

# Walsall Virtual School

## Annual Report

### 2020/2021



Walsall Council

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## Executive Summary

Throughout the whole of the 2020/21 academic year and including the Covid 19 lockdown period the Virtual School has continued to support all children in care. 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 school age children in care has increased slightly over the last 12 months from 568 in 2020 to 573 at the end of July 2021.

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

Our ePEP has been amended to capture information on how the disruption of Covid 19 has impacted on the child's education and what intervention is being put in place to support this

With the majority of PEPs taking place on line, our staff have been able to attend more PEPs and work alongside designated teachers to improve the PEPs. We have continued to see improvements in our PEPs, especially in early years and primary schools with 94% of the PEPs being rated good or better in the Summer term.

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 2021 alongside attainment data from the last 3 academic years. **The 2021 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 15% on the previous year. The number of children predicted to achieve ARE in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 1 improved slightly in reading and stayed the same in writing and maths.

The number of children predicted to achieve the expected level of attainment at the end of KS2 increased slightly from 48% to 51% in reading but decreased from 48-45% in writing and 52%-49% in maths.

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 29% in 2020 to 38% in 2021. We have also seen a rise in the number of young people achieve 5-9 GCSEs from 15% in 2020 to 19% in 2021.

Post 16 engagement is supported by the Virtual School Post 16 Team and monitored by the monthly NEET Action Group. 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. To date we have 31 schools involved in the project and a further 14 due to join the project in September 2021

To improve the emotional wellbeing and enhance school stability we have commissioned a CAMHS practitioner to sit within the Virtual School.

## 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 children in care 2020/2021. 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 children in care as of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

Attainment data in this report is for children who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

## 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 children in care. 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 children who were previously in care 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 children in care 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 children in care, wherever they are placed, have an effective PEP.
- Ensure the educational achievement of children in care is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibility for promoting their welfare.
- Report regularly on the attainment of children in care 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 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 2020 to 2021 Conditions of Grant and Pupil Premium: Virtual Heads' Responsibilities
- Tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of all children in care
- 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 children in care 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:

- Further developed our pre apprenticeship scheme to provide a 12 week package of support to our children in care and care leavers which includes a monthly wage, funding for transport & equipment and the allocation of a mentor
- Worked closely with all our schools to ensure first day provision is put in place for any children in care who receive a fixed term exclusion.
- Provided apprenticeship opportunities to three care leavers
- Enabled all year 11 students to have access to additional tuition 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 children in care do not miss education
- Through targeted use of Pupil Premium provided focussed support to children in care 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 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021)

The Virtual School is a multidisciplinary team of dedicated professionals who provide support and guidance to our children and young people in a variety of ways

Staff roles and responsibilities:

Role	Responsibility
Virtual School and Vulnerable Groups Lead	Provides strategic leadership
Education Advisor x 2 (primary and secondary)	The Education Advisors monitor the attainment and progress of children in care and allocate appropriate resources where needed. They are also responsible for ensuring pupil premium is used effectively to improve educational outcomes
Key workers x 6 (EYFS, Primary x 2, secondary x 2, Post 16)	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	Mentor work alongside young people to develop appropriate relationships to engage, motivate and remove barriers to learning. Our mentors also support children in care through transitions
Tutors	Tutors provide tuition in or out of school and either face to face or online. Our tutors also support parents and carers with home learning activities
Careers Advisor	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
Education Liaison Officer	Our Education Liaison Officer has lead responsibility for previously children in care, children under Youth Justice and other vulnerable groups. They also provide specialist advice to schools where children and young people are at risk of exclusion
SEN Casework Officer	Our SEN Casework Officer works part time in the SEN assessment team to enable us to have a better oversight of those children and young people undergoing a SEN assessment and avoid any drift an delay in the EHCP process
PEP/Attendance Coordinator	The PEP/ Attendance Coordinator manages our ePEP process and tracks and monitors the attendance of our children and young people
Speech & Language Therapist	Our Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs) support schools and carers, provide training and work directly with children and young people to maximise their communication skills.
Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychology Services are commissioned to support looked after and previously children in care who are experiencing social and emotional difficulties within the school or care placements
CAMHS Practitioner	The primary role of the CAMHS practitioner is to support education placement stability by delivering direct support to designated teachers, teachers and support staff to increase and improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health provision for looked after and previously children in care

## 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 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021 there were 623, 3-18 year olds who were on our role. This is a significant increase on the 2019 cohort due to all year 13 students being kept open to the VS until the end of the academic year. The cohort was made up of 55% male and 45% female. 48% of children are educated in Walsall and 52% educated outside of Walsall. Of those children educated outside of Walsall, 78% are educated within the West Midlands.

Year Group	Phase Summary	No. of LAC	Male	Female	Walsall School	OOB School	SEN Support	EHCP
-2	81	26	15	11	19	7	0	0
-1		32	12	20	19	13	4	0
R		23	12	11	16	7	4	2
1	183	23	14	9	14	9	5	3
2		29	12	17	16	13	6	4
3		22	13	9	15	7	8	4
4		38	26	12	16	22	9	9
5		33	18	15	16	17	7	6
6		38	22	16	23	15	10	12
7	245	32	14	18	17	15	8	9
8		39	17	22	24	15	7	9
9		56	27	28	22	30	10	16
10		55	28	27	26	29	13	14
11		63	40	23	25	38	9	15
12 & 13	116	116	70	46	30	36	4	18
Total	623	623	340	283	298	325	104	121



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

Statutory guidance 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of children in care' states that children in care should be educated in good or outstanding schools and unless there exceptional, evidence based reasons, children in care 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 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021:

- 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

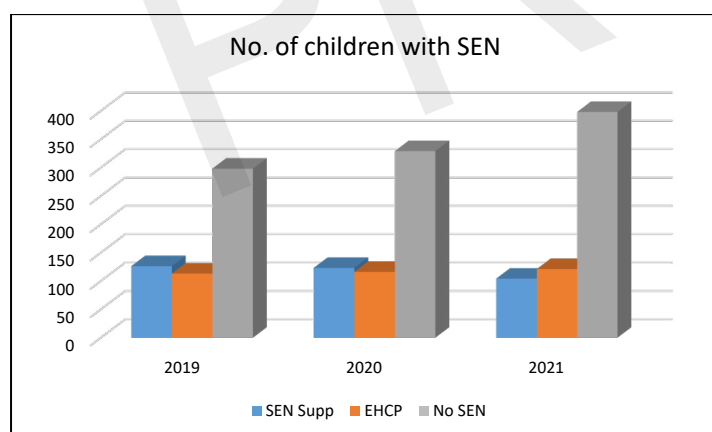
This figure has stayed the same as last year due to Ofsted inspections not being carried out throughout the Covid Pandemic.

