Walsall Virtual School
Annual Report
2019/2020

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Executive Summary

Throughout the whole of the 2019/20 academic year and including the Covid 19 lockdown period the Virtual School has continued to support all children looked after. We have continually reviewed our work to ensure we continue to deliver our statutory duties and provide effective support to all children and young people.

The overall number of children of school age looked after children has risen over the last 12 months from 471 in 2018/19 to 568 at the end of July 2020. 92 children entered the care system during 23rd March-31st August 2020.

The Pupil Premium funding continues to be available to all looked after children aged 3-18 and is distributed to schools though an' individual needs based' model requested through the child/young person's personal education plan.

Since the implementation of ePEP, the completion rate of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) has risen to over 95%. We have also seen an improvement in the quality of our PEPs since schools have taken over responsibility for the completion of the document.

Overall attendance overall continues to be good and for the 5th consecutive year is better that that of all looked after children regionally and nationally.

The number of children and young people receiving at least 1 fixed term exclusion continues to be lower than that of regional and national looked after children. The most up to date figures show Walsall at being ranked 8th in the country for the least amount of exclusions. There has been no permanent exclusions.

Due to the closure of schools in March 2020, national curriculum assessments and statutory collections for this year were cancelled. For the purpose of this annual report we have included EYFS, KS1, and KS2 attainment predictions based on information provided by schools in the spring term 2020 alongside attainment data from the last 3 academic years. The 2020 predicted data is for information purposes only and will not be used to make direct comparisons or for benchmarking outside of this report.

The number of children predicted to achieve a GLD at the end of reception increased by 6% on the previous year. The number of children predicted to achieve ARE in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 1 was lower in all subjects than the previous year. The number of children predicted to achieve the expected level of attainment at the end of KS2 in reading, writing and maths combined increased by 20% from the previous year.

At Key stage 4 we have seen an increase in the number of young people gaining 5 or more 4-9 GCSEs (or equivalent) passes from 18% in 2019 to 36% in 2020. We have also seen a rise in the number of young people achieve 5-9 GCSEs from 5 to 15%.

Post 16 engagement is supported by the Virtual School Post 16 Team and monitored by the monthly NEET Action Group (NAG). The Number of young people who are NEET fluctuates month by month but all young people who are NEET engaged with our careers advisor and are being supported to secure appropriate post 16 provision.

We continue to raise awareness of the impact of trauma and unmet attachment needs with our schools. This year we have 10 schools involved in our Attachment Aware Schools Project and a further 24 will join the project in September 2020.

Purpose of the report

The purpose of the report is to outline the activity of the Virtual School and inform the Virtual School Management Board about the educational outcomes for Walsall's looked after children 2019/2020. The report reflects on achievements and identifies areas of development to achieve the best outcomes for our children in care

Contextual data in this report is for all looked after children as of 31st July 2020. Attainment data in this report is for children who have been looked after for 12 months or more as of 31st March 2020.

Context

The concept of the 'Virtual School Head' (VSH) was first outlined in the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (DCSF, June 2007).

The Children and Families Act 2014 amended section 22 of the Children Act 1989 and placed a statutory duty on all local authorities to appoint a Virtual School Head (VSH) to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children. The children and Social work Act 2017 placed a duty on local authorities, under section 23ZZA of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children in their area by providing information and advice to:

- any person that has parental responsibility for the child;
- providers of funded early years education, designated teachers for previously looked-after children in maintained schools and academies; and
- any other person the authority considers appropriate for promoting the educational achievement of relevant children.

Previously looked-after children are those who:

- are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales (as defined by the Children Act 1989 or Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014) because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order; or
- were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales. 'State care' is care provided by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.
- The duty applies to children who are in early years provision (secured by the local authority under section 7(1) of the Childcare Act 2006) and continues throughout the compulsory years of education where the child is in provision funded in part or in full by the state.

VSHs are integral to ensuring that local authorities discharge their duty to provide suitable advice and information for the purpose of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked-after children. They can also undertake any activity they consider appropriate where that activity will promote the educational achievement of such children in their area.

The VSH should:

- Have the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively.
- Have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children their authority looks after (including those placed and educated out of county).
- Maintain an up to date roll of the Local Authority's looked after children who are in school or college settings and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress.
- Must inform Head Teachers and Designated Teachers in schools if they have a child on roll that is looked after by the VSH's local authority.
- Ensure Social Workers, Designated Teachers and school staff, carers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating each child's PEP (Personal Education Plan) and ensuring that identified needs are met.
- Ensure that up to date, effective and high quality PEPs focus on educational outcomes and that all looked after children, wherever they are placed, have an effective PEP.
- Ensure the educational achievement of looked after children is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibility for promoting their welfare.
- Report regularly on the attainment of looked after children through the authority's corporate parenting structures.

It is the responsibility of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services to ensure that these duties are met. The Virtual School is held to account by the Virtual School Advisory Board.

The Board is chaired by a Walsall primary school head teacher and constituted from representatives from education, health and social care.The Virtual School shares data, information and school development priorities with the Advisory Board each term.

The Role of the Virtual School

The role of the Virtual School is to promote the educational achievement of looked after children in the care of Walsall local authority, wherever they live or attend school. The Virtual school team work with partners to ensure that education is provided, children's needs are met and planning is of high quality. Our key responsibilities are:

- Coordinating and quality assuring all Personal Education Plans (PEP).
- Monitoring and challenging schools to make effective use of Pupil Premium in line with the 'Pupil Premium Grant 2019 to 2020 Conditions of Grant and Pupil Premium: Virtual Heads' Responsibilities
- Tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of all looked after children
- Using our tracking data to highlight individuals who are not on target to achieve their predicted outcomes and providing them with additional educational support.
- Ensuring children with special educational needs or disabilities are supported appropriately.
- Implementing a range of targeted interventions to raise academic standards.
- Providing support and challenge to students, schools, social workers and carers.
- Ensuring effective transition between schools or specialist providers.
- Encouraging our young people to have high aspirations about their futures and remove barriers to further education.
- Leading training for foster carers, designated teachers, school governors and staff , and delivering bespoke training for alternative learning providers.
- Celebrating Achievements

Links to Walsall Strategies

The Walsall Corporate Parenting Strategy is committed to improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers and have pledged to:

- Do everything they can to make sure children and young people have the very best education and training possible.
- Support young people in taking up opportunities for further education and apprenticeships.
- Help care leavers with their career plans

To support these pledges the Virtual School has:

- Moved to an electronic PEP (ePEP)
- Appointed a full time level 7 careers adviser
- Worked closely with all our schools to ensure first day provision is put in place for any looked after children who receive a fixed term exclusion.
- Provided apprenticeship opportunities to two care leavers
- Enabled all year 11 students to have access to a tutor to support their GCSEs
- Ensured that when a looked after child moves school they are placed in a good or outstanding school if it is the best school to meet their holistic needs
- A robust attendance monitoring process in place to ensure that looked after children do not miss education
- Through targeted use of Pupil Premium provided focussed support to looked after children working just below their expected levels of attainment or requested additional support with their learning
- Developed a Corporate Mentoring Scheme
- Further developed our Attachment Aware Schools Project

The Virtual School Team (as of 31st July 2020)

The Virtual School is made up of a team of dedicated professionals who provide support, advice and guidance to looked after children in a variety of ways.

In 2019, after a consultation with schools it was agreed that in addition to providing schools with pupil premium funding we would create a number of new posts to work directly with children and young people in their school or home. From July 2020 the virtual school is made up of two teams.

The School Support team

Education Advisor x 2 (QTS)

There are two Education Advisors within the team who manage a small team of tutors, mentors and key workers. The Education Advisors monitor the attainment and progress of looked after children and allocate appropriate resources where needed. They are also responsible for ensuring pupil premium is used effectively to improve educational outcomes

Key Workers

We have 4 key workers within the School Support Team. EYFS/KS1, KS2, KS3 and KS4. Our key workers model and coach strategies to improve outcomes, attend PEP meetings, provide advice and guidance to parents/carers and social workers in relation to improving education. Key workers also work alongside designated teachers to help facilitate and improve personal education plans

Mentors

We have a primary and secondary mentor with the school support team who work alongside children and young people to develop appropriate relationships to engage, motivate rand remove barriers to learning. Our mentors also support looked after children through transitions

Tutors

We have 4 tutors within the School Support Team, 2 primary, 1 English and 1 maths tutor. Our tutors provide tuition in or out of school and either face to face or online. Our tutors alos support parents and carers with home learning activities

Careers Advisor

Our careers advisor provides information, advice and guidance to young people aged 14-19 in relation to their career aspirations. She supports young people making a transition to HE and FE and works alongside out NEET young people to identify appropriate post 16 provision

The Inclusion Team

The inclusion team consists of a small number of staff who work with schools, carers and social workers to support children who do not have a school place, are at risk of disengaging from services/and or education. This includes children and young people who:

- Do not have a school place
- Are at risk of exclusion
- Have below 75% attendance
- Are undergoing an SEN assessment
- Are NEET

Education Liaison Officer

Has lead responsibility within the inclusion team and provides specialist advice to schools where children and young people are at risk of exclusion.

Key workers x 2

We have 2 key workers within the inclusion team who work alongside the education liaison Officer to reduce exclusions, challenge poor attendance, support schools through the graduated response and work with admissions teams to secure timely school places. Alongside the two teams we have our Business Support team who comprise of a PEP & Attendance Coordinator and Information & Finance Officer

We also have a full time Speech and Language Therapist and Educational Psychologist as part of our Specialist Support Team

Virtual School Staff Continued professional development

Training courses/CPD opportunities attended by the Virtual School staff during the 2019/20 academic year include:

- Transition and Vulnerability Training
- Delivering ASDAN courses
- Secondary Language and Communication Needs
- Supporting secondary aged children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- Solution Circle training
- Protecting Information (mandatory for all staff)
- Person Centred Planning
- Post Pandemic Nurture training
- Emotion Coaching
- Identifying Dyslexia & Dyscalculia
- Restorative Practice Training
- Trauma and Attachment with Lisa Cherry
- Secondary Speech & Language communication needs
- Safeguarding children and young people
- Drawing and Talking
- Teaching English to speakers of other languages

The Virtual School Advisory Board

The Virtual School reports termly to the Virtual School Advisory Board. The board is chaired by a Walsall primary school head and consists of the following people.

- HT Primary School (Chair)
- Principle IRO (Vice Chair)
- Assistant Principle-Local Secondary Academy
- Group Manager Youth Justice Service (Vice Chair)
- Early Years Adviser
- School Improvement Manager
- School Governance Manager
- Head of Service- Corporate Parenting
- Foster Carer
- Post 16 Officer- Walsall College
- Head of Service-Safeguarding

The virtual school sits structurally under the Access & Inclusion Service but is geographically situated within Children's Social Care in order to support and work closely with our Corporate Parenting social worker teams. The Virtual School Lead reports directly to the Director of Education and is part of the Access & Inclusion Senior Management Team.

The Virtual School cohort- A profile of our learners

As of 31st July 2020 there were 568, 3-18 year olds who were looked after. This is an increase of 31 children from 2018/19. There is an equal gender split with 51% being female and 49% male. 62% of children are educated in Walsall compared with 38% who are educated outside of Walsall. Of those children educated outside of Walsall, 75% are educated within the West Midlands.

Year Group	Phase Summary	No. of LAC	Male	Female	Walsall School	OOB School	SEN Support	EHCP
-2		18	9	9	14	4	2	0
-1	72	25	11	14	15	10	4	1
R		29	19	10	23	16	4	1
1		29	12	17	22	7	5	2
2		20	12	8	14	6	2	1
3	183	34	22	12	24	10	7	5
4		33	14	19	20	13	11	6
5		36	15	21	23	13	16	9
6		31	13	18	20	11	9	5
7		35	16	19	28	7	8	8
8		52	27	25	32	20	10	20
9	247	46	23	23	27	19	18	12
10		62	36	26	32	30	12	17
11		52	26	26	30	22	11	11
12 & 13	66	66	36	30	30	36	4	18
Total	568	568	291	277	354	214	123	116

What type of schools are our children and young people attending?

