Appendix 1

Virtual School Head Annual Report 2022

Full Report

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]
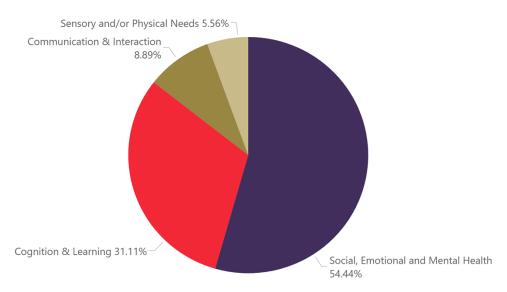
3.0   Cohort information

3.1	Total Pupils (Reception to Year 11)	343
	Educated in Wolverhampton	191
	Placed out of City	152
	Primary Phase	126

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[1] Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[2] SFR_Template_NatStats (publishing.service.gov.uk)

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

3.2   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 almost 55% - 5% higher than 2021 and 11% higher than 2020 (SEMH is the most common category need in EHCPs nationally for children and young people in care). The prevalence of each category of need is outlined in the chart below.
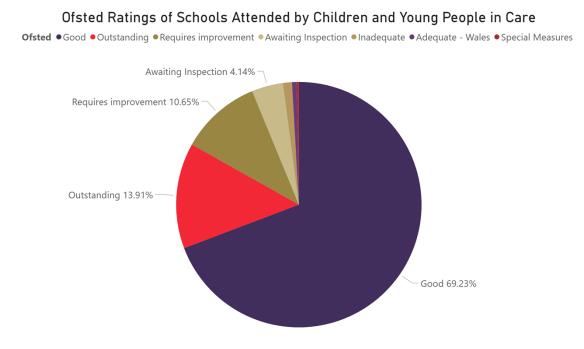
EHCP Categories of Need

Sensory and/or Physical Needs 5.56%
Communication & Interaction 8.89%
Cognition & Learning 31.11%
Social, Emotional and Mental Health 54.44%

4.0   School Ofsted ratings

4.1   Statutory guidance states that Children and Young People in Care should attend schools that are rated as either or Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. 83% of children and young people in care attend a school which is rated as good or better by Ofsted. 4% are

awaiting an Ofsted rating outcome. 1% are rated as inadequate. The ratings are summarised in the chart below.

4.2 As a corporate parent, Wolverhampton council will always strive to ensure that out pupils in care are educated in the best possible school available to them. There may be occasions, however (for example, when a child is settled and doing well in a school, and its Ofsted rating changes), when it is deemed better for the pupil to remain in a school rated by Ofsted as requiring improvement (or, in very exceptional circumstances, inadequate), than to move them and disrupt their education. In such cases, a decision is always made in the best interests of the child.

Ofsted Ratings of Schools Attended by Children and Young People in Care

Ofsted ●Good ●Outstanding ●Requires improvement ●Awaiting Inspection ●Inadequate ●Adequate - Wales ●Special Measures

Awaiting Inspection 4.14%
Requires improvement 10.65%
Outstanding 13.91%
Good 69.23%

5.0 Supporting learning and achievement

5.1 Wolverhampton's **Virtual School Team** are committed to improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care, and previously in care, in accordance with the council's statutory duties. We achieve this through a combination of direct, advisory, and strategic work with children, schools, social workers, carers and other key partners. These 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
- Providing advice and training, together with robust challenge and support to schools and social care
- Interventions and wider activities to promote learning, raise aspirations and celebrate achievements.

5.2   The Virtual Head manages the **Pupil Premium Plus** (PP+). This is the funding allocated to local authorities to support the education of pupils in care from year 1 to year 11, at a rate of £2,420 per pupil, per annum.[3] It has been clearly stated by the DfE that, for Children and Young people in Care, the Pupil Premium should be utilised to support the child's individualised learning targets as contained in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). This support can vary from 1:1 tuition, ICT equipment and other resources, to therapeutic programmes. In Wolverhampton we allocate the majority of funding directly to schools in termly instalments. The exact amount varies depending on needs and priorities but is usually approximately £600 per term. We retain the remaining amount for specific projects and interventions such as:

- 'Britannica School'; an online Encyclopaedia Britannica subscription for all CYPIC.

