care personnel with other local authorities	○	○
The way in which data is used	○	○
The way the virtual school is working with designated teachers, other school staff and governors	○	○
The way the local authority engages with further education	○	○

Question 3. How well does your Virtual School support LAC in the following key areas:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Doing the things they do for all children but more so	○	○	○	○
Balancing high level support with real challenge	○	○	○	○
Skilfully linking each child to a key person they can relate to	○	○	○	○
Making it a priority to know the children well and build relationships	○	○	○	○
Developing strong partnerships with carers, Local Authorities and specialist agencies	○	○	○	○
Making things happen and seeing them through	○	○	○	○
Ensuring consistency as well as discrete flexibility	○	○	○	○
Actively extending the horizons of each child	○	○	○	○
Planning for future transitions'	○	○	○	○

Question 4. In your LA have the following LAC attainment levels improved since the Virtual School opened:

	Yes	No
Key Stage 2 % LAC pupils gaining L4+ or above in English	○	○
Key Stage 2 % LAC pupils gaining L4+ or above in maths	○	○
Key Stage 4 % LAC pupils gaining 5+A* - C GCSE (including Eng & maths) or above	○	○
Key Stage 4 % LAC pupils gaining 5+A* - C GCSE or above	○	○
Key Stage 4 % LAC pupils gaining 1+A* - G GCSE or above (pass rate)	○	○

Question 5. In your LA have the following National Indicators improved since the Virtual School opened:

	Yes	No
NI 58. Emotional and behavioural health of looked after children	○	○
NI 61. Timeliness of placements of looked after children for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption	○	○
NI 62. The percentage of children looked after at 31 March with three or more placements during the year	○	○
NI 63 The percentage of looked after children aged under 16 at 31 March who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years, who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement last for at least 2 years	○	○

Question 6. The Future of the Virtual School:

	Yes	No
Do you believe that the concept of the Virtual School is sound and should remain a constant?	○	○

Question 7. Finally:

Please enter any additional observations / comments that you feel could assist me in my research.

Appendix iv

Key Stage 2 Results: % Pupils attaining English Level 4 [1] or above
Core Cities, Statistical Neighbour Authorities and Greater Merseyside Authorities
National Indicator 99

	2006			2007			2008			2009		
	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP
Core Cities (8)												
Newcastle	46	76	-30	41	74	-33	50	77	-27	52	78	-26
Manchester	48	72	-24	60	74	-14	51	75	-24	65	75	-10
Liverpool	39	77	-38	53	77	-24	57	80	-23	43	78	-35
Sheffield	33	72	-39	47	73	-26	31	77	-46	-	76	0
Leeds	35	79	-44	40	80	-40	43	81	-38	54	79	-25
Nottingham	-	70	0	50	72	-22	48	74	-26	50	74	-24
Birmingham	47	76	-29	43	76	-33	52	77	-25	48	76	-28
Bristol	58	73	-15	42	72	-30	40	75	-35	57	76	-19
CC Ave:	**44**	**75**	**-31**	**47**	**75**	**-28**	**47**	**77**	**-31**	**53**	**77**	**-24**
Statistical Neighbour Authorities (11)												
Middlesbrough	50	74	-24	71	78	-7	-	79	0	-	76	0
Newcastle	46	76	-30	41	74	-33	50	77	-27	52	78	-26
Salford	63	74	-11	62	79	-17	50	81	-31	65	81	-16
Knowsley	40	74	-34	-	77	0	43	83	-40	39	79	-40
Liverpool	39	77	-38	53	77	-24	57	80	-23	43	78	-35
Hull	35	73	-38	-	74	0	71	75	-4	35	76	-41
South Tyneside	-	78	0	-	81	0	-	81	0	58	73	-15
Halton	62	76	-14	-	81	0	-	84	0	-	81	0
Gateshead	29	79	-50	-	80	0	-	85	0	-	82	0
Hartlepool	-	80	0	-	82	0	-	85	0	-	81	0
Sunderland	52	75	-23	41	79	-38	79	82	-3	72	77	-5
SN Ave:	**46**	**75**	**-29**	**54**	**77**	**-24**	**58**	**80**	**-21**	**52**	**78**	**-26**
Greater Merseyside Authorities (7)												
Halton	62	76	-14	-	81	0	-	84	0	-	81	0
Wigan	35	79	-44	43	81	-38	47	83	-36	-	82	0
Knowsley	40	74	-34	-	77	0	43	83	-40	39	79	-40
Liverpool	39	77	-38	53	77	-24	57	80	-23	43	78	-35
St Helens	38	81	-43	46	81	-35	58	84	-26	64	83	-19
Sefton	62	85	-23	62	85	-23	70	86	-16	58	84	-26
Wirral	36	82	-46	41	82	-41	62	84	-22	59	83	-24
GMA Ave:	**45**	**79**	**-35**	**49**	**81**	**-32**	**56**	**83**	**-27**	**53**	**81**	**-29**
ENGLAND	**43**	**79**	**-36**	**46**	**80**	**-34**	**46**	**81**	**-35**	**46**	**80**	**-34**

[1] Expectation level fo the age group
[2] Children looked after continously for 12 months at 30 September
[3] Source: DCSF Statistical First Release 'National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2' in England, all schools
[4] - Indicates that 5 or less pupils or a percentage based on 5 or less were recorded, for presentation purposes a zero is recorded.

Appendix v

Key Stage 2 Results: % Pupils attaining Mathematics Level 4 [1] or above
Core Cities, Statistical Neighbour Authorities and Greater Merseyside Authorities
National Indicator 100

	2006			2007			2008			2009		
	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP
Core Cities (8)												
Newcastle	54	71	-17	31	73	-42	47	76	-29	57	78	-21
Manchester	45	72	-27	50	74	-24	47	75	-28	67	76	-9
Liverpool	39	74	-35	55	74	-19	38	77	-39	43	78	-35
Sheffield	30	70	-40	42	70	-28	-	74	0	-	76	0
Leeds	35	75	-40	30	77	-47	41	77	-36	53	77	-24
Nottingham	-	71	0	50	72	-22	52	73	-21	50	76	-26
Birmingham	46	71	-25	42	73	-31	49	75	-26	53	76	-23
Bristol	42	70	-28	33	69	-36	43	73	-30	49	75	-26
CC Ave:	**42**	**72**	**-30**	**42**	**73**	**-31**	**45**	**75**	**-30**	**53**	**77**	**-23**
Statistical Neighbour Authorities (11)												
Middlesbrough	-	75	0	53	76	-23	-	76	0	-	76	0
Newcastle	54	71	-17	31	73	-42	47	76	-29	57	78	-21
Salford	58	74	-16	59	77	-18	50	79	-29	71	80	-9
Knowsley	50	72	-22	-	75	0	50	76	-26	35	81	-46
Liverpool	39	74	-35	55	74	-19	38	77	-39	43	78	-35
Hull	48	73	-25	33	75	-42	76	75	1	50	76	-26
South Tyneside	-	76	0	-	78	0	-	79	0	58	79	-21
Halton	46	75	-29	-	77	0	-	81	0	-	81	0
Gateshead	33	77	-44	-	78	0	-	81	0	-	83	0
Hartlepool	-	79	0	-	81	0	-	85	0	-	83	0
Sunderland	32	74	-42	31	76	-45	93	78	15	47	78	-31
SN Ave:	**45**	**74**	**-29**	**44**	**75**	**-32**	**59**	**77**	**-18**	**52**	**79**	**-28**
Greater Merseyside Authorities (7)												
Halton	46	75	-29	-	77	0	-	81	0	-	81	0
Wigan	41	78	-37	48	80	-32	59	81	-22	-	82	0
Knowsley	50	72	-22	-	75	0	50	76	-26	35	81	-46
Liverpool	39	74	-35	55	74	-19	38	77	-39	43	78	-35
St Helens	44	80	-36	46	79	-33	58	82	-24	71	84	-13
Sefton	62	82	-20	54	82	-28	65	86	-21	58	83	-25
Wirral	36	77	-41	52	77	-25	62	79	-17	50	80	-30
GMA Ave:	**45**	**77**	**-31**	**51**	**78**	**-27**	**55**	**80**	**-25**	**51**	**81**	**-30**
ENGLAND	**41**	**76**	**-35**	**43**	**77**	**-34**	**44**	**79**	**-35**	**46**	**79**	**-33**

[1] Expectation level fo the age group
[2] Children looked after continously for 12 months at 30 September
[3] Source: DCSF Statistical First Release 'National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2' in England, all schools
[4] - Indicates that 5 or less pupils or a percentage based on 5 or less were recorded, for presentation purposes a zero is recorded.

