



Report of Melanie Stubbs, Virtual School Head, 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 2021-2022. This summary focuses on children and young people of statutory school age. It reflects the work we do which was recognised in the ILACS report May 2022. Which stated "**The virtual school is championing the educational needs of children in care. Personal education plans are used effectively in order to identify and support their educational needs. Children's aspirations are being recognised and supported. When required, additional support is given to ensure that children meet their full potential**". This year's annual report reflects the way in which we work together with Social Care, Health and SEND and Inclusion to ensure that this offer to our children and young people continues.

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 1st, 2021, to March 31st, 2022 – 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.
- 3 At Durham virtual school we believe we are making a difference to the education of children and young people in care. This report can evidence educational outcomes and progress from entry to care this year, as we return to formal examinations for all Key Stages. Good attendance, few suspensions, high aspirations, strong vocational and academic pathways, and effective preparation for adulthood continue to be evident for CLA. This is all brought about by a virtual school team which advocates strongly and loudly for our young people through collaborative working. 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.

Recommendations

- 4 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of the full annual report.
 - (b) agree that the virtual school head should ensure that looked after children and young people remain a priority focus within the wider team since the extension of the role to all children with a Social Worker.
 - (c) agree that the virtual school head should ensure that the identified priorities are actioned to further improve the educational achievement of looked after children.
 - (d) note that the report be read with an understanding that the return to formal examinations has affected all measures this academic year. Outcomes are available for Key Stage 1 and 2 children and Year 11 students

Background

- 5 As of July 2022, there were 676 Durham looked after children of statutory school age (SSA) and 97 Post 16 in care. 47.49% were of primary age and 52.51% were of secondary age. The gender split across SSA and Post 16 is 42.17% girls and 57.83% boys. 80.33% attended County Durham schools and 19.67% attend out of County schools, this is an increase of 3.6% from last year.
- 6 At the end of the academic year 2021-22, 71.6% attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better, 10.6% higher than last year. As of July 2022, 11.2% of children and young people attended a school with a grade of Requires Improvement or below, 7.8% lower than last year. 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. 116 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion.
- 7 In 2021-2022 there were 49 school moves, a decrease of 52% from the previous year. Due to the increasing numbers of school moves in previous years, we developed more robust systems this year to monitor the number of moves requested, reasons for moves and completed moves. More rigorous monitoring took place of school move planning and there was a clear message that school moves would only be considered as a last resort for our young people to promote stability of education. In all, 83 school moves were suggested, with the majority of these not agreed by the Virtual School Head. 31% of school moves were to support moving to a permanent placement or due to distance, while 10% were due to a child leaving care on an Adoption Order or SGO. School moves due to permanent places remain the most significant factors in requesting a school move. However, in all cases the PEP Caseworker oversees the move, including agreeing the chosen school. The Virtual School Head has the final say in agreeing school moves and the PEP Caseworker ensures they are consulted fully in the process. No Year 6 or Year 11 young people moved schools this year.
- 8 According to the Spring Census 2022, there are currently 988 previously looked after children on roll in Durham schools (maintained). This reflects an increase of 117 children from January 2021. The Virtual School offers support and advice to guardians and schools for this cohort of children
- 9 53.3% of Durham looked after children had an identified special educational need (SEN) in 2021-22, an increase of 4.3% from 2020/221, however 3% below national figures in 2022. 22.8% are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This has

increased by 2% since 2019/20. 30.5% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 4% since 2019/20. A challenge for Durham Virtual School is to ensure the needs of children with a SEN Support Plan are known and strategies put in place at transition points. When a child has an EHCP there is the additional challenge of securing the correct education provision at a time when many Special Schools are oversubscribed.

- 10 The primary SEN need of CLA of statutory school age is SEMH. 44% of the CLA SEND cohort are identified as having SEMH, with 26% having a moderate learning difficulty and 8% a speech, language, and communication need. This influences the way in which the virtual school directs the top slice PP+ money into the support we offer our schools through the service level agreements made available at no cost to schools.

