



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 21 JANUARY
2020**

LEICESTERSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work undertaken by the Virtual School (VS) over the past 12 months and the outcomes for children in care. This report also provides a contextual summary of the VS 2019 cohort and their 2019 examination results.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The 1989 Children Act places a duty on the local authority to promote the educational achievement of looked after children, and the Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended this duty to include previously looked after children. These duties are set out in the 2018 statutory guidance “Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children”.
3. In an effort to narrow achievement gaps over time between children in care and their non-looked after peers, the local authority has a duty to:
 - promote the aspirations and educational achievement of children in care wherever they live or are educated;
 - work in partnership with all agencies to ensure appropriate education provision;
 - ensure good quality Personal Education Planning (PEP);
 - manage the Pupil Premium Plus funding for children in care;
 - monitor the results of children in care and report on them.
4. The VS discharges its duties to previously looked after children by delivering educational advice and information to schools, parents and others who the VS Head considers necessary.

Background

The role of the Leicestershire Virtual School

5. The VS has a focus on improving educational outcomes for children in care, from Early Years upwards (from the point at which the child becomes eligible for free early education, currently the start of the term following a child’s second birthday); care leavers to age 21 years (or 25 if requested) and previously looked after children up to the age of 16 years.
6. The VS supports children and young people in care and care leavers regardless of where they are living in the country and this includes all Unaccompanied Asylum-

Seeking Children (UASC). Children and young people are supported by VS team members acting as corporate parents with a specific focus on education.

7. The VS is concerned with raising self-esteem, expectations and aspirations, removing barriers to learning and working with schools, colleges and settings and other agencies to enable children and young people to receive the best support for their emotional and mental health needs and improve their educational outcomes and life chances.
8. The VS works collaboratively with a full range of stakeholders, and key to the task is the work with schools, including Head Teachers, Secondary Education Inclusion Partnerships, Designated Teachers (DT) (a statutory post to support children in care in all schools) and school governors, who are vital to securing accountability for this agenda. VS training supports partners to understand the needs of looked after children and promote understanding in others, enabling them to nurture recovery and progress over time.
9. The VS does not teach the children in care, as responsibility and accountability for this rests with their schools and settings. However, the VS manages and distributes the Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) funding, requiring schools to define its intended use and impact against specific Personal Education Planning (PEP) targets. This is monitored by the VS on an ongoing basis through PEP meetings and rigorous quality assurance procedures. The PEP process is overseen by the VS, ensuring a high completion rate and good quality outcomes.
10. The VS supports previously looked after children by offering advice and information about issues relating to education to schools, parents and any other person deemed relevant by the VS Head. The VS has experienced an increasing number of requests for advice and help from schools and parents and the team delivers information, advice and in-school training and signposts resources where appropriate.
11. The VS Head has contributed to the re-drafting of the Leicestershire Education, Employment and Training (EET) Strategy and has implemented an action plan focusing on ensuring looked after children and care leavers access appropriate and individualised careers advice and support to access EET.
12. In June 2019 the VS Head achieved agreement from Leicestershire County Council's People Strategy Board to continue ring-fencing County Council apprenticeships for children in care and care leavers. The apprenticeships are matched to young people who have expressed an interest in that area of work and have the relevant qualifications.

New Developments - Exclusion Review

13. In May 2019, the government published an externally-led review of exclusions practice, led by Edward Timpson CBE. It highlights variation in exclusions practice across different schools, local authorities and certain groups of children. The review makes 30 recommendations to ensure exclusions are used appropriately and the government has committed to new school accountability measures.
14. Looked after children are no more or less likely to be permanently excluded than their peers (all children). However, the report, based on data for 2016/17, finds that looked after children are the group most at risk of fixed term exclusion and are over five times

more likely than their peers (all children) to experience one or more period of fixed term exclusion.