Statutory guidance 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of looked after children' states that looked after children should be educated in good or outstanding schools and unless there exceptional, evidence based reasons, looked after children should not be placed in a schools judged to be Inadequate.

We always aim to place a child in a good or outstanding school if it's in their best interest to do so. We will never place a child in an inadequate school unless there is no alternative options and we carefully monitor the education of those placed in requires improvement schools.

We recognise the importance of placement stability so would not move a child from a school rated less than good if the young person was safe, happy and making progress. If a school receives an inadequate rating, a meeting is held with the child's parent/carer and social worker to discuss what actions should be taken. We also discuss any move of school with the young person if appropriate to do so. In the last 12 months we have moved 1 young person due to the school being given an inadequate Ofsted rating.

As of 31st march 2020:

- 89% of children in early year's settings attend a good or better provision.
- 75% of children attend a primary school rated good or better.
- 68% of children attend a secondary school rated good or better

75% of looked after children attend a good or better school as of 31st March 2020. This is slightly less that last year (81%) which is mainly due to the number of children placed in secondary schools that have moved to a requires improvement (RI) grading.

There is a small number of children who are placed in schools/settings which do not have an Ofsted grade due to being an academy converter or new school. These have been excluded from the figures which are based on schools with an official Ofsted grade

Special Educational Needs

Looked after children are 4 times more likely to have a special educational need than all children, and are almost nine times more likely to have an education, health and care plan than all children (DfE 2019). Nationally 55.9% of looked after children had a special education need compared to 14.9% of all children.

At the end of the 2019/2020 academic year there were 116 (20%) looked after children with an EHCP and 123 (21%) on SEN support. In Walsall 239 (42%) Of our learners have an identified special educational need.

No. of children with SEN

	2018	2019	2020
SEN Supp	123	126	123
EHCP	106	113	116
No SEN	345	298	329

SEN Supp   EHCP   No SEN
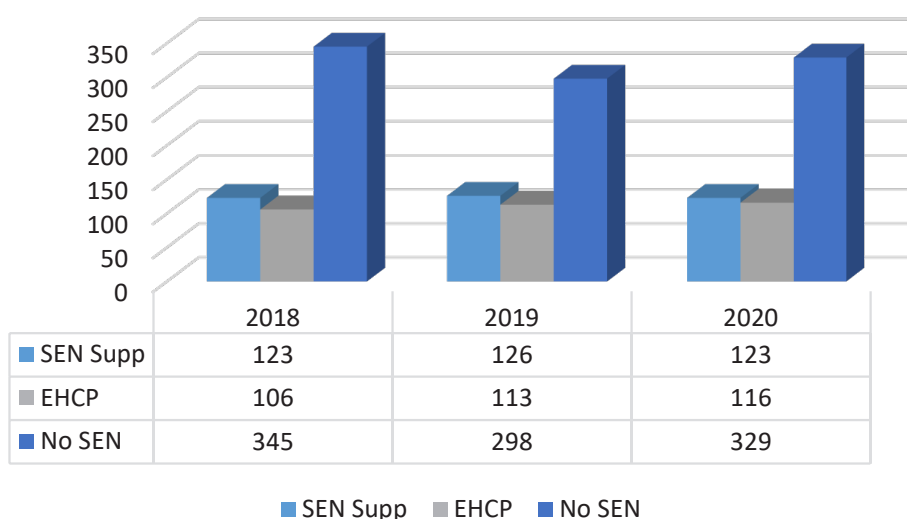
Looked after children are 3 times more likely to have social emotion and mental health (SEMH) as their primary needs than their peers. This is reflective in Walsall where 51 (44%) of our C & YP have SEMH as their primary need.

Our key workers work closely with schools and SEND teams to ensure the SEN graduated response is followed without drift and delay. They also work with schools to identify appropriate SEN resources, contribute to the SEN support plan, Support parents and carers to understand the SEN Code of Practice and facilitate statutory assessment requests. Over the last 12 months 5 parental requests for EHCPs have been made by the Virtual School.

The Virtual School Lead attends the SEN panel and External Placement Panel to advocate for looked after children when additional funding or a change of placement is required

EYFS (Reception)

There are 20 children in the EYFS reporting cohort, 14 of which attend an early years setting/school in Walsall and 6 attend a provision outside of Walsall. 18 children attend a provision rated good or outstanding by Ofsted and 3 have an identified special educational need. Of the 20, 8 are placed with foster carers, 8 are placed with family & friend's carers, 3 are placed with their parents and 1 is placed for adoption.

Of the 20, 10 (50%) were assessed as on track to achieve a good level of development at the end of reception. This is a 6% increase on the number who achieved a GLD in 2018/19. 10 of the cohort have been looked after for 4 years+, of these 10, 5 was assessed as on track to achieve achieved a GLD. Of the 10 who were looked after for less than 4 years, 5 were assessed as on track to achieve a GLD.

Interventions that were put in place to support children in Early Years

- Early Years Tuition Service provided tailored 1:1 support to 7 children in reception
- who were working slightly below age related levels
- All nursery and reception aged children received a purple letter box parcel full of learning resources to be used on their own or supported by their carers

Next steps

- We will hold half termly attainment and progress meetings to identify underachievement in early years and allocate appropriate resources/interventions
- We will initiate the introduction of a PEP for children aged 2
- Our Speech & Language Therapist will screen all under 5s to help identify any communication and language difficulties
- We will develop and implement an Early Years Enrichment Pack for all children in Nursery and Reception
- We will work with early years providers to further increase the uptake of the early years pupil premium

Key Stage 1

There are 15 children in the KS1 reporting cohort, 8 of which attend a school in Walsall and 7 attend a school outside of Walsall. 14 children attend a provision rated good or outstanding by Ofsted and 3 have an identified special educational need and 1 has an EHCP and attends an SEMH school. Of the 15, 8 are placed with foster carers, 6 are placed with family & friends carers, and 1 is placed with parents.

Of the 15, 7 (46%) were assessed as being on track to achieve age related expectation in reading, 8 (53%) were assessed as being on track to achieve age related expectations in writing and 8 (53%) were assessed as being on track to achieve age related expectations in maths.

Of the cohort 6 have been looked after for 5 years+ and 9 have been looked after for less than 5 years.

Interventions that were put in place to support children in Key Stage 1

- We worked alongside our teaching school to develop a KS1 writing project to help close gaps and raise attainment in writing
- All children in KS1 children received Storytime magazine through the post each month
- All children in KS1 received a letter box parcel full of learning resources to be used on their own or supported by their carers

Next steps

- We will hold half termly attainment and progress meetings to identify underachievement in KS1 and allocate appropriate resources/interventions
- Our Speech & Language Therapist will screen all KS1 children new into care to help identify any communication and language difficulties
- We will develop and implement a termly 'book in a bag' for all children in KS1 who have been identified and needing extra reading intervention
- All children in KS1 will have a log in to our online reading and maths programmes

Key Stage 2

There are 21 children in the KS2 reporting cohort, 13 of which attend a school in Walsall and 8 attend a school outside of Walsall. 19 children attend a provision rated good or outstanding by Ofsted and 14 have an identified special educational need of which 6 have an EHCP and attend special schools. Of the 21, 15 are placed with foster carers, 5 are placed with family & friends carers, and 1 is placed with parents.

Of the 21, 10 (48%) were assessed as being on track to achieve age related expectation in reading, writing and maths and SPAG. 8, (38%) were on track to reach the expected standard in reading writing and maths combined

Of the cohort 14 have been looked after for 5 years+ and 7 have been looked after for less than 5 years.

Interventions that were put in place to support children in Key Stage 2

- We worked alongside our teaching school to develop a KS2 writing project to help close gaps and raise attainment in writing
- All children in 3 & 4 received Storytime magazine through the post each month
- All children in KS2 received a letter box parcel full of learning resources to be used on their own or supported by their carers

Next steps

- We will hold half termly attainment and progress meetings to identify underachievement in KS2 and allocate appropriate resources/interventions
- Our Speech & Language Therapist will screen all KS2 children new into care to help identify any communication and language difficulties
- We will develop and implement a termly 'book in a bag' for all children in KS2 who have been identified and needing extra reading intervention
- All children in KS2 will have a log in to our online reading and maths programmes

Key Stage 4

There are 39 young people in the KS4 reporting cohort, 18 of which attend a school in Walsall and 21 attend a school outside of Walsall. 24 children attend a provision rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. 20 have an identified special educational need which 10 having an EHCP and 8 attend a special school. Of the 39, 24 are placed with foster carers, 5 are placed with family & friends carers, 1 is placed with parents and 9 are placed in residential homes

Of the 39, 14 (36%) achieved a 9-4 pass in English and maths and 6 (15%) achieved a 9-5 pass in English and maths

Of the cohort 27 have been looked after for 5 years+ and 12 have been looked after for less than 5 years.

Interventions that were put in place to support children in Key Stage 3 & 4

- All year 11 students had access to additional 1:1 English and maths tuition

Next steps

- We will hold half termly attainment and progress meetings to identify underachievement in KS4 and allocate appropriate resources/interventions
- Our Speech & Language Therapist will screen all KS4 children new into care to help identify any communication and language difficulties
- Careers advice will be available to all young people who are choosing their options in year 9
- We will develop and implement a termly 'book in a bag' for targeted children in KS3 who have been identified and needing extra reading intervention
- All children in KS3 and 4 will have a log in to our online learning programmes

Key Stage 5

The Virtual School are responsible for looked after children up to the age of 18.

The Virtual school has a careers advisor and KEY Stage 5 SEN Key worker who work closely together to support young people from year 11 thought to post 16. The Virtual School Head also chairs the monthly NEET Action Group (NAG) where all young people aged 16-25 who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET are discussed

We aim to get the best outcomes for our care leavers by working with them as individuals, ensuring wherever they are placed, they are engaged in education, employment or training commensurate to their ability and aspirations. Each individual young person receives support and guidance towards their desired destination. For those young people moving on to university, the Virtual School has continued to remain involved at each step of the process. This has included working on the UCAS form and Personal Statement, applying for student finance and attending Open Days. The table below shows the post destination of all looked after children in year 12 and 13 as of the 20th March 2020

2019/20 post 16 destinations	Year 12/13
6th Form	7
6th Form (specialist provision)	4
College	38
Training provider	10
Apprenticeship	4
NEET (not seeking EET)	2
NEET seeking EET	14
Custodial	1
Total	76

Next steps

- Align the personal education and pathway plan
- Develop a robust tracking and monitoring system to track the attainment and progress for young people in key stage 5

Care Leavers Apprenticeship Programme

The Apprenticeship Programme for Care Leavers was specifically established to provide those Care Leavers who are interested in pursuing a career with the local authority, the experience and qualifications needed to secure permanent employment and so achieve adult independence and economic wellbeing. The Programme provides care leavers with the opportunity to access paid work through an apprenticeship for a fixed-term period (normally 13 – 18 months) during which time they can gain confidence, learn new skills and gain qualifications.

To date 20 Apprenticeships vacancies have been ring fenced within the local authority for care leavers and 20 care leavers have been recruited onto the scheme.

There has been a number of successes including a care leaver starting a Higher Apprenticeship in revenues and benefits.

The Virtual School have appointed two care leaver apprentices in the role of business and admin assistants

What our care leavers say about the programme

'Sometimes I was lazy but I could see this was a fantastic opportunity and I needed to work hard to get the results'.

The Endless Possibilities programme has opened so many doors for me; it has been a great kick-start to my career in Customer Service. The programme accommodated all my needs from support with travel through the Virtual School team to lack of confidence and experience. The help I have received has been overwhelming; I have been able to achieve many life goals since starting my Apprenticeship. With a lot of hard work and help from the programme, I can positively say I am more confident in the way I present myself and have the ability to offer excellent customer service. I am positive it will only get better from here and I look forward to what the future holds for the rest of my career.'

