

Strong Families, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

11 January 2023

Report title	Virtual School Head Annual Report 2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Chris Burden Cabinet Member for Education, Skills, and Work	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
Originating service	Governance	
Accountable employee(s)	Darren Martindale	Virtual School Head
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Report to be/has been considered by	Children's Social Care and Education Leadership Team Meeting	15 December 2022

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Strong Families, Children and Young People Panel is asked to comment on the attached draft Virtual School Head Annual Report 2022 prior to receiving Cabinet approval.

Report title	Virtual School Head Annual Report 2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
Originating service	Children's Services	
Accountable employee	Darren Martindale Tel: 01902 556951 Email address: darren.martindale@wolverhampton.gov.uk	Virtual School Head
Report has been considered by	Children and Young People in Care Managers Team Children's and Education Leadership Team	7 December 2022 15 December 2022

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2022.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to highlight the educational outcomes of Wolverhampton's children and young people in care and care leavers from September 2021-July 2022, and how these have been supported by the Council, schools and other key partners. It also highlights notable successes as well as future priorities and areas for development.
- 1.2 This report also seeks to inform knowledge and understanding in a number of areas pertinent to the achievement of children and young people in care.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Virtual School Head (VSH) for children and young people in care is responsible for ensuring that the local authority effectively discharges its statutory duty, under 22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, to promote the education of children in the care of the local authority (DfE 2014)¹. Due to a range of barriers, the educational outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers are statistically far poorer than those of their peers. Local authorities seek to narrow this gap through the model of the 'virtual school', with the VSH as the head teacher of that school, working closely in partnership with education settings, social care and other partners and stakeholders.
- 2.2 Unless otherwise stated, all data was taken at the end of July 2022 and pertains to the Department for Education's definition of a 'looked after child', which in this case is a child "who has been continuously looked after for at least 12 months up to and including 31 March 2022". This definition has been used because 12 months is considered an appropriate length of time to gauge the possible association of being looked after on educational attainment."²

3.0 Cohort information

3.1	Total Pupils (Reception to Year 11)	343
	Educated in Wolverhampton	191
	Placed out of City	152
	Primary Phase	126
	Secondary Phase	217
	Attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)	10
	Attending Special Schools	34
	Attending other alternative provision	4
	Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)	92

¹ [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf)

² [SFR Template NatStats \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/SFR_Template_NatStats.pdf)

Special educational needs & disability (SEND) support	70
Boys	197
Girls	146
Total Ethnic Groups	16
Non-White	42%

4.0 Summary of report

4.1 There is much to celebrate regarding the educational achievement of the children in our care:

- The majority (83%) of Children and Young People in Care are attending schools which are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- There were again no permanent exclusions for pupils in care in 2021-22 and suspensions have reduced, with consistent improvements in inclusive practice.
- Attainment at KS4, though it has dropped as expected since schools returned to exam-based assessments, is higher than in the years immediately prior to the COVID pandemic despite the disruptions that young people experienced due to COVID. 19% achieved grade 4 or above in both English and maths at GCSE in 2022.
- Progression to education, employment training is excellent, and better than average for the cohort based on the available national data, with 96% of pupils in year 11 progressing to education, employment or training (EET) from school, and notable successes at post-16 including a high number of care leavers attending and achieving at university. Nine care leavers graduated in 2022.
- Aspire2Uni is starting to show real long-term impact.
- A very high percentage of young people have up-to-date PEPs and quality is improving.
- Pupils in care are given top priority for school admissions in Wolverhampton and we have excellent relationships with our schools, who have a good understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities and of the value of attachment and trauma-informed practice. This was evidenced in 2022 when the VSH nominated two Wolverhampton schools for the “Alex Timpson Attachment Award”, a national award which recognises and celebrates best practice in attachment and trauma-aware schools and settings. The winners were announced at the ARC (Attachment Research Community) national conference on 22 November 2022, with Low Hill winning the early years award for making “a profound and lasting contribution to attachment and trauma-aware practices”. The other

Wolverhampton school nominated, St Michael's CE Primary, were shortlisted in their category.

- Foster carers are well supported and the structural move of the virtual school team into the Children and Young People in care service is supporting improved partnership working with social care.

4.2 At the same time, however, there are always areas for development:

- 20% of pupils are persistently absent
- PEP quality, though good overall, is still uneven and our Ofsted inspection highlighted a need to ensure a firmer overview of our PEP auditing and audit moderation processes.
- There is, as always, an urgent need to narrow the significant attainment gap between care-experienced children and young people and their peers. Attainment at the end of reception year and KS2 are both priorities for improvement, based on 2022 attainment.
- When children move to a school outside Wolverhampton, we work extremely hard with schools and admissions teams in other local authorities to ensure that our young people are provided with the best education available to them without drift or delay. This can be very challenging, however, due to pressures on school places and limited options in for pupils with higher levels of need.

4.3 All of these areas are being addressed as a priority **as outlined in the full report, which is attached as an appendix**, as we continue to strive to improve the life chances of our children and young people in care and previously in care. Key objectives for 2022-2023 include:

- Establishing a more comprehensive data set on the educational progress of children and young people in care in the form of a monthly performance dashboard drawn largely from the Eclipse PEP system
- A review of attachment awareness in Wolverhampton schools, including the impact of attachment and trauma training on school exclusions and inclusive practice
- Continuing to improve the quality of PEPs, supported by a new framework for quality assurance and moderation
- Increasing the participation of young people in our arts/cultural and other enrichment activities.
- Developing the extended strategic and advisory role of the VSH around all children with a social worker, including the use of attendance and inclusion data to evidence impact.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any costs associated with the development of the plan and any future plans that are identified as a result of this report will be funded from existing budgets within the Children and Young People in Care Service.

[JF/20122022/H]

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications to this report. The VSH for children and young people in care is responsible for ensuring that the local authority effectively discharges its statutory duty, under 22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, to promote the education of children in the care of the local authority (DfE 2014), and this report outlines how Wolverhampton is meeting its duties.

[SB/20122022/C]

7.0 Equalities Implications

7.1 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.

8.0 All other Implications

There are no other implications.

9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 - Virtual School Head Annual Report 2022