CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	**Corporate Parenting Board** 25 March 2021

Report title	Virtual School Head Annual Report 2020
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People
Wards affected	All wards
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services
Originating service	Inclusion and Empowerment
Accountable employee	Darren Martindale Tel Email	Service Manager 01902 556951 Darren.martindale@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Children and Young People in Care Leadership Team	6 January 2021
	Children in Care Council	6 January 2021
	Social Care Leadership Team	7 January 2021
	Inclusion and Empowerment Leadership Team	28 January 2021
	Education Leadership Team	28 January 2021

Recommendation for decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2020.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to receive the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2020.

2.0 Background

2.1 To inform Corporate Parenting Board of the educational progress and achievements of our Children and Young People in Care, and previously in care, and the steps that the local authority has taken to support those achievements.

3.0 Report Contents

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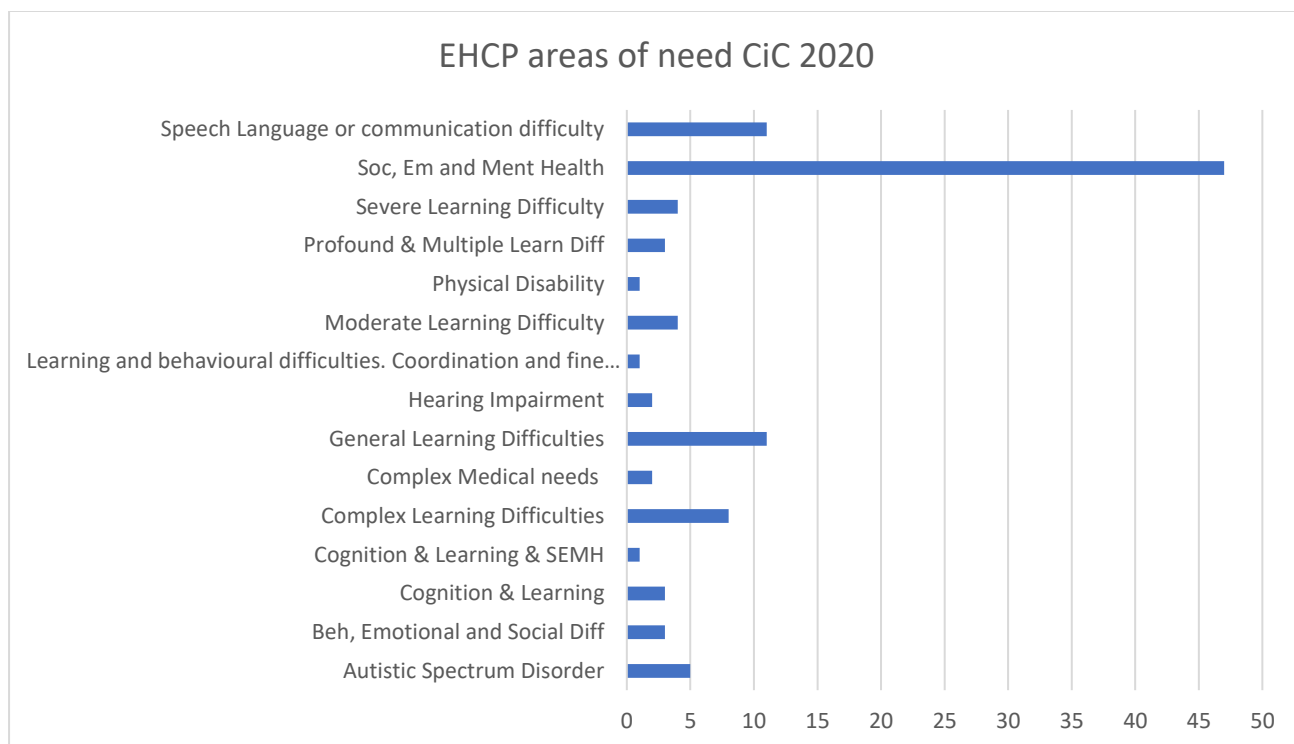**4.0 Cohort Information**

4.1 At November 2020:

- Total pupils (Reception – Year 11)   409
- Placed in Wolverhampton   207 = 51%
- Placed out of City   202 = 49%
- Attending primary schools   165 = 40%
- Attending secondary schools   244 = 60%
- Attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)   10 = 2.4%
- Attending Special Schools   69 = 17%
- Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) 106 = 26%
- Boys   228 = 56%
- Girls   181 = 44%

- Total ethnic groups   15%
- Non-White British   40%

4.2   Among the children and young people in care with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulty is by far the most prevalent category of need, accounting for 44% of this cohort. The prevalence of each category of need, as a percentage of children and young people in care with EHCPs, is outlined in the chart below.