15. There have been no permanent exclusions of Leicestershire looked after children for several years, but data for Leicestershire looked after children, whilst better than national looked after children, reflects the trend regarding fixed term exclusions.
16. A key recommendation of the Timpson Report is that school leaders should be able:

“to share practical information on behaviour management strategies, including how to develop and embed a good understanding of how underlying needs can drive behaviour”. “This should include expert training on the underlying causes of poor behaviour (including attachment, trauma and speech, language and communication needs, among others)”
17. The government response notes that:

“statutory guidance for Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers for Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children places an emphasis on whole-school awareness of the impact of trauma and attachment disorders” and they will “consider the need for further training and support on attachment and trauma as part of the Children in Need Review.”
18. The Leicestershire VS continues to provide school senior leadership, governors, Designated Teachers and other staff members with attachment and trauma awareness training and its conference in February 2020 “Preparing all learners for future success” has as its focus the exclusion of vulnerable children from school.

New Developments – 2019 Ofsted Inspection of Children’s Social Care Services

19. The recent inspection of Leicestershire Children’s Social Care Services identified that a few children attend non-registered alternative provision and determined that there is insufficient oversight of the quality of education provided in these settings. The report recognises that suitable plans in place to address this and the VS is formalising processes to gather and record evidence from commissioners of alternative provision to show they have effective ongoing quality assurance procedures in place.
20. In addition to monitoring the progress of children in alternative provision at PEPs, the VS will be seeking commissioners’ evidence of the children’s progress as supplied by the alternative provision.
21. To capture the impact of wider enrichment activity on children’s progress the VS asks for involvement in VS activities to be included on the participating children’s PEP and schools are notified of this. Participants in activities are requested to complete feedback forms which evidence the impact of the activity on them.
22. The DfE implementation grant provided to support local authorities in meeting their duties to previously looked-after children will be used to supplement the capacity of the VS to respond to rising numbers of requests for advice and information and develop and deliver relevant training to schools, adopters and prospective adopters.

2019-20 academic year – Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) funded interventions

23. The VS top-slices £400 of PPP per eligible pupil to create a pooled resource, allowing the VS to fund interim education provision where children are out of education as a result of a placement move, or a delay in accessing a school place. The pooled resource also funds participation activities that support the development of children's aspirations and self-esteem.

One to one tuition

24. The VS promotes one to one tuition as an effective means of enabling pupils to fulfil their academic potential. Supplementary tuition for primary and secondary pupils, agreed at PEP meetings, is funded through PPP, managed by the VS and allocated by the VS Head to schools.
25. The VS can arrange for tuition to be provided by tuition companies from its standing list of providers; thereafter schools are able to commission them directly. The aim is for schools to take more responsibility for sourcing the additional support required by children and to ensure it complements the work being undertaken in school.
26. Post-16 students requiring support to improve their maths and English qualifications can also be provided with tuition.

Learning Support Assistant (LSA)

27. The VS funds additional LSA support to facilitate effective transitions, academic progress and promote emotional stability in class. LSA support is agreed for a specific number of hours per week and for a specific duration, whereon it is reviewed, and new arrangements agreed if necessary.

Educational Psychologist Support

28. The VS has a contract with the Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service (LEPS) to provide 52 days of dedicated Educational Psychologist work during the year. This facilitates timely access to the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process for children in care.

Participation activities

29. As corporate parents, the VS provides a range of participation opportunities that raise aspirations and promote engagement in education, in order to unlock children's potential and achieve success. These activities cover the primary, secondary and post-16 age ranges and cater for a variety of interests.
30. Children and young people have attended annual University Experience days and residential visits, giving them the opportunity to experience university life, discover the courses that are available, learning how their attendance can be supported financially and how Higher Education can enhance employment prospects.
31. Other participation events are sport- or culture-based, giving children and young people the opportunity to take part in activities that they might otherwise not experience. This includes theatre trips, author events, music workshops, sporting activities and the annual Year 11 post exam Tall Ships reward trip.
32. All the participation events are well-attended, and feedback demonstrates progress in confidence, self-esteem and attitudes to the learning experience.