- 'Beanstalk'; a volunteer reading help programme for selected pupils at primary phase.

- 'Aspire2Uni' – see 5.10.

- 'My Own Tutor' online learning package.

- Musical instrument tuition for 17 of our young people. Wolverhampton's Music Service also delivered 2 'play in a day' events in 2021-22, giving our aspiring musicians an opportunity to play together with other children and young people in care from around the City.

- A local and regional arts and culture offer for care experienced children & young people through an organisation called 'Artslink'. The online platform allows all our children to have access to a wide range of arts & culture activities and experiences to have at home, including art, music, dance, drama, creative literacy, digital arts. including creative challenges, filmed activities set by artists in the region and a gallery to showcase some of the work created by young people. Since face-to-face interaction became possible again post-COVID, more face-to-face activities have been delivered (having previously been 'virtual'), including a theatre trip in which 23 young people from Wolverhampton participated. The Virtual School Team have applied for 'Artsmark', a national quality mark, in recognition of our growing arts and cultural offer.

- Dedicated Educational Psychology support and 1:1 learning support from Assistant Educational Psychologists for pupils at key stage 4 who are at risk of underachieving. The short case study below gives an example of how valuable this support can be, not only to the young person but also to their foster carer and the relationship between them. The names have been changed.

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[3] [Pupil premium: virtual school heads' responsibilities - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](www.gov.uk)

5.3 **Assistant Psychologist Interventions for Virtual School Students: A case study of effective support including collaboration with a foster parent**

"Emily was introduced as Chloe's foster parent in my initial planning meeting with Chloe's designated teacher. Chloe's teacher mentioned Emily had extensive experience as a carer and was able to discuss Chloe's strengths and needs in more depth than she was. We collaboratively used this information to plan my sessions with Chloe. Focussing on her preparation for exams, we used approaches and strategies which best suited Chloe, aiming to remove potential barriers to achievement. Emily emphasised how important relationships were for Chloe, so the first few sessions focussed on me building a genuine connection with her. Emily would often dip in and out of the conversation, offering support and clarification when needed. The positive social communication between myself and her carer helped me to build a real rapport and sense of trust with Chloe, improving her readiness to learn.

The duration and frequency of sessions were also decided collaboratively between the three of us, taking into consideration Chloe's other commitments. Everything we did was co-produced, and Emily would support by helping Chloe to verbalise what she wanted from the sessions. Leading up to and during the examinations, Emily's and Chloe's relationship was tested due to the stress of exams. For example, Emily had noticed Chloe was not sticking to her revision timetable and would challenge Chloe, resulting in arguments. During this time, I worked restoratively with them to help maintain the relationship, including 1:1 phone consultations with Emily. During the consultations, it was clear that Emily felt hugely responsible for Chloe's educational achievement; so much so that it was affecting her own wellbeing. I was able to support a more restorative approach between them, which helped to repair and strengthen their relationship.

Chloe achieved Good GCSEs in all of her subjects."

5.4 In addition to Pupil Premium Plus, the **School-led Tutoring (SLT) and Recovery Premium grants** were allocated to local authorities for the 20201-22 academic year. Both of these grants are intended to help close the education gap which widened as a result of COVID-19. For children and young people in care, funding was allocated to local authorities to be passed to their VSH to decide, in line with DfE guidance, how best to use the funding to provide tuition and other support for their pupils. The SLT grant is part of the tuition offer from the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and its allocations were calculated on the basis that, for the academic year 2021 to 2022, the grant would cover 75% of the cost of tuition, based on an average cost of £18 per hour for a pupil in mainstream education receiving a package of 15 hours of tuition (totalling £202.50 per pupil). For pupils in specialist educational settings, such as a special school, allocations were based on an average cost of £47 per hour. VSHs were required to contribute the remaining £11.75 from their pupil premium plus budget. The Recovery Premium grant was based on a rate of £145 for each eligible pupil in mainstream education and £290 for each eligible pupil in a specialist setting.