Key Stage 4 Results: % Pupils attaining 5+A*-C GCSE or above
Core Cities, Statistical Neighbour Authorities and Greater Merseyside Authorities
National Indicator 101 (adapted to not including English and maths)

	2006			2007			2008			2009		
	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP
Core Cities (8)												
Newcastle	-	55.8	0.0	-	61.3	0.0	-	67.1	0.0	18.4	72.5	-54.1
Manchester	7.0	47.6	-40.6	15.0	51.8	-36.8	10.0	57.0	-47.0	19.8	62.6	-42.8
Liverpool	11.0	54.1	-43.1	15.0	58.3	-43.3	16.0	66.1	-50.1	20.6	73.6	-53.0
Sheffield	-	48.5	0.0	20.0	52.3	-32.3	19.0	57.2	-38.2	-	65.2	0.0
Leeds	6.0	52.2	-46.2	8.0	55.9	-47.9	9.0	62.4	-53.4	6.0	57.4	-51.4
Nottingham	-	44.8	0.0	-	53.4	0.0	-	58.8	0.0	-	67.1	0.0
Birmingham	13.0	58.8	-45.8	13.0	61.8	-48.8	14.0	66.6	-52.6	21.3	72.7	-51.4
Bristol	-	43.8	0.0	-	46.9	0.0	18.0	64.1	-46.1	-	61.7	0.0
CC Ave:	**9.3**	**53.2**	**-43.9**	**14.2**	**56.0**	**-41.8**	**14.3**	**62.2**	**-47.9**	**17.2**	**66.6**	**-49.4**
Statistical Neighbour Authorities (11)												
Middlesbrough	-	48.9	0.0	-	53.9	0.0	-	61.7	0.0	-	65.2	0.0
Newcastle	-	55.8	0.0	-	61.3	0.0	-	67.1	0.0	18.4	72.5	-54.1
Salford	28.0	51.4	-23.4	-	59.6	0.0	26.0	66.9	-40.9	-	73.4	0.0
Knowsley	-	48.8	0.0	-	50.8	0.0	29.0	57.4	-28.4	-	64.0	0.0
Liverpool	11.0	54.1	-43.1	15.0	58.3	-43.3	16.0	66.1	-50.1	20.6	73.6	-53.0
Hull	21.0	52.4	-31.4	17.0	52.0	-35.0	-	51.2	0.0	31.0	65.4	-34.4
South Tyneside	-	55.5	0.0	-	59.3	0.0	-	64.2	0.0	-	77.5	0.0
Halton	-	52.6	0.0	-	61.9	0.0	-	71.1	0.0	-	71.5	0.0
Gateshead	-	69.7	0.0	-	71.3	0.0	-	75.0	0.0	39.1	81.2	-42.1
Hartlepool	-	57.5	0.0	-	61.6	0.0	-	66.7	0.0	-	72.9	0.0
Sunderland	39.0	55.0	-16.0	21.0	59.4	-38.4	19.0	63.9	-44.9	17.9	69.2	-51.3
SN Ave:	**24.8**	**53.2**	**-28.5**	**17.7**	**56.6**	**-38.9**	**22.5**	**63.6**	**-41.1**	**25.4**	**71.5**	**-46.1**
Greater Merseyside Authorities (7)												
Halton	-	52.6	0.0	-	61.9	0.0	-	71.1	0.0	-	71.5	0.0
Wigan	-	56.9	0.0	-	60.8	0.0	-	66.4	0.0	-	69.8	0.0
Knowsley	-	48.8	0.0	-	50.8	0.0	29.0	57.4	-28.4	-	64.0	0.0
Liverpool	11.0	54.1	-43.1	15.0	58.3	-43.3	16.0	66.1	-50.1	20.6	73.6	-53.0
St Helens	33.0	56.6	-23.6	-	62.3	0.0	-	68.0	0.0	-	71.4	0.0
Sefton	-	61.9	0.0	-	64.1	0.0	-	71.2	0.0	23.3	77.4	-54.1
Wirral	15.0	57.7	-42.7	16.0	60.9	-44.9	16.0	65.8	-49.8	14.8	73.3	-58.5
GMA Ave:	**19.7**	**56.1**	**-36.5**	**15.5**	**59.6**	**-44.1**	**20.3**	**63.1**	**-42.8**	**19.6**	**71.6**	**-52.0**
ENGLAND	**11.8**	**59.2**	**-47.4**	**12.6**	**62.0**	**-49.4**	**13.9**	**65.3**	**-51.4**	**14.8**	**70.0**	**-55.2**

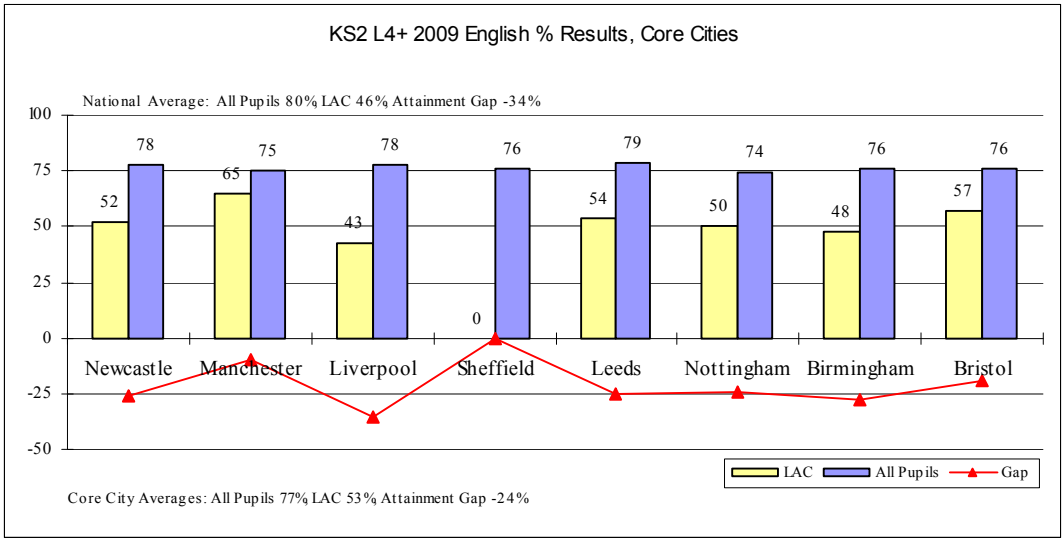
[1] Expectation level fo the age group
[2] Children looked after continously for 12 months at 30 September
[3] Source: DCSF Statistical First Release 'National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2' in England, all schools
[4] - Indicates that 5 or less pupils or a percentage based on 5 or less were recorded, for presentation purposes a zero is recorded.