EHCP areas of need CiC 2020

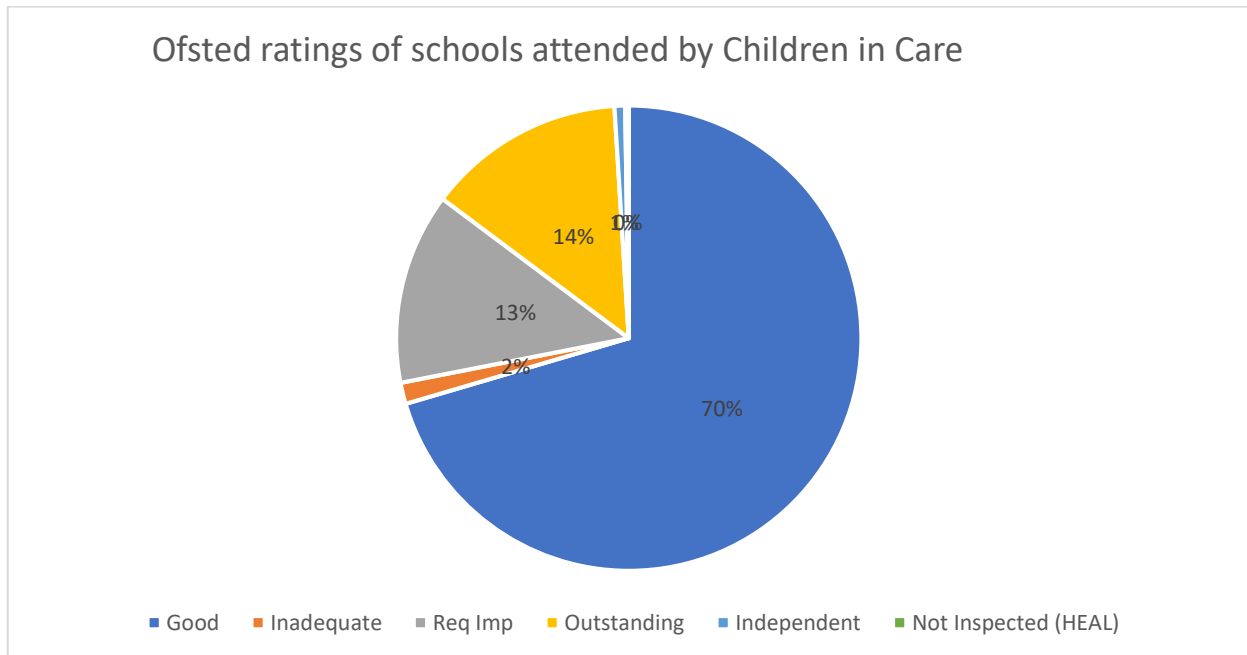| Category	Value
Speech Language or communication difficulty	11
Soc, Em and Ment Health	47
Severe Learning Difficulty	4
Profound & Multiple Learn Diff	3
Physical Disability	1
Moderate Learning Difficulty	4
Learning and behavioural difficulties. Coordination and fine…	1
Hearing Impairment	2
General Learning Difficulties	11
Complex Medical needs	2
Complex Learning Difficulties	8
Cognition & Learning & SEMH	1
Cognition & Learning	3
Beh, Emotional and Social Diff	3
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	5

5.0   School Ofsted Ratings

5.1   Statutory guidance states that Children and Young People in Care should attend schools that are rated as either or Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.[1]

5.2   At November 2019, 84% of children and young people in care attend a school which is rated as good or better by Ofsted, which is a 1% improvement on 2019. The ratings are summarised in the chart at 5.3.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children

5.3

Ofsted ratings of schools attended by Children in Care

- 70%
- 14%
- 13%
- 2%
- 1%
- 0%

Legend: ■ Good ■ Inadequate ■ Req Imp ■ Outstanding ■ Independent ■ Not Inspected (HEAL)

6.0 Supporting Learning and Achievement

6.1 Wolverhampton's Virtual School team are committed to improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care through a combination of direct, advisory and strategic work with children, schools, social workers, carers and other partners.

6.2 The team consists of one full-time equivalent (FTE) Senior Education Advisor, 3.5 FTE Education Support Officers (ESO), one 0.5 FTE Data Officer and one full-time Administrator together with the VSH. We also benefit from the support of three Educational Psychologists (0.9 FTE) and a 0.35 FTE Assistant Educational Psychologist, as well as strong links with other key agencies. A full-time Education, Employment and Training (EET) Co-ordinator in the Children and Young People in Care Transitions team acts as an extended member of the team in her support for Children and Young People in Care post-16.

6.3 The Senior Education Advisor (SEA) provides strong support and challenge to schools, social care and other key partners to promote the inclusion and raise the achievement of children and young people in care. The SEA also acts as a team manager and deputy to the Virtual School Head. The SEA has been instrumental in ensuring that permanent exclusions remain at zero in 2019-2020, ensuring that appropriate school placements are secured in a timely manner and that children's support plans are strong and appropriately joined-up.

6.4 The team promotes the educational achievement of children and young people in care in a variety of ways, However, key areas, in line with statutory guidance, include:
- Regular meetings with Designated Teachers in schools
- Supporting and improving the Personal Educational Planning process
- Tracking attendance, exclusions, attainment and progress

- Providing direct learning support to pupils, as well as
- Providing advice, training, challenge and support to schools and social care
- Interventions and wider activities to promote learning and raise aspirations

6.5   During the summer term 2020, while schools were partially closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the virtual school team provided ongoing support both to children and young people in care who had been identified by their social workers as needing to attend school, and those who were accessing remote learning at home. This support focussed on several areas, as outlined below.

6.6   Pupil Premium Plus was paid for the summer term, as planned, for all CYPIC up to and including Year 10. Schools were encouraged to use the funding as creatively as was needed, provided it corresponded to targets on the summer term's PEP, and were offered the option of deferring the summer PP+ spend, if they felt it would be more beneficial to the pupil, to roll it forward to the autumn term. The funding was available to pupils in year 11 by individual request, and these allocations were generally to support transition into post-16 education, employment and training (EET).

6.7   The team attended as many PEP meetings as possible, most of which were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. It was noted that some pupils took a more active part in their PEP meetings via this method, which was a positive development. The VS team, working with the Educational Psychology Service, developed an alternative 'Pupil Voice' section of the PEP which was tailored to reflect the current educational context of remote learning for many. This allowed for considerable differentiation between stages and ability levels and is a continuation of our increasingly flexible approach to capturing the pupils' views in the most effective way possible.

