

Virtual School Head Annual Report 2023

Full Report

Darren Martindale – Virtual School Head

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 for the academic year September 2022-July 2023, and how the council, schools and other key partners have supported these. It also highlights notable successes as well as future priorities.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 Unless otherwise stated, all data was taken at the end of July 2023 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 2023”. 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

2.0 Cohort information

2.1 Pupil characteristics

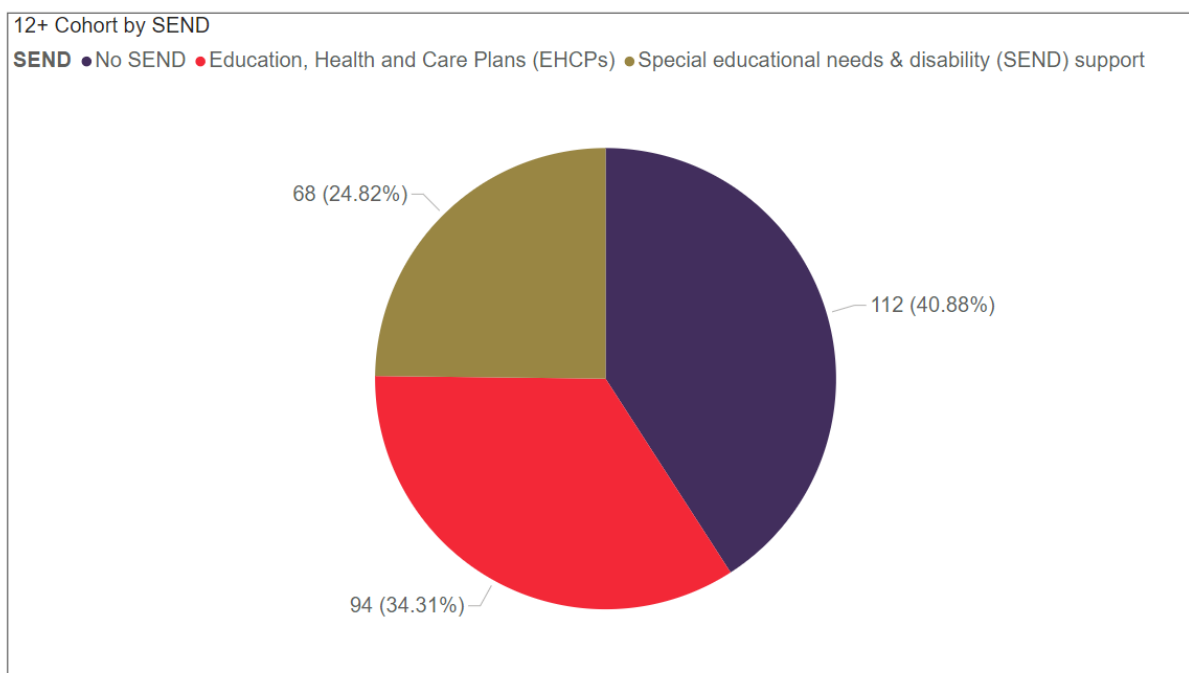
All pupils	12+ Cohort	% of Cohort	% Difference to Last Year
Total Pupils (Reception to Year 11)	274		-4.90%
Nursery Age (-1, -2)	16		
Year 12 and 13	89		
Educated in Wolverhampton	130	47.45%	+2.6%

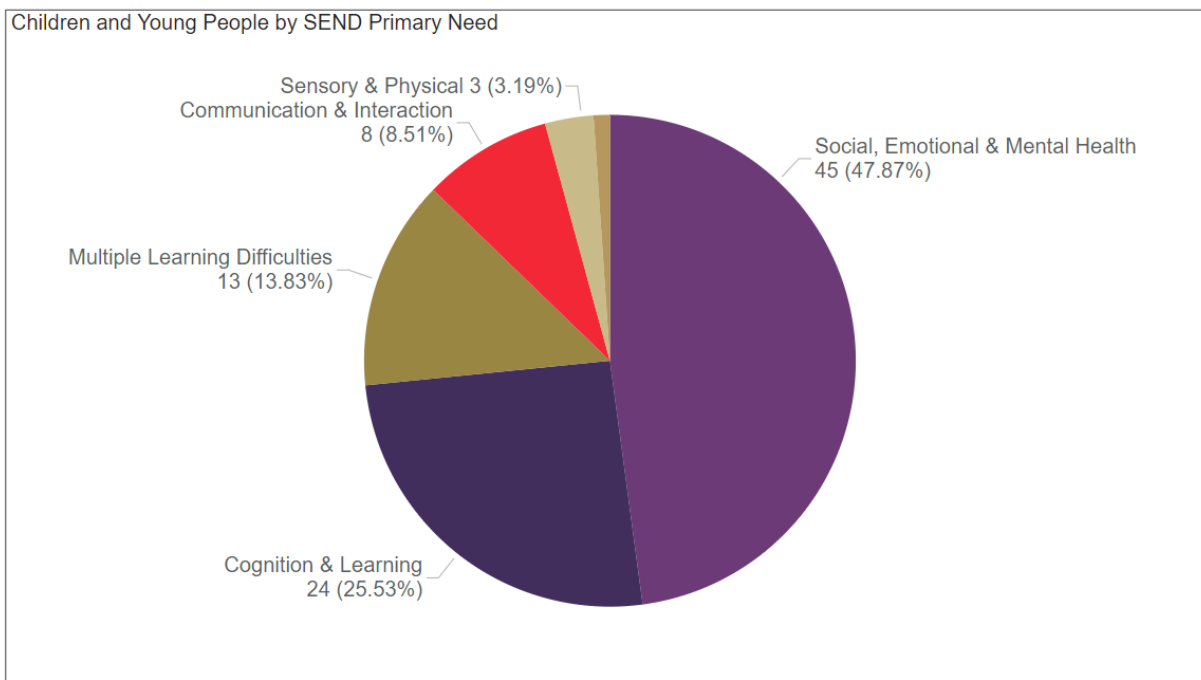
¹ [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

