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**Report of Melanie Stubbs, Durham Virtual School Head, Children & Young People's Services, Durham County Council**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide an outline summary of the full virtual school annual report for 2020-2021 (appendix 2). This summary focuses on children and young people of statutory school age.

**Executive summary**

- 2 In line with DfE reporting, the data reported in this document is based on those children and young people who have been continuously looked after for a minimum of 12 months from April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 – hereafter referred to as the reporting cohort. This executive summary covers statutory school age, whilst the body of the report also includes Early Years and Post 16.

At Durham virtual school we believe we are making a difference to the education of children and young people in care. This report is unable to evidence educational outcomes and strong progress from entry to care this year due to the COVID-19 restrictions placed upon schools. There are no KS 1 and 2 results, however there is evidence of progress for KS4 following the submission of Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). Good attendance, few exclusions, high aspirations, strong vocational and academic pathways and effective preparation for adulthood continue to be evident for Children Looked After (CLA). This is all brought about by a virtual school team which advocates strongly and loudly for our young people and collaborative working with stakeholders. Over the last three years we have insisted on an increasing focus on the education of children in care within schools and with our partners and raised the profile of the work of the virtual school, developing very close working relationships with headteachers and designated teachers. The strengthening of the virtual school has allowed us to have increased capacity to attend PEP meetings and work more directly with social workers and schools to achieve the best outcomes for CLA.

## **Recommendation(s)**

- 3 It is recommended that members CPP note the contents of the full annual report.
- 4 The virtual school head should ensure that looked after children and young people remain a priority focus within the wider team.
- 5 The virtual school head should ensure that the identified priorities are actioned to further improve the educational achievement of looked after children.
- 6 That 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 Grads (TAGs). There are no outcomes for EYFS, KS1 or KS2 again this year.

## **Background**

- 7 As of July 2021, there were 573 Durham looked after children of statutory school age. 48% were of primary age and 52% were of secondary age. 45.8% were female and 54.2% were male. 81% attended County Durham schools and 19% attend out of County schools, this is an increase of 3.6% from last year.
- 8 At the end of the academic year 2020-21, 61% attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better. As of July 2021, 120 (19%) of children and young people attended a school with a grade of Requires Improvement or below. To avoid additional trauma, we do not routinely remove a child from a school which becomes Inadequate unless there was an exceptional reason, but we do provide additional scrutiny and academic support if required. 125 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion.
- 9 In 2020-2021 there were 69 school moves, an increase of 81.6% from the previous year. 38% of school moves were to support moving to a permanent placement or due to distance placed from school, while 3% were due to a child returning to the care of their parents. 6 young people moved onto the roll of Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision and continued to be heavily supported by the Virtual School. 3 young people moved into secure placements due to their social care needs. In all cases appropriate education provision was in place to ensure both care and education needs were being met appropriately. Distance and movement of school due to permanent places remain the most significant factors in requesting a school move.

49% of Durham looked after children had an identified special educational need (SEN) in 2020-21, an increase of 6% from 2019/20 with 21% of them supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This has increased by 2% over the last two years. 28% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 4% since 2019/20. A challenge for Durham Virtual School is to ensure that the needs of children with a SEN Support Plan are known and strategies put in place at transition points.

## **Headline Outcomes 2020**

- 10 There were 47 young people in the Year 11 reporting cohort, which consisted of 49% boys and 51% girls. 22 had identified SEN, 47% of the group. 13 had an EHCP, 28% of the reporting cohort, a decrease of 12% from 2020. 66% were on the roll of a mainstream Secondary, a 15% increase from 2020. 13% attended a maintained/academy Special School with an additional 6% attending an Independent Special School. 1 young person attended a bespoke education package supported by his EHCP. 6 pupils attended an Ofsted registered Alternative Provision. From the reporting cohort 9 pupils were not following a curriculum that included GCSE's due to their SEN. All had needs met through an EHCP.
- 11 We are delighted to report further improvement from 2020, with a positive 3-year trend in pupils achieving maths at Grade 4+. After a dip last year in English grades, both English 9-4 and English 9-5 grades have increased. Both Maths and English grades at 5+ have increased with the number achieving a grade 5+ in Maths doubling from last year. The numbers of young people achieving grade 9 – 4 in both Maths and English, 38%, also rose significantly from last year.
- 12 28% of the cohort year group had an EHCP and 9 of these were not following a GCSE curriculum. However, of the 4 young people with an EHCP who were following a GCSE curriculum, 3 achieved a 9-1 grade in Maths and English. One of those young people achieved Grade 4 in the Basics.
- 13 Unlike last year, where boys outperformed girls across the board, this year has seen our girls achieve significantly more 9-4 grades than boys, in Maths, English and the Basics. However, there is a more even split in the 9-5 grades, with boys achieving more 9-5 grades in both Maths and the Basics. Further analysis will take place to consider how our boys can be supported to achieve higher grades, particularly in English. However, consideration needs to be given to the varying cohort and we must ensure further analysis takes place this year to identify areas of development within the current Year 11 cohort. 2021 – 2022 cohort will sit formal exams; this will bring challenges for a cohort of young people who will have experienced disruption over the last two years.