6.8   The Virtual School's Education Support Officers made frequent contact with Designated Teachers to monitor attendance and progress, and check for potential areas of concern. These discussions focussed various areas including access to, and engagement with, online work, effective home-school communication, Personal Education Planning, transition planning (e.g. primary-secondary, post-16), what to do if any assessment or intervention work had been interrupted due to COVID-19, and measuring pupil progress in the absence of summer tests or teacher assessments.

6.9   An arts and culture offer has been developed for CYPIC as part of the virtual school's partnership with others through the West Midlands Virtual Schools Network. Having previously been delivered partly through live events, this was adapted to become entirely online throughout the summer. This gave a wide range of activities were offered, including an 'Awesome Arts Festival' over 2 weeks in the summer break offering activities such as puppetry, visual arts, dance, theatre, circus, poetry, food, relaxation and a 'detective mission'. Carers were also advised in creative strategies and projects to support remote schoolwork, for example using creative arts and horticulture. A summer reading challenge developed by the City's library service and Arts Council was also actively promoted by the Virtual School.

6.10 The Virtual School worked in collaboration with the authority's Educational Psychology and Inclusion Team to offer a consultation service which was offered to all parents and carers of children both in City and in out of City placements. The service offered advice and support to carers in need of help with educational matters.

7.0 Raising Aspirations – Aspire2Uni

7.1 Aspire2Uni (A2U) is an innovative partnership project between Wolverhampton University and four 'virtual schools' for children and young people in care around the Black Country – Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Walsall and Staffordshire. A2U is a long-term, intensive, progressive programme designed to raise the aspirations and support the achievement of children in care. Research shows that children and young people in care and care leavers do not regard Higher Education (HE) as a natural course and will often be looked after by adults who have little experience of HE themselves, or indeed an understanding of the value of HE or further training. It is important to note that this does not mean there is a lack of aspiration among these pupils, but less access to potential role models who have progressed to university, less established 'networks' which can combine to less knowledge of areas like HE or graduate careers. Research tells us that HE can be a critical first step to enhanced life opportunity, wellbeing and economic independence for children and young in care: In this context, Aspire2Uni has two underpinning goals:

- Raise aspirations (and increase knowledge)
- Break down barriers, and improve progression, to Higher Education

7.2 The programme aims to support children who reach the expected attainment in core subjects at the end of Key Stage 2 or have the potential to reach that level but underachieve. It completed its fifth year in 2020. At the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, there were 32 children from Wolverhampton on the programme (out of 137 pupils in total). The programme aims to support from Year 7 to 11, to university and beyond.

7.3 The VSH provides strategic oversight of the project from Wolverhampton's perspective, while one of the Virtual School Support Officers acts as an operational lead and all members of the team provide staffing, organisational and administrative support as required.

7.4 There are three main elements to the programme:

- **Outreach** - a series of university visits and other events, designed to raise aspirations, break down barriers and inform progression to higher education.
- **Mentoring** - a dedicated mentor is allocated to the young person and works with them in their home either once per week or once per fortnight. In 2018-2019, group and online mentoring sessions have also been organised for some older students who have been accessing A2U mentoring for a long time and are ready to move on to a different form of support.
  Several mentors have been with the programme since the outset, have graduated the University and are now mentors in various schools and organisations.

- **Work Experience and Enrichment** - Working with local businesses, accesses high quality, bespoke work placements and group visits to local employers such as Jaguar Land Rover. In addition, the project offers enrichment experiences, such as visits to the theatre or outward-bound experiences, to broaden students' horizons and build their confidence.

7.5   A varied programme of **enrichment activities** were delivered between September 2019 and March 2020. These included a 'Preparation, Revision, Engagement, Participation (P.R.E.P) camp' to provide further support with preparing for assessments. This was a two-night residential which took place at Egmond Hall in Telford in February half term, 2020. The two days were a mixture of GCSE revision, finance and personal development workshops mixed with outward bound activities including a night walk and camp fire. Two year 11 pupils from Wolverhampton attended the camp and excelled in all activities. They were also 'buddied' with younger pupils for mutual support, which was very successful and beneficial to all. Participants were involved in conducting formal interviews for an A2U Coordinator – a new post - in 2019. Activities are outlined in the table below:

Cohort/Year	Outreach Day
Cohort 3 (Year 9)	FEHW Day Walsall Campus- Faculty Subject talk, Campus Tour. Workshops-SENDIS Institute of Education (Carl), Study of Human Sciences and P.E, First Aid session with A-Med training (Hayley and Rowena) A2U evaluations
Cohort 4 (Year 8)	Careers Day The Way Youth Zone- Careers Advice Sessions held at our Careers Day event with Connexions, Choosing Options performance by 2Engage, Adobe Spark session, Tag Line competition session, an activity of choice session (Football, Music, or Art) and A2U evaluations
Cohort 1 (Year 11)	Welcome Back The Way Youth Zone- Connexions careers workshop on action planning and next steps. University Challenge performance provided by 2Engage theatre company. 'Time to be a youth' – a free youth club activity session for A2U young people, and A2U evaluations
Cohort 5 (Year 7)	The Launch Cohort 5- Pupils arrival, welcome/health and safety, 'Why Uni' session, Pre Attitudinal Survey session for A2U evaluation purposes, Build a Lego University session, Carer arrival/refreshments, A2U speakers/music performances, Programme Info - MH, Access and Outreach Speaker- DH
Cohort 2 (Year 10)	FOSS Day- City Campus- Welcome, Business Studies session, Deaf Studies session, Law Session, followed by the final session- A2U evaluations
Cohort 2 (Year 10)	Speakers Trust Day- Event surrounding developing confidence in public speaking with Gabi Glover. Final session- A2U evaluations
Cohort 5 (Year 7)	FSE Day- Two alternating sessions 'Potions' and 'Robots' covering the Science and Engineering faculties. Final session- A2U evaluations
Cohort 3 (Year 9)	Birmingham City University Day- Academic session on 'Law' with Luke Mason, Study Skills Workshop, BCU campus tour, final session A2U Evaluations

7.6   The partial closure of schools and other challenges presented by COVID-19 have made it impossible to deliver the project in the usual way between March and July 2020. Mentoring has continued via the 'Brightside' online mentoring platform. A 'lockdown challenge' ran throughout the summer period so that the young people, alongside their foster carers and other household members, can engage in active, positive activities and stay connected to the project. A theme of health and wellbeing has been a theme of many of the challenges. Participation has dipped somewhat since delivery became entirely 'virtual'. However, However, organisers continue to work hard to keep the project going and a delayed launch event for the new year 7 cohort is currently planned for late March 2021, with an online pre-launch in January 2021.