5.5   It was helpful, given the complicated funding formula and changing advice throughout the year, that the DfE widened their definition of what can be classed as 'tuition' under the terms of the SLT grant. It was allowed to include a wider range of support than traditional 1:1 academic tuition, such as mentoring, targeted teaching assistant support or interventions of a therapeutic nature or to improve engagement. In the end, NAVSH (the National Association of Virtual School Heads) agreed with the DfE that both the SLT and Recovery Premium simply be viewed as a top-up to our existing PP+ funding, which is how it was shared with schools and monitored through PEPs and meetings with designated teachers. All of the funding was utilised by Wolverhampton.

5.6   An initial allocation of £145 per pupil was provided directly to schools for our children and young people in care, alongside the spring term allocation of Pupil Premium Plus, totalling £49,880.00. In addition, schools were invited to apply for additional funding for pupils who required more support. Many schools took us up on this offer and received additional funding for identified pupils, which included 1:1 tuition but also therapeutic intervention, physical resources, in-class support or mentoring and specialist tuition for pupils with English as an additional language.

5.7   Additionally, the Recovery Premium, with its more flexible remit, funded:

•   Whole-school training for schools with high number of children and young people in care attachment aware / trauma informed practice, along with membership of the Attachment Research Community (ARC) to further support with attachment/trauma awareness.

•   A series of online workshops in study skills, exam preparation and post-16 planning for young people at assessment stages and their foster carers.

5.8   Another programme funded by Pupil Premium Plus is '**Aspire2Uni**' (A2U), a progressive programme for children and young people in care in Year 7 upwards, designed to raise aspirations and increase the numbers of care leavers in university. Working in partnership with Wolverhampton University and virtual schools from four other local authorities within the West Midlands, we have been running A2U successfully since 2015. 29 young people from Wolverhampton are currently participating in the programme, from year 7 to year 13. Participants are mentored by undergraduates from the university, who are selected, trained and employed for this role. In addition, outreach days, enrichment events are offered to support the young people on their journey toward higher education.

5.9   Aspire2Uni held its first 'graduation' event in July 2022, with two young people in care from Wolverhampton among those who, having completed the whole A2U programme and earned places at universities (three young people from Wolverhampton started the programme in its first year), proudly wore their black gowns as they were presented with certificates celebrating their commitment and achievement. They went on to university two months later. One of these young people said: "The Aspire2University is designed to

give insight into what university would be like and I would recommend it to any young person in care who wants to go onto university. The staff members are the most dedicated and passionate people I have ever met and the amount of effort they put into enhancing the experience is hard to describe in words alone."
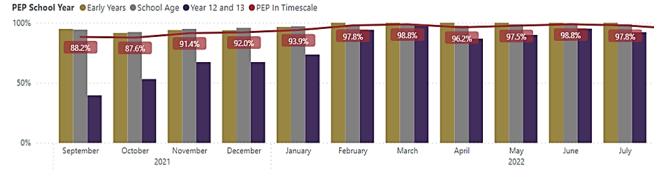
5.10   One year 10 student from Wolverhampton was selected as A2U's 2021-2022 'mentee for the year'. His punctuality, enthusiasm and dedication was described as 'fantastic' by programme staff.

5.11   The numbers of children who started A2U in each year, and who are still engaged in the programme, plus the two university starters, are outlined in the table below. 67% of children who started the programme are still engaged with it, and two of the three participants who are now old enough to have started university achieved that outcome.

Year started	Number of starters	Number still engaged	Outcome
2015	3	2	2 started university
2016	10	6	
2017	5	0	
2018	6	4	
2019	8	5	
2020	5	5	
2021	4	4	
2022	4	4	

6.0   Personal Education Plans

6.1   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 the end of July 2022, 98% of the cohort had a PEP completed within statutory timescales. A further breakdown of PEP completion rates, as illustrated by the chart below, reveals how they improved throughout 2021-2022. The completion rate of post-16 PEPs was a cause for concern at the start of the academic year. However, this improved by over 52% between September 2021 and July 2022, following concerted and ongoing efforts by social care teams and the virtual school team.