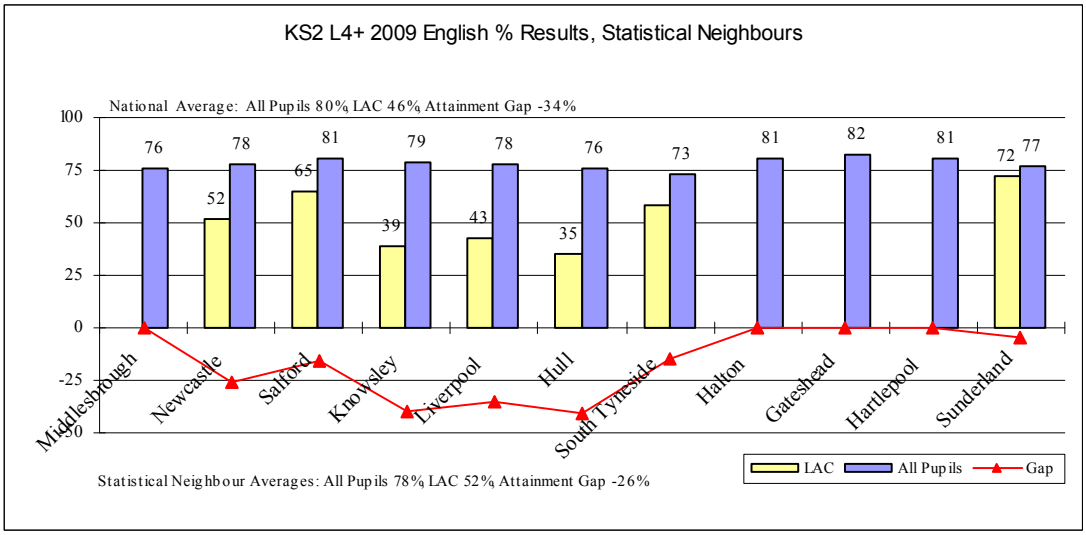
Key Stage 4 Results: % Pupils attaining 1+A*-C GCSE or above
Core Cities, Statistical Neighbour Authorities and Greater Merseyside Authorities

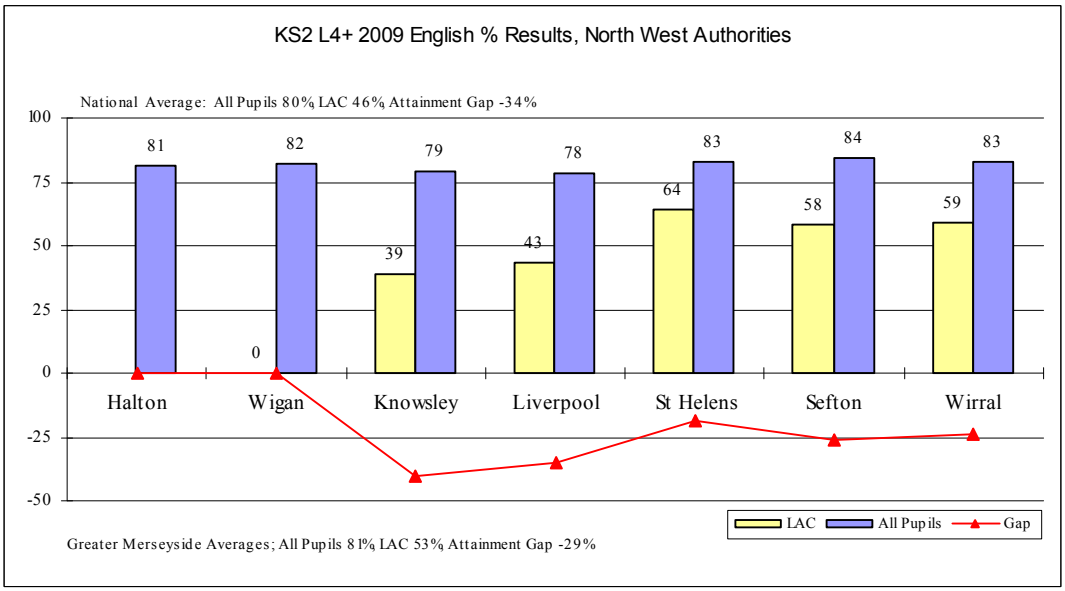
	2006			2007			2008			2009		
	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP	Looked after[2]	All pupils[3]	GAP
Core Cities (8)												
Newcastle	65.0	93.6	-28.6	55.0	95.2	-40.2	56.0	95.8	-39.8	73.7	97.1	-23.4
Manchester	58.0	94.6	-36.6	72.0	95.0	-23.0	64.0	95.5	-31.5	62.9	96.1	-33.2
Liverpool	58.0	94.3	-36.3	74.0	95.1	-21.1	73.0	95.7	-22.7	84.1	97.2	-13.1
Sheffield	61.0	95.0	-34.0	70.0	96.8	-26.8	62.0	96.9	-34.9	55.4	98.2	-42.8
Leeds	67.0	95.6	-28.6	62.0	96.3	-34.3	64.0	97.7	-33.7	77.6	98.1	-20.5
Nottingham	54.0	93.0	-39.0	39.0	94.0	-55.0	62.0	95.2	-33.2	50.0	96.5	-46.5
Birmingham	55.0	97.8	-42.8	60.0	98.0	-38.0	60.0	98.3	-38.3	70.7	98.7	-28.0
Bristol	61.0	94.1	-33.1	50.0	96.4	-46.4	72.0	98.6	-26.6	70.4	97.6	-27.2
CC Ave:	**59.9**	**94.8**	**-34.9**	**60.3**	**95.9**	**-35.6**	**64.1**	**96.7**	**-32.6**	**68.1**	**97.4**	**-29.3**
Statistical Neighbour Authorities (11)												
Middlesbrough	67.0	92.8	-25.8	61.0	95.4	-34.4	57.0	97.4	-40.4	-	98.1	
Newcastle	65.0	93.6	-28.6	55.0	95.2	-40.2	56.0	95.8	-39.8	73.7	97.1	-23.4
Salford	72.0	94.5	-22.5	50.0	97.0	-47.0	82.0	98.4	-16.4	69.0	98.7	-29.7
Knowsley	71.0	94.1	-23.1	58.0	94.0	-36.0	76.0	95.3	-19.3	81.3	96.2	-14.9
Liverpool	58.0	94.3	-36.3	74.0	95.1	-21.1	73.0	95.7	-22.7	84.1	97.2	-13.1
Hull	61.0	92.8	-31.8	66.0	93.5	-27.5	75.0	94.6	-19.6	76.2	96.9	-20.7
South Tyneside	80.0	96.6	-16.6	94.0	97.7	-3.7	71.0	97.6	-26.6	88.0	98.7	-10.7
Halton	-	96.5	0.0	-	98.1	0.0	63.0	98.0	-35.0	46.2	98.3	-52.1
Gateshead	82.0	96.4	-14.4	70.0	97.4	-27.4	68.0	97.2	-29.2	91.3	98.9	-7.6
Hartlepool	-	97.4	0.0	-	97.2	0.0	64.0	98.0	-34.0	91.7	98.3	-6.6
Sunderland	67.0	96.8	-29.8	68.0	98.0	-30.0	75.0	98.5	-23.5	76.9	98.6	-21.7
SN Ave:	**69.2**	**94.7**	**-25.4**	**66.2**	**95.9**	**-29.7**	**69.1**	**97.0**	**-27.9**	**77.8**	**97.9**	**-20.1**
Greater Merseyside Authorities (7)												
Halton	-	96.5	0.0	-	98.1	0.0	63.0	98.0	-35.0	46.2	98.3	-52.1
Wigan	62.0	97.3	-35.3	68.0	98.6	-30.6	72.0	98.6	-26.6	67.6	99.3	-31.7
Knowsley	71.0	94.1	-23.1	58.0	94.0	-36.0	76.0	95.3	-19.3	81.3	96.2	-14.9
Liverpool	58.0	94.3	-36.3	74.0	95.1	-21.1	73.0	95.7	-22.7	84.1	97.2	-13.1
St Helens	79.0	96.1	-17.1	76.0	97.6	-21.6	76.0	97.9	-21.9	69.2	98.5	-29.3
Sefton	57.0	97.9	-40.9	47.0	97.9	-50.9	56.0	98.2	-42.2	73.3	98.8	-25.5
Wirral	62.0	97.3	-35.3	79.0	97.8	-18.8	71.0	98.6	-27.6	75.9	99.1	-23.2
GMA Ave:	**64.8**	**96.2**	**-31.3**	**67.0**	**96.8**	**-29.8**	**69.6**	**97.5**	**-27.9**	**71.1**	**98.2**	**-27.1**
ENGLAND	**63.2**	**97.8**	**-34.6**	**63.7**	**98.9**	**-35.2**	**65.6**	**98.6**	**-33.0**	**68.2**	**98.9**	**-30.7**

[1] Expectation level fo the age group
[2] Children looked after continously for 12 months at 30 September
[3] Source: DCSF Statistical First Release 'National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2' in England, all schools
[4] - Indicates that 5 or less pupils or a percentage based on 5 or less were recorded, for presentation purposes a zero is recorded.