Next steps

- To further develop our Pre-Apprenticeship scheme to ensure young people have the opportunity to fully explore the requirements of the world of work in advance of applying
- Develop part time hour apprenticeships so young people can build up their resilience to working 37 hours per week as necessary.
- Develop a package of employability skills training – prior to application, linked to work experience.
- Align the Corporate Mentoring and apprentice scheme to enable young people to receive additional mentoring from senior council staff.

Attainment and Progress

The virtual school track and monitor the termly progress of all looked after children form the age of 3-18. Attainment data is collected by ePEP and analysed by our primary and secondary education advisors. Where concerns are raised that expected progress is not being made our advisors will liaise directly with schools to discuss appropriate interventions.

The 2020 predicted outcomes are for looked after children who have been continuously looked after, for at least 12 months, up to and including 31st March 2020, by Walsall local authority.

2020 results are standalone and should not be used to make direct comparisons or for benchmarking. Historical data has been included for information purposes only.

Exams were cancelled in 2020 following the closure of schools and colleges, on 20th March, to the majority of students (except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children) as part of the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP), phonics, key stage 1 (KS1) and key stage 2 (KS2) national curriculum assessments did not take place this year. Therefore, statutory collections were also cancelled.

Following concerns about the standardisation of A level results, the government and Ofqual announced on 17th August that key stage 4 (and key stage 5) students would receive their centre assessment grade (CAG) or, if higher, the standardised grade awarded by the exam boards for 2020.

Performance tables will not be published by the Department for Education (DfE) for 2019/20.

Early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 assessment grades have been collected via pupil's Personal Education Plans (PEP) and Walsall Virtual School staff intelligence.

Key stage 4 grades were collected on GCSE results day (20th August 2020).

Currently, the validated 2020 outcomes for children looked after is scheduled to be released in March 2021.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved a good level of development at the end of reception 2017-19 and those predicted to achieve a GLD based on school data collected at the end of the spring term

EYFSP - % Achieving a Good Level of Development

	2017	2018	2019	2020 (PEP)
Children In Our Care	57%	63%	44%	50%
Walsall All	66%	68%	68%	
NAT All	71%	72%	72%	

■ Children In Our Care   ■ Walsall All   ■ NAT All
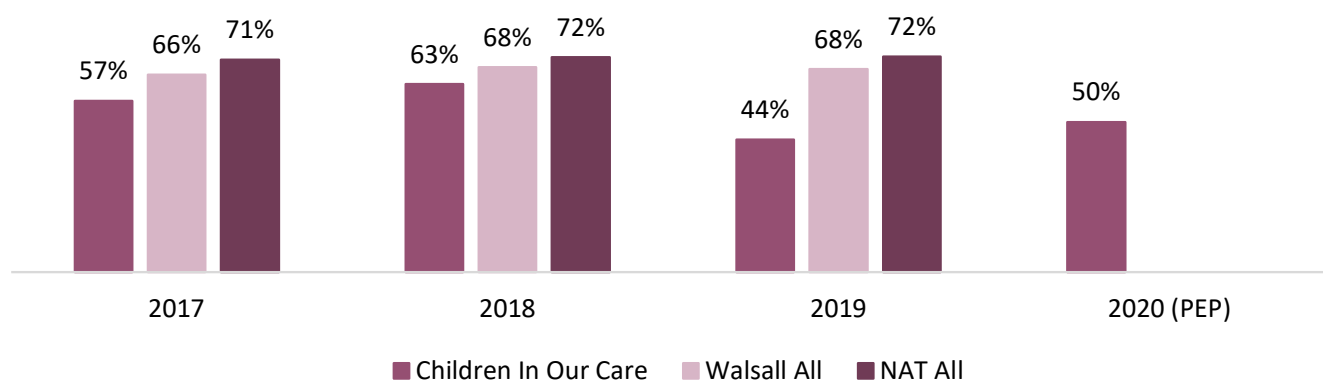
Key Stage 1

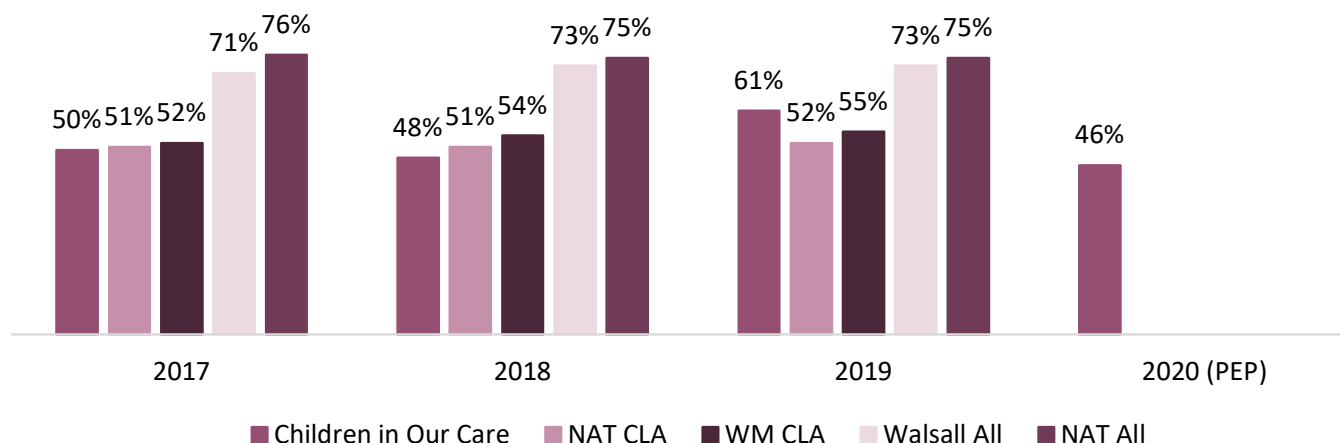The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who achieved the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 1 from 2017-2019 and those predicted to achieve the expected standard based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.

KS1 Reading - % Achieving the Expected Standard or above

Legend: Children in Our Care, NAT CLA, WM CLA, Walsall All, NAT All

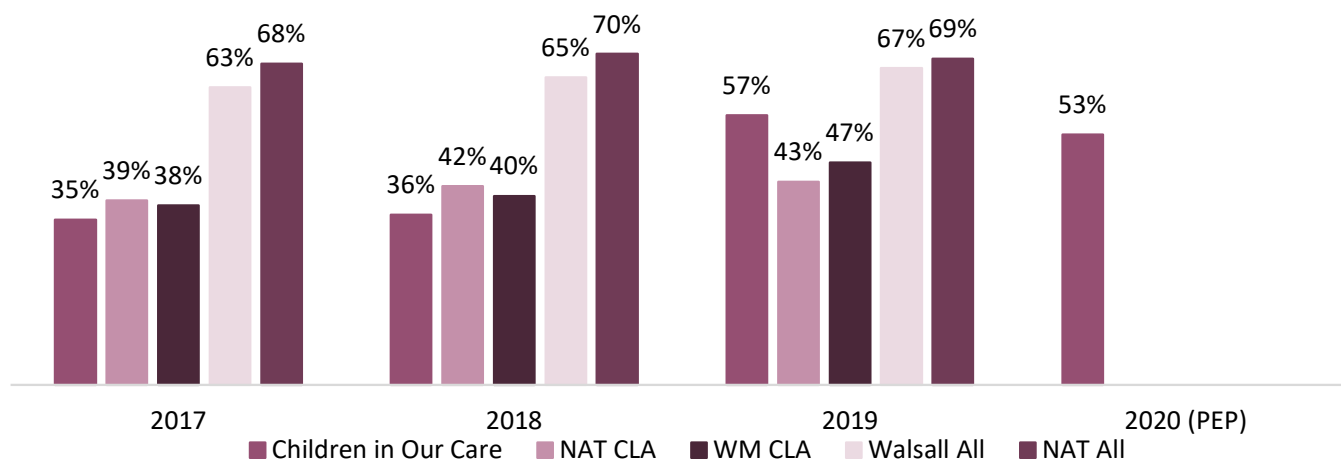| Year	Children in Our Care	NAT CLA	WM CLA	Walsall All	NAT All
2017	50%	51%	52%	71%	76%
2018	48%	51%	54%	73%	75%
2019	61%	52%	55%	73%	75%
2020 (PEP)	46%				

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved the expected standard in writing at the end of key stage 1 (2017-2019) and those predicted to achieve the expected standard based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.

KS1 Writing - % Achieving the Expected Standard or above

Legend: Children in Our Care, NAT CLA, WM CLA, Walsall All, NAT All

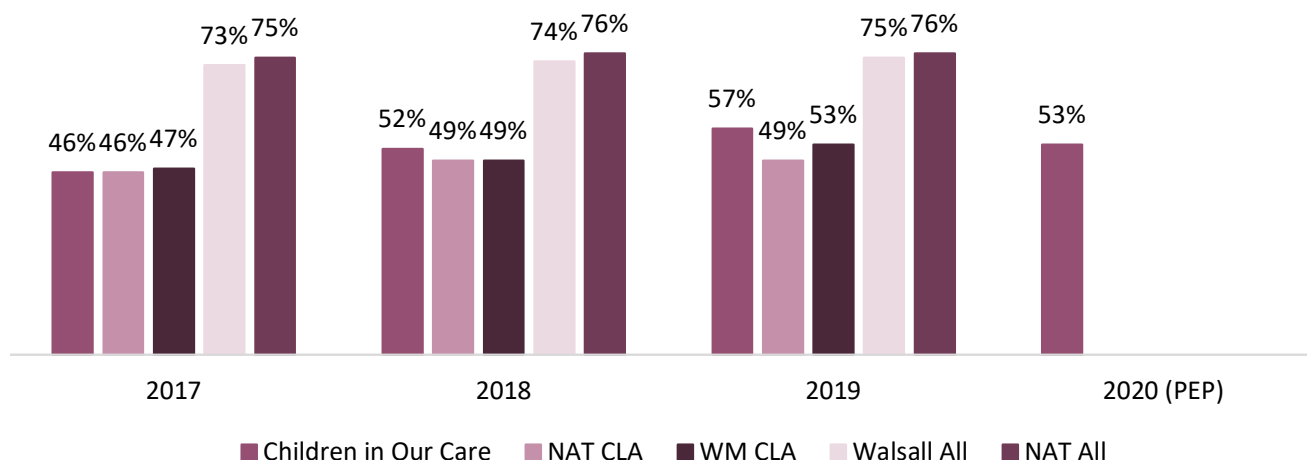| Year	Children in Our Care	NAT CLA	WM CLA	Walsall All	NAT All
2017	35%	39%	38%	63%	68%
2018	36%	42%	40%	65%	70%
2019	57%	43%	47%	67%	69%
2020 (PEP)	53%				

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved the expected standard in maths at the end of key stage 1 (2017-2019) and those predicted to achieve the expected standard based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.