- 14 Durham CLA continue to do better than those regionally and nationally based upon 2019 outcomes.
- 15 Of the 56 young people leaving statutory education in June 2020, early indication shows that 43 have moved onto Sixth form or College, 4 are either in Apprenticeships or other training. At this point we believe 8 are NEET.
- 16 Early indication shows that 9 Care Leavers achieved A Levels and BTEC equivalents in August 2021.

### **Attendance and Exclusions**

- 17 Attendance continues to be a strength of the virtual school. The slight increase in absence and persistent absence is in line with the national and local trend.
- 18 Due to the pandemic the attendance of CLA does not give a true reflection of the cohort's attendance as many carers chose to educate the children at home during the second lockdown. The Government had changed the attendance guidance, and CLA were marked as authorised absence.
- 19 We have not had any permanently excluded looked after children since 2014. We work closely with schools and settings to support children when there is a need for a FTE. Fixed Term Exclusions remain low for Durham CLA. The academic year 2020/21 has seen a rise against the Autumn term 2019/20. Data reflects the full academic year. 5.6% of CLA cohort experienced a Fixed term exclusion, this represents 22 children /young people, 18 were in the Secondary sector.

### **Quality Assurance of the PEP**

- 20 During 2020-2021 all young people had a PEP on the Welfare Call system completed. This was an improvement of 5% from the previous year, when compliance was 95%. Introducing the electronic PEP has improved and streamlined many processes including tracking PEP completion; monitoring involvement; tracking and analysing Pupil Premium Plus use and the quality assurance process.
- 21 89.2% of PEPs were rated as high quality (green), an increase of 17% against 2019/20, with 10.8% rated as amber which indicates an aspect was missing. In these cases, the CLA PEP Caseworker raised the area for improvement with either the school or the Social worker.

### **Pupil Premium Plus Funding**

- 22 In 2020-21 (Financial Year) our total PP+ budget was £1,634,388. Schools were allocated £1,700 of the government allocation of £2,345

in 3 instalments. However, due to continued school closures and a need for schools to be able to access funding to address gaps in knowledge and emotional health, we decided to increase all termly payments to £600. In total, approximately £958,336 was provided to schools during the 2020-21 academic year to support their work with children in care.

- 23 A significant amount of the PP+ funding given to schools is spent on one-to-one tuition. 58.3% of PP+ funding given to schools is used to support individuals with academic progress and achievement.
- 24 The top sliced PP+ is used to buy a variety of Service Level Agreements to support CLA and allow schools to act in a timely manner when a need is identified. In 2020-21 (Financial Year) Durham Virtual School retained approx. £698,152. The full report gives a detailed account of how this was used.
- 25 All schools were given an additional £135 for every child of statutory school age and asked to use it to support emotional wellbeing or “catch up” activities.

### **Durham Virtual School Team**

- 26 The casework team of seven has been able to maintain the high level of support for our young people and challenge for schools. During the pandemic the team have been able to attend more meetings virtually. The agreement by Durham County Council to increase capacity of the virtual school from September 2020 has improved our offer to schools and allowed a more targeted response to our children. This has also led to improved communications with Social Workers and Carers.
- 27 We have continued to provide advice to parents of Previous CLA and those on Special Guardianship Orders, thus meeting our duties as a Virtual School.
- 28 The report for 2020-21 shows the inclusion of a Deputy Virtual School Head in the structure diagram. From September 2021 the holder of this post has returned to his substantive post in SEND and Inclusion full time, thus this post no longer exists as we move into the new academic year.

