

## Virtual School Annual Report

### **Executive Summary**

Local authorities have a duty under the children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a specific duty to promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated.

The Virtual School Head (VSH) is responsible for ensuring that the council effectively discharges the above duty. The VSH manages the Virtual School Team, which is dedicated to supporting that duty and ensures that the educational outcomes of our looked after children are maximised.

The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of the Virtual School and report on the 2019-20 educational outcomes of Walsall's looked after children and the work carried out to support the education of looked after children during Covid 19

### **Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board**

To update the Board and provide an overview of the role of the Virtual School

### **Recommendations**

The Board is asked to receive the Virtual School Annual Report and note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to promoting the educational achievement of looked after and previously looked after children.

### **Background papers**

There are no back ground papers attached to this report

### **Resource and legal considerations**

Local authority duties to improve the educational outcomes of children and young people are set out in the following legislation:

- Children Act 1989, as amended by The Children and Families ACT 2014 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, as amended

**The Children and Families Act 2014 amended the Children Act 1989** to require local authorities in England to appoint at least one person for the purpose of

discharging the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked-after children, wherever they live or are educated. That person (the VSH) must be an officer employed by the authority or another local authority in England.

Local authorities have a duty **under section 23ZZA of the Children Act 1989 (inserted by section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017)** 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.

### **Performance management**

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.


- It acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- The mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively transition to adulthood and independence.

### **Reducing inequalities:**

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017- 2020 sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

### **Contact Officer**

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	<b>Walsall Virtual School for looked after and previously looked after Children</b>																																																																																																																																																												
1.0	<b>Introduction</b> The Virtual School Annual Report 2019-2020 (appendix 1) outlines the full activity of the Virtual School. This report provides an overview of the work carried out by the Virtual School and .....																																																																																																																																																												
1.1	<b>Virtual School cohort</b>  As of 31 <sup>st</sup> 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																																																																																																																																																												
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year Group</th><th>Phase Summary</th><th>No. of LAC</th><th>Male</th><th>Female</th><th>Walsall School</th><th>OOB School</th><th>SEN Support</th><th>EHCP</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>-2</td><td rowspan="3">72</td><td>18</td><td>9</td><td>9</td><td>14</td><td>4</td><td>2</td><td>0</td></tr> <tr> <td>-1</td><td>25</td><td>11</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>10</td><td>4</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>R</td><td>29</td><td>19</td><td>10</td><td>23</td><td>16</td><td>4</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>1</td><td rowspan="8">183</td><td>29</td><td>12</td><td>17</td><td>22</td><td>7</td><td>5</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr> <td>2</td><td>20</td><td>12</td><td>8</td><td>14</td><td>6</td><td>2</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>3</td><td>34</td><td>22</td><td>12</td><td>24</td><td>10</td><td>7</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr> <td>4</td><td>33</td><td>14</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>13</td><td>11</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr> <td>5</td><td>36</td><td>15</td><td>21</td><td>23</td><td>13</td><td>16</td><td>9</td></tr> <tr> <td>6</td><td>31</td><td>13</td><td>18</td><td>20</td><td>11</td><td>9</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr> <td>7</td><td>35</td><td>16</td><td>19</td><td>28</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>8</td></tr> <tr> <td>8</td><td rowspan="5">247</td><td>52</td><td>27</td><td>25</td><td>32</td><td>20</td><td>10</td><td>20</td></tr> <tr> <td>9</td><td>46</td><td>23</td><td>23</td><td>27</td><td>19</td><td>18</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr> <td>10</td><td>62</td><td>36</td><td>26</td><td>32</td><td>30</td><td>12</td><td>17</td></tr> <tr> <td>11</td><td>52</td><td>26</td><td>26</td><td>30</td><td>22</td><td>11</td><td>11</td></tr> <tr> <td>12 &amp; 13</td><td>66</td><td>36</td><td>30</td><td>30</td><td>36</td><td>4</td><td>18</td></tr> <tr> <td>Total</td><td>568</td><td>568</td><td>291</td><td>277</td><td>354</td><td>214</td><td>123</td><td>116</td></tr> </tbody> </table>								Year Group	Phase Summary	No. of LAC	Male	Female	Walsall School	OOB School	SEN Support	EHCP	-2	72	18	9	9	14	4	2	0	-1	25	11	14	15	10	4	1	R	29	19	10	23	16	4	1	1	183	29	12	17	22	7	5	2	2	20	12	8	14	6	2	1									3	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	247	52	27	25	32	20	10	20	9	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	36	30	30	36	4	18	Total	568	568	291	277	354	214	123	116
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1.2	<p><b>Ofsted Rated Schools</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>At the end of the 2020 academic year  89% of children in early years attended a school/setting rated good or better  75% of primary aged children attended a school rated good or better  68% of secondary aged young people attended a school rated good or better</p>
1.3	<p><b>Attainment &amp; Progress</b></p> <p>The virtual school track and monitor the termly progress of all looked after children from 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.</p> <p>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 report we have included EYFS, KS1, and KS2 attainment predictions based on information provided by schools in the spring term 2020. <b>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.</b></p> <p>50% of children in reception were predicted to achieve a good level of development</p> <p>46% of children in key stage 1 were working at expected levels in reading and 53% were working at the expected levels in writing and maths</p> <p>48% of children in key stage 2 were working at the expected levels in reading and writing and 52% were working at the expected levels in maths</p> <p><b>Key stage 4 data is based on teacher assessments as no formal GCSEs were undertaken in 2020 due to Covid 19</b></p>