Headline Outcomes 2022

- 11 The reporting cohort in Year 2 was 26. There was roughly an equal split of 12 girls and 14 boys. 65% of the cohort attended schools in Durham, with a further 24% being educated in the neighbouring local authorities. 10 (38%) children had SEN, with 2 having an EHCP and 8 with an SEN Support Plan. The most common Primary need in SEND was Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) Our girls have performed better than the boys across all areas, with quite significant differences in reading and writing. However, only three children achieved Greater Depth in Reading, one in Writing and one in Maths; this is an area that will require further analysis. We will continue to monitor this cohort closely to ensure continued efforts are made to catch up on missed learning. 29% of the boys and 50% of girls achieved expected standards in Reading, Writing and Maths.
- 12 The reporting cohort in Year 6 was 38; there were 24 boys and 14 girls in the reporting cohort. There is a large differential making comparisons on gender more difficult. 35 of the reporting cohort attended schools in Durham, with the other 3 attending schools in neighbouring authorities. 20 (53%) had SEN, with 8 having an EHCP and 12 with an SEN support plan. Our girls have performed better than the boys across all areas, with a significant difference notable in Reading and Maths, although boys do account for 63% of the cohort, making it difficult to make valid comparisons for the gender gap. However, it is also worth noting that the boys account for 16 (80%) of the children with SEN, with 60% of those with SEN having difficulties in cognition and learning. Those with identified SEN, either SEN Support Plan or EHCP, account for a low number of those who achieved expected standards in the KS2 measures, and a number of these were not entered for 1 or more of their SATs tests. However, their PEPs have shown that they are

following an appropriate curriculum in line with their academic and SEN needs. Children are monitored closely to ensure they are making expected progress in line with their ability. 29% of the boys and 43% of girls achieved expected standards in Reading, Writing and Maths

- 13 There were 59 young people in the Year 11 reporting cohort, which consisted of 53% boys and 47% girls. 29 had identified SEN, 49% of the group. 19 had an EHCP, 32% of the reporting cohort, an increase of 4% from 2021. 54% were on the roll of a mainstream Secondary, a 12% decrease from 2021. 17% attended a maintained/academy Special School with an additional 5% attending an Independent Special School. 14 young people followed a curriculum that did not include GCSEs in Maths and English. All of these had SEN, with 13 having an EHCP. All followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs including literacy and numeracy. 7 (12%) pupils attended an Ofsted registered Alternative Provision.
- 14 Although there was a drop in the basics grades across all areas from last year, it is important to note that the 2020-2021 results were based on Centre Assessed Grades. This was the first year of formal GCSE examinations since 2019. However, despite the additional challenges facing our young people they mostly performed in line or above in the basics when compared to the last formal examinations in 2019. Although English results were below the 2019 figures for Durham CLA, our cohort this year consistently performed above the National figures from the same year. We believe this highlights the impact of the support provided by our schools, carers, social workers, and Virtual School Caseworkers to ensure young people can access the correct support to make good progress.
- 15 Results indicate that our girls have outperformed boys significantly in English, which is a similar trend to that in 2019 when GCSEs were last sat as formal exams. However, in Maths's boys and girls performed equally well in the 9-4 grades, although only 16% of boys achieved the higher measure of 9-5 in Maths compared to 21% of girls. Interestingly, in the Basics 9-4 measure, boys and girls were equally matched, but it was boys who performed better in the Basics 9-5 measure. It is also worth considering that 75% of the girls in the reporting cohort attended a mainstream school compared to only 35% of boys.
- 16 Early indication shows that 17 Care Leavers achieved A Levels and BTEC equivalents in August 2022. Intended destinations show that 8 have secured a university place.

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. It also reflects the anxieties demonstrated by some CLA when realising the return to normality and formal exams post Covid
- 18 Since returning to school in September attendance of children looked after has mostly been good. Data collected in July provides a picture for this academic year. Attendance was 92%, almost 3% higher than in 20/21
- 19 There have been thirty-four Suspensions during the academic year 2021/2022 for CLA. Thirteen children/young people experienced more than one period of Suspension. Eighteen children attended the secondary sector, ten were primary aged children and five children attended Specialist Provision and one attended Alternative Provision.
- 20 There have been two permanent exclusions, despite an extended offer by the Virtual School to support both young people into bespoke packages of Alternative Provision. In both cases the Virtual school has supported a move onto the roll of The Woodlands PRU and continued to support the young people in their new provision. The casework team work closely with schools to prevent any issues reaching crisis point and explore appropriate alternative pathways better suited to meeting the need of the young person. We challenge any schools which consider permanent exclusion, and then implement appropriate support, using Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding to avoid this.
- 21 During 2021-2022 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.
- 22 During 2021-2022 the Autumn ePEP quality was rated as 91.7% Green (High Quality) and 8.3% Amber (did not meet expected standard to achieve high quality). This is an increase of 8.63% High Quality PEPs from the same time last year. Over the year the number rated as Green (High Quality) has improved by 1% to 90%. There was a slight dip in the High-Quality judgement in the Spring PEP, however we are not concerned about this and believe that this is a natural variation.