A2U Outcomes

7.7   In autumn 2019, we found that 75% were at the age-related expected standard in English and 72% in maths. This is significantly higher than average attainment for children and young people in care.

7.8   When asked about the impact of Aspire2Uni on their learning:

- 75% of pupils felt their attitude to learning had improved as a result of the programme
- 50% of pupils felt their ability in Maths had improved and 67% of pupils felt their English ability has improved as a result of the programme
- 75% of pupils felt they had improved abilities in other subjects and 67% said their 8
- Two of Wolverhampton's participants completed the programme in year 11 this year. They both achieved excellent grades (including grades between 4 and 7 in both English and maths) and are now in further education.

7.9   Feedback from participating young people and their foster carers has been very positive. Examples include:

> "I saw an attitude change in the way she viewed her future. Initially she wanted to move out of home as soon as possible and pursue hairdressing. However, throughout discussion we established she had interests in other areas such as drama" - Mentor

> "A2U and mentoring has really helped my confidence a lot" – Young Person

> "A2U and the group mentoring has been very positive. The young people can relate to each other - all within the care system. It has built P.B's confidence, offers her additional support, is fun for her, and also offers her many new opportunities" – Foster Carer

8.0   Personal Education Plans

8.1   It is a statutory requirement of local authorities to ensure that all children and young people in care have a quality, up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP). At July 2020, Insight and Performance reported 91% of children overall having an up-to-date PEP. This

was an improvement on the 88% reported overall at July 2019. PEP completion rates throughout the 2019-2020 academic year are illustrated in the table below:

PEP Timescales

PEP School Year ● Early Years ● School Age ● Year 12 and 13 ● PEP In Timescale
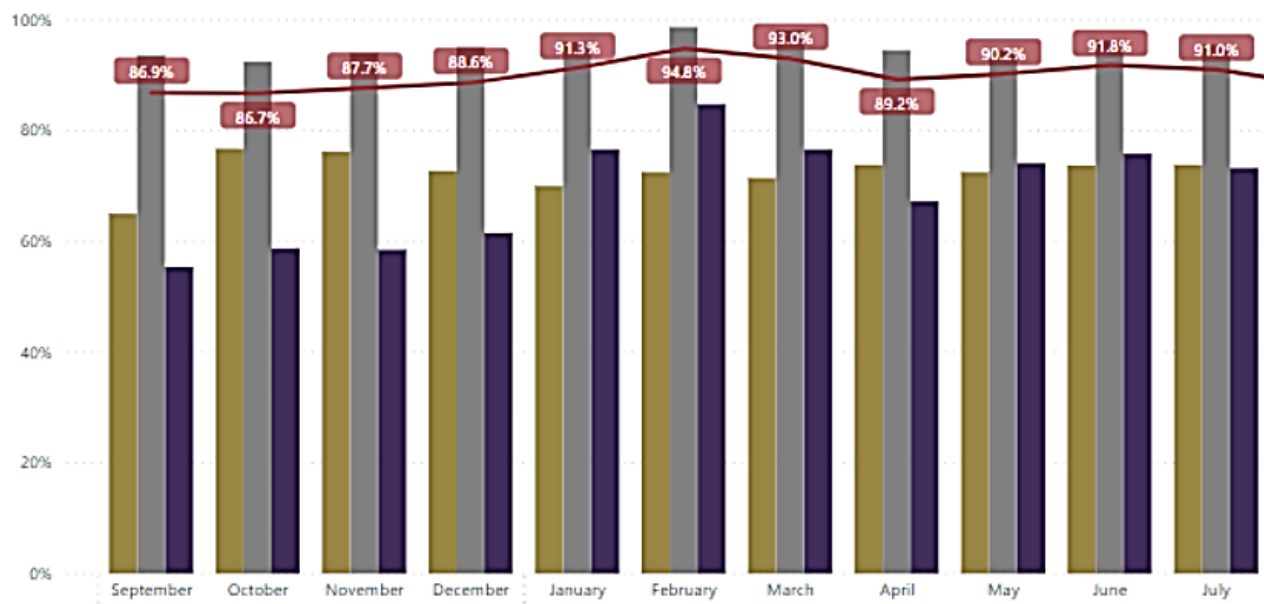
8.2 Despite implementation challenges and 'teething problems' - such as the large number of schools needing to securely access the system, changes of staff or the availability of internet access in schools – Wolverhampton's electronic PEP form, hosted on the Eclipse system, has contributed to support good levels of both completion and quality.

8.3 The Virtual School Team audit PEPs on a termly basis, focussing specifically on two key areas: (1) whether the individualised learning targets contained in the PEP are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related) and (2) whether the Pupil Premium Plus is being effectively utilised for the pupil, as recorded in the PEP. Focussing on these key areas, in particular, allows the team to formally audit at least one PEP for every child in each school year (all PEPs are monitored by the team, but these are formally audited and the results recorded). 150 PEPs were audited in the summer term 2020. Of these:

- 81% had SMART targets recorded (compared to 85% in summer 2019)
- 77% demonstrated appropriate use of the Pupil Premium Plus (compared to 78% in summer 2019)

8.4 There is evidence to suggest that PEP quality dipped slightly in 2020, therefore, though it remains higher than in previous years.