	<p>36% of young people in key stage 4 achieved a 9-4 pass in English &amp; Maths. 15% of young people in key stage 4 achieved a 9-5 pass in English &amp; Maths</p>
1.4	<p><b>Special Educational Needs</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>This figure is slightly less than looked after children nationally and broadly in line with our statistical and regional neighbours</p> <p>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.</p>
1.5	<p><b>Attendance</b></p> <p>The Virtual School use 'Looked After Call' to collect attendance and exclusion data for children placed in and out of the borough. This allows the Virtual School to immediately challenge any absences from school.</p> <p>Due to Covid we have broken down our attendance based on the figures from September to March when school closures commenced.</p> <p>The overall attendance rate for looked after in 2020 was <b>96.3%</b> This is higher than that of looked after children nationally (95.3%), regionally (95.8%) and that of our statistical neighbours (95.6%). Attendance rates of looked after children is also higher than all Walsall Children (95.1%) and all children nationally (95.3%)</p> <p>The number of looked after children classed as persistent absentees (below 90% attendance) reduced in 2020 from 7.70% in 2019 to <b>7.50%</b>. This is below that of all looked after children nationally (10.9%) and that of our Statistical (10.25%) and regional (9.00%) neighbours. Persistent absence for Walsall looked after children is also below that of all Walsall children (11.70% and all children nationally (10.90%)</p> <p>Allocated key workers will also respond to information from Schools, Social Workers, Foster Carers, IROs etc. where it appears a pupil's education is either being disrupted, a pattern of poor attendance is beginning or they are accumulating fixed term exclusions</p>

	<p><b>Attendance during Covid 19</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>All decisions about a child's attendance were made jointly by the parent/carers, school, social worker and virtual school and were monitored regularly.</p>
1.6	<p><b>Exclusions</b></p> <p>The virtual school has worked with schools to ensure that no looked after children have been permanently excluded from their school.</p> <p>During the 2019/2020 academic year the virtual school provided intervention to 12 young people who were at risk of exclusion. In some cases intensive support enabled the young people to remain at their schools and in other cases intervention such as managed moves and alternative provision were agreed to avoid a permanent exclusion.</p> <p>The most up to date data shows that the percentage of Walsall looked after children with 1 or more fixed term exclusion (7.67%), remains below that of children in care nationally (11.67%) and our regional (10.28%) and statistical neighbours (11.65%) but is higher than that of all children in Walsall (4.3%) and all children nationally (5.08%).</p> <p>Children with at least 1 fixed term exclusion are discussed at our weekly complex case meeting. This enables us to discuss reasons for exclusion, co-ordinate a response and implement actions.</p>
1.7	<p><b>Personal Education Plans (PEPs)</b></p> <p>It is the statutory duty of the local authority to ensure that all looked after children aged 3-18 have a high quality, up-to date personal education plan (PEP).</p> <p>PEPs should take place within 10 days of the child/young person becoming looked after and be reviewed termly.</p> <p>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. Our PEPs changed to a Covid 19 PEP in the summer 2020 term so quality assurance of PEPs was put on hold.</p> <p>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</p>