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

Children in care 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 children in care had a special education need compared to 14.9% of all children.

At the end of the 2020/21 academic year there were 121 (19%) children in care with an EHCP and 104 (17%) on SEN support. In Walsall 225 (36%) Of our learners have an identified special educational need.



Children in care are 3 times more likely to have social emotional and mental health (SEMH) as their primary needs than their peers. This is reflective in Walsall where 53 (44%) of our C & YP have SEMH as their primary need.

Due to the high number of requests for an EHC assessment and the specialist intervention required to ensure we were meeting the needs of all our children and young people with special educational needs, we decided to co-locate one of our key workers into the SEN assessment team for 16 hours a week. This enabled closer working between the SEN team and Virtual School and reduced the amount of drift and delay when children in care go through the graduated response. This pilot was so successful we created a full time SEN Casework Officer within the Virtual School who continues to work within the SEN team.

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

## Attainment and Progress

The Virtual School track and monitor the termly progress of all children in care 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.

The 2020/21 predicted outcomes are for children in care who have been continuously looked after, for at least 12 months, up to and including 31st March 2021, 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.**

As part of steps taken to fight the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Department for Education announced that all exams due to take place in schools and colleges in England in summer 2020 were cancelled and that there will be no publication of any school or college level educational performance data based on tests, assessments or exams for 2020.

**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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 2020/21.

Performance tables will not be published by the Department for Education (DfE) for 2020/21.

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.

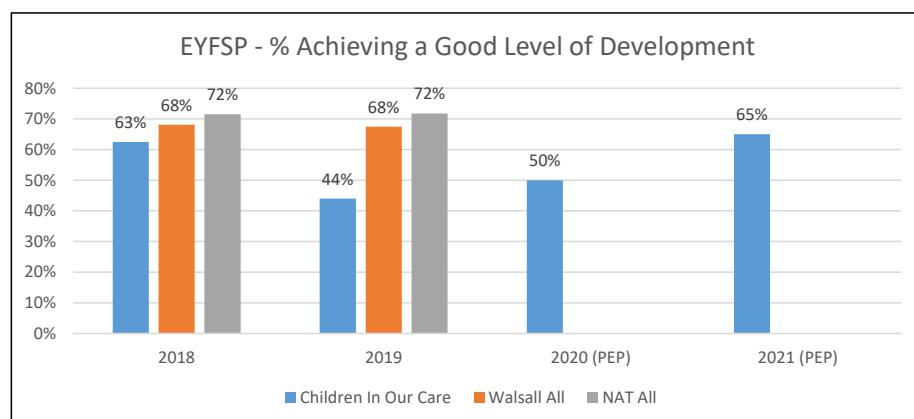
Currently, the validated 2021 outcomes for children looked after is scheduled to be released in March 2022.

## Academic outcomes

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 2021 alongside attainment data from the last 3 academic years. **The 2021 predicted data is for information purposes only and will not be used to make direct comparisons or for benchmarking outside of this report.**

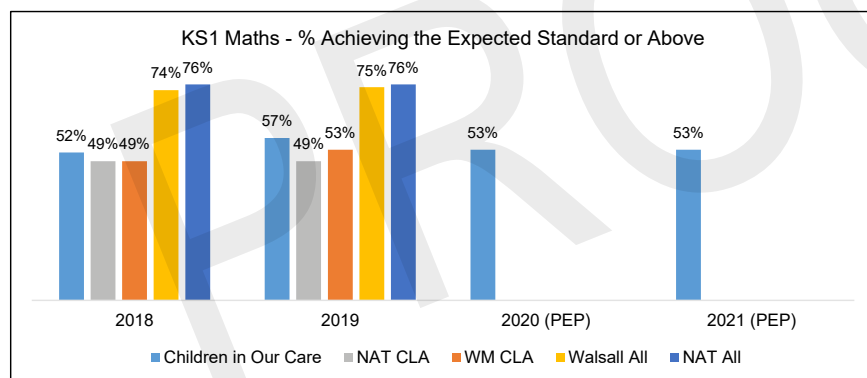
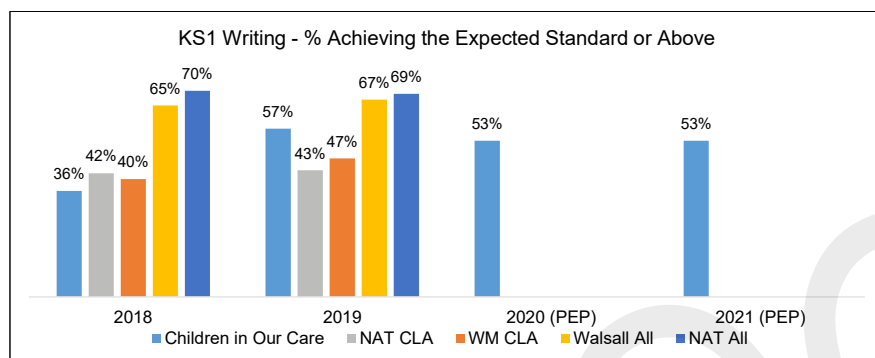
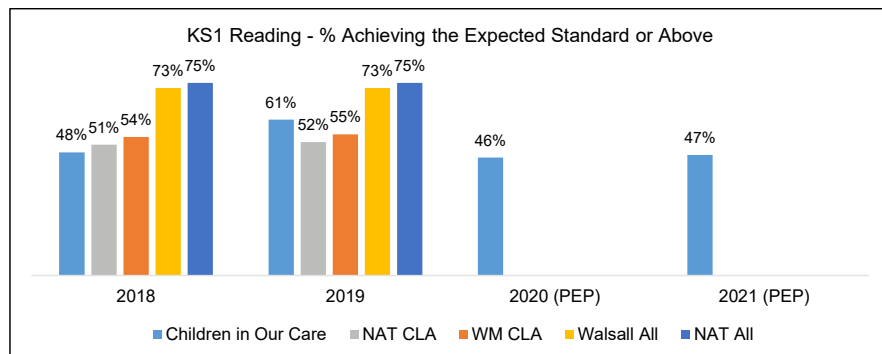
### How well do our children do in Early Years

The chart below shows the number of children in care who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31<sup>st</sup> March and who have achieved a good level of development at the end of reception 2018-19 and those predicted to achieve a GLD based on school data collected at the end of the spring term 2020-2021.