9.0 Pupil Premium Plus

9.1 The Pupil Premium Plus is the main form of financial support for local authorities to promote the education of children in care, in accordance with their statutory duty in this

regard (DfE 2014, updated 2018). The PP+ is allocated to local authorities at a rate of £2,345.00 per pupil, per annum, and is managed by the Virtual School Head (VSH).

9.2   In accordance with DfE statutory guidance, the majority of the grant is allocated to schools to support the individualised learning targets of their children and young people in care. This is monitored through the Personalised Education Plan (PEP) process and by the Virtual School Team, in their scrutiny of PEPs and regular communication with schools and social workers. £1,900.00 has been allocated to schools for each child and young person in care, in termly instalments, in 2019-2020.

9.3   The remainder is utilised on a range of projects, interventions and resources to target support where it is most needed, and to support the strategic priorities of the Virtual School. These interventions include Aspire2Uni, Beanstalk Volunteer Reading Help, Welfare Call (service commissioned to monitor the attendance and attainment of children and young people in care educated outside Wolverhampton) and training for Designated Teachers. The grant also funds the staffing of the Virtual School Team, other than the Virtual School Head's post.

9.2   Following changes introduced under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, an additional, smaller grant was allocated to local authorities to support the extension of the VSH's role to provide information and advice around children who have left care via an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order. £30,000 has been allocated to Wolverhampton for this purpose in 2020-2021. This funding is utilised to support the work of the virtual school generally, rather than utilised to fund (for example) a separate, dedicated post. Some PPG-funded resources, such as Britannica School online learning, have been made available to adopters and the take-up of this has been very good.

10.0 Attendance

10.1   The average attendance of children and young people in care, prior to the partial closure of schools in March 2020, was as follows:

- Wolverhampton schools: 95.21%
- Out-of-City schools: 91.43%
- All schools combined: 93.32%

10.2   This is slightly lower than the averages for 2018-2019, which when the total for all schools combined was 94.59%. Very slight fluctuations are to be expected, however.

10.3   The percentages of children and young people in care who has school attendance below 90% in 2019-2020 are captured below.

	No. of CiC with less than 90% attendance 2019/2020	No of CiC in cohort 2019/2020	% of cohort
In City	41	207	19.81%
OOC	17	202	8.42%
Total	58	409	14.18%

10.4 These percentages are higher than in 2018-2019. An analysis by school of year has revealed that pupils in year 11 account for almost 37% of the persistent absentees in Wolverhampton schools, with the combined year 11 cohort accounting for 33% of persistent absentees. The percentage was also high in year 10 – 18.97%. With that said, however, the education setting with the highest number of persistent absentees was Evergreen Pupil Referral Unit, which serves the primary phase.

10.5 The high percentage of persistent absentees at Key Stage 4 is due to a number of pupils with very high levels of need and, in some cases, ongoing difficulties outside of education. This area will be monitored very closely, however, in 2020-2021, with additional resource allocated where necessary to ensure that action plans are put into place wherever persistent absence becomes, or looks likely to become, an issue.

10.6 Following the partial closure of schools in the spring 2020, some children and young people in care continued to attend school, along with some other pupils from vulnerable groups. The attendance of these pupils, from 1 June 2020 until the end of the summer term, was high considering the additional challenges and uncertainties of this period, and higher than for other groups of vulnerable pupils:

- Wolverhampton schools - 103 children attended during this period with an average attendance of 91.35%
- Out-of-City schools - a total of 43 children attended school with an average attendance of 89.18%
- Combined - 146 children, so 35% of the total cohort, attended school during this period with an average attendance of 90.26%

11.0 Inclusion

11.1 There was one permanent exclusion of a Wolverhampton children and young people in care in 2019-2020. Permanent exclusions are very rare for Wolverhampton children and young people in care – 0 in 2018-2019, one in 2017-2018, two in 2016-2017 and one in 2015-2016. This is a notable outcome (statistically, children in care are far more likely to be excluded than their peers) which reflects the concentrated, proactive work by the Virtual School alongside schools, social care and other key partners, in challenging exclusions, promoting inclusive practice and ensuring that the right support is in place for children and young people in care.

11.2 54 fixed term exclusions (FTE) were issued to Wolverhampton children and young people in care in 2019-2020. Even allowing for the fact that many did not attend during the summer term, this constitutes a significant reduction on previous year (there were 163 FTE in 2018-2019). 43 children received at least one FTE, compared to 64 in 2018-2019. 31 fixed term exclusions were for pupils attending Wolverhampton schools, while 23 were for the out-of-City cohort.

11.3   The table below summarises the reasons for fixed term exclusions. Persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason, in line with all pupils in Wolverhampton. FTE for physical assault has reduced significantly since 2018-2019, when it was the most common reason, accounting for 55 fixed term exclusions in that school year.

Exclusion type	No of exclusions	No of children	No of days
Persistent Disruptive Behaviour	14	12	35.5
Physical Assault Against an Adult	9	6	25
Physical Assault Against a Pupil	3	3	15
Racist Abuse	1	1	2
Verbal Abuse/Threatening Behaviour Against an Adult	10	8	16
Damage	3	3	8
Drug and Alcohol Related	1	1	14
Verbal Abuse/Threatening Pupil	3	3	7
Other	10	6	19
Totals	54	43	141.5

11.4   The Virtual School Team closely monitors the relatively small number of children and young people in care who are on **modified or reduced timetables**. The number of pupils on modified timetables fluctuates but is generally between 10 and 20 and the use of modified timetables is usually a short-term measure, due to a change in either care or education provision or another change that necessitates a short-term provision or intervention. In such cases, the Virtual School Team works closely with education providers, social care and, where applicable, other local authorities to ensure that each pupils' educational offer is suitable and that they return to a full-time timetable as soon as possible and appropriate.