KS1 Maths - % Achieving the Expected Standard or above

Legend: Children in Our Care | NAT CLA | WM CLA | Walsall All | NAT All

2017: 46%, 46%, 47%, 73%, 75%
2018: 52%, 49%, 49%, 74%, 76%
2019: 57%, 49%, 53%, 75%, 76%
2020 (PEP): 53%

Key Stage 2

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 2 (2017-2019) and were predicted to achieve the expected standard based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.
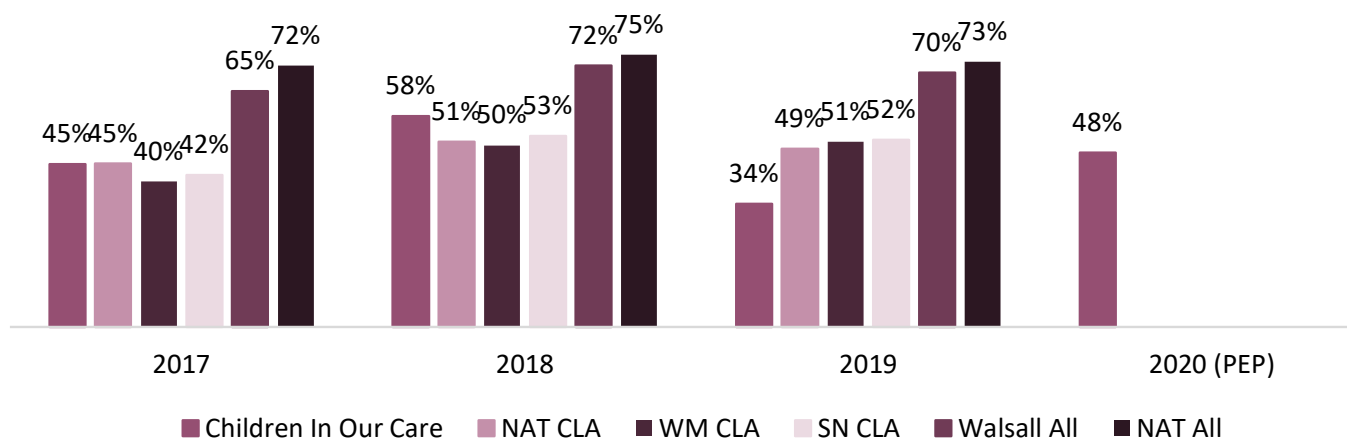
KS2 Reading - % Achieving the Expected Standard or above

Legend: Children In Our Care | NAT CLA | WM CLA | SN CLA | Walsall All | NAT All

2017: 45%, 45%, 40%, 42%, 65%, 72%
2018: 58%, 51%, 50%, 53%, 72%, 75%
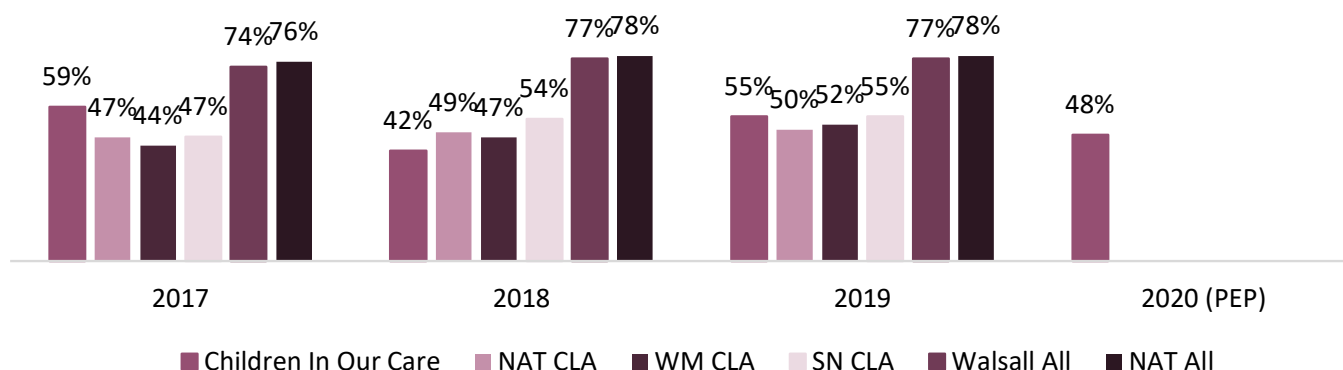2019: 34%, 49%, 51%, 52%, 70%, 73%
2020 (PEP): 48%

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved the expected standard in writing the end of key stage 2 (2017-2019) and those who were predicted to achieve the expected standard based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.

KS2 Writing TA - % Achieving the Expected Standard or above

Legend: Children In Our Care, NAT CLA, WM CLA, SN CLA, Walsall All, NAT All

2017: 59%, 47%, 44%, 47%, 74%, 76%
2018: 42%, 49%, 47%, 54%, 77%, 78%
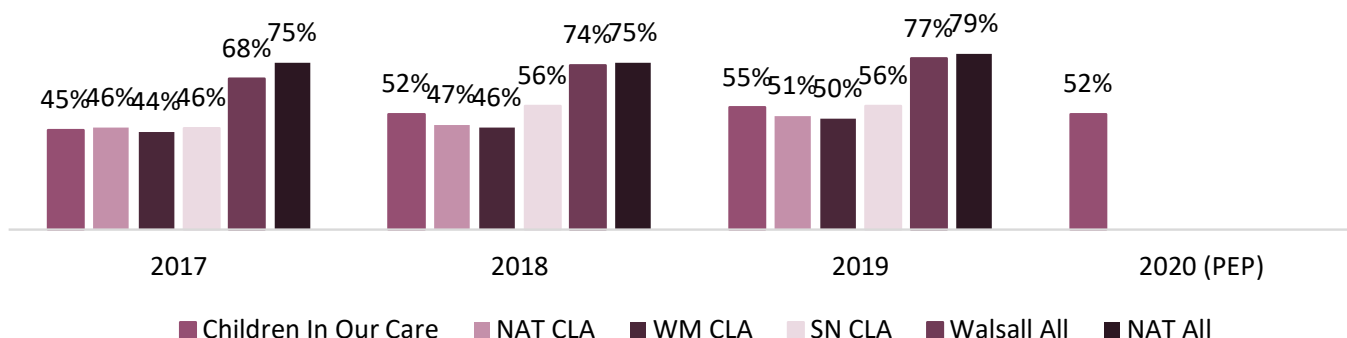2019: 55%, 50%, 52%, 55%, 77%, 78%
2020 (PEP): 48%

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved the expected standard in maths the end of key stage 2 (2017-2019) and those predicted to achieve the expected standard based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.

KS2 Maths - % Achieving the Expected Standard or Above

Legend: Children In Our Care, NAT CLA, WM CLA, SN CLA, Walsall All, NAT All

2017: 45%, 46%, 44%, 46%, 68%, 75%
2018: 52%, 47%, 46%, 56%, 74%, 75%
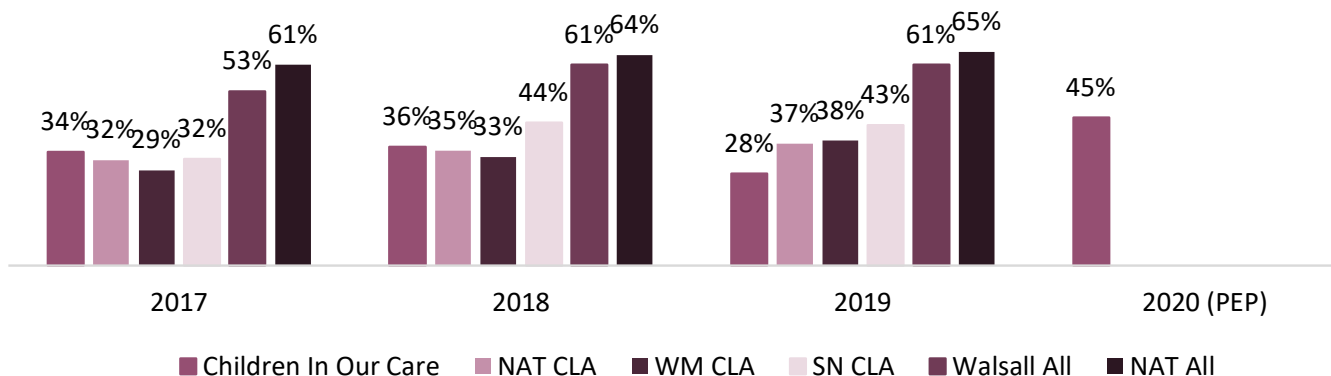2019: 55%, 51%, 50%, 56%, 77%, 79%
2020 (PEP): 52%

The chart below shows the number of looked after children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31st March and who have achieved the expected standard in reading. Writing and maths combined at the end of key stage 2 (2017-2019) and those predicted to achieve the expected standards based on school data collected at the end of the spring term.

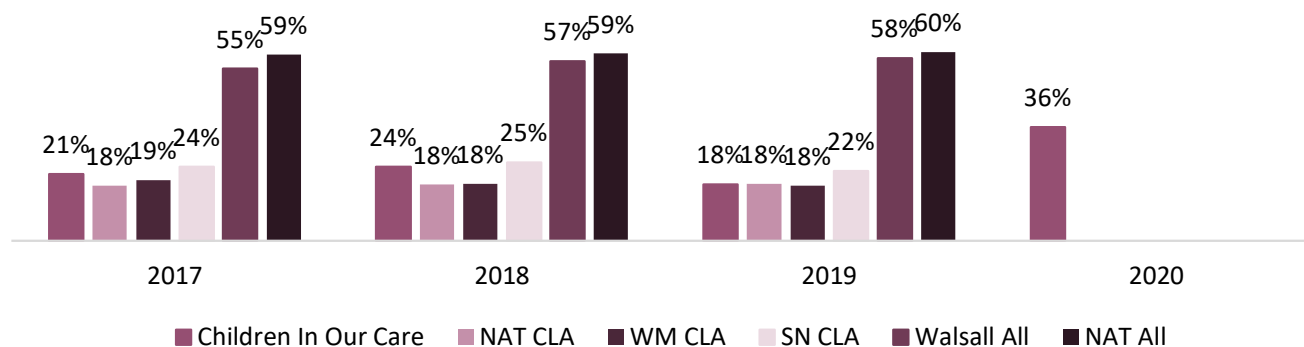## KS2 RWMC - % Achieving the Expected Standard or above

Legend: Children In Our Care, NAT CLA, WM CLA, SN CLA, Walsall All, NAT All

2017: 34%, 32%, 29%, 32%, 53%, 61%
2018: 36%, 35%, 33%, 44%, 61%, 64%
2019: 28%, 37%, 38%, 43%, 61%, 65%
2020 (PEP): 45%

Key Stage 4

KS4 9-4 pass including English and maths

Bar chart showing KS4 9-4 pass including English and maths:
- 2017: Children In Our Care 21%, NAT CLA 18%, WM CLA 19%, SN CLA 24%, Walsall All 55%, NAT All 59%
- 2018: Children In Our Care 24%, NAT CLA 18%, WM CLA 18%, SN CLA 25%, Walsall All 57%, NAT All 59%
- 2019: Children In Our Care 18%, NAT CLA 18%, WM CLA 18%, SN CLA 22%, Walsall All 58%, NAT All 60%
- 2020: Children In Our Care 36%

Legend: ■ Children In Our Care ■ NAT CLA ■ WM CLA ■ SN CLA ■ Walsall All ■ NAT All

In 2020, 36% of key stage 4 children in our care pupils achieved a 9-4 pass in English and maths. Due to Covid 19 the GCSE results were based on teacher assessments rather than exams. This is a 50% increase on the 2019 figures.

In 2020, 15% of children in our care achieved a 9-5 pass in English and maths.

In 2020, 3% of children in our care (1 student) achieved the English baccalaureate including a 9-5 pass in English and maths.

A full report on KS4 GCSE results is available separate to this annual report **(appendix 2)**
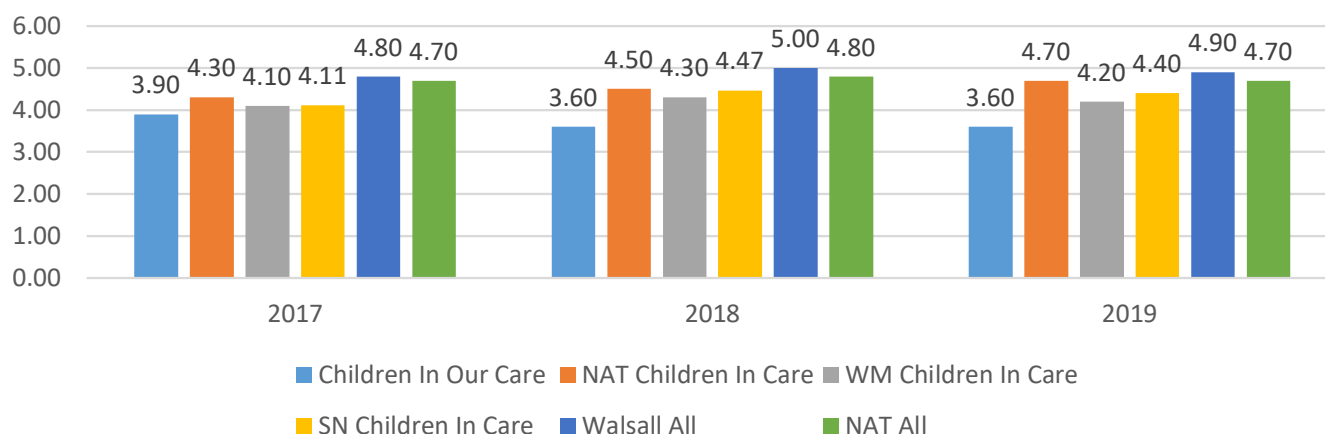
Attendance and Exclusions

Attendance figures for Walsall's looked after children continue to better than that of looked after children regionally and nationality and that of all Walsall children.