## How well do our children do in Key Stage 1

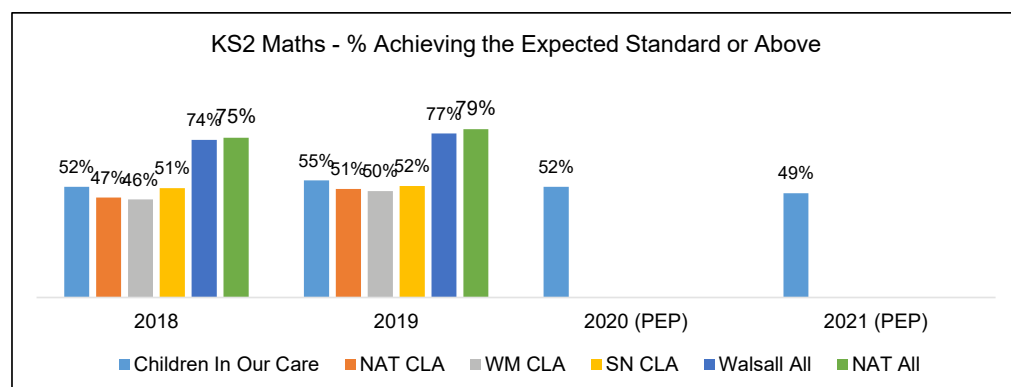
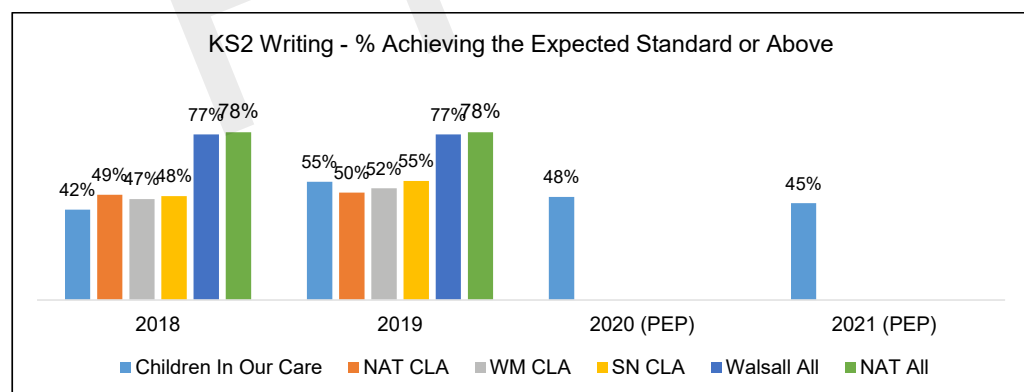
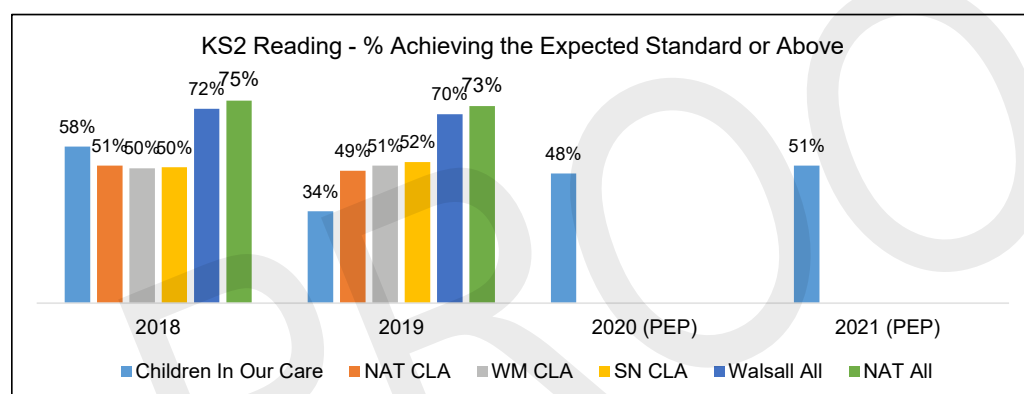
The charts below shows the number of children in care who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31<sup>st</sup> March and who were predicted to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of the spring term 2020-2021.





## How well do our children do in Key Stage 2

The charts below shows the number of children in care who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31<sup>st</sup> March and who were predicted to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of the spring term 2020-2021.

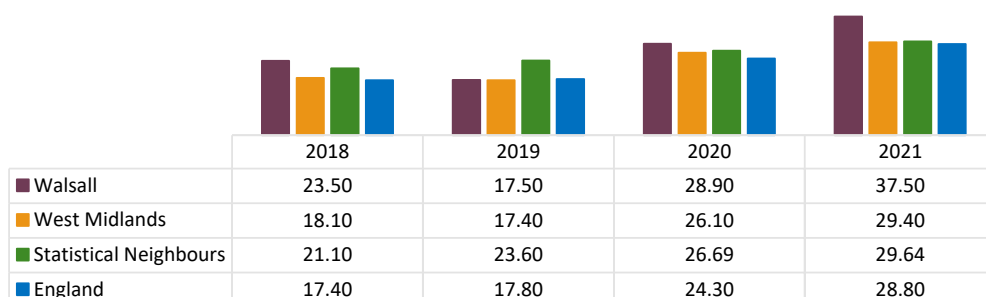




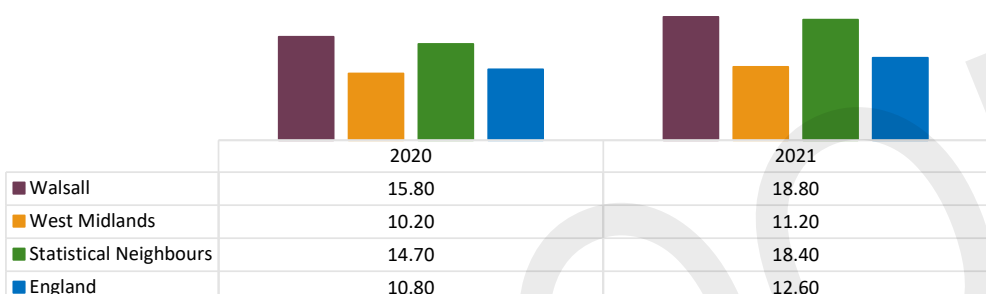
## How well do our children do in Key Stage 4

The charts below shows KS4 GCSE results of looked after young people who have been in care for 12 months or more as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