KS2 L4+ 2009 English Results & Gaps







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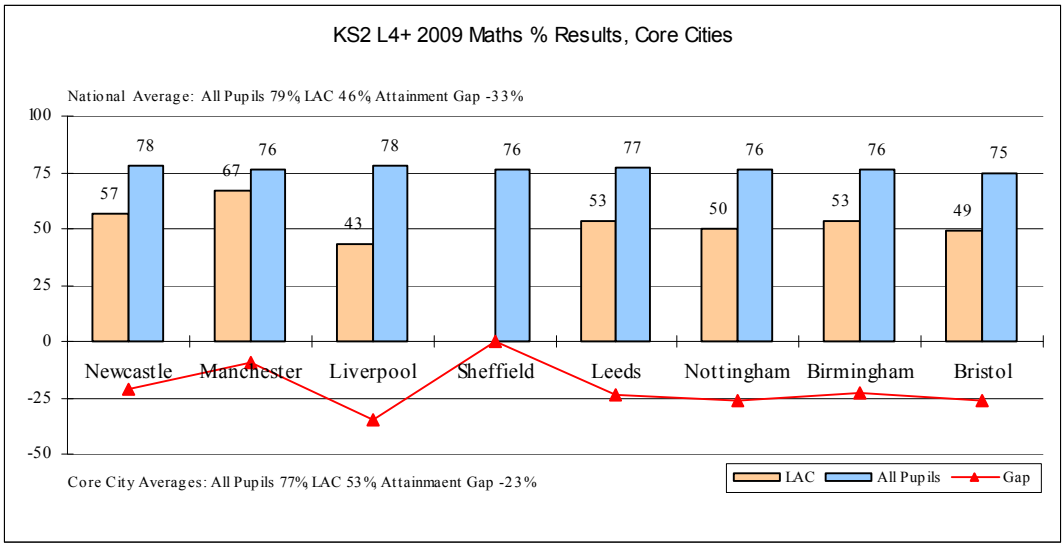
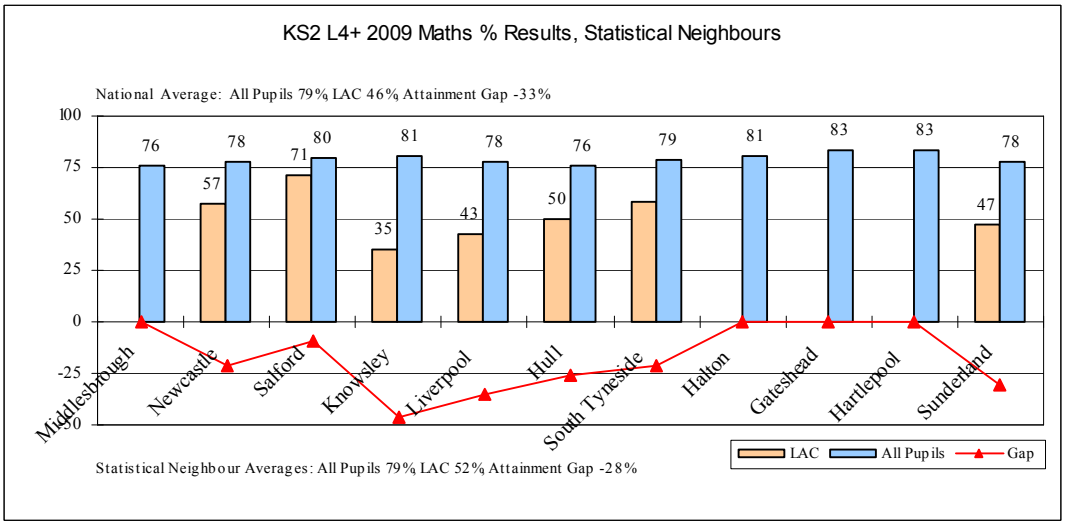
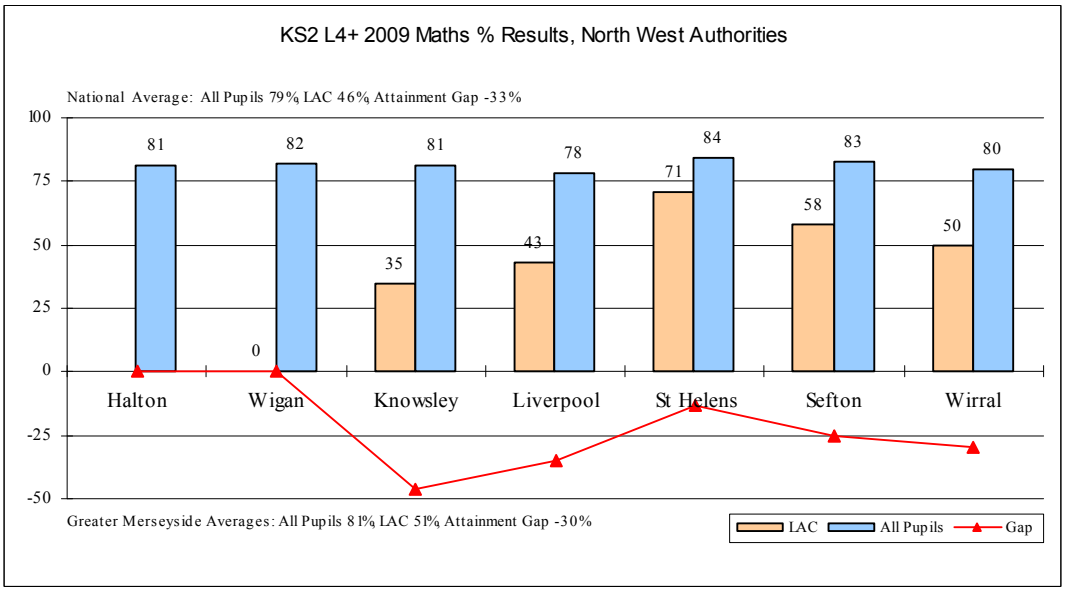
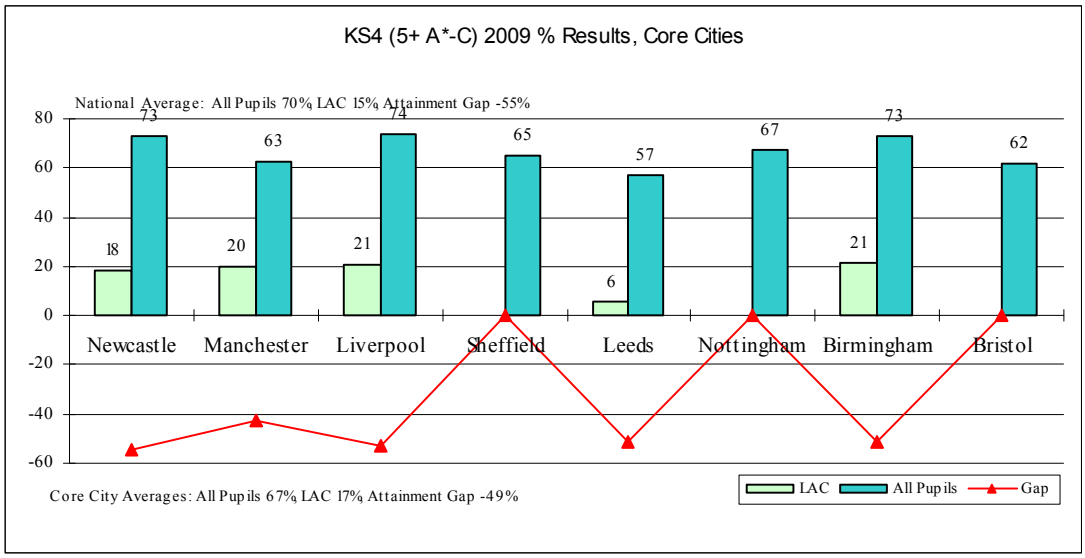


