

## **Vulnerable Learners Hub**

**Ward(s): ALL**

**Portfolios: Education and Skills Councillor Statham**

### **1.0 Aim**

- 1.1 This report will provide an overview of the work carried out by the Vulnerable Learners Hub (VLH).
- 1.2 The report will also highlight the current educational outcomes for children with a social worker to evidence why this cohort of young people need more targeted support to enable them to reach their potential

### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 For the committee to note the impact of the work carried out by the VLH

### **3.0 Report detail – know**

- 3.1 In June 2021 the DfE announced that from September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head will be extended to promote the education of all children aged 0-18 with a social worker and those who have had a social worker within the last 6 years (Ever 6), meaning there will be a local champion for children with a social worker in every local authority in England. This is to ensure more focus is placed on targeting support earlier on in these young people's lives and helping improve how they engage with education.
  - 3.2 To support the new duties we have developed a Vulnerable Learners Hub and appointed three members of staff to work with social workers, schools and LA officers to help make visible the disadvantages children with a social worker can experience and promote practice that supports their engagement in education.
  - 3.3 We have also created a full-time permanent SEN Casework Officer to sit with the SEN Assessment Team to work directly with looked after children and young people who have an EHCP or are undergoing a SEN needs assessment. A further post has been developed to support the work of the Vulnerable Learners hub to ensure that all children with a social worker who have an EHCP or who are undergoing a SEN assessment are prioritised.
  - 3.4 The Virtual 'School Specialist Support Team, comprising of 3 Education Psychologists, 2 Speech and Language Therapists and a CAMHs Practitioner work closely with schools and social workers to ensure the needs of looked after and vulnerable children with special educational needs are prioritised.
-

- 3.5 In June 2022 the DfE announced a further 1 year extension to the duties
- 3.6 At the time of writing this report there are 214 children/young people in Walsall on a Child Protection Plan and 1086 on a Child in Need Plan
- 3.7 The CiN review identified for the first time that 1.6 million children needed a social worker between 2012 and 2018, equivalent to 1 in 10 children or 3 children in every classroom. These children are present in 98% of state schools and face barriers to education due to experiences of adversity, most commonly as a result of domestic abuse, mental ill-health, and substance misuse, with 62% of children needing a social worker having experienced one or more of these.
- 3.8 On average, children with a social worker do worse than their peers at every stage of their education.
- In 2019 34% of children in need achieved the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 compared to 61% of all children in Walsall
  - In 2021 25% of children in need achieved 9-4 GCSEs including English and maths at the end of KS4 compared to 65% of all children in Walsall
  - In 2021 42% of children in need were classes as persistent absentees compared to 14.9% of all Walsall children
  - In 2021 8.64% of children in need received at least 1 suspension compared to 2.98% of all Walsall children
  - In 2019 1.27% of children in need were permanently excluded from school compared to 0.14% of all children in Walsall
- 3.9 The focus of the VLH is to ensure all children with a social worker have a school place, have good school attendance, are not being excluded and have the right support and interventions to enable them to succeed.
- 3.10 The work of the VLH - Since the development of the VLH in September 2021, we have:
- Developed a Vulnerability Matrix to help identify those children and young people most at risk of underachievement. Vulnerability factors, such as children missing education, suspensions, below 50% attendance, Youth Justice Involvement, reduced time tables, elective home education etc. are all scored to enable the team to identify and implement appropriate support and challenge where needed.
  - Extended the work of our SEN Casework Officer to oversee EHCP requests for all children with a social worker
  - Attended social work team meetings to inform social workers on how they can access support from the VLH
  - Delivered training to Designated Safeguarding leads and designated teachers to highlight the disadvantages children with a social worker may have experienced
  - Implemented and led a regional working group with staff from other local authorities carrying out the role of supporting children with a social worker
  - Visited over 30 schools to discuss individual and cohorts of children
-

During the 2021/22 academic year the team have dealt with 348 referrals from social workers, schools and other professionals

	Total	%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub (overall)	348	100%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub with SEN support	73	21%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub with an EHCP	87	25%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub with an EHCP in progress	2	1%

- 90 issues related to school attendance
- 44 issues related to children missing education
- 40 issues related to exclusions
- 68 issues related to school admissions/awaiting a school placement
- 34 issues related to special educational needs
- Other issues were around reduced timetables, managed moves, support for NEET etc

### Reducing the exclusions of children with an Education Health and Care Plan

In addition to the work carried out to improve educational outcomes for children with a social worker, the staff in the VLH are also challenging schools where children with an EHCP are at risk of exclusion. The table below shows the number of referrals into the hub for young people at risk of exclusion.

Perm Ex referrals	Total
Number of YP referred at risk of suspension/PEX	33
Number of YP without an identified SEN who were at risk of PEX	11
Number of YP without an identified SEN who went on to be PEX	3
Number of YP on SEN support were at risk of suspension/PEX	12
Number of YP on SEN Support who went on to be PEX	2
Number of YP with an EHCP were at risk of suspension/PEX	10
Number of YP that went on to be PEX	0
<b>Total number of YP at risk of perm ex</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Total number of exclusions avoided by the VLH</b>	<b>28</b>

## **Further development of the Vulnerable Learners Hub**

Due to the success of the VLH, an additional Education Liaison Officer has been seconded into the team to provide additional capacity to help improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

- 3.11 From September 2022 the staff in the VLH will be responsible for working alongside schools and other professionals to help reduce the number of all children and young people who are permanently excluded from school. The team will challenge any exclusion where a graduated response to exclusion has not been followed. There is an expectation that Head teachers only use their powers to exclude where all other options to avoid an exclusion have been explored. Where we have a concern about schools not following the graduated response, a schools causing concern referral will be made will

### **4.0 Financial information**

- 4.1 The posts within the team are funded through the DfE VSH additional duties grants. Local authorities were given additional funds based on the number of schools. Walsall received £100k for the academic year 2021-22 and will receive a further £100k for the next academic year

### **5.0 Reducing Inequalities**

- 5.1 While there is no single cause for the poor educational outcomes for children with a social worker, experiences of adversity can create barriers to good outcomes. The work carried out by the VLH ensures that with the right support, the aspirations of these children can be raised to enable them to achieve their best and ensure there is equal access to education opportunities.

### **6.0 Decide**

- 6.1 The committee may decide to request further information on the education outcomes of children with a social worker.

### **7.0 Respond**

- 7.1 Any recommendations made by the committee will be responded to by the appropriate service area

### **8.0 Review**

- 8.1 The actions and outcomes within this report are monitored by Access & Inclusion SMT and Children's Services DMT and through a monthly performance board
-

## Author

Lorraine Thompson  
Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead  
☎ 01922 652837  
✉ [Lorraine.thompson@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Lorraine.thompson@walsall.gov.uk)

---