12.0   School Transition and Stability

12.1   Research shows that children and young people in care who changed school in Years 10 or 11 scored over five grades less than those who did not.[2] The Virtual School works closely with social workers, schools and carers to maintain existing school placements, wherever possible and appropriate. If a change of school is the best option, then we help to ensure a successful transition and support joined-up working with all key partners.

12.2   Social workers are expected to consult the Virtual School Head prior to any change of school for a child in care, so that advice can be given as to the suitability of any potential school placement. This requirement is highlighted in PEP training, as well as in Wolverhampton's Education Policy for Children and Young People in Care and our Model School Policy, which was updated and reissued to schools in 2019. We provide support for children and young people in care if they do have to move schools, ensuring

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[2] http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenKeyMessages_Nov2015.pdf

a successful transition through 1:1 support, in-class support and close partnership working with all key agencies.

12.3 The transition from primary to secondary school can be particularly difficult for many children and young people in care. The Virtual School ensure that all are supported with a successful transition through 1:1 meetings with year 6 pupils and their teachers, and follow-up meetings in their new secondary school before and after secondary induction sessions. We also help to ensure that children are given their preferred choice of secondary school. Out-of-City pupils are given additional information and support by a dedicated Education Support Officer.

13.0 Attainment

13.1 Attainment and progress data for early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 were not made available by schools in 2020, due to statutory assessments at those stages being abandoned as a result of the partial closure of schools over the summer term. Attainment 8 and Progress 8 data was also not made available in 2020.

13.2 The tables below illustrate the percentage of eligible children (in care for 12 months or more at 31 March 2020) in year 11 who achieved GCSEs at grade 4 and grade 5 in maths and English in 2020. The figures in brackets represents the same outcome when we have removed pupils who attended schools that didn't take GCSE examinations (e.g. special schools). 2020 data is currently provisional and has been collated by the Virtual School Team with the support of colleagues in Research and Assessment.

In-City cohort (24 pupils)	2020
English Grade 4+	10 = 42% (50%)
Maths Grade 4+	10 = 42% (50%)
English & Maths Grade 4+	7 = 29% (35%)
English Grade 5+	7 = 29% (35%)
Maths Grade 5+	5 = 21% (25%)
English & Maths Grade 5+	4 = 17% (20%)

Out-of-City cohort (20 pupils)	2020
English Grade 4 or above	4 = 20% (24%)
Maths Grade 4 or above	7 = 35% (41%)
English & Maths Grade 4 or above	4 = 20% (24%)
English Grade 5 or above	1 = 5% (6%)
Maths Grade 5 or above	2 = 10% (12%)
English & Maths Grade 5 or above	0 = 0%

Combined cohort (44 pupils)	2020
English Grade 4 or above	14 = 32% (38%)
Maths Grade 4 or above	17 = 39% (46%)
English & Maths Grade 4 or above	11 = 25% (30%)
English Grade 5 or above	8 = 18% (22%)
Maths Grade 5 or above	7 = 16% (19%)
English & Maths Grade 5 or above	4 = 9% (11%)

13.3 GCSE outcomes for Wolverhampton children and young people in care have improved significantly in 2020, compared to previous years, based on the data above. For example, in 2019 (according to data published by the Department for Education) 15% of the combined cohort for Wolverhampton achieved GCSEs at grade 4 and above in both maths and English, while 13% achieved the same benchmark in 2018.

13.4 Nationally, 17.9% of children and young people in care achieved GCSEs at grade 4 and above in both maths and English, while 7.2% achieved GCSEs in both maths and English at grade 5 and above in 2019.

13.5 It can be seen, therefore, that outcomes are significantly better than 2019 national averages as well as Wolverhampton's previous outcomes. A comparison of GCSE performance with pupils' predicted grades does suggest that this cohort would have performed slightly stronger than the 2019 and 2018 cohorts (18% were predicted to achieve GCSEs in English and maths at grade 4+). The more significant factor, however, is likely to be the removal of examinations in 2020 and results being based instead on teacher assessment - evidence that our children and young people in care tend to be disadvantaged by an exam-based system, as can be seen by the following:

- Of the **14 pupils 12m+** that achieved their **grade 4 or above in English**, **4** of them were not predicted to achieve grade 4+ in the spring term 2020.

- Of the **17 pupils 12m+** that achieved their **grade 4 or above in Maths**, **7** of them were not predicted to achieve grade 4+ in the spring term 2020.

- Of the **11 pupils 12m+** that achieved their **grade 4 or above in both English & Maths**, **3** were not predicted to achieve grade 4+ in the spring term 2020.

13.6 At the same time, however, other virtual school heads in the west midlands region have told me that their GCSE results have been varied, and where results do seem to have improved in 2020, improvements have been more marginal than for Wolverhampton. It will be interesting to see, once GCSE results for children and young people in care have been validated and reported by the Department for Education, whether there were significant improvements nationally in 2020.

14.0   Achievement at Post-16

14.1   In Further Education (FE), of the 84 young people in year 12 and 13 (aged 17-18) who were studying for recognised qualifications during 2019-2020, 80% either achieved a qualification or progressed to the next year of their course. Several other young people achieved FE qualifications. In total:

- 24 students achieved Level 3 (A-level or equivalent) qualifications

- 17 students achieved Level 2 qualifications

- 26 students achieved Level 1 qualifications

- 4 students passed GCSE resits

- 10 students achieved entry level qualifications

14.2   Six Wolverhampton care leavers graduated from university in 2020. One of these achieved a first-class honours degree, three achieved upper second class (2:1) honours (one is still to be confirmed), one achieved lower second class honours (2:2) and one achieved third class honours.