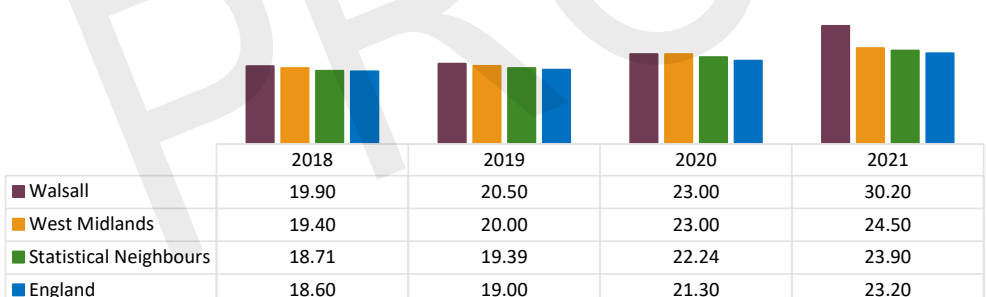
% of CLA Achieving 9-4 Pass in English and Maths



% of CLA Achieving 9-5 Pass in English and Maths



CLA Key Stage 4 - Average Attainment 8 Score



## Attendance and Exclusions

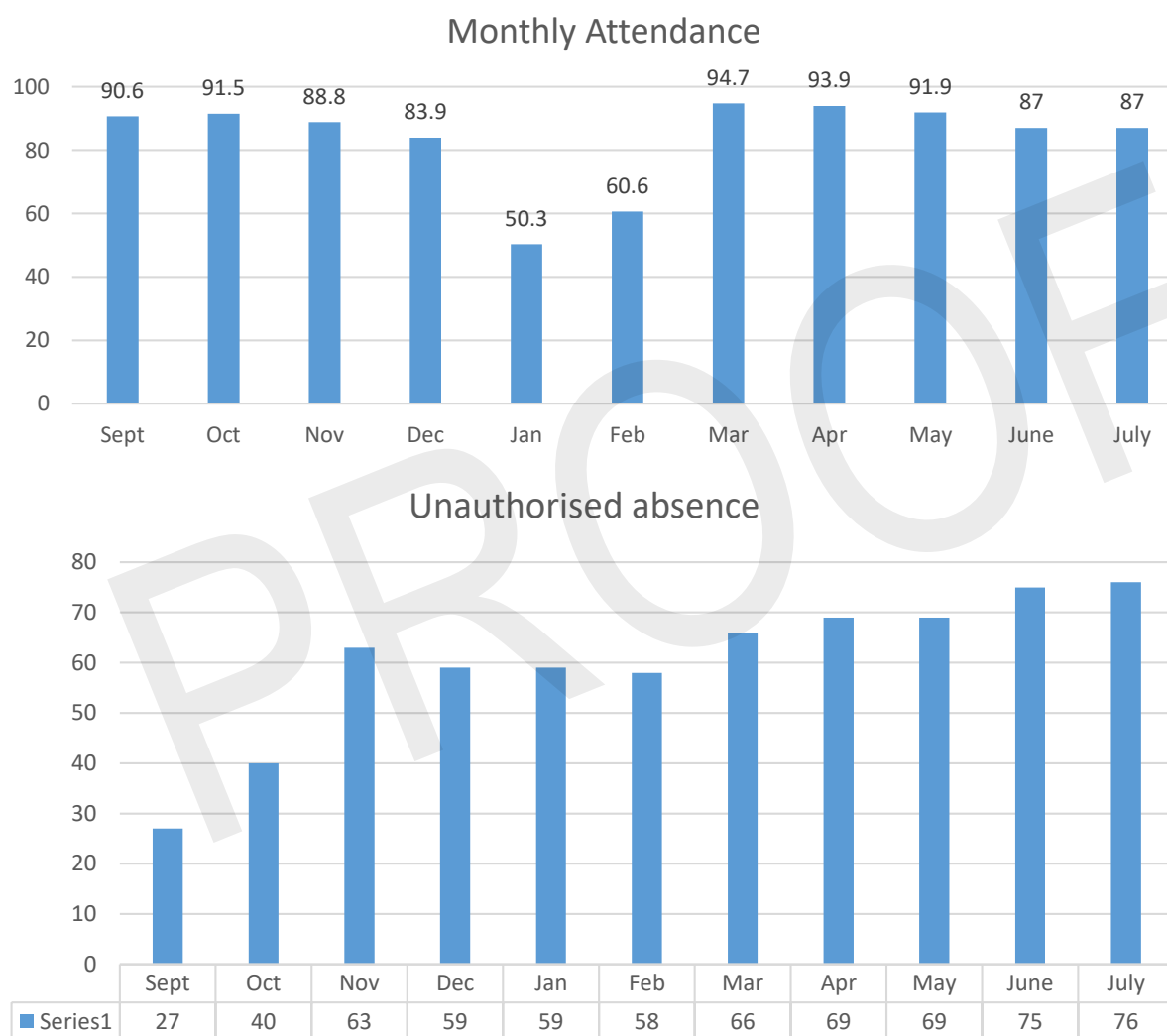
Due to the pandemic, attendance data has not been published nationally since 2019

Due to the pandemic the attendance of our children in care does not give a true reflection of their attendance. Many carers chose to educate children at home during the second lockdown and as the government had changed the attendance reporting, they were not awarded an attendance mark.

The overall attendance rate for our children in 2020 was 83.65%

Looked After Call have collected attendance and exclusion data for Walsall children in care 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.

The chart below shows the monthly attendance of our children in care aged 5-16



The chart below shows the accumulating number of children and young people who had at least 1 unauthorised absence

In order to address the unauthorised absence figure, we introduced weekly monitoring meetings to highlight any young person who had an unauthorised absence. Absences were addressed with school and carers and actions were identified and implemented to help support any anxiety-based school absence.

In some instances school miscoding was identified, this was challenged by our Attendance Officer.

# Exclusions

## Permanent exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions since 2005. The Virtual School team work closely with schools to prevent any issues reaching crisis point and explore appropriate alternative options better suited to meeting the need of the young person.

We challenge any schools which consider permanent exclusion, and implement appropriate support, using Pupil Premium Plus funding to avoid the exclusion.

