

## **Virtual School Annual Report**

### **Executive Summary:**

Local authorities have a duty under the children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their care. 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 local authority effectively discharges its statutory duty to promote the education of children in care

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

The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of the Virtual School and report on the 2020-21 educational outcomes of Walsall's children in care and the work carried out to support children and young people during the Covid pandemic

Attainment and attendance data contained in this report is for children who were in the care of Walsall Council for a year or more as at 31 March 2021.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **That:**

The Board is asked to note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to promoting the educational achievement of children in care and children previously in care

The report be read with an understanding that the COVID19 pandemic has affected all measures this academic year and outcomes are only available for Year 11 students and based on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). There are no reported outcomes for EYFS, KS1 or KS2 again this year.

### **Background papers:**

The Virtual School Annual report 2020/21  
The Virtual School Offer

### **Corporate Parenting Pledges**

- We promise to help you to play and learn at a school that is right for you

- We promise to make sure that you have the best education possible and help you to plan for your future
- We promise to help you to enjoy new experiences and develop your own interests and hobbies
- We promise to make sure that you get all the help and support you need to learn, achieve and succeed
- We promise to help you with your education and with finding the right employment and training opportunities.

### **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;

### **Performance management**

As part of the Council's annual cycle of Employee Performance Reviews, all members of the Virtual school have non-negotiable objectives related to pupil outcomes.

### **Reducing inequalities:**

All pupils receive appropriate levels of support and funding to achieve successful educational outcomes.

### **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

State here the council corporate plan priorities that this issue links to and supports.

### **Citizen impact:**

State here the impact on the public, specific service users and other stakeholders.


**Environmental impact:**

State here the potential environmental impact of the scrutiny exercise

**Consultation:**

Access & Inclusion Senior Management Team  
Virtual School Management Board

**Contact Officer:**

Lorraine Thompson- Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead  
 . 01922 652837  
Lorraine.thompson@walsall.gov.uk

## **1. Introduction**

The Virtual School Annual Report 20/21 outlines the full activity of the Virtual School. This report provides an executive summary of the work carried out by the virtual school in the 2020/21 academic year.

## **2. Headline Outcomes**

There were 50 young people in the Year 11 reporting cohort, which consisted of:

- 30 (60%) boys and 20 (40%) girls.
- 24 (48%) had identified SEN.
- 14 (28%) had an EHCP,
- 36 (72%) were on the roll of a mainstream school
- 3 (6%) attended a maintained/academy Special School
- 11 (22%) attending an Independent Special School.

We are delighted to report that not only did we see further improvements from the 2020 GCSE results but the 2021 GCSE results were the best ever GCSE results reported for children in care

The number of young people gaining 5 or more 4-9 GCSEs (or equivalent) passes has increased from 29% in 2020 to 38% in 2021. This was better than regional, national and statistical neighbour reported outcomes

We have also seen a rise in the number of young people achieving 5-9 GCSEs from 15% in 2020 to 19% in 2021. Again this was better than regional, national and statistical neighbour reported outcomes

## **3. Attendance & Exclusions**

Due to the pandemic the attendance of our looked after children does not give a true reflection of their engagement in education. Although our children and young people were allowed into school, many carers chose to educate children at home during the second lockdown. The government had changed the attendance reporting, and children in care were marked as authorised absence.

The overall rate of attendance for our children in in 2021 was 83.65%

We continued to have no permanent exclusions in 2021. We challenge any school which considers permanent exclusion, and implement appropriate support and intervention, using Pupil Premium Plus funding to avoid the exclusion.

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.

#### 4. Quality Assurance of PEPs

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 team attended 630 PEP meetings in the 2021 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 our outstanding in the autumn term to 72.6% in the spring term and 77% in the summer term.

#### 5. 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..

We also use pupil premium funding to provide enrichment activities to our children and young people. Some of the projects funded this year include:

**Early Years Enrichment Pack-** a pack of activities and resources for parents/carers to use to support the development of our children in aged 3-5 years

**Summit2Success** – A programme for year 7 & 8 students which runs for 9 weeks throughout the summer term with a focus on building resilience, confidence and social skills.

**Artslink Project** - Artslink was set up in 2018 by the consortium of 14 Virtual Schools across the West Midlands to enable all children in care across the West Midlands to access a range of experiences and opportunities that enables them to develop their interests and talents.