### **Virtual School Areas for Development.**

- 29 The key priorities for 2021-22 have been identified through consultation, data analysis, response to the gaps COVID 19 has created the inclusion of EYFS and Post 16 in the ePEP system and the development of the new VS team.
  - Introduce the Nursery 1 ePEP through work with EY team

- Support KS1 to close gaps emerging during Lockdown
- Support more children to achieve high scores / greater depth at KS2
- Appropriate curriculum access / bespoke offers when a child requires a different approach.
- Work in partnership to develop clear academic and vocational pathways in preparation for adulthood
- Develop systems to support Post 16 through the ePEP for Year 12 and 13 and avoid NEETs.
- Further raise awareness in all schools and settings of the impact of early trauma and insecure attachment on behaviour and learning and support schools to review policies and implement change
- Improve the quality of the PEPs through a swift approach to quality assurance.
- Further strengthen links with the Children in Care Council (CICC).
- Contribute to an increasingly integrated and joined-up process with health and social care teams to provide a holistic and cohesive approach to support readiness to learn by building on the systems developed through the pandemic.
- Promote the role of the CLA PEP Caseworkers through their presence at PEP meetings.
- Ensure the additions to the casework team enhances our offer for children in care through support and challenge for schools.
- Distribute the CLA Covid Catch up fund to schools and hold them accountable for its effective use.
- Continue to offer advice and signposting for previously children in care
- Develop our therapeutic offer to schools through the Full Circle SLA, develop the training package provided by Full Circle to all Designated Teachers with a Durham CLA in school.
- Develop the use of the Clear Cut Tool at the entry into care PEP meeting to support CLA through better communication.

- Ensure a robust system is in place to increase school stability through monitoring and challenge.

## **Conclusion**

The VS annual report provides a comprehensive overview of the performance of our CLA in schools across County Durham and those placed outside of Durham during the academic year 2020/21. The report also takes account of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions on learning and exam results. It highlights the support by the virtual school, schools, and other agencies to help CLA achieve better outcomes. It reflects the commitment we have to our children and young people and how we strive for excellence in our offer to meet their needs.

## **Background papers**

- Virtual School Annual Report 2020-2021

## **Other useful documents**

- Previous Cabinet reports

## **Author(s)**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that top priority is given to creating a culture of high educational aspirations and strives for accelerated progress and age-related attainment or better for looked-after children.

### **Finance**

De-Delegated funding of £73,000 by Maintained Primary Schools has been used to provide additional behaviour support in school through the Behaviour Intervention Team. Additional burdens grant determination funding of £78,068 has been allocated to Durham to support the work of the Virtual School head with previously looked after children for 2021/22.

### **Consultation**

Ongoing consultation with schools through briefings and a designated teacher network meeting. Consultation with young people through the CiCC.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

As a public body, the Council must take into account the Equality Act 2010, a consolidating Act which brings together previous Acts dealing with discrimination. Decisions must be reviewed for potential impact on persons with "protected characteristics".

### **Climate Change**

Text.

### **Human Rights**

It is the right of the child to a high-quality PEP that identifies their needs, sets targets, and uses PP+ appropriately to support their educational outcomes. It is their right to have their voice heard and contribute to matters that affect them in education. We acknowledge the Children Promise and have highlighted this in the Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Policy we have shared with schools and settings.

### **Crime and Disorder**

Young people who do not access full-time education are more at risk of criminality, CSE or criminal exploitation across county lines. The VS supports all CLA to find the right setting to support their needs and promotes high attendance in school.

## **Staffing**

The seconded post for developing the offer for previously looked after children has become a permanent post of CLA and PCLA Manager. The increase of 4 CLA PEP caseworkers to 7. A new post of a CLA front door manager to strengthen the offer to schools and CLA. Moving forward through the decision of Secondary schools to no longer de-delegate funds there may be implications to the staff who run the Virtual School Inclusion Base at Lanchester, funding will need to come from top sliced Pupil premium Plus. This will have implications upon the wider offer to schools.

Due to the additional responsibilities given to Virtual Heads from September 2021 both the CLA/PCLA Manager and Front Door Manager have taken on extra responsibilities to allow the VSH to meet the requirements of the role and accountability for CIN/CP. They are currently receiving a temporary upgrade in salary funded through Grant 31.

From September 2021 the role of Deputy Virtual Head was removed from the Virtual School structure.

## **Accommodation**

The Virtual School Head is based at Green Lane. Spennymoor whilst the CLA/PCLA Manager, Front Door Manager and Casework team are based at Broom Cottages Primary School. This is historic and stems back to when the Virtual School sat in SEND and Inclusion. The full team now sit in Education Durham.

The Inclusion Base is placed at Lanchester and is accommodated within the building known as The Bridge.

## **Risk**

The extended offer to schools and settings relies upon Pupil Premium Plus. Staff costs are funded through the Corporate budget; however this does not apply to two members of staff at the Inclusion Base. The Base is an asset and supports CLA in times of crisis.

## **Procurement**

The contract with Welfare Call will end in March 2022. It would not be wise to change the provider for the ePEP system due to the system we have established with schools and Social Care. Further discussions are necessary to look at this going forward.