% of CYPIC with PEP in Timescale

PEP School Year ● Early Years ● School Age ● Year 12 and 13 ● PEP In Timescale

Chart values: September 88.2%, October 87.6%, November 91.4%, December 92.0%, January 93.9%, February 97.8%, March 98.8%, April 96.2%, May 97.5%, June 98.8%, July 97.8% (2021–2022)

6.2   It is imperative that this key document is of high quality. Quality assurance, as DfE statutory guidance states, "is the joint responsibility of the local authority that looks after the child and the school. Social workers, carers, VSHs, designated teachers and, as appropriate, other relevant professionals will need to work closely together [on this].[4]" The Virtual School Team complete audits of PEPs on a termly basis. For the last few years, focussed audits 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.

6.3   Of the 95 Personal Education Plan that were audited in the summer term 2023:

- 95% had SMART targets (11% higher than 2021 and 14% 3% higher than summer 2020)

- 84% demonstrated appropriate and effective use of Pupil Premium Plus (5% higher than 2021 and 7% higher than 2020.

6.4   PEP quality can still be uneven overall, however, and this was highlighted by Ofsted in their 2022 inspection of Wolverhampton's children social care services, which also stated that the oversight of managers in the quality assurance of PEPs needed to improve. In response to this, the VSH is establishing a new auditing framework to begin in January 2023. This will entail a large sample of PEPs to be audited in greater depth than previously, by a wider pool of managers from across social care and education. New PEP audit tools have been developed to support this process.

6.5   It is also necessary to link PEP quality formally to performance management. Results of individual audits will be reported to the child's social worker and their manager, and to the designated teacher in their school, to be discussed during supervision meetings etc. Overall findings and recommendations will be fed back to the Quality Assurance Triangulation meetings which take place three times a year. Moderation meetings will take place twice-yearly between all auditors to ensure consistency of practice.
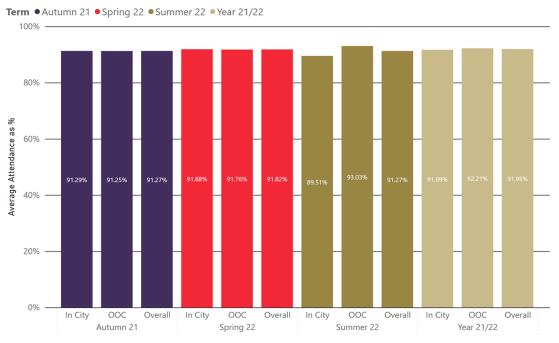
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[4] Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children (publishing.service.gov.uk)

6.6 An enhanced programme of PEP training will support quality improvement alongside audit activity. A concerted effort has been made, through the summer and autumn terms 2022, to ensure that all social workers and social care managers have completed the council's online PEP training - 79 staff have completed the training so far and the target is for all social workers and social work managers to complete the training in 2022-23. The virtual school will also be delivering half-termly open 'PEP clinics' for social care and designated teachers from January 2022, as well as offering 1:1 support.

7.0 Attendance

7.1 The Virtual School team monitors the school attendance of all of Wolverhampton's children and young people in care by scrutinising PEPs and half-termly attendance reports for the whole cohort, while pupils who are persistently absent are continually monitored and offered support to improve attendance, with the team working closely with designated teachers, education welfare officers, social workers, and foster parents. The importance of good school attendance is highlighted in training for carers and social workers, and in the relevant council policies.

7.2 Attendance monitoring is further enabled by daily telephone calls to all out-of-City schools by 'Welfare Call', a service funded by Pupil Premium Plus, which provides regular reports and helps to ensure that children and young people in care who are educated outside Wolverhampton (and are therefore potentially more vulnerable) benefit from even closer monitoring than those in Wolverhampton schools.

7.3 The small number of children and young people in care on modified timetables are monitored closely by the Virtual School Team, supported by key partners such as the council's Inclusion Team, and help to ensure that pupils receive an appropriate offer of full-time education. If a modified timetable or attendance at an alternative education provision becomes necessary for an individual pupil, the team ensure that provision is regularly reviewed and remains appropriate to the child's strengths and needs, with a clear plan to return to full-time education as soon as possible.

7.4 Most of our pupils in care attend school very well. The average school attendance of the cohort for 2021-22 was 92%, with the attendance of in-City and out-of-City pupils being virtually identical. This is 5% higher than in 2021.