33. Since July 2019, participation trips have included:
- Pedestrian Arts 5-day music workshop
 - Forest Schools
 - Alton Towers – The Big Convoy
 - Curve Theatre – Grease
 - Curve Theatre – Pizza Shop Heroes (focusing on UASC)
 - Charnwood Museum - Dastardly Dinosaurs
 - Bosworth Battlefield – Disgustarous Romans
 - Tall Ships Trust 5-day residential
 - Loughborough Museum – Day of the Dead

Book parcels

34. Monthly book parcels are sent out to children: Bookworm parcels go to children in Reception and Year 2 between November and April; Boomerang parcels go to children in Years 4 and 6 from May to October; and Letterbox book parcels go to children in Years 1, 3, 5 and 7 from May to October.
35. The VS also subscribes to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library which provides a monthly delivery of books free of charge to all children in care between 0 and 5 years.

Creative Writing Project

36. A creative writing project resulted in the publication of the “Superheroes!” book featuring 48 stories written by Leicestershire looked after children. The book was launched at an event at the Sue Townsend Theatre, Leicester on 8th October and was featured in an ITV Central News bulletin Good Morning Britain and the BBC Radio Leicester Breakfast Show. Enquiries to purchase copies of the book have come from across the UK, with one order coming from Australia.

Newsletters

37. There is now a bi-annual Virtual School and Corporate Parenting newsletter which is sent to every child in the care of Leicestershire during the autumn and summer terms. This newsletter promotes children’s involvement in educational experiences and celebrates their success.
38. The VS sends a termly Designated Teacher newsletter to all schools attended by Leicestershire children in care. This gives up-to-date information around local and national developments, events and training and provides useful advice about PEP meetings, PPP spending, children adopted from care and other issues pertinent to the role of the Designated Teacher.
39. The VS makes monthly contributions to Fostering News, Special Guardian (SGO) newsletters, adoption newsletters and the Leicestershire Governor publication for school governors.
40. The Virtual School website is updated regularly with information pertinent to schools, social workers, children and adoptive parents and special guardians.
<https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/leicestershire-virtual-school>

Virtual School Training

Training for schools

41. The VS offers bespoke attachment, trauma and emotion coaching training packages to schools, which continue to be very well received. The VS is now developing training that targets school senior leadership teams in order to more effectively embed attachment aware practice in both primary and secondary schools in Leicestershire with the aim of reducing the number of fixed term exclusions experienced by looked after children.
42. The innovative Leicestershire VS Key Adult Learning Module project is well-embedded in the Leicestershire Designated Teacher training programme; the following is feedback on the impact of the strategies learnt from the 2018-19 course and the positive impact they have had on pupils:
 - He is now a *“happy secure child making progress with their learning. Popular with class, forging friendships with a growing range of children.”*
 - *“Anxiety levels are lower, and the child appears more contented and relaxed in the company of peers and forming better relationships with peers.”*
 - He is *“arriving at school with a positive outlook and ready to start the day. Beginning to show a greater self-worth as well as praising his peers when he recognises their achievements.”*
43. Foster carers benefit from VS training on a number of topics covering Early Years to Post-16, helping to raise educational and EET awareness, as well as helping them to develop an understanding of the barriers to learning that children in care face and giving them strategies to support.
44. Induction training for new Designated Teachers is held twice yearly, as is training for governors and social workers. Designated Teacher events promote networking opportunities and the first PEP workshop took place on 20 November 2019.
45. Evaluations of all the VS training continue to be excellent: 99% of attendees rate it as “Useful” or “Very Useful” and would recommend to others.
46. The VS offers educational awareness training to social workers, personal assistants (PAs) and foster carers, with information about provision for Early Years to Post-16. These sessions help carers to develop an understanding of the barriers to learning faced by children in care and offers strategies in support.
47. Training for social workers and personal assistants covers education issues and how to support young people to remain in or re-engage in Education, Employment or Training.