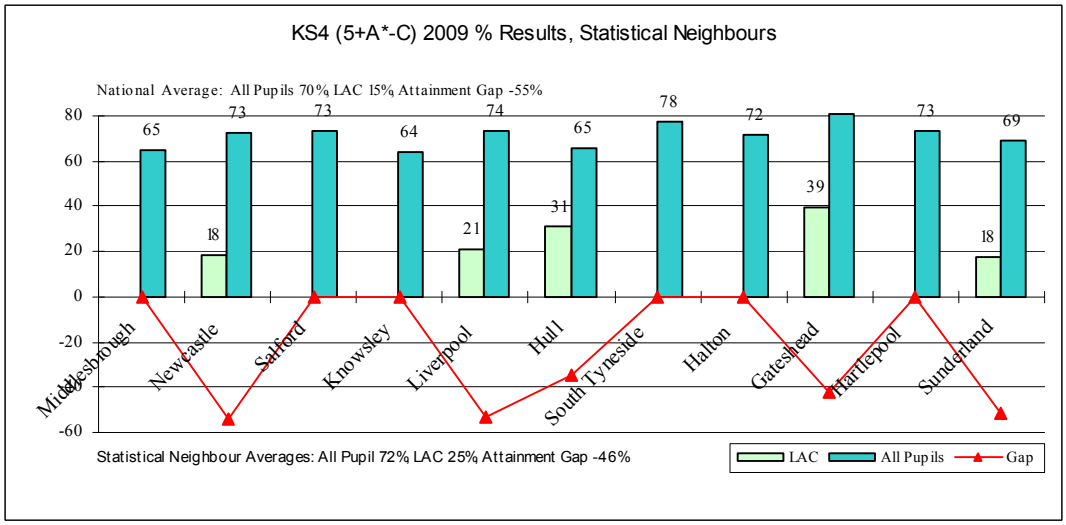


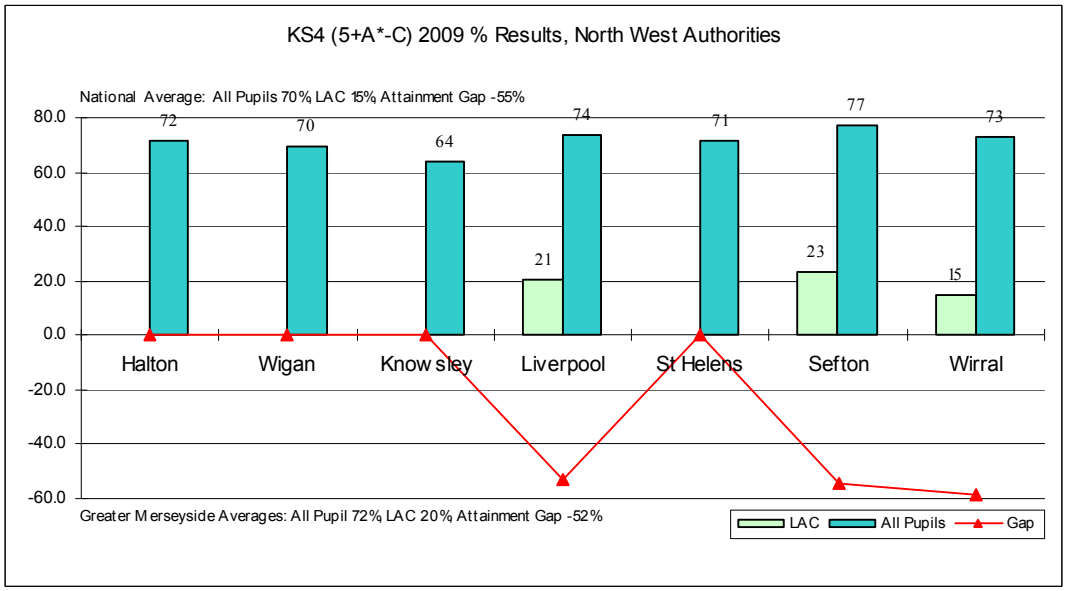


Appendix x

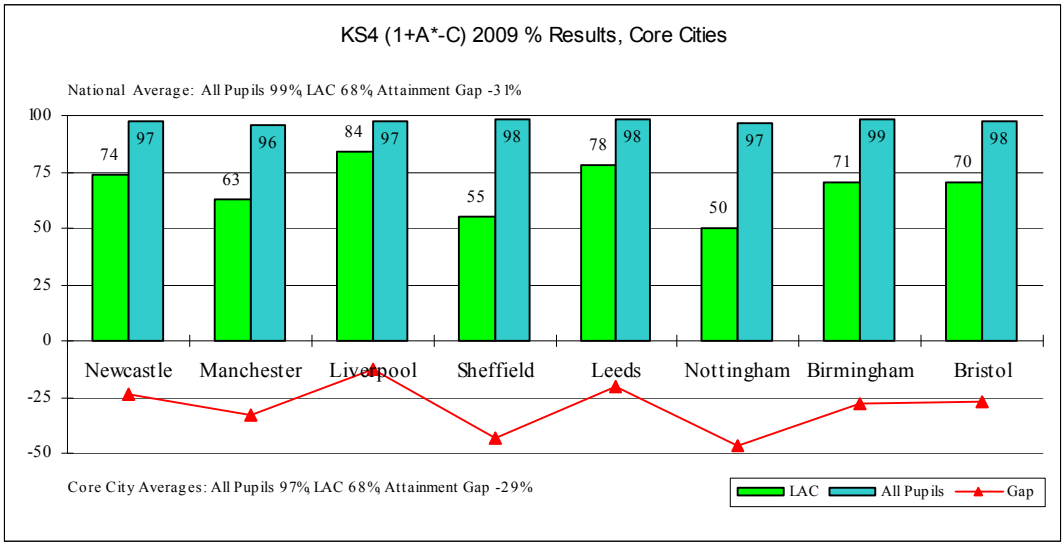
KS4 (5+A*-C) GCSE Results & Gaps

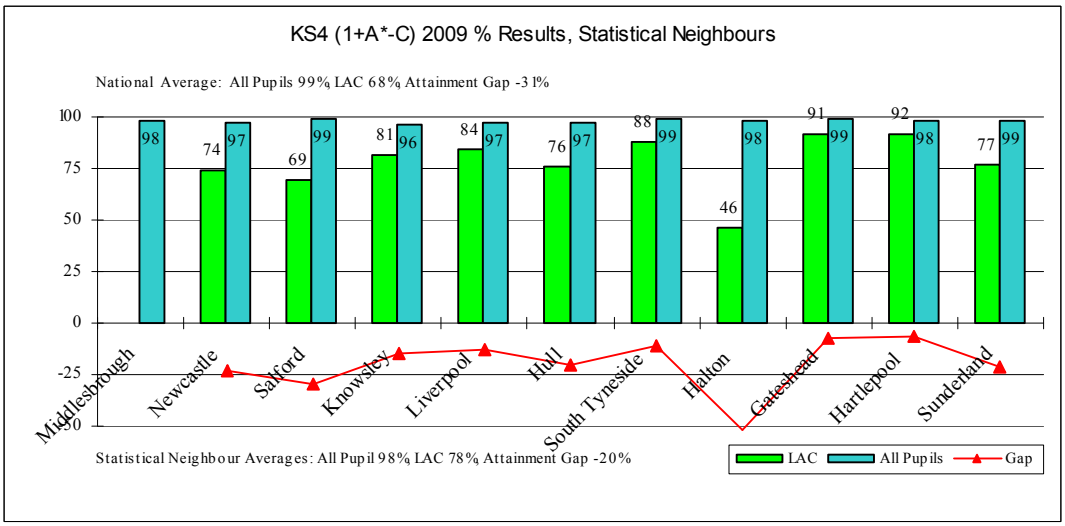


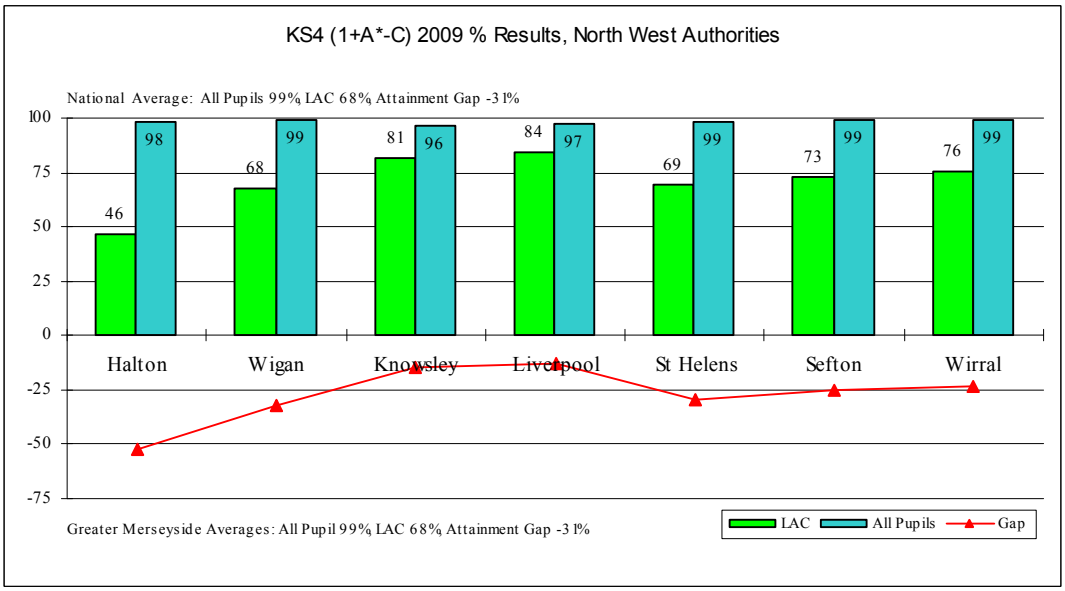