The overall attendance rate for our children in 2019 was 96.3%,

The number of children and young people classed as persistent absentees reduced slightly form 7.7% in 2018 to 7.5% in 2019

Looked After Call have collected attendance and exclusion data for Walsall looked after children since 2015. The system notifies staff in the Virtual School about student absences twice a day, in the morning and afternoon. Notifying staff about anyone with an unauthorised absence, school exclusion, and/or extended authorised absence. This enables our key workers to immediately challenge any absences, recall the PEP meeting and identify resources or intervention to improve attendance and reduce exclusions.
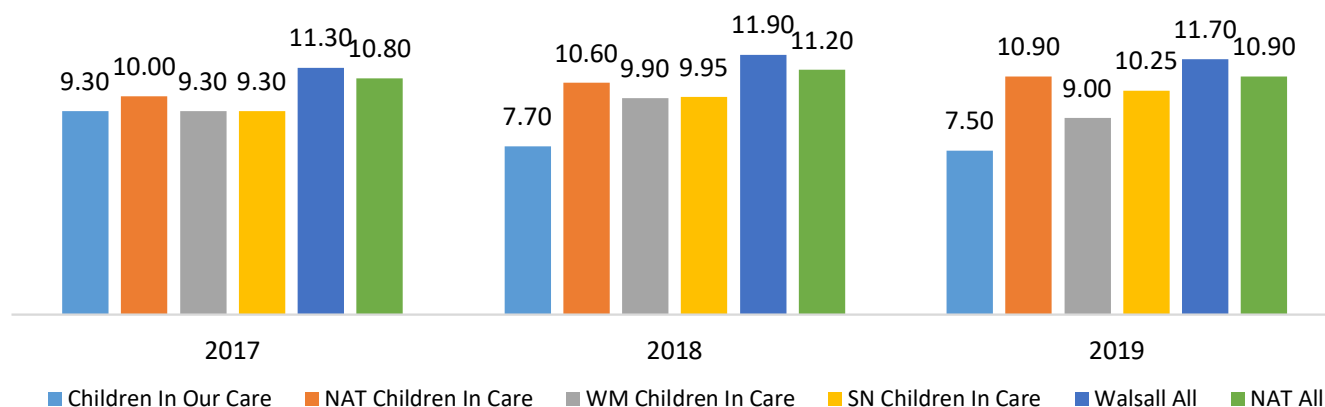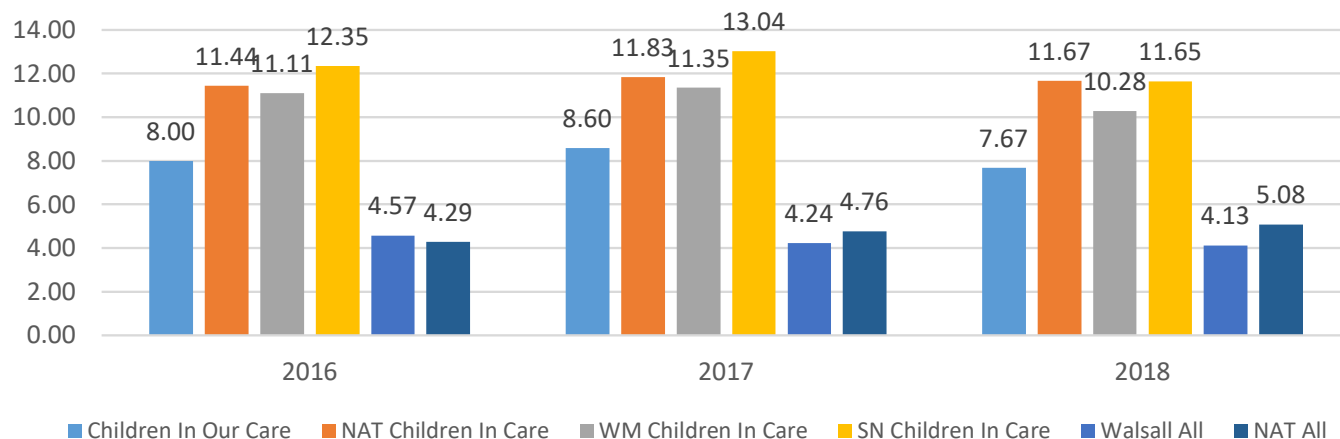
% Overall Absence Comparison

Bar chart showing % Overall Absence Comparison:
- 2017: Children In Our Care 3.90, NAT Children In Care 4.30, WM Children In Care 4.10, SN Children In Care 4.11, Walsall All 4.80, NAT All 4.70
- 2018: Children In Our Care 3.60, NAT Children In Care 4.50, WM Children In Care 4.30, SN Children In Care 4.47, Walsall All 5.00, NAT All 4.80
- 2019: Children In Our Care 3.60, NAT Children In Care 4.70, WM Children In Care 4.20, SN Children In Care 4.40, Walsall All 4.90, NAT All 4.70

Legend: ■ Children In Our Care ■ NAT Children In Care ■ WM Children In Care ■ SN Children In Care ■ Walsall All ■ NAT All

Persistent Absentees

% Persistent Absentees Comparison

Legend: Children In Our Care | NAT Children In Care | WM Children In Care | SN Children In Care | Walsall All | NAT All

	2017	2018	2019
Children In Our Care	9.30	7.70	7.50
NAT Children In Care	10.00	10.60	10.90
WM Children In Care	9.30	9.90	9.00
SN Children In Care	9.30	9.95	10.25
Walsall All	11.30	11.90	11.70
NAT All	10.80	11.20	10.90

Exclusions

% At Least 1 Fixed Term Exclusion Comparison

Legend: Children In Our Care | NAT Children In Care | WM Children In Care | SN Children In Care | Walsall All | NAT All

	2016	2017	2018
Children In Our Care	8.00	8.60	7.67
NAT Children In Care	11.44	11.83	11.67
WM Children In Care	11.11	11.35	10.28
SN Children In Care	12.35	13.04	11.65
Walsall All	4.57	4.24	4.13
NAT All	4.29	4.76	5.08

The percentage of children in our care with 1 or more fixed term exclusion, has decreased in 2018 by 0.93% and remains below children in care nationally, in the West Midlands and the statistical neighbour average. The number of looked after children receiving a fixed term exclusion is higher of that of all children in Walsall and all children nationally

Nationally, children in our care ranked 8th out of 152 Local Authorities, 2nd out of 14 LA's in the West Midlands, and 1st out of 11 statistical neighbours.

Children with below 75% attendance and at least 1 fixed term exclusion are discussed at our weekly complex case meeting. This enables us to discuss reasons for poor attendance or exclusion, co-ordinate a response and implement actions.

Having Looked After Call inform us of any exclusion on the day it happens enables us to act swiftly and put in any intervention or challenge required.

Placement stability

Underpinning all aspects of the work carried out by the Virtual School is our commitment to minimise any disruption to our children's learning. Research is clear that when a child moves school the impact on their progress can be significant and can contribute towards the attainment gap between looked after children and their peers. We make every effort possible to maintain a school placement when a child moves home.

Managers from the virtual school attend social care panels where children who may be at risk of their placement breaking down or who are undergoing a planned move are discussed. This enables us to have plan and implement any school move.

The Virtual school take lead responsibility for all school moves, including those where a child moves school due to SEN needs, moved to an adoptive placement, moves to a placement where attending their current school is unrealistic and emergency schools move to ensure safeguarding

In 2019/20 48 looked after children moved school, of these 48

- 34 moved school due to a placement move
- 4 young people requested a move of school
- 1 young person moved to avoid a permanent exclusion
- 9 young people moved due to a change in the SEN needs

Personal Education Plans

Since moving to an electronic PEP system in 2019 we have seen a gradual improvement in the quality of our PEPs. The number of PEPs rated good increased from 69% in the autumn term to 72% in the spring term.
The number of PEPs rated at good for the autumn and spring term was 70%. Our PEPs changed to a Covid 19 PEP in the summer term so quality assurance of PEPs was put on hold.

To further improve the quality of our PEPs we also implemented a 'quality assurance working group' consisting of primary and secondary head and designated teachers, post 16 managers, Independent reviewing officers and social work team managers. The group were asked to quality assure 10 PEPs each term alongside our normal QA procedure. PEPs and QA comments were then uploaded onto the ePEP system.

In addition to the QA process, we monitor every PEP to review the academic progress of looked after children and plan any support or interventions required.

Virtual School Education Advisors attend all initial PEPs and Key workers attend all PEPs for children in reception, year 2, 6 and 11. We will also attend PEPs where is has been identified that a young person is not reaching their potential. Our key workers will also attend PEPs where it has been identified that the quality of the PEPs need improving

Support and training is available to assist settings, schools and colleges to improve the quality of their PEPs. In March 2020 we carried out a 'deep dive' into the quality of our PEPs and RAG rated schools in terms of how many PEPs had been rated as requires improvement. An action plan was developed and in the autumn term we plan to work closely with those schools who have been identified as needing support to improve their PEPs.

We still have work to do to ensure PEPs are completed within timescales. School are allocated two weeks form the date of the meeting to the completion of the PEP form. In the majority of cases the form is not completed within the allocated two weeks two weeks

Pupil Premium Plus

The Virtual School's main budget is the pupil premium plus which is devolved to the local authority and is used as seen appropriate by the VSH to improve outcomes for looked after children. The local authority received £1,117,800.00 pupil premium for the 2019/20 financial year

We often review our services to ensure we are meeting the educational, emotional and personal needs of our looked after children and young people. This year, as well as commissioning a wide range specialist provision through the use of pupil premium we have also developed 'the Virtual School Offer'.(Appendix 1).The offer enables schools to access specialist provision in place of pupil premium funding. We have increased the number of Virtual School tutors, trained our key workers to offer a range of interventions to children and young people and appointed mentors to help remove barriers to education and participation. As well as direct work with children/young people our Virtual School Offer also provides support to schools and education providers, parents/carers and social workers. We also have an enrichment and enhancement offer to children and young people. In addition to the offer schools can also request pupil premium payments through our ePEP system.

We continuously look at how we can use pupil premium to inspire and meet individual needs and while the majority of funding is used to improve academic progress, this year we have used funding to appoint a full time speech and language therapist and educational psychologist.

The tables below provide a breakdown of activities funded through pupil premium and the percentage allocated to schools, staffing and projects

Activity	Examples
Virtual school Staffing	Key worker, mentor and tutor posts funded by pupil premium
1:1 support, tuition, mentoring and counselling	Home Tuition, extra tuition at school, mentoring, in class support, Online tuition, group work, homework support, booster sessions, play therapy, specialist counselling
Enrichment Activities	Music, sports clubs, activities
Learning Resources	Revision books, learning aids, digital technology
Alternative Provision	Other than mainstream school, additional nursery hours, Offsite nurture provision
Training	Schools, carers, social workers, other professionals and virtual school staff
Virtual School projects	EP, Salt, A2U, Letterbox, QM High School, holiday activities, residentials, Attachment Aware Schools Project
Other	Rewards, travel, data licences

Virtual School Projects funded by pupil premium

It is part of the role of the virtual school to provide the support needed to help children realise their short and long term academic achievements and aspirations. Alongside the academic support we provide we also run a number of activities and projects to ensure our students are able to experience learning in a variety of different ways and in different settings. These include:

The Letterbox Project

Letterbox is a national programme that provides personalised reading materials, games and exercises directly to local authorities to be delivered to looked after children. The aim of the project is to improve confidence in learning, and to increase the confidence of the parents/carers helping them at home. In 2019/20 141 children aged from 3-11 received monthly letterbox parcels. Feedback for our carers include what our carers said about the Letterbox Project:

He is much better with counting and writing in his books for Maths and before was very shy to do any maths work due to no confidence"

"We do more together as a family it's had such an impact at school and home it's made them more confident with reading and writing and maths".