	<p>each term alongside our normal QA procedure. PEPs and QA comments were then uploaded onto the ePEP system.</p> <p>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 it has been identified that a young person is not reaching their potential.</p> <p>Our key workers will also attend PEPs where it has been identified that the quality of the PEPs need improving</p>
1.8	<p><b>Pupil Premium Funding</b></p> <p>The Virtual School's main budget is the Pupil Premium which is funding, devolved to the local authority and is to be used as seen appropriate by the Virtual School Head to best promote achievement and progress of Walsall's looked after children. The local authority received £1117,800.00 pupil premium for the 2019/20 financial year</p> <p>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 <b>Virtual School Offer</b>'. (Appendix 2). 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.</p> <p>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.</p>
1.9	<p><b>Training</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Some of the training delivered during the 2019/20 academic year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Termly Designated Teacher training sessions</li> <li>• Trauma &amp; Attachment training for school staff</li> <li>• Transition &amp; Vulnerability training delivered to designated teachers and non-teaching staff</li> <li>• Supporting looked after and previously looked after children in primary schools - delivered by Stuart Guest- HT of Colbourne Primary School and winner of the Sir John Timpson Attachment Aware Schools Award 2019</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:1 ePEP training</li> <li>• Induction training for newly qualified social workers and social workers new to Walsall.</li> <li>• A range of online courses available to schools, social workers and carers</li> </ul>
1.10	<p><b>Post 16</b></p> <p>The Virtual School have a dedicated Post 16 team comprising of a key worker and careers adviser and mentor who work with young people aged 14-18 to ensure they are in appropriate post 16 education and are given the right support advice and guidance to make informed career choices:</p> <p>Since the start of the pandemic, the virtual school have continued to have face to face and virtual meetings with our young people to provide careers advice. They have recently supported 10 young people with university applications for this forthcoming year.</p> <p>They have also supported 3 young people onto a Council apprenticeship and are in the process of appointing a care leaver onto a full time Teaching Assistant apprenticeship within the Virtual School.</p> <p>The Virtual School continues to provide support and guidance to our young people who are currently NEET by identifying appropriate provision and/or referring them onto other services such as IMPACT and Walsall Works.</p>
1.11	<p><b>Previously looked after children</b></p> <p>Under the <b>Children and Social Work Act 2017</b> 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).</p> <p>Some of the work we have carried out in relation to previously looked after children is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging schools to avoid drift and delay in relation to the admissions of previously looked after children</li> <li>• Challenging schools in relation to exclusions of previously looked after children</li> <li>• Attended school meetings to support parents/carers</li> <li>• Provide intervention from our own staff/resources</li> <li>• Contribute to the SGO carers newsletter</li> <li>• Challenge schools on the use of pupil premium funding for previously looked after children</li> </ul>
1.12	<p><b>Celebrating achievement</b></p> <p>To recognise and reward the fantastic achievements of our children and young people in care we run two annual celebration events.</p>



	<p>The primary event 'An Excellent Tea Party' normally takes place in the summer term and our secondary event 'An Excellent Night Out' takes place in the autumn term</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Due to Covid 19 restrictions we were unable to hold our summer term primary celebration event</p>
1.13	<p><b>The work of the Virtual School during Covid 19</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p> <p>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</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 50 children received laptops/tablets to enable them to continue with their learning in the home.</li> <li>• Online tuition was provided to children and young people who requested additional support</li> <li>• Weekly emails were sent out to parents and carers providing lists of educational resources and websites for different areas of learning and development</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artslink resource packs were provided for children and young people aged 3-12</li> <li>• Reading books and learning resources were been sent to all primary aged children</li> <li>• Log in details to our own digital learning platforms were provided to all children and young people</li> </ul> <p>In addition to providing learning resources we also provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online training to schools, parents and carers on supporting children back into school after</li> <li>• Supported a number of children to access education provision after a placement move or when their own school remained closed.</li> <li>• Provided careers advice to year 11 students concerned about their GCSE and A level results</li> <li>• Supported children new into the care system by ensuring they were still able to access their education provision after moving placement</li> <li>• delivered face to face and online transition support to children moving to new schools in September</li> </ul> <p>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.</p>
1.14	<p><b>Virtual School Priorities for 2020/21</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To continue to support our children and young people to attend school or access appropriate education at home by ensuring they have the right resources/equipment to help them achieve.</li> <li>• To increase the virtual school offer to children and young people by providing the following age appropriate resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ All children aged 9-14 will receive a weekly edition of 'First News' newspaper and have access to learning resources on their website</li> <li>❖ All children aged 5-9 receive a monthly subscription of Storytime magazine and access to high quality learning resources'</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To continue to work with schools and education settings to improve the quality of our personal education plans (PEPS) with a specific focus on post 16 PEPs</li> <li>• We will further developed our Attachment Aware School Project by rolling out information to our 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort in the Spring term of 2021</li> <li>• We will further develop our relationships with post 16 providers to increase opportunities to young people and reduce the number of 16/17 year olds who are NEET</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will further develop our training offer to schools, social workers and parents/carers by utilizing the work of our educational psychologist and speech and language therapists</li> <li>• We will work with partners to further develop our celebration events</li> </ul> <p>Lorraine Thompson- Virtual School Lead</p>
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