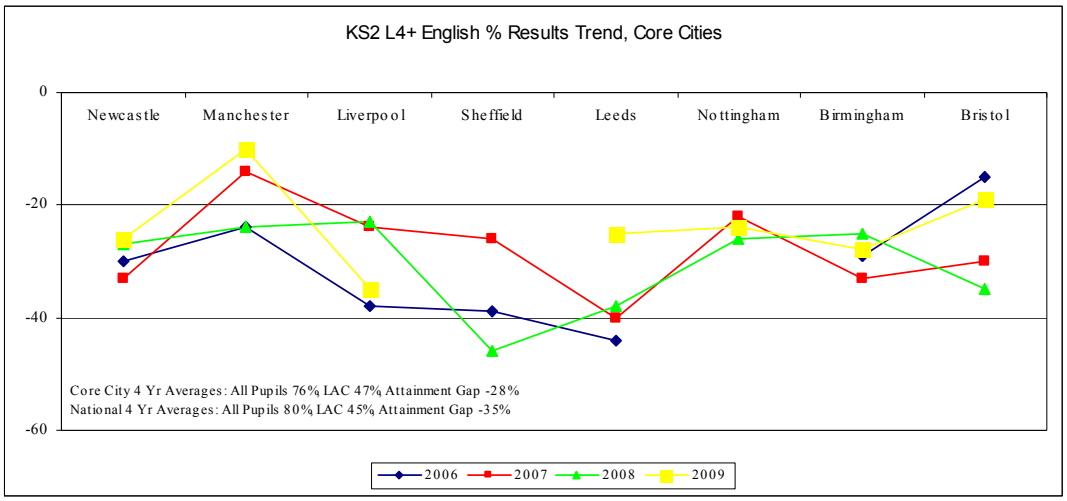
KS4 (1+A*-C) GCSE Results & Gaps

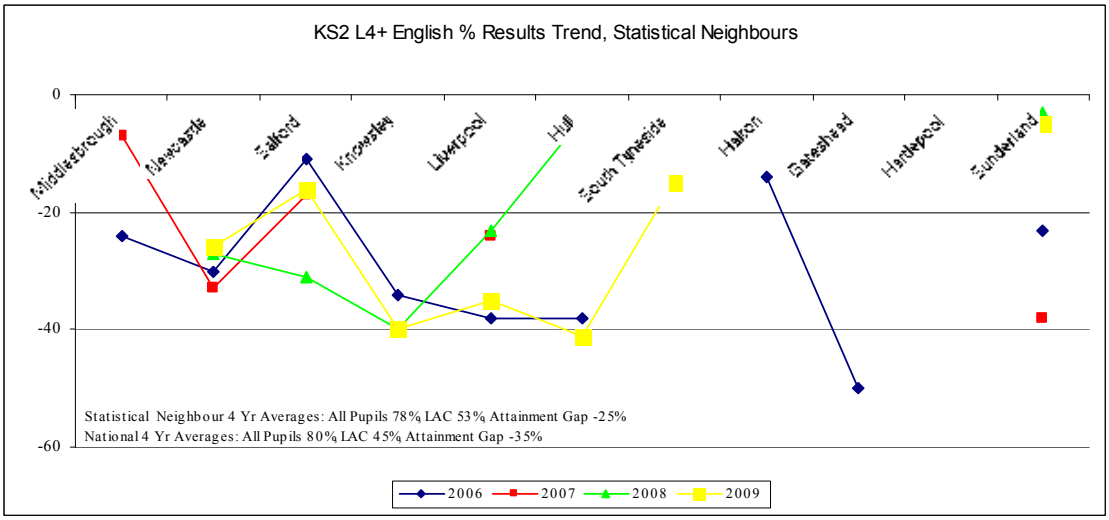


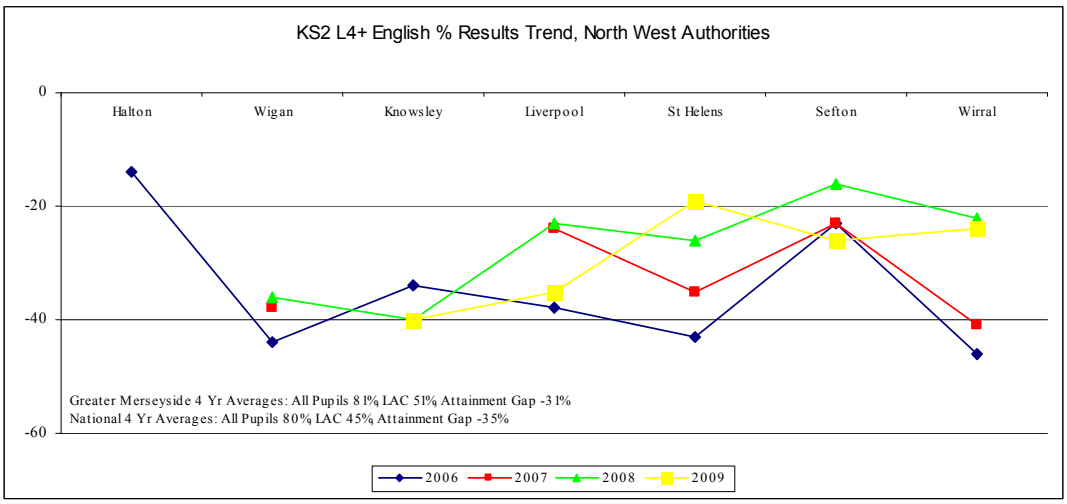




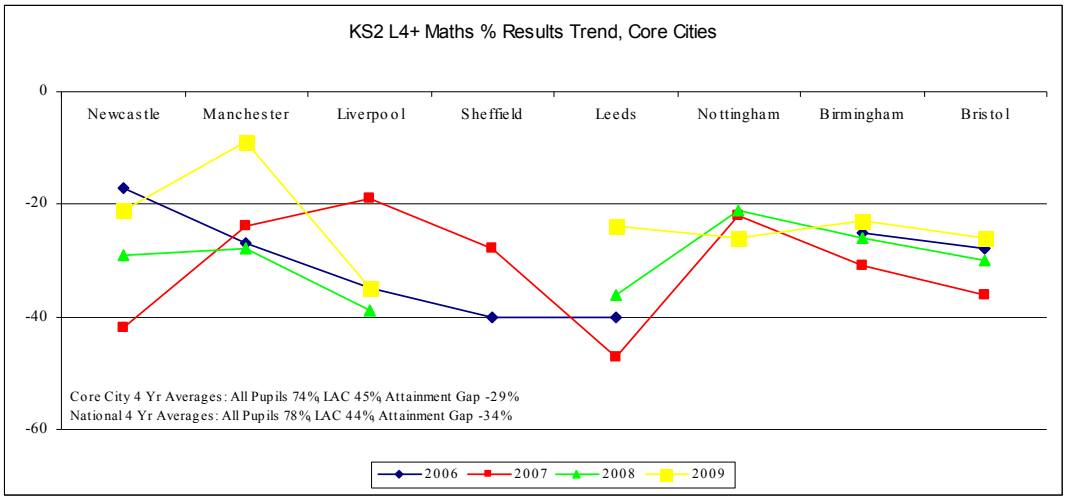