7.5   A breakdown of attendance by school and cohort (in-City or out-of-City pupils), as illustrated in the chart below, shows a consistent level of attendance throughout.
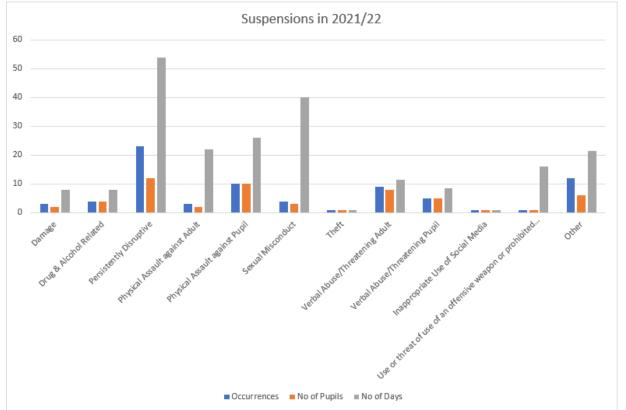
Average Attendance % by Term and Cohort

Term ● Autumn 21 ● Spring 22 ● Summer 22 ● Year 21/22

	In City	OOC	Overall
Autumn 21	91.29%	91.25%	91.27%
Spring 22	91.88%	91.76%	91.82%
Summer 22	89.51%	93.03%	91.27%
Year 21/22	91.69%	92.21%	91.95%

Average Attendance as %

7.6   Despite this, 20% of the cohort had attendance of below 90% in 2021-22. While this is 2% lower than the last figure reported for 2020-21 (taken from when schools reopened following the second lockdown in March 2021, to the end of the summer term), it is still an unacceptable level of persistent absence. This was highlighted by Ofsted in their inspection of Wolverhampton's children's social care services in April 2022. In response, the relevant section of the council's policy on the education of children and young people in care has been revised to outline clearer and more robust measures for responding to attendance problems in the most timely manner.

7.7   The education updated policy also reiterates the expectation that carers should not take children and young people in care out of school for holidays during term time, after a rise in such instances which has undoubtedly impacted on attendance figures. This clear message has been reiterated to our foster carers and social workers and continues to be reiterated in supervision meetings. If a carer feels that exceptional circumstances apply, they should submit a request to their child's social worker, who will forward the request in writing to the Virtual School Head. As the authorising officer on behalf of the local authority, the VSH will consider the request and provide a written response to the social worker within 10 working days of receipt of the request. The VSH will discuss the request with the child's school and other managers and arrive at a decision.

8.0   Inclusion

8.1   There were no permanent exclusions for Wolverhampton children and young people in care in 2021-2022. Permanent exclusions are extremely rare for Wolverhampton children and young people in care – there were none in 2020-2021, one in 2019-2020, none in 2018-2019, and one in 2017-2018, for example. This is a notable outcome (statistically, children in care are far more likely to be excluded than their peers) which reflects the concentrated work of schools, the council and other stakeholders in providing strong support for pupils who are struggling and alternative to exclusion.

8.2   There were 76 suspensions (previously called fixed-term exclusions) in 2021-2022, with 55 pupils receiving one or more suspension. This is an increase from 2020-2021 (when there were 67 suspensions), but 2020-2021 included two months when schools were partially closed due to COVID. Suspensions in 2021-2022 were lower than in other recent years. Persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason for suspensions, which is in line with previous years and the wider school cohort. The reasons for suspensions are illustrated in the chart below.

8.3   The virtual school will continue to work closely with schools and other partners to reduce exclusion, promoting inclusive practice, and ensuring that the right support is in place for vulnerable children. In 2022-23, for example, we are offering whole-school training in attachment and trauma-aware practice to Wolverhampton schools with high numbers of children with a social worker, provided by AC Education and funded with the recovery premium grant.

9.0   Attainment – Early Years to Key Stage 4

9.1   In 2022 assessments:

- Zero children and young people in care who attended Wolverhampton early years settings achieved a good level of development (GLD) in all areas. However, there are only four eligible children (i.e. in care for 12 months +) in this cohort, which is a very small number and the DfE have stated that these results should not be compared to previous years due to changes in the assessment framework.

- 83% of children and young people in care achieved ARE or above in the Year 1 phonics test.

- The table below outlines outcomes for children and young people in care in assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) or Year 6 – all 24 pupils. The highest results were in reading and writing for in-City pupils (40% achieving ARE) while the lowest performance was in reading and writing for the out-of-City cohort (22%).