14.3   Wolverhampton currently have 27 confirmed care leavers in Higher Education (HE), which is a significantly higher than the national average percentage of care leavers in HE. Five care leavers started university in September 2020, as outlined in the table below:

University	End Date	Subject	Course length
University of Kent	2023	Psychology	Three Years
University of West London	2023	Aviation and Airport Management	Three Years
Wolverhampton University	2023	Early Childhood studies	Three Years
Wolverhampton University	2024	Social Care Plus Foundation	Four Years
Wolverhampton University	2023	Early Childhood Studies	Three Years

14.4   88% of Wolverhampton children and young people in care that completed year 11 in 2020 made a positive progression to post 16 education, employment or training (EET).

14.5   The 12% (six young people) that were not in EET in September 2020 had reduced to 8% (four young people) in October 2020 and 6% (3 young people) by November 2020.

14.6   From this cohort of 52 young people:

- 29 progressed into college further education (FE)

- 11 progressed to Sixth Form FE

- five progressed to training

- one progressed to employment

Year 11 to 12 Transition

COLLEGE   6TH FORM   WBL   EMPLOYED   NEET
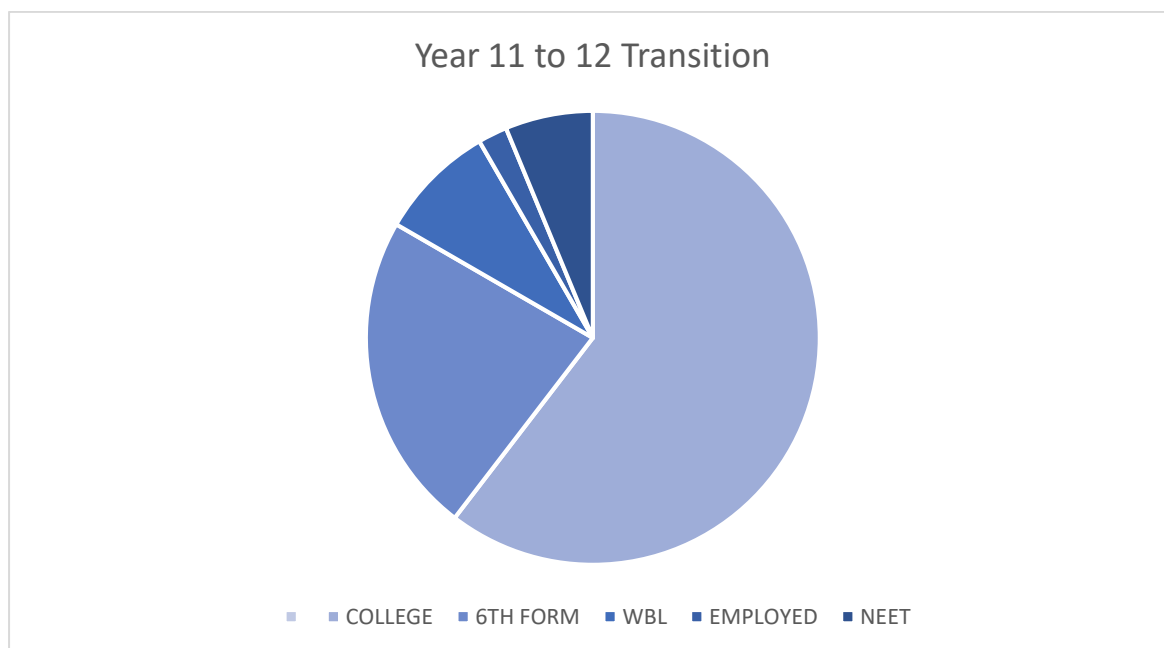
14.7   The Children and Young People in Care Service and key partners ensure that all children and young people in care and care leavers have access to impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) at the appropriate stage, and are consistently supported with a pathway through education, enabling them to positively engage in the labour market. The VSH attends a monthly EET panel and supports strategic developments to help to ensure that all key partners working effectively together to create opportunities, enhance support and break down the barriers to EET. Numerous other initiatives are in place which to consolidate this support, including:

- A weekly **EET Drop In** session, involving Housing, Health and Education

- A designated **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) Black country Impact Worker**, alongside a named Connexions officer, including specialised support such as counselling, mentoring or arts therapy to increase confidence and engagement.

- **DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) Protocol** protocol in place providing post-18 Care Leavers who are accessing benefits with Work Coaches and other bespoke support from day one (other recipients of these benefits have to wait six months to access this support).

- A full-time **EET Co-ordinator** and an EET Apprentice. The EET Co-ordinator also leads on support for HE students, conducting visits to students and completing personal education plans and supporting post graduate opportunities and careers progression support.

- There are currently four **ringfenced apprenticeships** available within the Children and Young People in Care Service. Additional support, and pre-apprenticeship support, is available.

- **Guaranteed interviews** for Care Leavers and Children and Young People in Care are offered for apprenticeship roles in the local authority.

- The **Workbox** website is being developed to highlight pathways and support into EET for Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers.

- A designated connexions advisor is available to assist with planning for post 16 destinations and NEET cases up to 18 in City.

15.0 Participation

15.1 Wolverhampton has a very strong and well-established Children in Care Council (CiCC) which benefits from close links with the Youth Council, and with elected members via the Corporate Parenting Board. The CiCC is actively involved in Participation at a regional and national level, enabling our children and young people in care to act as a real force for change and the improvement of services. This report is shared and discussed with the CiCC as well as Corporate Parenting Board.