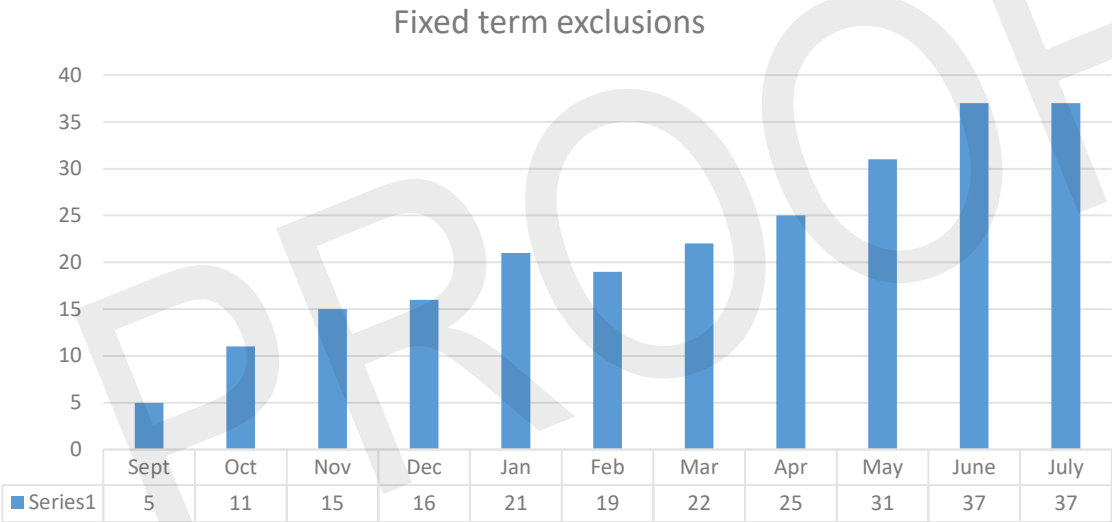
## Fixed term exclusions

In the 2020/21 academic year 37 children received at least 1 fixed term exclusion. This is a slight increase on the 2019/20 figure of 35.

This figure is below the regional and national average but reducing exclusions is a focus for improvement for the Virtual School.

Every effort is made to prevent exclusions and Virtual School staff work closely with schools to find alternative options to an exclusion.

Although we are notified of the exclusion straight away it is normally after schools have made the decision to exclude. One-off exclusions are difficult to prevent, particularly for children out of the borough although we receive notifications through our attendance monitoring this is after the schools have made the decision to exclude. We do expect schools to inform us prior to an exclusion, but this is still an area for improvement.



## Key Stage 5

The Virtual School are responsible for children in care up to the age of 18.

Priority is given to ensure all young people at the end of KS4 have a suitable identified destination and remain in employment, education or training.

Our secondary key worker attends all year 11 PEPs to ensure those who are at risk of becoming NEET have appropriate intervention in place

We use our Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) in key stage 3 and 4 PEPs to provide early identification of any young person who would be at risk of NEET

Our careers advisor now works with young people from year 9 to ensure they have the right advice and guidance to support them into their chosen post 16 career path

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.

The table below shows the post destination of all children in care in year 12 and 13 as of the 31st<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

2020/21 post 16 destinations	Number
6 <sup>th</sup> Form	17
6 <sup>th</sup> Form (specialist provision)	10
College	58
Training provider	12
Employment	2
Apprenticeship	2
NEET seeking EET	15
Total	116

### 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 ensure all young people on apprenticeships received the right support we have developed a Pre-Apprenticeship offer to all care leavers, this includes:

- A 12 week paid trial to ensure the apprenticeship is right for the young person before an official sign up
- A named mentor to support them through the duration of the apprenticeship
- A clothing/equipment allowance to ensure they are fully equipped when starting the apprenticeship
- Help with travel costs to and from the work placement
- Tuition support to help with maths/English element of the apprenticeship

11 young people were engaged on or due to start an apprenticeship as on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021.



## 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 children in care 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 2020/21 59 children in care moved school, of these

- 49 moved school due to a placement move
- 3 young people requested a move of school
- 2 young person moved to avoid a permanent exclusion
- 5 young people moved due to a change in the SEN needs

## Personal Education Plans

Since adopting the electronic PEP in 2019, we have seen a significant improvement in the quality of our PEPs. We now have a robust PEP document that is a comprehensive and evolving record of the child's education journey.

The majority of PEPs in 20/21 academic year were held virtually. This allowed the Virtual School key workers to attend a higher number of PEPs. The Virtual School teams attended 630 PEP meetings in the academic year.

The number of PEPs completed within time scales were 99% in the autumn term, 90% in the spring term and 96% in the summer term. The majority of those not completed within time frames were due to PEPs not being signed off before the end of term rather than PEPs not taking place. We still have work to do to ensure PEPs are completed within timescales. School are allocated two weeks from the date of the meeting to the completion of the PEP form.

We continue to quality assure our PEPs and provide support and training to assist settings, schools and colleges to improve the quality of their PEPs.

The quality of PEPs improved from 58.6% being rated as good or outstanding in the autumn term to 72.6% in the spring term and 77% in the summer term.

An evaluation of our PEPs was completed at the end of the academic year, this highlighted

- 20 of our schools had no PEP rated requires improvement or inadequate in 20/21
- 59 of our schools had no PEP rated RI or inadequate in the summer term
- 100% of all PEPs in Walsall Early years provision were rated good or better
- Our quality assurance process is time consuming
- Staff quality assurance was inconsistent
- More of our out of borough PEPs were rated RI or inadequate
- The majority of our RI and inadequate PEPs are secondary school PEPs

This piece of work has enabled us to identify where we need to focus to further improve our PEPs.

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.



## 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 children in care. The local authority received £1,193,605.00 pupil premium for the 2020/21 financial year.

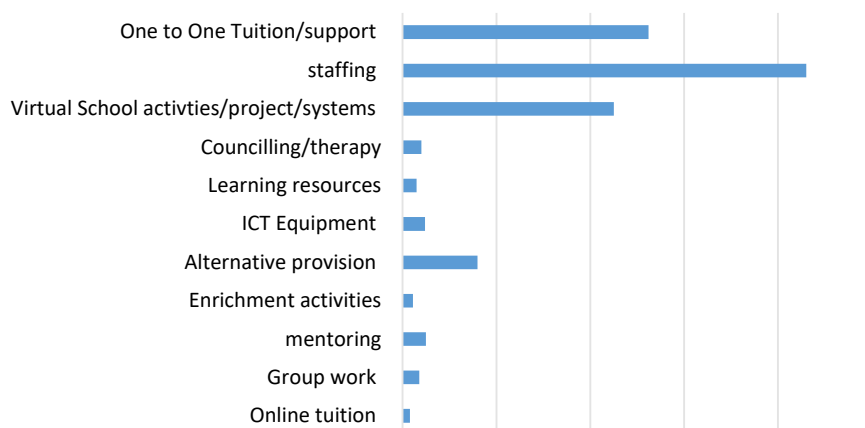
In line with our pupil premium policy we continued to deliver a needs based model of allocating pupil premium funding.