- It should be noted, however, that of the nine pupils who were educated outside Wolverhampton, four were not entered for standard assessments because they attend special schools which do not enter their pupils for those assessments. Therefore, a high % of pupils with SEND can have a big impact on assessment results in a small cohort, as was the case here.

Subject	At Age Related Expectation
Reading	33%
Writing	33%
Maths	29%
All three Subjects	21%

9.2   The table at 9.3 outlines the proportions of Wolverhampton pupils in care who achieved Grade 4 and above in English, maths, and both English and maths, at GCSE in 2022. The following table outlines the proportions of pupils achieving Grade 5 in the same subjects.

9.3   The DfE have stated that 2022 GCSE results should not be compared to 2021 or 2020 results because of the differing conditions - schools returned to exam-based assessments in 2022 while grades were largely based on teacher assessments in the preceding two years due to the COVID pandemic. Indeed, the percentages below are lower than in 2021 and 2020, in common with many other pupils nationally. However, they are generally higher than in 2019 and 2018. For example, 16% achieved Grade 4 in English and maths in 2019 and 13% in 2018. The results are noticeably better for pupils

in Wolverhampton than for those educated outside the City, which is often the case due to the out-of-City cohort often (though not always) having higher levels of need.

Pupils achieving grade 4 at GCSE			
	English	Maths	Eng & maths
In-City pupils (22)	41%	32%	27%
Out of City (26)	12%	19%	12%
All pupils (48)	25%	25%	19%
Pupils achieving grade 5 at GCSE			
	English	Maths	Eng & maths
In-City (22)	18%	9%	9%
Out of City (26)	12%	4%	4%
All pupils (48)	15%	6%	6%

10.0 Post-16 Education, Employment and Training

10.1 The Children and Young People in Care Service and key partners ensure all Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers of an appropriate age[5] have access to impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and are supported with a pathway through education, employment or training (EET). The service supports young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), helping to break down any barriers to positive participation. The support includes:

- close partnership working with EET providers, Work Coaches and the Department for Work and Pensions
- dedicated Connexions Advisor and SEND Officer
- support from young person's advisors
- EET Coordinator, EET Advisor and EET Apprentice
- weekly EET drop-in service for young people
- bi-monthly EET panels to agree plans and support for young people who are NEET
- bespoke work experience opportunities and ring-fenced apprenticeships
- partnership working with the Care Leaver Covenant
- financial, practical and emotional support for young people in Higher Education (HE), including PEP meetings, well-being support, post degree planning and access to academic studies and welfare support.
- Particularly close partnerships with the University of Wolverhampton, with an enhanced offer of support including access bursaries, 1:1 one mentoring, a designated care leaver contact, pre-application and entry support, 52-week accommodation, help with graduation costs and a dedicated web page for care leavers[6]

10.2 **Young people with SEND** are given additional priority for such support and extra help to access opportunities if needed (e.g. if mobility support is needed to access a session). Support will always be planned in accordance with their levels of need, aspirations, education, health and care plans and other support plans. A dedicated SEND Officer for

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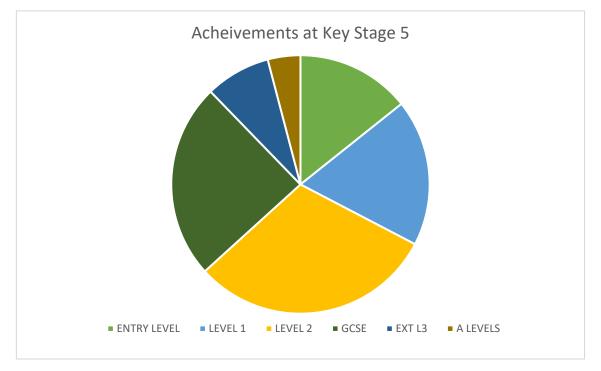[5] Wolverhampton's PEP asks for information on IAG from year 8 for children and young people in care.
[6] https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/student-support/support-for-care-leavers-and-estranged-students/

vulnerable pupils joined the SENSTART team in 2022. His role is to write, review and monitor the effectiveness of EHCPs and help to ensure that provision and transition support plans are appropriate and effective for children and young people in care, care leavers and other vulnerable students. In addition, the EET Coordinator now meets with the Virtual School Education Support Officer Amarpal Bagri on a half-termly basis to review all EHCPs for children and young people in care in school year 11 to ensure a positive transition into education, employment or training, in liaison with Connexions, SENSTART and other partners as appropriate.