Pupil Premium Plus Funding

- 23 In 2021-22 (Financial Year) our total PP+ budget was £1,688,400. Schools were allocated £1,800 of the government allocation of £2,345

(increased to £2410 in April 2022) in 3 instalments. This was an increase of £100 from the previous years and was again an acknowledgement of the additional support children required in school to bridge the gaps from covid absences and closures. In total, approximately £1,100,000 was provided directly to schools during the 2021-22 academic year to support their work with children in care. Recovery Grant Premium for eligible pupils was given directly to schools in two payments. Evidence of use was added to the PEP documents. The School Led Tutoring Grant was used to fund packages of support delivered to some of our most vulnerable learners, including those not attending school, in our children's homes, leaving secure and those at risk of permanent exclusion. Additional funding was also sent directly to schools to fund packages of support.

- 24 A significant amount of the PP+ funding given to schools is spent on one-to-one tuition. 56% of PP+ funding given to schools is used to support individuals with academic progress and achievement.
- 25 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 2021-22 (Financial Year) Durham Virtual School retained approx. £600,000. The full report gives a detailed account of how this was used.

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. 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. The increasing numbers of children coming into Care and the inclusion of Post 16 has led to caseloads more than 130 in some cases. This has influenced the decision to appoint a bespoke Post 16 Caseworker from December.
- 27 We have continued to provide advice to parents of PCLA and those on SGO, thus meeting our duties as a Virtual School.
- 28 The report alludes to the extended role of the VSH for Every Child with a Social Worker (CWSW).

Virtual School Areas for Development.

- 29 The key priorities for 2022-23 have been identified through consultation, data analysis, response to the gaps COVID19 has created, the return of formal examinations and the inclusion of EYFS and Post 16 in the ePEP

system. Some of our priorities will roll over from 21/22 due to the needs of CLA.

- Support children and young people in the key transition years to achieve stronger outcomes, whilst ensuring they are following a curriculum pathway which is appropriate to their needs and ability.
- Develop the work with the SEND and Inclusion Team to ensure all CLA with an EHCP have a named SEND Caseworker, raising the awareness of the need to find a suitable placement when the child needs to change school through a placement breakdown
- Work in partnership to develop clear academic and vocational pathways in preparation for adulthood and develop systems to identify earlier intervention to support Post 16 to reduce NEET data.
- 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. Develop a strong offer to schools and settings to support the emotional wellbeing of CLA and the therapeutic offer through Full Circle.
- 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 whilst ensuring CLA have stability in their education setting. Develop work with Children's Homes to support school anxiety and other barriers to education and continue to use the voice of the child/young person through our links with the Children in Care Council.
- Further embed the work for Every CWSW through extended role of the VSH having a strategic lead with this cohort of children.

Background papers

- Virtual School Annual Report 2021-2022

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

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 from Maintained Primary Schools is no longer available to the Virtual School to provide additional behaviour support in school through the Behaviour Intervention Team. This may put pressures on the Primary phase as they benefited from this support

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

As a public body, the Council must consider 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

None.

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

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 now have an 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 Inclusion Base is placed at Lanchester and is accommodated within the building known as The Bridge. This provision reduces the number of suspensions for CLA of secondary school age.

Risk

The extended offer to schools and settings relies upon Pupil Premium Plus continuing. Staff costs are funded through the Corporate budget. Capacity in the team relies upon this funding continuing.

Procurement

The contract with Welfare Call was renewed in March 2022. It would not have been wise to change the provider for the ePEP system due to the system we have established with schools and Social Care. The quality of PEPs have improved since its introduction in 2019