We continue to review our services to ensure we are meeting the educational, social, emotional and personal needs of our children in care and young people. This year, as well as commissioning a wide range specialist provision through the use of pupil premium we updated our Virtual School offer.

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 CAMHS Practitioner to join our speech and language therapist and educational psychologists.

The tables below provide a breakdown of activities funded through pupil premium.

### Pupil premium spend



## 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:

### Artslink Project

Artslink was set up in 2018 by the consortium of 14 Virtual Schools across the West Midlands. Its mission is to create a high-quality arts and cultural offer which all children in care across the West Midlands can access. The Artslink offer is underpinned by a model of a progression pathway which provides a range of experiences and opportunities that enables children in care to develop their interests and talents.

### 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

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 over 40 young people on our Aspire 2 university programme. We have 7 cohorts running at present from Years 7- 11. Each cohort has 3 outreach activity days a year, 1 per term. Covid 19 has limited the number of face to face activities but online activities have still been available.

### Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book gifting programme for children aged 0-5 operated by the Dollywood Foundation, Dolly Parton's own charity. Their mission is to inspire a lifelong love of books and reading by placing books into the hands of children.

All children enrolled in the Imagination Library programme receive a free book every month from birth until their 5th birthday.

### First News

First News is a weekly newspaper aimed at 7 to 14-year-olds that aims to get children and young people talking about the news in an easy to understand and non-threatening way. The weekly Newspaper covers issues that are relevant to children and which specifically affect them with a mix of world and UK news and loads of fun stuff, such as entertainment, games, animals, sport and puzzles. Using news as a foundation to learning develops children's ability to identify and understand the way facts are presented, explore detail in-depth and evaluate information accurately. All children ages 9-13 receive a weekly copy of first news through their door.

### Storytime Magazine

Reading for pleasure is so important it's now part of the national curriculum, and magazines for children play an important role in that, as well as books. This is why we have subscribed to the magazine for all children in years 1-4. Each magazine is packed with brilliant tales for both boys and girls and each magazine includes a pack of resources relevant to each edition. The magazine is delivered monthly directly to the child's home address.



## **Magazine subscription**

Pictures, short stories and activities open the door to the most reluctant readers, so to encourage our young people in KS4 to continue reading and help spark their interests, we offer all our young people in years 10 & 11 a free annual subscription to a magazine of their choice

## **Summit2Success**

Summit2Success is a project we run for Year 7 & 8 students. The project runs for 9 weeks and has a focus on building resilience, confidence and social skills. As well as the weekly sessions, the group attend one day at an outdoors centre and finish off the course at a weekend residential. Young people are identified through their PEP and given the option to attend.

## **Early Years Enrichment Pack**

Early education and care can have a huge educational and emotional impact both short and long term. We have created a pack of activities and resources for carers to use with our youngest children to support their development. We work with carers, parents and social workers to model how to use the resources. There is a range of fun activities designed to stimulate enjoyment while developing key skills. The pack is delivered termly to the child's address.

## **Book in a Bag**

We have developed our own book gifting programme for children in primary school. These children will receive books with carefully crafted activities to go with them to cultivate a continued love of reading. They will receive their book in a bag once every term.

## **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 project is now in its second year and as of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021 31 schools are involved in the project.

5 schools have achieved their Platinum award, 9 have achieved their gold award and 18 are working towards their Bronze award.





## Support for previously children in care 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 children in care 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 children in care to take on this responsibility.

We currently have 319 previously children in care attending a school in Walsall. This is an increase of 25 since last academic year.

- 146 ceased to be looked after through a Special Guardianship Order
- 136 ceased to be looked after through adoption
- 21 ceased to be looked after through a Child Arrangement Order
- 16 ceased to be looked after through a Residency Order

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

- Challenging schools to avoid drift and delay in relation to the admissions of previously children in care
- Challenging schools in relation to exclusions of previously children in care
- 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 children in care

## 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 to 14 young people classed as UASC.

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. Additional English sessions were delivered during the school holidays.

All children in care with English as their second language receive a laptop to help with communication and to enhance their studies. They also receive a Pearson (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.

## Training for professionals

The Virtual School has a role to ensure that professionals working with children in care 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 children in care.

In the 2020/21 academic year the following training was delivered to schools, social workers and foster carers

- Identifying and supporting care experienced children with communication needs in early years
- Identifying and supporting care experienced children with communication needs in primary
- Identifying and supporting care experienced children with communication needs in secondary
- Study skills support
- How to use Dr Karen Treisman resource to support emotional wellbeing
- An introduction to Trauma & Attachment
- How to use the SDQ
- Person centred training
- Solution circles training



## Celebrating Achievement

Due to the Covid outbreak it was not possible to hold the annual celebration events.

Virtual School staff have sent termly praise/well done post cards to children and young people for achievements identified in their personal education plans.

## Covid 19/Summary

Throughout the whole of the 2020/21 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.

We encouraged our children to attend school to support their education, maintain routines and prevent additional strains on placement with children not being in school. This meant that our children who attended school, especially in the summer term of 2020 and spring term of 2021, were taught in very small group sizes with high levels of adult support. We were aware that children would need support to adjust to all children returning to school, and through the PEPs and Virtual School knowledge of the children offered individualised support to schools on how to manage this change. Educational psychologist support has also been used to support this process using pupil premium.

Where children were not attending school, we worked closely with schools, carers, parents and social workers to ensure that all children had access to appropriate educational provision. We also supported parents/ carers to access other online learning, including our online learning platforms, Reading Eggs and Doodle Maths.

We continued to ensure that every child had a termly PEP, which was quality assured by Virtual School staff. Our ePEP has been amended to capture information on how the disruption of Covid 19 has impacted on the child's education and what intervention is being put in place to support this. The Young Person's Section of the PEP was also amended to gather pupil views of the impact of COVID on their education, and ensure their voices were part of the planning process moving forwards.

Virtual School team have analysed attainment and continue to ensure that appropriate provision is in place for each child to limit the impact of the pandemic. This will include tuition from our Virtual School tutor for children in Years 2, 6 and Reception, tuition offered to all year 11 children, and then further tuition via the PEP for any child who would benefit from this support. Academic mentors have also been identified for some children in secondary school.