10.3   This work continues to support good outcomes. For example:

- 61% of young people referred to our EET panel progressed into education, employment or training in 2021/22 (referrals to the panel are usually for young people who are long-term NEET and/or are experiencing significant barriers to engagement).

- 96% of children and young people in care left school in year 11 with a positive EET destination. By way of comparison with national averages for the cohort, the DfE track the % of children and young people in care who are still in EET, 6 months after leaving school in year 11. Their 2021 data reports 78% of children who had been in care for 12 months+ achieving this, and 65% for children who had been in care for less than 12 months. We have not tracked this exact statistic in the past, but at the end of January 2022, 90% of our 2021 school leavers were still in EET. Therefore, our performance apprearance to compare very favourably with national data.

- 79% of the cohort progressed to college or 6th form study, with the others going on to a range of other options such as training or specialist SEND provision. Of the remaining 4% (2 young people), one is NEET and one is not available to the labour market (NALM). The young person who is NEET is being supported to seek education, employment or training through Black Country Impact specialist provision.

- EET figures for the cohort are consistently higher than national averages with a large number of young people achieving qualifications in further education (see 10.3) with a comparatively high number of care leavers in higher education - 25 of our Care Leavers currently attend university with a further 2 taking a break from studies for a year due to becoming new parents (see 10.4). The number of care leavers accessing university has increased year on year.

10.4   There are 111 young people at Key Stage 5 (year 12 and 13), of whom 67 are male and 44 females. 85% of these were in education, employment or training and either achieved a qualification(s) or continued with their studies and are not yet due a qualification until 2023   (e.g. A levels and extended BTEC Level 3). In total 74 qualifications were achieved. Seven young people made a seamless progression to higher education.

- Seven achieved Entry Level qualifications
- Nine achieved Level 1 qualifications
- 15 achieved Level 2 qualifications
- Eight achieved Level 3 qualifications
- 12 achieved GCSEs
- Four achieved extended Level 3 BTECs
- Two achieved A levels

A breakdown of the qualifications achieved is illustrated in the chart below.

Acheivements at Key Stage 5

■ ENTRY LEVEL   ■ LEVEL 1   ■ LEVEL 2   ■ GCSE   ■ EXT L3   ■ A LEVELS

10.5 There were 26 **young people in this cohort with EHCPs** and 12 of these achieved qualifications:

- Five achieved entry level qualifications

- Six achieved Level 1 qualifications

- One achieved Level 2 qualifications

- Nine are continuing in education

- Five young people either left or were either withdrawn from their course. They were supported to access other appropriate EET pathways.

10.6 The City of Wolverhampton are proud to support our graduates who have worked extremely hard and shown resilience through not only their studies but also through disruptions to their learning due to the COVID pandemic.

10.7 The table below shows our care leavers' achievements in HE in 2022. There are two results still pending results due to resits and late submissions.

University	Classification
Harper Adams	2.1 BSC hons Bio veterinary Science
Coventry	2.1 BSC hons Bio medical Science
Wolverhampton	2.2 BA hons Social Care, Criminology and Criminal justice
Lincoln	3rd class with honours BA hons Music
Wolverhampton	2.1 BSC hons Psychology
Heart of Worcester	2.2 BA hons Game Design and digital Media
Sheffield	2.1 BA hons Social Care and Criminology
Worcester	2.1 BA hons Primary Education
Wolverhampton	2.1 BSC hons Psychology and Counselling

10.7 Seven young people started courses at university in 2022.

11.0 Participation

11.1 Wolverhampton has a 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 with Corporate Parenting Board.

11.2 Work continues to strengthen young people's contribution their PEPs, to ensure the plan is properly informed by their views and is meaningful to them. Virtual attendance and 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. Designated Teachers are advised on a range of flexible approaches to completing PEPs in order to maximise pupils' engagement.