"It's been great receiving these parcels not just for the kids but for me as a parent, it helps been to help teach the girls the right way, letterbox also helps you to bond with your kids and for you to see for yourself how they have grown with the activities. I thank you for the parcels. I hope many more people feel the way I do."

The Corporate Mentoring Scheme

The Corporate mentoring scheme was developed to provide short term career focused mentoring to looked after children. The purpose of the mentoring scheme is to support young people with their aspirations, realise their potential and build their futures through support provided 'by the family firm'. That would encourage them to move onto council lead apprenticeships or further education. The aim of the mentors would be to enhance the understanding and experience of the mentees by assisting them to with knowledge of work based experience that will help young people to gain an insight into the world of work and how organisations work which will in turn support young people in making informed choices about their career pathway. In 2019/20 4 young people received mentoring sessions from senior staff within the council

Artslink Project

The Artslink Project was established by the West Midlands Virtual School to increase the number of cultural activities available to looked after children. Activities are offered to all children in care regardless of which area they live in and which authority looks after them.

A recent Artslink project to the BBC was attended by a group of our children and young people. The children learnt about the history of the BBC and had the opportunity to make a short video about important things in their life. The reported who worked alongside our children told us that the young people he had met had a natural talent in front of the camera.

To date 20 young people have been involved in activities run by Artslink

Aspire 2 Uni (A2U)

The Aspire to University Project (A2U) is a project jointly run by Wolverhampton University, Walsall, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Virtual Schools and the Creating Chances Trust.

The scheme is an awareness raising programme with the aim of increasing the number of Looked after children achieving successful outcomes pre and post-16 and consequently entering university. To support young people to progress to higher education, Aspire2Uni designs and delivers a programme of informative and engaging outreach activities that give the young people more information and advice about what university is about, how to get there and what to study. They also offer work experience opportunities and support young people to achieve their qualifications by providing mentors and a tutor if needed.

There are currently 35 young people on our Aspire 2 university programme. We have 5 cohorts running at present from Year 7- 11. Each cohort has 3 outreach activity days a year, 1 per term.

Our young people are offered opportunities to explore a range of different faculties where they can meet current students, lecturers and mentors, in areas such as Science and Engineering, Sports, Performing Arts, Education and Health and Well-being. They also have the opportunity to visit Birmingham City University and University of Wolverhampton (Walsall Campus). Additionally, the children attend Jaguar Land Rover to share with them the different pathways into higher education such as apprenticeships or Vocational studies.

There are further opportunities such as a visit to the Houses of Parliament, opportunities to be ball boys and flag bearers at Walsall Football Club and residential camps to support with their studies and preparation for their exams.

The Queen Mary High School Project

The Virtual School takes part in a Literacy project aimed at children in Years 4 and 5. It is delivered by Queen Mary's High School. During the 6-week programme, the children work with Julian Roderick - a published author for one afternoon a week to create their own stories step-by-step through a range of teaching strategies including ICT and Lego! In the final session, they have the opportunity to share the stories they have written.

The Forest School

We take part in the Forest School Programme at Christ Church Primary School. It offers opportunities for children to make choices for their own learning and take and manage risks. Development of these skills encourages positive attitudes and behaviour. Children enjoy such experiences as building shelters, woodland craft-work, telling stories, cooking over fires, climbing trees, hunting for mini-beasts and making mud pies. As the programme develops, woodland tools are introduced to extend learning and provide new opportunities for risk management. Forest school sessions are available for children in year 3-5 during the summer term.

Nurture Provision

Some of our children and young people need a higher level of nurture to support their needs. We are able to access the Nurture House at Lower Farm School. Each child will have an action plan set at the start of the interventions at the Nurture House and this will be reviewed during and at the end of the child's time there. Children can access this provision for between 6-12 weeks dependent on their needs and progress when they are there. Nurture provision is available for children in years R-Y6.

Educational Psychologist

In February 2020 we appointed an Educational Psychologist to work one day a week in the Virtual School. Since this time she has completed 5 reports, delivered in house training to VS staff and has provided consultations with a number of social workers and schools. From September 2020 we have increased the EP time to 3 days a week, this will enable further development of Attachment Aware Schools Programme

Speech & Language Therapists

Our Virtual School team has two Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) who can support schools and carers, offer training and work with children to maximise a child or young person's communication skills and opportunities for social interaction and learning.

We offer advice and support to children and young people up to the age of 19 who have a speech, language and communication need (SLCN). This may be a single area of need or related to other difficulties e.g. learning; hearing or Autism Spectrum. These might include difficulties in understanding spoken language; learning vocabulary; using sentences; speaking clearly or fluently; or knowing how to communicate appropriately. Our Speech and Language Therapists offer bespoke packages of support to children presenting with speech, language and communication needs, including both direct and indirect support.

The work delivered by our Speech & Language Therapists this year includes:

- Direct one to one support to children and young people delivered in Schools (with some home visits) prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Continued and regular liaison with Social Workers and Carers regarding children's progress throughout the pandemic.
- Attendance (both face to face and virtually) at PEP meetings and LAC reviews
- Direct access to NHS systems to follow up queries raised in a timely manner
- Liaison with NHS SALT regarding in excess of 80 + children and young people in our care who are known to Walsall Speech and Language Therapy services or have recently been discharged (outcomes updated onto our SALT database on a termly basis.)
- From April 2020, every new child registered with the Virtual School (45 children and young people) has been cross referenced with NHS systems, 14 of which were either open to Walsall NHS Speech and Language Therapy or had had previous involvement. Outcomes of which have been recorded onto our database which is accessible to all Virtual School staff.
- Initial appointments completed in a timely manner reducing waiting times from initial point of concern/referral.
- Liaison with other Health Care Professionals (e.g. Health Visiting Team, CAMHS, and Community Paediatricians) to child or young persons' care is viewed holistically.
- Development of 'what we offer' spider diagram
- Development of Speech, Language and Communication training packages for all Key Stages, tailored for Educational staff and Parents/Carers.
- Training delivered to Virtual School staff, including WELLCOMM training and resources shared. A session has also been held on helping to develop the Teams understanding of current NHS SALT services and how children and young people are supported across a range of service delivery options.
- Speech and Language care pathway devised for implementation from Sept 2020, however amendments may need to be considered in light of Covid-19 pandemic
- A 'Teams' meeting held between the Salford Virtual School Head (Sue Johnson) Speech and Language Therapist (Fiona Taylor) in May '2020.

Attachment Aware Schools Project

As part of the local authority's Building Resilient & Inclusive Communities & Schools (BRICS) Project have developed our own Attachment Aware Schools Project. The project aims to increase awareness of trauma and attachment in relation to children's behaviour and learning. The first cohort of schools were identified in September 2019 and so far 9 of the 10 schools involved in the project have completed the first year of the project and achieved their bronze award. The second cohort of schools are due to join in September 2020. In addition to the 10 schools already involved in the project we have two schools who in partnership with the Attachment Research Community (ARC) have delivered regional training on how they have developed attachment aware practise in their schools

Walsall Schools taking part in the Attachment Aware Schools Project:

- Walsall Academy,
- Shire Oak Academy
- The Shepwell School
- Chuckery Primary School
- Delves Infants
- Delves Juniors
- Greenfield Primary
- Edgar Stammers Primary
- Woodlands Academy of Learning
- Brownhills West Primary

KS1/KS2 Writing Project

Walsall Virtual School and St John's Primary School (Teaching School) have developed a project to close gaps and raise attainment in writing, increasing the number of looked after children achieving the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 and 2. The project aimed to support school staff to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to learning for individual children and have a bank of strategies, including a network of support in order to overcome these barriers. The project started with a cohort of children in Year 1 and Year 5. These children are now in Year 2 and Year 6, and so are at the end of their respective key stage. Due To Covid 19 we have been unable to fully evaluate the programme based on end of key stage data.

Support for previously looked after children and young people

Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 local authorities and schools have a new statutory role to support young people who have previously been in care such as those who have been adopted from care and who left care under a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order (Residence Order). The Virtual School has always proved support, advice and guidance to previously looked after children but as a result of the additional funding provided by the DfE to help support VSHs to deliver the additional duties we appointed a key worker who has a wealth of experience in previously looked after children to take on this responsibility.

We currently have 294 previously looked after children attending a school in Walsall. 41 in early years, 162 in primary schools and 71 in secondary schools

Some of the work we have carried out in relation to previously looked after children is

- Challenging schools to avoid drift and delay in relation to the admissions of previously looked after children
- Challenging schools in relation to exclusions of previously looked after children
- Attended school meetings
- Provided intervention from our own staff
- Contribute to the SGO carers newsletter
- Challenge schools on the use of pupil premium funding for previously looked after children

Support for children and young people with English as a second language

Although we have relatively small numbers of UASC in Walsall, the number of young people arriving into Walsall has increased slightly over the last 12 months. In order for to provide support to this cohort of young people our English tutor completed a Training English to speakers of other languages course which has enabled enable her to deliver ESOL courses to children and groups of children in addition to their school or college lessons.

All looked after children with English as their second language receive a Person (Nimbl) tablet. The tablet provides young people with access to a whole library of interactive resources especially designed to help them with their school work.

We are currently in the process in developing an offer to our UASC young people to support them in education

Training for professionals

The Virtual school has a role to ensure that professionals working with looked after children have the right knowledge, information and skills to enable them to fulfil their role in contributing to improving the educational outcomes of all looked after and previously looked after children.

In the 2019/20 academic year the following training was delivered to schools, social workers and foster carers

- Termly designated teacher training sessions were held for each of the 4 localities in Walsall. The training sessions covered pupil premium, PEPs, Attachment aware project, admissions, exclusions and virtual school projects/activities. The sessions provided an opportunity for designated teachers to share strategies and initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for looked after children
- Transition & Vulnerability delivered by Kate Cairns Associates training was delivered to designated teachers and non-teaching staff
- Supporting looked after and previously looked after children in primary schools was delivered to designated teachers by Stuart Guest- HT of Colbourne Primary School and winner of the Sir John Timpson Attachment Aware Schools Award 2019
- 1:1 ePEP training is provided to new designated teachers and social workers
- Induction training was delivered to the newly qualified social workers and individual inductions sessions were offered to social workers new to Walsall. These sessions look at how social care staff can better understand the educational needs of looked after children and the role and responsibilities of the virtual school
- We have also commissioned online courses from ACEducation. Schools, social workers and carers can access the online courses free of charge

Celebrating Achievement

To recognise and reward the fantastic achievements of our children and young people in care we run two annual celebration events.

The Primary Event 'An Excellent Tea Party' takes place in the summer term and our secondary Event 'An Excellent Night Out' which takes place in the autumn term

On 18th October 2019 over 300 people attended the 'An Excellent Musical Night Out', our annual celebration event for secondary and post 16 children in care.

Over 100 looked after children and young people were nominated by their Carers, Social Workers and teachers for an award for excellent achievements during the past year. 86 children were presented with an award on the night by our Mayor and Children's Services Portfolio Holders. Awards were presented for achievements in school, participation in sporting activities and personal achievements such as moving onto independence and overcoming barriers.