We have also worked closely with schools to support any collection of evidence for EHCP requests. The pandemic meant that some of this collection of evidence was limited, and so we have attended PEPs for children who are not making expected progress to ensure appropriate SEN provision is in place and if not, appropriate next steps are made.

We are aware of the impact the COVID pandemic may also have on the social, emotional and mental health needs of the children in our care. With this in mind, we have planned a number of school and carer training sessions to be led by our Educational Psychologists and new CAMHS practitioner. Our Speech and Language Therapists will also continue to share their knowledge and expertise in training sessions for school, parents/carers and social workers.

## Case studies

### 1. Supporting the emotional health and well-being of a primary aged looked after child

#### Child's core experiences

CB has been in care for 2340 days due to neglect, and parental drug misuse and domestic violence. CB and her younger sibling were placed in a connected person's placement for 5 years after the Care Order was enforced, however this ended recently due to ongoing concerns. In June 2020 CB and her sibling were placed with a foster carer and have appeared relatively settled since this move.

#### School Context

CB is in year 5 in a mixed gender primary school for children aged between 3 – 11 years old. This school has capacity for 315 students, of these 5 are Walsall Children in care (LAC). The school has an Ofsted rating of 'Outstanding' (May 2016). The Designated Teacher (DT) is very proactive in seeking support for the LAC, and promotes good communication between the professionals involved.

#### Child's needs at school

CB is currently working below age related expectations in Maths, Literacy, and Reading. The school have identified that CB struggles with sound recognition (phonics) and spelling, and this has caused CB to have some reluctance to engage in literacy work. CB prefers to demonstrate her understanding verbally. CB also struggles with her times tables due to difficulty retaining information. CB continues to practice time tables and reading with her carers and in addition, interventions have been put in place in school to bridge this gap. CB is now making progress towards achieving age related expectations in Maths and Reading.

CB is on the SEN register at school and receives extra support for this.

CB has struggled with her social skills since moving to a new school. She has difficulty communicating her feelings and regulating her emotions. This can lead to CB having emotional outbursts in school including shouting/screaming in class and has made some of CB's peers wary of her. CB has formed some friendships but she needs to develop skills to maintain and repair relationships with her peers.

CB has good attendance in school, although has had to isolate a number of times due to COVID-19. Whilst isolating, CB completed the school work with the support of her carer.

There are some concerns about CB's Social, Emotional, and Mental Health, her SDQ score is in the 'Very High' range, and she has difficulty managing her emotions. CB has recently transitioned to the school and therefore relationships with staff are still fairly surface level. Staff have indicated that at times CB is reluctant to follow instruction, and is quite focused on retaining control of the situation.

Control Chart to help with control issues, and make CB feel more comfortable in following instruction.

#### Intervention

In order to support CB, the Virtual School Offer included an observation of CB, 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.
- Zones of Regulation to develop self-regulation skills, manage sensory needs and improve ability to problem solve.

The SMART goals of this support were:

- To recognise when growing distressed and use language to express this to an adult 2-3 times a week
- To use mindfulness strategies to manage feelings of distress, reducing outbursts in class to 1-2 times a week
- To use friendship skills to repair relationships with peers, resulting in the initiation of one meaningful relationship

The expected outcomes of this support are for CB to notice and communicate her feelings with school staff and peers and use strategies to manage these emotions, leading to improved relationships with schools staff and peers.

## **Child's Views of the support**

CB explained that she had enjoyed the sessions, and that together the mentor and her had explored Emotions and Friendships. She had also enjoyed learning how to play 'Dobble'

## **Impact of Intervention**

In total 11 sessions were completed with CB. This was increased from the original 10 planned due to issues with COVID-19. The DT felt that an extra session was needed to support CB through the lockdown period.

CB engaged with the mentor support well and has benefited from the sessions. CB's communication skills have improved, she can comfortably discuss how she is feeling and reflect on the reasons behind her emotions. The DT reiterates this, reporting that CB has not had any further emotional outbursts but instead has been communicating with her teacher and TA about her

Initially CB found it very difficult to take instruction, she demanded control over the sessions and preferred giving instruction. Over time CB began trusting the mentor more, and also benefitted from the 'Responsibility Chart'. This allowed CB and the mentor to delegate responsibilities, for example; Reading, Spelling, Choosing Game. This reduced conflict in the session and lessened CB's concern about taking instruction. CB is now much more comfortable in taking instruction, and is willing to be led through an activity. This also means that CB is more comfortable with receiving assistance with her work and is more open to correction with her reading or spelling.

The DT has reported that CB has formed a very good relationship with the teaching assistant in her class, and responds positively to teachers.

CB's relationship with her sibling remains strong and she has been able to manage conflicts within this relationship well. The mentor and CB have explored negative thought patterns, and this has enabled CB to reflect on conflicts with her sibling in a healthy way. CB has been able to identify how the conflict made her feel, and counter the statements with facts she knows to be true. This can be challenging and needs to be rehearsed, therefore this work should be continued

## **2. Supporting the educational attainment in Key stage 2 and transition to secondary school**

### **Child's Core experiences**

KL has been in care since July 2020 due to neglect, experiencing significant emotional harm and was at risk of physical harm in her mother's care. There were no family members suggested to care for KL so she was placed with a foster family. KL had stability within that placement while parental assessments were taking place with a view to KL possibly being placed with father.

### **School Context**

KL is in year 6 in a mixed gender junior school for children aged between 7 – 11 years old. This school has capacity for 240 students, of these 2 are Walsall Children in care (LAC). The school has an Ofsted rating of 'Good' (January 2017). The Designated Teacher (DT) is very proactive in seeking support for the LAC and has attended Virtual School training to support her professional development

### **Child's Needs at school**

KL is just about working within Age Related Expectations in maths, reading and writing but due to her lack of self-confidence is finding it difficult to maintain these levels. However, school and Virtual School tutor felt that with additional support KL was capable of achieving ARE.

KL is a quiet girl who takes time to form a relationship. Once she feels confident with a person, she begins to share her thoughts and opinions. She has a group of set friends. She is extremely polite and enjoys 1:1 tuition sessions. She is very keen to learn new concepts. During the first part of lockdown, she remained at home. She returned to school in May.

It was decided in the summer term, that as the Virtual School tutor had built a strong relationship with KL, the tuition would also involve some transition work to prepare her for secondary school.





## Intervention

1:1 Tuition was identified by the Virtual School Education Advisor to support KL with her maths and literacy. Tuition started on 14th September 2020 and continued for the academic year 2020-21. It was reviewed termly, but each time was felt that it was having a positive impact and it would support KL to have tuition for another term. The tuition was for an hour per week, split into 40 minutes for maths and 20 minutes for reading/writing. The tuition was expected to improve her confidence so that she can meet or exceed Age Related Expectations by the end of the academic year.