12.0 Strategic and Advisory Developments

12.1 In September 2021 the Virtual School Head's role was extended nationally to include, not just children and young people in care previously in care, but all children with a social worker, or who have had a social worker within the past six months for safeguarding or welfare reasons (i.e. including those with Child in Need or Child Protection plans, or who had had one recently). Non-statutory guidance was published and funding made available to local authorities (£100,000 per annum was allocated to Wolverhampton) to support this extended role. The funding is currently only guaranteed until April 2023, pending the government's spending review.

12.2 This decision was informed by the government's 2019 Children in Need review which highlighted how poor the educational outcomes of children with social workers could be.[7] It showed that children who needed a social worker tended to fall behind their peers at

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[7] Review of children in need - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

every stage of their education. For example, children with a social worker are around three times more likely to be persistently absent from school and between two to four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers. The review recognised "the crucial role that VSHs have in helping education settings and local authorities work together" and wanted to "extend their leadership to the cohort of children and young people with a social worker." There is also a recognition that the COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on children's learning and will have increased existing barriers for some of the most vulnerable children.

12.3   The guidance pointed out that "this extended role does not require VSHs to provide direct intervention, help or support for individual children with a social worker or their families". Rather, it would be a strategic role which seeks to enhance the partnerships between education settings and local authorities, and schools to further understand and address the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience. VSHs will "help to demonstrate the benefits of attending an education setting and ensure there are mechanisms in place to offer advice and support to teachers and social workers, with the aim of narrowing the attainment gap".[8]

12.4   In 2021-2022, Wolverhampton's response to the newly extended VSH duties was a detailed action plan which included:

- A management restructure that created additional capacity for the VSH to take on this added responsibility

- Recruitment of a School Improvement Advisor (SIA) for Children with a Social Worker

- Establishment of a data set on this wider cohort utilising the council's vulnerability matrix, which details attendance and exclusions data, which schools the pupils attend and a range of other vulnerability factors such as SEND, safeguarding risks and involvement with other key agencies

- Direct advice and support from the SIA for schools with high numbers of children with a social worker, alongside contribution to existing processes such as Inclusion Support and Alternative Provision Panel (ISAPP) and Social Workers in Schools (SWIS)

- Briefings delivered to social care teams, management teams and school leadership networks (designated teachers, designated safeguarding leads, ConnectEd partnership)

- Training delivered to new school head teachers, school governors and early career teachers, plus an enhanced package of whole-school training offered to schools with high numbers of children with a social worker.

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[8] Promoting the education of children with a social worker (publishing.service.gov.uk)

12.5   In 2022 the virtual school team moved from the Inclusion and Empowerment Service to the Children and Young People Service. This establishment change is enabling closer partnership working with social care teams, while the VSH has retained close links with Inclusion and Empowerment and other services with Education, maintaining positive partnerships with both social care and education teams.

12.6   The Virtual School Head's role includes strengthening the awareness of key professionals around the needs of children and young people in care, building partnerships and developing policy and procedure in this area. In 2022, both our Model School Policy and Children and Young People in Care Education Policy were revised and updated to encompass new requirements and priorities. The virtual school website continued being developed and promoted to provide a 'one-stop-shop' for information and advice.[9] The virtual school continued to deliver training on supporting education to foster carers, PEP clinics and advice to social workers and schools, and a termly forum for designated teachers.

12.7   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 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, particularly with regard to the use of the Pupil Premium Plus for this cohort.

13.0   Conclusions and next steps

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

- The majority 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 2021-2022 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.

- Progression to education, employment training is good, and better than average for the cohort based on the available national data, with notable successes at

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[9] Wolverhampton Virtual School (wolvesvirtualschool.co.uk)

post-16 including a high number of care leavers attending and achieving at university.

- Aspire2Uni are 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.

- The Virtual Head is becoming more actively involved with the regional VSH network and National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) and has been identified as the regional lead for PEPs and Pupil Premium Plus for 2022 - 2023.

13.2   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. We are constantly working to improve communication. It is vital that we work together as closely, creatively and proactively as possible to address any issues early on, helping to prevent greater problems and potential school moves in the future.

13.3   All of these areas are being addressed, as outlined in the sections above, 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.