Children and young people performed songs from their favourite musicals and were joined by special lookalike guests from the Greatest Showman. Social workers, youth workers and elected members also joined in the fun by performing a dance routine at the end of the evening.

Due to Covid 19 restrictions we were unable to hold our summer term primary celebration event

The work of the Virtual School during Covid 19

During the Covid 19 lockdown there was an expectation that children with a social worker continued to attend school as long as they did not have an underlying health condition putting them at severe risk. This included children in the care of the local authority.

To ensure our children and young people were supported to continue to access education during lockdown we worked closely with our social workers, fostering service to identify any young people who was RAG rated as high risk e.g. placement breakdown, social, emotional and mental health issues. We also contacted all schools to identify those children and young people who were most in need of additional support.

Risk assessments were carried out for every young person who had an Education Health and Care Plan and who was receiving extra support for any additional needs to ensure their needs could be met safely at home.

Each young person was allocated a named key worker who they could contact at any time if they required any additional support. The key worker would also keep in regular contact with the social worker to ensure they were fully aware of any care planning changes

Parents/carers and schools of those children not attending school were regularly contacted to discuss what support was needed to enable children to access learning at home. The majority of children were able to access learning via their own school learning platforms but for those children and young people who were unable to access online support learning resources were provided

- Over 50 children received laptops/tablets to enable them to continue with their learning in the home.
- Online tuition was provided to children and young people who requested additional face to face support
- Weekly emails were sent out to parents and carers providing lists of educational resources and websites for different areas of learning and development
- Artslink resource packs were provided for children and young people aged 3-12
- Reading books and learning resources were been sent to all primary aged children
- Log in details to our own digital learning platforms were provided to all children and young people

In addition to providing learning resources we also provided

- Online training to schools, parents and carers on supporting children back into school after
- Supported a number of children to access education provision after a placement move or when their own school remained closed.
- Provided careers advice to year 11 students concerned about their GCSE and A level results
- Supported children new into the care system by ensuring they were still able to access their education provision after moving placement
- delivered face to face and online transition support to children moving to new schools in September

Looked after children and young people were encouraged to attend school if they were safe to do so but due to the high number of families self-isolating at the start of the pandemic the attendance of looked after children was low. As families stopped isolating we saw a week on week increase of school attendance from 25 (6.3%) in March to 190 (30%) attending in July.

Virtual School Case Studies

Case Study Title: Supporting the emotional health and well-being of a primary aged looked after child

Reason for case study: To highlight the work of the Virtual School Mentor

Date of Case Study: Spring Term 2020

Agency Involvement: Virtual School

Child's Core Experiences:

RM has been in care for 1971 days due to Emotional Abuse and Neglect. He has had 4 care placements, but was recently reunified with his parent

School Content:

RM is now in year 3 in a local primary school. The school has 232 students, and of these, 2 are LAC. The school has an Ofsted rating of 'Good'. The school have expressed an interest in participating in training opportunities. The designated teacher has recently been assigned.

Child's needs at school: (know)

Attendance at school had been good but RM was working below Age Related Expectations in English Writing and Reading, as well as Mathematics. RM had been receiving Maths and Literacy tutoring, as well as Speech and Language interventions to address his communication difficulties and stammer. RM was refusing to work independently, and was extremely sensitive to sound or distraction within the classroom.

No SEN have been identified, and RM has not had a diagnosis.

RM had poor social skills, particularly with peers. There had been multiple incidents of aggressive/physically violent and inappropriate behaviour towards peers. Additionally, RM was lacking in skills to initiate and maintain friendships.

RM had healthy attachments and relationships with his foster family and sister, and actively sought attachment opportunities with school staff. He understood that conflicts with school staff were temporary and would not have a lasting impact. However, RM had anxiety around meeting with or speaking to mum. This was worsened by a delay in the planned reunification with mum due to COVID-19.

There were concerns about RM's Social, Emotional, and Mental Health. He had a very high SDQ score, indicating that these issues significantly affect learning and social interaction. CAMHS had previously been referred in relation to toileting issues but were no longer supporting. RM also presented with symptoms of anxiety, including bed wetting, inappropriate toileting practices, and emotional instability

Intervention: (decide)

In order to support RM, the Virtual School Offer included an observation of RM in school, leading to the design and delivery of a supportive programme by the Virtual School Mentor (Millie Hayes). This support would initially be provided every morning for 2 weeks, moving to 3 times a week. It would also include one virtual session a week during the summer break, giving a total of 25 sessions. This support took place within the classroom and other shared educational spaces, as well as a private space for sensitive and confidential work, and eventually within the home environment.

The programme included:

- Emotion Coaching to address anxiety and inappropriate behaviour towards others. Using Emotion Coaching resources, including emotion fans, empathy work, and problem solving, as well as modelling.
- Mindfulness to address issues with self-confidence and solutions to anxiety. Supported by Dr Karen Triesman resources (Binnie the Baboon workbook) for anxiety and mindfulness activities and worksheets.

The SMART goals of this support were:

- RM is able to recognise and understand emotions.
- RM is able to use strategies to deal with conflicts with peers.
- RM is able to use strategies to cope with stress.

Child's view of support: (respond)

 "I helped Binnie feel less worried"
"I know who I can talk to when I feel worried"
"I am happy that you (Millie) will be working with me at my new school"

Impact of Intervention: (review)

RM has expressed that he enjoys the support from the mentor to the mentor and the carer. The carer noted that RM was uniquely excited to speak with the mentor compared to the other professionals involved.

RM is now able to label basic emotions when asked about how he feels, and has further developed his empathy skills. He is showing more sensitivity towards peers, and is able to recognise other's emotions, and offer solutions. However, his emotional vocabulary is still quite limited but is developing.

RM's social skills have improved, he is actively seeking relationships and has grown more comfortable sharing toys. He enjoys roles of responsibility but still requires further support with social skills, particularly play skills.

RM has been using some of his newly developed social skills to prevent stresses, and periods of distress have a shorter duration. He has also started using words to express himself when stressed allowing him to find a solution.

The introduction of a visual timetable eased transitions within school and improved engagement in classwork. RM responded positively to the timetable, and enjoyed the achievement of moving through the subjects as shown on the timetable.

Case Study Title: To improve self-esteem and confidence of a primary aged looked after child

Reason for case study: To highlight the work of the Virtual School Mentor

Date of Case Study: Spring Term 2020

Agency Involvement: Virtual School

Child's Core Experiences:

LP has been in care for 233 days due to family dysfunction, chronic neglect and parental drug misuse. LP and her family have been known to Children Services since 2007, and the family have previously been subject to Child Protection Plans due to risks of emotional harm. LP is currently placed in a foster placement with her younger sibling. There are plans to eventually place all siblings in one foster placement. LP has transitioned well into the current foster placement, she has bonded well the carers and seems relatively settled

School Content:

LP is in year 5 in a mixed gender primary school for children aged between 2 – 11 years old. This school is a Sponsor led academy, with a capacity of 315 students, although it currently has 457 students in attendance, of these 5 are Looked After Children (LAC). The school has an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement' (January 2019). The Designated Teacher (DT) is very responsive and proactive in seeking support for the LAC.

Child's needs at school: (know)

LP is working below age related expectations in Maths, Literacy, and Reading. LP particularly struggles with grammar, handwriting and reading comprehension. The DT has explained that this is due to previous poor attendance and punctuality issues, but progress has been made since LP was placed with the foster carers. Interventions have been put in place to bridge this gap, and LP is continuing to make good progress. No SEN has been identified and LP has not had a diagnosis.

LP has surface level social skills, she is able to talk to adults and peers, however she finds it difficult to trust others, and often prefers to remain unnoticed. LP is shy and rarely offers to answer questions in front of her peers and is also reluctant to ask for help from a teacher. However, LP has a small group of close friends, with whom she spends a lot of time with in school. Some of LP's social skills are thought to be caused by a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Prior to the care placement LP had poor attendance and was often late to school. This has improved significantly since being placed with her carers and is no longer an issue.

LP seems to have a healthy attachment to her foster carers, and siblings, however she is reluctant to trust other adults and seems to be unsure about their motivations at times. Since being placed with her carers, LP has started to engage in a more meaningful way with school staff. There are no major concerns about LP's Social, Emotional, and Mental Health at this time, although her low self-esteem and confidence can inhibit her social abilities and result in worry/anxiety. This could become a more significant issue in future.

Intervention: (decide)

In order to support LP, the Virtual School Offer included an observation of LP, leading to the design and delivery of a supportive programme by the Virtual School Mentor (Millie Hayes). This included 10 mentor sessions delivered in school on a weekly basis, for around 30 minutes. The programme incorporated:

- Emotion Coaching to develop emotional intelligence, and improve communication and relationships with peers and school staff. Using Emotion Coaching resources, including emotion fans, empathy work, and problem solving, as well as modelling.

Mindfulness to address issues with self-confidence, self-esteem and provide solutions to anxiety. Supported by self-esteem activities (Butterflies of positivity) and mindfulness strategies to manage anxiety

The SMART goals of this support were:

- To develop emotional vocabulary in order to label emotions, and express these with teachers and peers daily.
- To use mindfulness strategies to manage anxiety in order to increase daily participation in group activities/ discussions with peers and teachers.

Child's view of support: (respond)

Unfortunately the mentor support sessions have been paused following the announcement of a second lockdown (COVID-19) in November due to school policies. The risks will be re-assessed after the 4 week lockdown (virtual sessions were offered but cannot be facilitated due to staffing issues). This means that an up to date view of the support cannot be gathered from LP, however she has previously expressed that she enjoys coming for the sessions, and feels excited on that day of the week because we will meet for a session. More extensive views will be collected during the final session

Impact of Intervention: (review)

Since our sessions began, LP seems to be more positive, comfortable, and reflective. LP initially found work focused on her self-esteem quite difficult, she could not always think of positive affirmations about herself, and did not have an accurate perception of her skills, however this has improved and she can now quite easily pinpoint her achievements. We have been working on a visual representation of her qualities and skills (Butterflies of Positivity), and LP is excited about how this will look once completed. Combined with our other work on self-esteem, this should help to cement an improved perception of herself.

LP also seems to have further developed her communication skills and ability to trust. She has used our sessions to discuss her anxiety as well as issue with friends with very little prompting, opening up about friendship anxiety and a fear of loneliness. This seems to suggest that she feels safe and understood in our sessions, and also shows a desire to find solutions. She now seems to enjoy the process of sharing a worry and finding a solution/strategy. The DT has also shared with me that she has observed positive changes in LP, particularly related to her confidence and social skills. The DT explained that LP's body language has changed considerably, previously she would walk around school with her head down in an effort to go unnoticed but she now seems to be far more comfortable.

LP's attendance has significantly improved since being placed with her current foster carers and she has expressed that she enjoys school.

LP still needs some further mentor support in order to reinforce strategies for anxiety and further develop her communication abilities. This will be the focus of the remaining sessions once the school is able to permit visitors.

Case Study Title: Supporting a Post 16 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Minor

Reason for case study: To highlight the work of the Virtual School ESOL tutor

Date of Case Study: Summer Term 2019-Autumn Term 2020

Agency Involvement: Virtual School

Child's Core Experiences:

HH had been in the UK for a matter of days, arriving as unaccompanied asylum seeker from Afghanistan, his first language being Pashto, he could not speak English and was living in a residential home in Birmingham

School Content:

Due to the timing of his arrival in the UK the academic school year had already ended and HH was preparing for KS5 when he would attend Solihull College in September. The residential placement was the location for any learning interventions and there was no educational history available.

Child's needs at school: (know)

As English was HH's second language, the need for reading and writing skills were basic at the time. The immediate learning need was for HH to speak basic Standard English so that he could confidently integrate into the UK and his local community. At this stage no SEN had been identified.

HH had some awareness of the English alphabet and was able to form some letters correctly by copying them but further work was needed as well as work on pronunciation of several individual sounds.

HH was often quiet [most often because he was concentrating] and more focused on learning than socialising compared to his peers. HH was new to the country and had several adjustments to make; linguistically, culturally and socially so progression was to run parallel to his transition to living in the UK.