The Virtual School conference 2020

48. The Leicestershire Virtual School 2020 Conference - “Preparing all Learners for Future Success” - takes place on Thursday 27 February at the King Power Stadium, Leicester.

49. The new Ofsted framework focuses on the extent to which school *“leaders’ and managers’ high ambitions”* include *“all pupils, including those who are harder to reach”*. This conference will look at how schools’ vision, ethos and strategic direction can be shaped to provide *“high-quality education for all pupils”*.
50. The conference will target school senior leaders, governors, designated teachers and Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator’s (SENCOs) who will hear how school policies impact on the everyday experience of children, especially looked after and previously looked after children.
51. The conference will feature:
 - Jaz Ampaw-Farr, who grew up in care and is now an internationally renowned motivational speaker
 - Dave Whitaker, Director of Learning for the Wellspring Academy Trust, National Leader of Education, member of the DFE’s Timpson Exclusions Review expert reference group, founder member of the Head Teachers’ Roundtable think-tank and chair of The Difference Programme Board.
 - A panel of care-experienced young people, who will recount their experiences in education, identifying the things that supported them to achieve success.

Outcomes for Leicestershire Children in Care 2019

52. In monitoring the attendance, exclusions and the attainment and progress of children and young people, the VS obtains a unique oversight of their education which is shared with relevant partners with the aim of securing accountability for their educational outcomes, supporting and challenging partners as necessary to help the children and young people achieve their full potential.
53. Each VS Education Improvement Officer is responsible for monitoring and challenging the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of their own caseload of pupils. Higher levels of absence and exclusion than their peers are of concern and the VS is working with schools and education services to address the reasons.
54. As at the end of the academic year 2018-19, there were 378 Leicestershire children of statutory school age in care: 203 boys and 175 girls. This number has risen from 263 at the same point in 2012 (an increase of 43.7% in 6 years and an increase of 8.6% on 2017). Numbers continue to increase into 2019.
55. Compared to the general school population, a high percentage of looked after children have Special Educational Needs (SEN); 100 children (26.5%) of the Leicestershire VS cohort had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) compared with 2.9% of their peers.
56. Of the overall cohort, 73.3% (277/378) young people were placed within Leicestershire schools and 26.7% (101/378) were placed out of county.
57. 234/277 pupils (84.5%) attending Leicestershire schools were in ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rated schools and 87/101 pupils (86.1%) attending out of county schools were in in ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rated schools.

Key Stage Test and Examination Results

58. References to VS children in care include pupils being educated in schools both within and beyond Leicestershire (the VS cohort) and figures are for those in care continually for at least 12 months as at 31st March 2019.
59. Test and examination results for 2019 remain provisional and will be published on confirmation of the data later in the academic year.
60. Instability, high levels of complex needs and length of time in/point of entry into care remain key factors influencing GCSE attainment at Key Stage 4. Numbers of pupils with SEND and the small numbers within cohorts also need to be taken into account when attempting comparisons with other groups.

2018/19 Headline Summary Children in Care Attainment against Key Measures – all Key Stages:

	2019
KS1 Expected Standard Reading, Writing and Maths	22.2%
KS2 Expected Standard Reading, Writing and Maths	36.8%
KS4 Attainment 8	22.48
KS4 Progress 8 - State funded schools	-1.37
KS4 Achieving a pass in English and Maths GCSEs (Grade 9-4 pass)	25.0%
KS4 Achieving a pass in English and Maths GCSEs (Grade 9-5 pass)	10.0%
KS4 English Baccalaureate Average point score	1.5

61. DfE headline measures focus on Progress 8; Attainment 8; passes at grade 4 and grade 5 or above in English and maths; EBacc entry and success and the percentage of students staying in education or employment after KS4.