15.2 Work is ongoing to strengthen young people's contribution their PEPs, to ensure the plan is properly informed by their views and that the PEP process feels meaningful to them. During the partial closure of schools, many PEP meetings were held online via Microsoft Teams and it was felt that this enabled a fuller contribution from some young people who enjoyed the online format more than face-to-face meetings in school. Other tools, such as more child-friendly versions of the section of the PEP form which captures the young person's contribution, tailored to different ages and ability levels, have also been trialled with some success.

16.0 Strategic and Advisory Development

16.1 The Virtual School Head's role includes strengthening the awareness of key professionals around the needs of children and young people in care, building strong working partnerships and developing policy and procedure in this area. This involves a combination of advisory and strategic work with a range of agencies.

16.2 In 2019-2020, the following training sessions were delivered by the Virtual School Team:

- Half-termly 'PEP clinics' for social workers and Designated Teachers as well as continual support around the introduction of the electronic PEP on Eclipse
- A termly twilight Forum for Designated Teachers, including training on child exploitation
- Two half-day training sessions on the role of the Designated Teacher
- Two training sessions for social workers on the SEND Code of Practice and EHCP process
- Half-termly sessions for foster carers on supporting education
- Training for school governors on supporting Children and Young People in Care in school and on helping to prevent school exclusion
- A range of online courses made available to Designated Teachers and other school staff in key areas, such as attachment aware and trauma-informed practice.

16.3 Training sessions were delivered online via Microsoft Teams since April 2020. Sessions were consistently well attended and received.

16.4   The Virtual School team also provide information and advice in relation to supporting the education of children and young people who have left care via an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order receive additional support with their education, as set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This duty is covered in Designated Teachers training and the Designated Teachers Forum and further training is made available to schools. The Virtual School team regularly respond to requests for advice and information regarding the education of children previously in care, from schools, adoptive parents / special guardians and social care, in accordance with the duty.

16.5   The Virtual School team have continued working to promote effective joined-up working between different teams and partners services that support the education of vulnerable children. The creation of the Inclusion and Empowerment Service, alongside the Virtual Head's wider role around the inclusion and attendance of vulnerable learners, has helped to facilitate further collaborative working and information sharing. While the widening of the VSH role has presented challenges in terms of capacity, two additional specialist staff have been added to the team in the autumn 2020 to compensate for this and ensure that children and young people in care have access to the support that they require.

16.6   The VSH has continued to work closely with the **Youth Offending Team (YOT)** to improve the educational engagement of young people in the criminal justice system in Wolverhampton. This work started in 2016, prior to which the school attendance of young offenders in Wolverhampton was low, with around 50% of the school-aged cohort attending education full-time. By the summer 2018, that figure had improved to 73% and at summer 2019 it had risen by a further 3%. In 2020, full-time school attendance rose again to 85% for the school-aged cohort.

16.7   Further plans for improvement, including the development of a Virtual School Stakeholders Group, which will be developed in the spring term 2021, are outlined in the Attainment Improvement Plan for Children and Young People in Care 2020-2021.

17.0   Conclusion

17.1   2020 has been an unusual and challenging year for all. The Virtual School Team, alongside schools and other partners has worked very hard to support our children and young people in care though the additional challenges that have been presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, helping to find new ways to engage with young people and ensure continuity of support. Some of our regular events, such as the I-Awards ceremony and regional and national virtual school conferences, have not gone ahead due to restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19, and if restrictions remain well into 2020, alternative ways to deliver these will be explored.

17.2   Once again, there is much to celebrate regarding the educational achievement of the children in our care. A very small percentage of Children and Young People in Care are attending schools which are rated as requiring improvement or inadequate by Ofsted. Temporary exclusions have decreased, and permanent exclusions remain extremely rare

for Wolverhampton children and young people in care. Attainment has improved significantly at Key Stage 4, with notable successes at post-16 including a high number of care leavers attending and achieving at university. Personal educational planning is generally strong, with the introduction of the Eclipse electronic PEP allowing greater flexibility and quality control, and our schools and other partners have a good understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Aspire2Uni is demonstrating excellent outcomes for participating young people and supporting positive progression to FE and HE. The positive impact of the Virtual School Team's interventions on so-called 'soft outcomes', such as children's confidence, self-esteem and attitude to learning is also clearly demonstrated in reports from interventions such as A2U. The school attendance of young people in the youth justice system also continues to improve, reflecting the development of stronger monitoring and support around this cohort and vulnerable pupils more generally.

17.3   At the same time, however, there are always areas for development. School attendance dropped somewhat before March 2020, with a rise in persistent absence, though this was linked to particular cohorts and settings and the school attendance is generally good. PEP quality, though strong overall, has not shown continued improvement through audits since 2019 so this is an area for further investigation and improvement. It has not been possible to report on attainment and progress at early years and primary phase in 2020, and these areas will be closely monitored throughout 2020-2021. The development of a multi-agency stakeholder group for the Virtual School, to promote the contributions of other teams and services to raising the achievement of children and young people in care, is another priority for 2020-2021. There is also opportunity for a Wolverhampton's virtual school to become more actively involved with the regional network and National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) to ensure that we stay abreast of new developments and research as we continue to strive to improve the life chances of children and young people in care and previously in care.

18.0   Financial Implications

There are direct financial implications arising from this report

[SB/07012021/O]

19.0   Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report

[TS/07012020/I]

20.0   Equalities Implications

An equalities analysis will be undertaken if required, in partnership with the Equalities and Diversities Team. As the work that underpins this strategy is to overcome any inequality, the analysis is aspirational and will need to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the work undertaken.

21.0   All Other Implications

There are no other implications arising from this report.

22.0   Schedule of background papers

There are no background papers

23.0   Appendices

There are no appendices