Intervention: (decide)

In order to support HH, the Virtual School Offer included an initial ESOL introductory session, leading to the design and delivery of an ESOL programme of study by the Virtual School Tutor (Annette Round). This support would initially be provided for a one hour morning session twice a week, moving to a two hour session twice a week for the remainder of the summer. This support took place within the residential setting - initially in the large kitchen, moving to a designated room where space and equipment was more readily available.

The programme included:

- Speaking activities to address language in a variety of social situations for which communication is key. Visual learning games for new vocabulary, role play, questions and answers, and 'be the teacher' activities
- Listening activities to address issues associated with hearing and understanding spoken native English in formal/informal situations. Modelled scripts, 1:1 listening activities, 'be the teacher activities'
- Reading activities to address basic skills in a variety of different social situations; menus, timetables, vocabulary flash cards, alphabet flash cards, whiteboard activities, matching labels with items
- Writing activities to address and reinforce newly acquired vocabulary and to practise scribing letters of the alphabet and individual words; paper activities, whiteboard activities, lists, labels

The SMART goals of this support were:

- HH is able to recognise basic vocabulary to be able to understand basic Standard English associated with a variety of everyday formal/informal situations
- HH is able to speak basic Standard English using basic vocabulary with his peers in a variety of formal/informal situations

HH was able to use his notes and resources provided to learn new vocabulary.

Child's view of support: (respond)

HH was motivated to learn English from the outset and expressed his ambition to go to college. When asked about his future, HH stated that he wanted to learn business skills and focus on ICT long term. When the sessions ended he said how grateful he was for the opportunity to learn to English and referred to his notebook of notes saying that he felt happy and ready to go to college. He also commented that he was [now] confident catch a bus to Birmingham to visit friends.

Impact of Intervention: (review)

HH had overcome some of the initial challenges of learning English as a second language.

HH expressed that he enjoyed the practical language sessions with his tutor and his peers.

HH was able to recall basic vocabulary in Standard English to make simple statements about himself such as his name, age, family and interests and was prepared for the classroom in September.

HH social skills improved, he actively showed support for his peers, offering help with translations to be able to understand specific areas of meaning between first language and English. HH had grown more comfortable sharing information about himself.

HH wanted to learn and enjoyed the challenges and coped with the pressure of learning English as a second language by copying down lots of vocabulary in his own notebook.

HH had been using some of his newly developed English language skills to answer questions and ask questions that are relevant to a range of social situations like finding out directions to a classroom, asking the time, asking for help, ordering food etc.

The use of visual images supported the recognition of various items like food and stationery items without the need for vocabulary initially, meaning that HH acquired a wide range of vocabulary.

HH benefited from working in a mixed male group. He began to understand some of the humour that became a part of the learning process and this helped him to relax and interact with his peers.

The impact of the intervention was not only evident in the short term in terms of newly acquired vocabulary and language skills, including basic speaking, reading, pronunciation and writing, but also in the medium term as HH went on to successfully attend college, further positively impacting improved outcomes for HH's new life in the UK.

In December, the SW provided an update on HH's progression at college, stating that HH had achieved over 98% in all three exams sat, commenting that "Given that [HH] knew no English whatsoever upon arrival this must in part be due to the foundational learning completed with the English tutor in the summer."

Case Study Title: Supporting transition from primary to secondary school

Reason for case study: To highlight the work of the Virtual School Primary Key Worker

Date of Case Study: Summer Term 2019-Autumn Term 2020

Agency Involvement: Virtual School

Child's Core Experiences:

O has been with his carer since he was in Year 2, he has a stable home environment and is placed with a supportive care. A transition plan had previously been put in place with the school for a very detailed transition period. Due to Covid 19, the schools were closed and the plan could not be implemented.

School Content:

At the Summer PEP, school expressed their concerns regarding the lack of transition preparation for O. They felt that O would need one to one sessions and support when he started secondary school to ensure he settled and his anxieties were minimised. They were concerned about O adapting to the size of the school and the continuing transitions throughout the day. School were worried that O would not be able to cope with the continuous change of room and staff.

Child's needs at school: (know)

In lessons, O had no issues with completing work, he is a quiet member of the class and is often reluctant to ask or answer questions. He will communicate on a one to one basis with peers and staff but will not speak aloud in front of the class

Intervention: (decide)

We completed four one-hour sessions with O. Three of the sessions were virtual using Bramble and the final session took place at O's home. These sessions covered a variety of transition activities and provided O with a transition booklet all about his new school. The booklet covered where the school was, whom his form teacher, head of house and designated teacher was, the school rules, routines of the day, uniform, homework and frequently asked questions and worries other children had before starting at the school. O kept this booklet and regularly shared it with his carer in the final weeks of the summer holiday.

When O started secondary school we supported him in school for two and a half days. This covered settling in, making friends, finding key rooms and meeting key staff in the school, learning the layout of the school and learning the routines. O adapted really well to the new school and although the keyworker was in the class or on the school premises very little support was actually needed after the first morning.

Child's view of support: (respond)

I felt more settled having a member of Virtual School to support him; he said he did not feel as nervous. He enjoyed the one to one sessions before starting secondary school and said a lot of his anxieties and worries had gone. He had all his questions answered in the sessions and was looking forward to starting the school

Impact of Intervention: (review)

O has received a smooth transition after being out of school for six months the return was evidently daunting for him just like many children but with the added anxiety of starting secondary school O felt very overwhelmed. By offering O the support, he was able to reduce his anxieties and see the transition as a positive move. He starting communicating with his carer in an appropriate way again and even agreed to wear his blazer to school.

He was much happier on the first day having already had the information about his key teachers and settled well. He used conversations starters discussed in our one to one sessions to help him talk to his peers and quickly built up a small friendship group of male and female student.

On the second day, he received reward point for helping another student who was lost and became very proud that he could help him or her thanks to the transition book and the extra tour of the school he has on the first day.

O made fantastic progress both in the one to one sessions and with starting at the secondary school, he impressed everyone and adapted to the new school much quicker that anyone thought.

Since the intervention finished O has continued to make fantastic progress in school, he has maintained the initial friendships and is widening his friendship group. He will participate in class and is fully engaged in his learning. He has also started to put his hand up in class to ask and answer questions.

Case Study Title: Improving outcomes with online tuition

Reason for case study: To highlight the work of the online tutors

Date of Case Study: Autumn Term 2020

Agency Involvement: Virtual School

Child's Core Experiences:

TA is an unaccompanied Asylum Seeker from Sudan and was registered at the home office in England on November 2019. He speaks Zaghawa/ Arabic and English as an additional language. TA was previously place with two other foster carers while living in Suffolk. He was officially transferred to Walsall in July 2020 however he has lived with his current carers in Walsall since March 2020. TA reports that he is much happier living in his current placement and that all his needs are being fully met. TA does not have any family or friends in the UK and has limited contact with his mother who is currently living in Calais. He has recently begun to socialise with other young people of his age within the local area.

School Content:

TA is currently in year 11 and has not attended school since moving to Walsall. The plan is for TA to go on role at a local Secondary school but attend another identified school where his needs will be fully meet in supporting his EAL. The school has an OSFTED rating of 'Good' and there is currently one other LAC in the school. The identified school currently has 132 children on roll of mixed gender aged between 11-19 years old.

Child's needs at school: (know)

TA previously attended a local High School in Suffolk where he enjoyed learning a musical instrument, Maths, English, French and Electricity which. TA has previously reported that he was subjected to racist remarks while as school, a meeting took place and school took appropriate action. He has said that he would like to be able to have Friday prayer in school. TA also had support from TLC Live (On-line tuition) where he was supported in English, Maths and the focused area of learning was English as an Addition Language.

TA is very demanding at times and does not like to be told 'no' a lot. He struggles with boundaries as he wants complete freedom and independence, otherwise he feels restricted. TA has been known to use threats of running away when boundaries are enforced. He worries about being lonely and isolated, he wants to live in an area he feels comfortable which has other African cultures. TA struggles with rules and boundaries and can feel like he's being unfairly treated if he does not like certain rules. TA has said he feels comfortable in the local area as it is more diverse and there are more people with similar cultures and languages to him. He would like to be able to speak English fluently and to make better progress in school.

Intervention: (decide)

In order to support TA, the Virtual School Offer was to ensure that he was able to continue some form of educational support while at home. He was given a Laptop to enable him to access ICT programmes and appropriate packages considered. A discussion was had with various online companies in regards to teaching sessions and support available.

It was decided that because TLC Live were able to provide daily sessions with the support for students with EAL they would be the appropriate provider for TA. It was also agreed that as TLC Live had previously supported TA they had records of work that they had already completed and the same member of staff would be teaching him. TA was offered on line tuition on a daily basis x 1 hour per day until the end of August 2020.

Daily emails were received from TLC Live to Virtual School to confirm TA's attendance at the sessions and to inform us that he had arrived on time completing the sessions as required

Child's view of support: (respond)

TA attendance for the tuition sessions was 100% and he informed his carer that he had really loved the sessions as he continues to be very keen to be a fluent English Speaker. His carer reported that TA had not complained at all about the sessions and that it been really good for him. He said that it helped that there was continuity of support and that TA has said that the work given to him was more age appropriate for his level of understanding. Via the interpreter TA has reported that he feels more confident and prepared to start school and is looking forward to catching the bus, becoming more independent and socialising with other people of his own age when he goes to school

Impact of Intervention: (review)

A meeting has now been held with TA, his carer and his new school. His name is on role of a new school and will start on Monday 07 09 2020. TLC Live have been asked for records of reports from the tutor and these will be shared with the new school as appropriate. This will ensure that transition is supported to enable them to offer work at the level which is appropriate for TA.

Case Study Title: Year 6 attainment and progress

Reason for case study: To highlight the work of the primary tutors

Date of Case Study: Autumn Term 2020

Agency Involvement: Virtual School

Child's Core Experiences:

BS came into care in December 2017 due to being exposed to parental substance misuse, domestic abuse and neglect. BS was placed with his paternal grandparents since becoming looked after and is currently living with them under a Special Guardianship Order

School Content:

BS attends a local primary school. There are 209 pupils on roll. The school is rated Good by Ofsted.

Child's needs at school: (know)

BS was at Age Related Levels in Maths and Reading but was slightly below ARE in Writing. Blake is a very sociable and has many friends within the year group. He regularly talked about how he socialised with friends in and out of school. He is extremely polite and maintains excellent relationships with adults in the school. He attended every tuition session

Intervention: (decide)

1:1 Tuition was identified for B to support him with his Writing. I started tuition with B on 25th September 2019 until 11th March 2020. The tuition was for an hour per week. The tuition was expected to accelerate his progress so that he could meet ARE by the end of the academic year.

Child's view of support: (respond)

B was completely motivated by the sessions. He enjoyed learning new concepts. I covered a new element of Writing every week, which we practised. He would complete his work in his workbook but additionally would make his own notes in a book that he brought from home. This book would be used to help him remember the things we had covered, so that he could use them in his class work. He was organised and thoroughly enjoyed the learning experience. The class teacher informed me that B was using the techniques we had covered in his class work, which continued to improve. B started to grow in confidence as he recalled all the techniques. He would modify his practise writing and try to improve his vocabulary so that his sentences were the best they could be. He enjoyed the sessions so much, he asked if they could continue over the hour.

Impact of Intervention: (review)

The tuition enabled B to become more confident in his Writing. It allowed him the opportunity to explore his ideas without fear of errors, which in turn led him to become more creative. He would discuss his sentences so that talk became an integral part of the writing experience. I would ask him to search for improved vocabulary and he would self-correct. He would opt to use a comma for example and then state that if he changed the sentence he could then upgrade to using a semi-colon. His confidence grew throughout the sessions. He was always prepared for the sessions and brought books to the sessions, which we used as a stimulus for writing. He continued to make progress with his writing, sharing ideas with his peers, once he had returned to the class. The class teacher commented that he was making good progress with his writing as a result of the sessions.