KS2 L4+ English Results Gap Trend

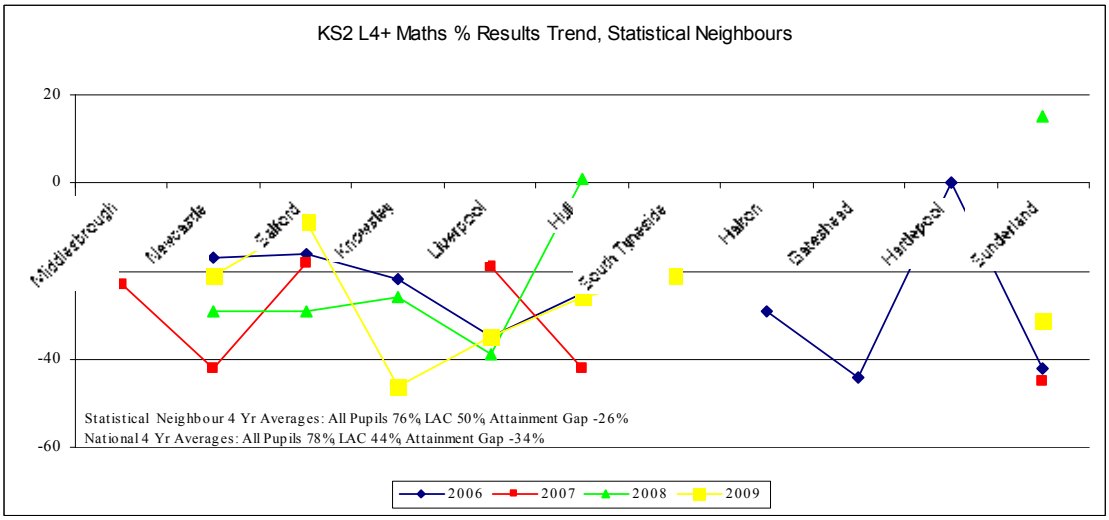


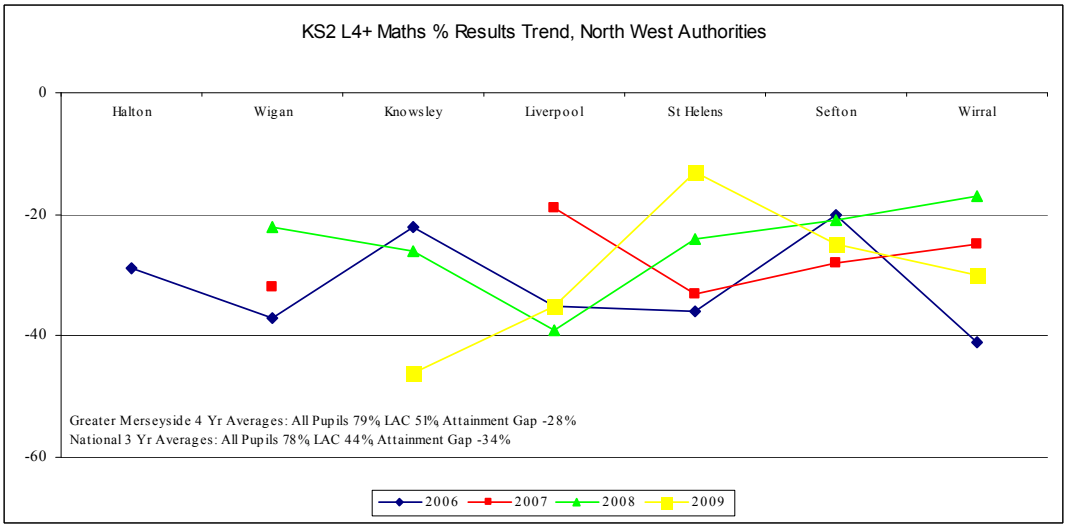




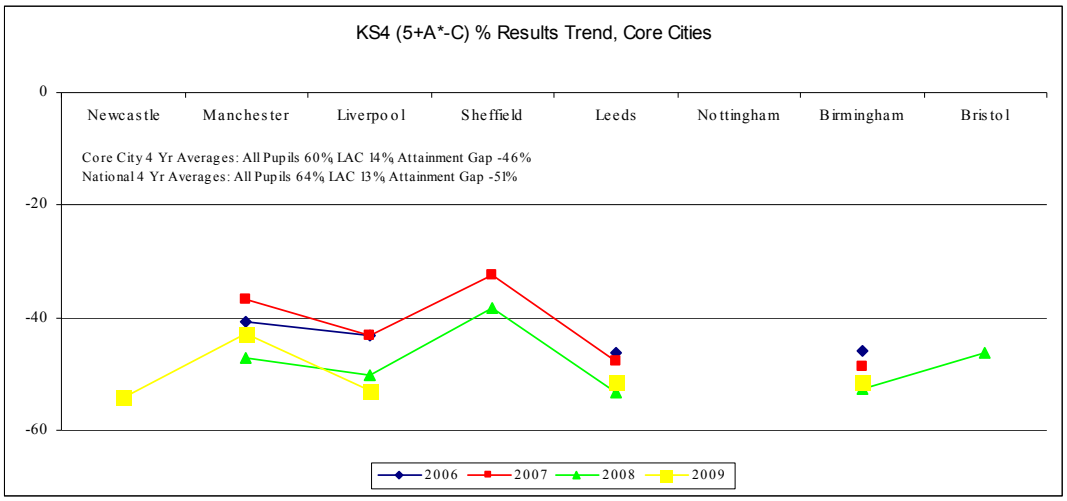
KS2 L4+ Maths Results Gap Trend

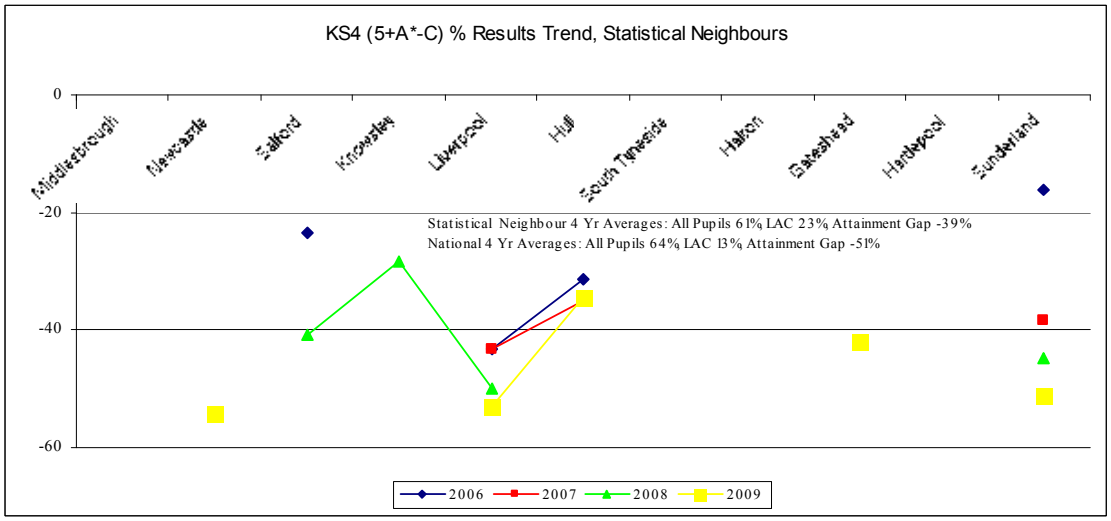