All Schools	Total cohort	Good Pass English (5 or above)	Good Pass Maths (5 or above)	Good Pass Eng and Maths (5 or above)	Standard Pass English (4 or above)	Standard Pass Maths (4 or above)	Standard Pass Eng and Maths (4 or above)
Financial Year - In care for continuous 12 Months as at 31 March 2019	40	7	4	4	12	10	10
Financial Year - In care for continuous 12 Months as at 31 March 2019		17.5%	10.0%	10.0%	30.0%	25.0%	25.0%

62. For those young people who finished year 11 in academic year 2017/18, of the 37 young people who had been in care for a continuous 12 months as at 31 March 2018, 31/37 (83.8%) were still in education, employment or training at the end of the academic year.

2018/19 Attendance and exclusions

Attendance

63. Reporting is prompt and supported by the use of Welfare Call alerts. Weekly attendance and exclusion reports allied to termly Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) Red / Amber / Green (RAG) reports from schools enable the VS to robustly monitor and support this agenda, responding to emerging issues and supporting pupils to maintain their attendance.
64. The VS works collaboratively with social workers, carers and schools to address individual attendance issues as they appear. Attendance increased to 92.19% in 2018-19, and the percentage of pupils with persistent absence (less than 90% attendance) increased marginally to 17.99% in 2018-19.

Exclusions

65. The VS works closely with Schools/Settings/Services to develop an understanding of looked after children's issues and appropriate strategies to address them. The VS is working with the Leicestershire Secondary and Primary Heads group to promote the attachment and trauma training to school senior leadership teams and identifying alternatives to exclusion.
66. The 2020 VS conference will target schools' senior leadership teams and address the need for individualised approaches to behaviour concerns to enable vulnerable pupils to develop and thrive in school.
67. There were no permanent exclusions of Leicestershire looked after children in 2018-2019. The overall percentage of children receiving at least one fixed term exclusion decreased from 12.32% (50 pupils) in 2017-18 to 9.58% (41 pupils) in 2018-19. Primary fixed term exclusions have fallen by 0.33% and secondary fixed term exclusions have fallen by 4.21%.

School Admission Performance Information

68. The annual report of the Chief Schools Adjudicator for England records the progress made by admission authorities in England in complying fully with the School Admissions Code and achieving fair access to schools for all children.
69. The latest report to the Secretary of State for Education (published 17 January 2019) covers the 2017-2018 academic year. Having warned in 2018 that some school admissions authorities... *"appear to seek to delay or discourage the admission of looked-after children who need a new school place partway through the school year"*, this year the Chief adjudicator Shan Scott added *"some of the children who can least afford to miss any part of their education are out of school for too long."*
70. In Leicestershire, the response to requests for a school place for children in care varies depending on whether the admissions arrangements for the school are administered by Leicestershire County Council Admissions team or the school.
71. Primary schools are generally responsive to applications. In 2018/19 two out of sixteen in-year applications to Leicestershire primary schools for children without an EHCP resulted in a child missing more than five days of education; one because it was a child placed for adoption and a delayed start was agreed and one was where consultation with the initial preferred school resulted in a change in the application.

72. At secondary, three out of eight in-year applications to Leicestershire secondary schools for children without an EHCP resulted in a child missing more than five days of education: two unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who were out of education for 15 and 25 school days and one was a child without a school place whose admission was delayed as the school applied to was over number and an application was submitted to another local school.
73. There are examples of good practice where schools have been prompt in their acceptance of in-year requests for school places and supported children to settle quickly in their new environment. This is usually the case where staff and senior leadership have a good understanding of attachment and trauma issues and work closely with the VS.
74. Instances of both good and poor practice are included in the Leicestershire contribution to the Annual School Adjudicator Report.

Background Papers

- Statutory guidance for local authorities:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children
- Ofsted Education inspection framework (EIF):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf
- Timpson Review of School Exclusion:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

There are no equality or human rights implications arising from this report.

Officers to Contact

Nicci Collins, Head of Service – Fostering, Adoption, CiC Service and the Virtual School
Email: nicci.collins@leics.gov.uk
Telephone number: 0116 3054504

Tony Barnard, Virtual School Head
Email: tony.barnard@leics.gov.uk
Telephone number: 0116 3056460