## Child's View of support

KL enjoys the 1:1 tuition sessions and often comments about how much she has learnt. She is methodical in her work and comments about the new strategies she is learning. She has informed the tutor that she could use these strategies in her class lessons. She was pleased that she achieved 39 out of 40 questions in her Maths Test, which was conducted in class. She said that some of the concepts we had covered were in the test which made her feel more confident. She is beginning to recognise how much she can achieve.

The DT was also pleased with her progress. During her time at home during lockdown, KL chose to write a story book which she has completed with support and guidance from Virtual School tutor. KL wrote a 50 page plus story and completed illustrations. She is very proud of this achievement and enjoys talking about this.

KL's view of transition was that:

- She is nervous and excited at the same time
- She is worried about what the new people she meets will think of her. She said 'ages ago I felt upset and insecure about myself. But I'm not that worried. My life has changed so much( She mentioned being in care) and I'm not the quiet ne now
- When asked if she was worried about her education and not achieving predicted grades, KL said, "Not really, I did well in my SATS and I didn't think I would do well because of everything that happened

However, following the support she shared that she was happy with her support and transition to secondary school, and said, "I think because my new school is smaller than a lot of secondary schools this has helped me as I don't like big groups. When asked if she was worried about her education and not achieving predicted grades, KL said, "Not really, I did well in my SATS and I didn't think I would do well because of everything that happened.

## Impact of Intervention

KL ended Key Stage 2 working comfortably at Age Related Expectations in reading, writing and maths

With support from school and the Virtual School tutor, KL was able to access Reading Eggs and Doodle Maths (Virtual School online learning platforms) regularly which supported her learning.

At the end of year 6, KL was awarded the class award prize. Only two children from each class are chose each year, so it's a big achievement.

Her secondary school reports that she has settled in well and coped well with the transition to secondary school.

### 3. Improving the educational outcomes of young people in KS4

#### Child's Core Experiences:

AJ has been in care since Feb 2020. She has lived in one foster placement since coming into care. She has lived with her sister in the foster placement since they came into care. She has 3 brothers and 1 sister but she doesn't live with any of her siblings.

#### School Content:

AJ has been to one secondary school. She didn't move school when she came into care and she has been at her current secondary school since year 7. AJ has no SEN needs. Her school has 9 other Walsall CLA. It has an RI OFSTED rating and 1429 young people on role between the ages of 11-19.

#### Child's needs at school:

AJ enjoys going to the gym. She is good at sports. She was on the athletics team at school. She had academic mentor support from school during Y11, and extra support from the GCSE PODS. She had a good group of friends at school and during year 11 had very good attendance. She had good behaviour and engages with the school behaviour system well. This improved since she came into care. Prior to that her behaviour was a concern.

#### Intervention:

At her first PEP Virtual School identified that she was capable of gaining grade 4 for both English and Maths, but was working below that grade in both areas. In consultation with AJ, school, home and social worker we put in an hour of English tuition via an external agency; and an hour of Maths tuition via our internal Virtual School tutor. Tuition started on the 12/1/2021 and finished on the 5/5/2021.

#### Child's view of support:

She reported struggling with English throughout her time in Y11 so appreciated the sessions. She engaged fully with them and all the reports say that she had a fantastic attitude to learning as she asked for the tutor to send her additional work. This shows that she was happy with the sessions.

#### Impact of Intervention:

AJ attended the vast majority of her tuition sessions. Both tutors reported that she was fully engaged and working well throughout. They reported that she was achieving the targets that were set as she worked through the sessions. She passed her English and Maths GCSE's and went on to a L2 Apprenticeship at a Primary School. She needed 4's to get onto the apprenticeship. Virtual School also sourced and funded a safeguarding course that she had to complete in order to gain her place on the apprenticeship. She completed the course.



## 4. Supporting young people with mental health issues during Covid 19

### Child's Core Experiences:

LR has been in care since Jun 2019. She lived with her Mum for some of this time and then a short term foster placement, followed by a longer term foster placement where she has been since Oct 2020. She has lived with her sister in the foster placement since they came into care. Her younger sister has recently moved out and LR has stayed with the same carer.

### School Content:

LR has been to 2 schools. One primary and one secondary. She has been at her current secondary school since year 7. LR Has had an EHCP since Dec 2017. The primary need is for Cognition and Learning. She has 15 hours TA support, regular mentoring sessions and support from her school hub if she wants it. The school has an OFSTED rating of 'Good'. They have 8 other Walsall CLA. They have 1489 children on roll of mixed gender between 11-19 years old.

### Child's needs at school:

LR loves outdoor activities such as running, street dancing and boxing. She was on the athletics team at school. She enjoys seeing her friends at school but also enjoyed home learning during lockdown. LR had additional Maths support from a TA at school during year 10. She also has a school mentor and key person to speak to at school. She has a good group of friends at school and during year 10 had very good attendance. She has good behaviour and engages with the school behaviour system well.

### Intervention:

Virtual School Offer ensured that she had mentoring sessions, in school and face to face, once a week to address the need identified in her PEP during lockdown. She told staff that she felt depressed and had headaches during lockdown. The mentoring was put in place to address this. There was a slight delay/disruption due to school bubbles and ways of working, but the mentoring started in Oct 2020. There was an attempt to do online/phone call sessions when in person couldn't take place, but that didn't work, so sessions re-started in person when they could. The mentor and DT communicated well so that our mentor was aware of any issues that had taken place in the week between sessions.

### Child's view of support:

LR has attended her mentoring sessions as often as she could given the covid lockdowns and outbreaks at school. LR has always been engaged in the sessions and keen to attend. Her feedback was as follows:

I feel like it helped me and gave me a free mind after. It just helped me in areas I needed to improve on. I will take away the worry jar with me because after that it gave me positive thoughts and gave me a happy mood. Also I would take the sense with me because it helps me feel less worried and less negative and also makes me feel more confident as well.

### Impact of Intervention:

The social worker has reported that the sessions have been helpful, and LR reported that she wanted a second block of support, following lockdown. As the mentor works for Virtual school they will be able to support longer term, as she moves into Y11. The sessions helped her transition back into school following the disruption of covid. It helped her stay settled in school and get things off her chest so that she could be open to learning at school following the sessions. She also learnt about mindfulness, communication, and managing anxiety via work that was completed with the mentor.

PROOF

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