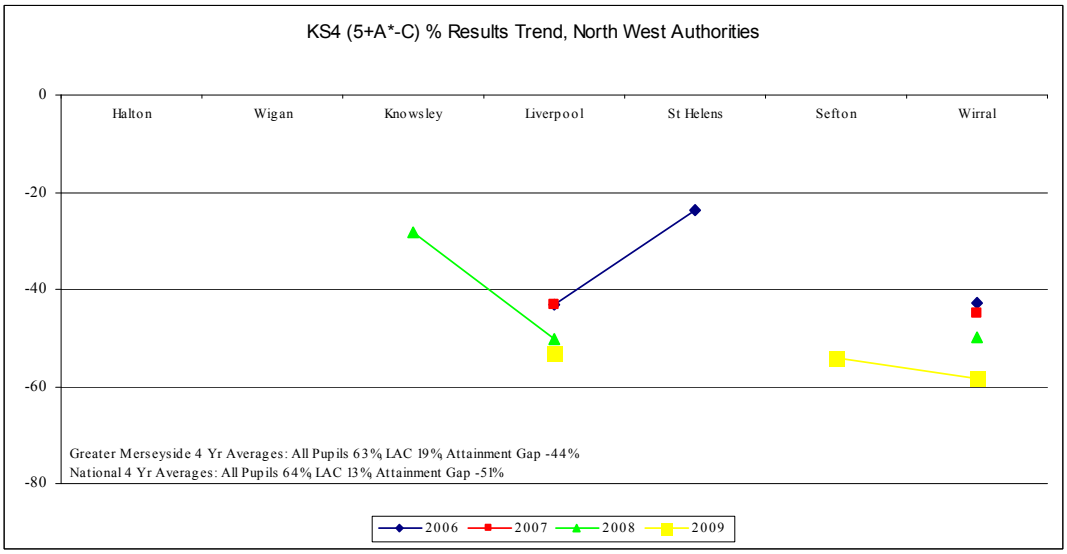


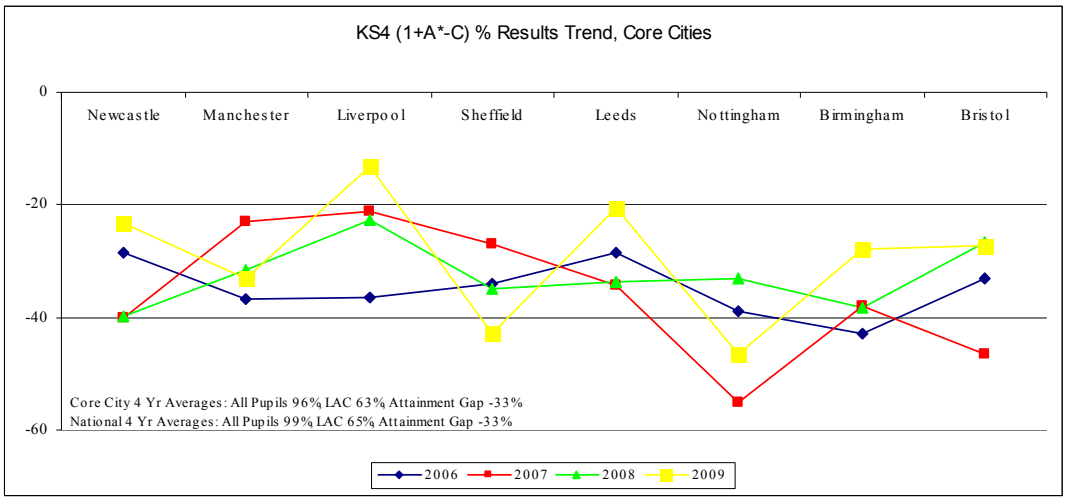
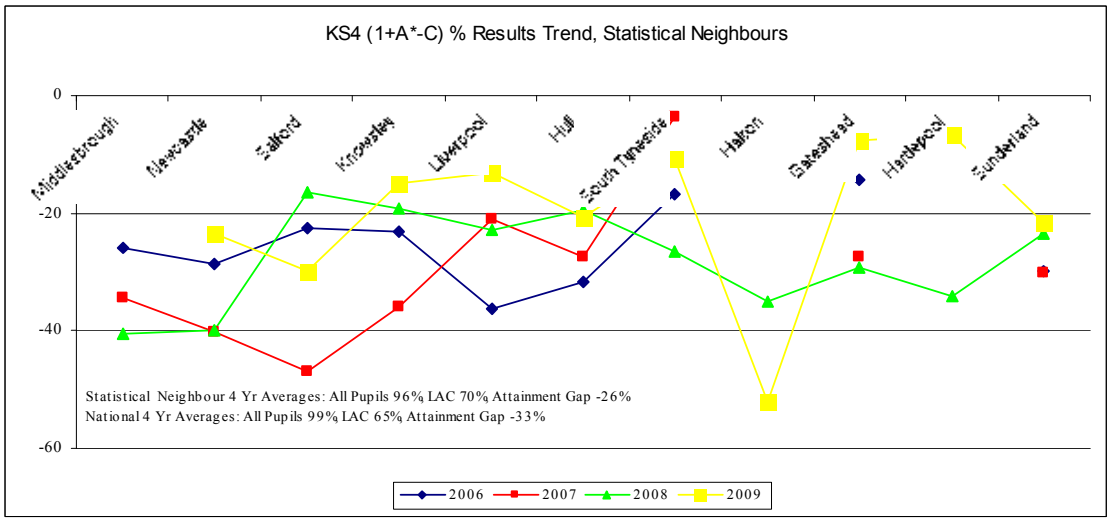
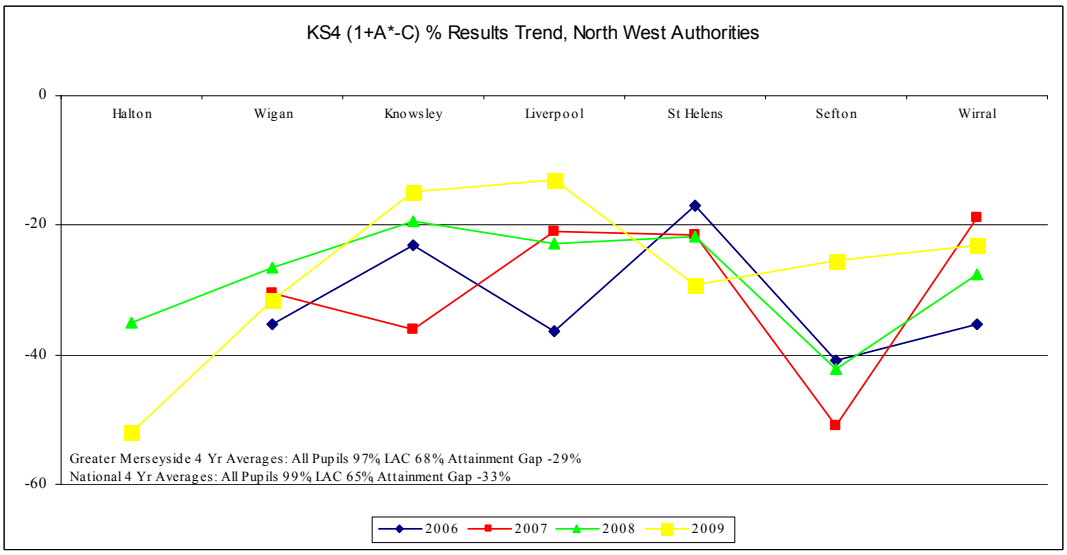


KS4 (5+A*-C) GCSE Results Gap Trend







Appendix xv

KS4 (1+A*-C) GCSE Results Gap Trend