² [SFR Template NatStats \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Educated Out of City	144	52.55%	-2.60%
Primary Phase	101	36.86%	-0.80%
Secondary Phase	173	63.14%	+0.8%
Attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)	2	0.73%	-2.40%
Attending Special Schools	46	16.79%	+7.4%
Attending other alternative provision	7	2.55%	+1.8%

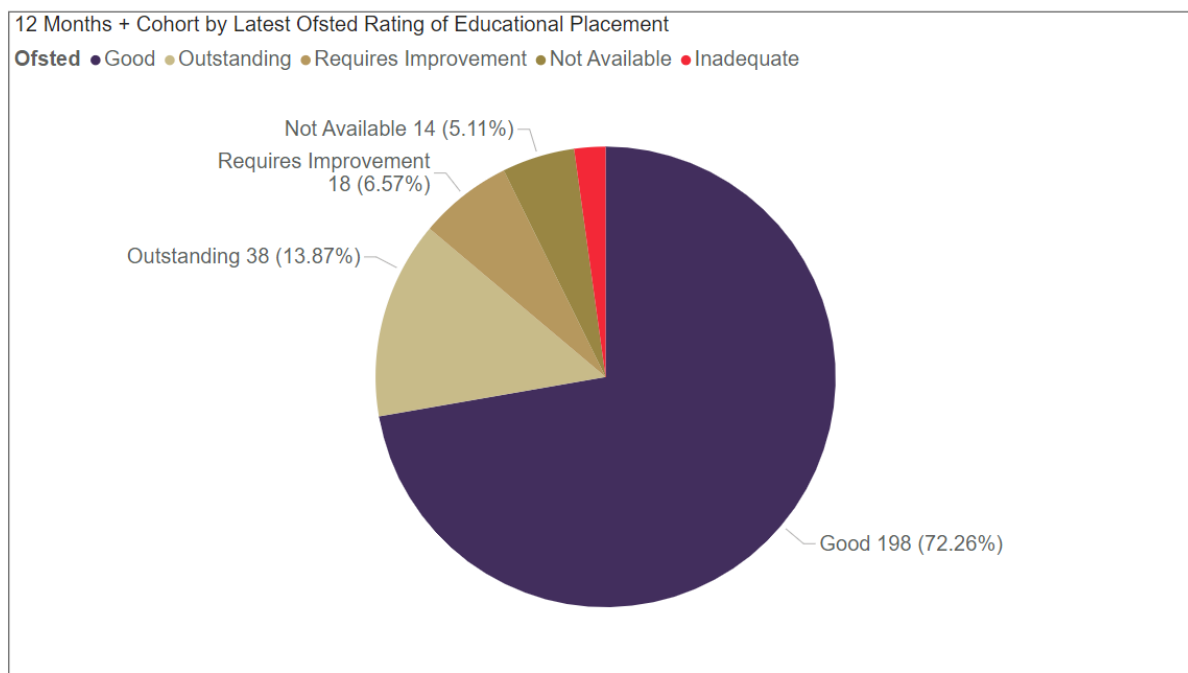
2.2 The first chart below illustrates the % of children and young people in care with SEND – almost 60% of the cohort - and those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in particular. The graph illustrates the primary category of need for those with EHCPs. There is a consistent trend with previous years with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulty the most prevalent category of need, accounting for almost 48%, though 7% lower than in 2021.





3.0 School Ofsted ratings

3.1 Statutory guidance states that children and young people in care should attend schools that are rated as either or Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. 86% of children and young people in care attend a school which is rated as good or better by Ofsted, a 3% improvement on the measure in 2021/2022. The ratings are summarised in the chart below.



3.2 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, 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. An example might be when a child is settled and doing well in a school, and its Ofsted rating changes. In such cases, a decision is always made in the best interests of the child, on a case-by-case basis.

4.0 Supporting learning and achievement

4.1 Wolverhampton's Virtual School team are committed to improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care, and previously in care. We achieve this through a combination of direct, advisory, and strategic work with children, schools, social workers, foster parents and other key partners. This includes:

- Supporting Designated Teachers in schools (training, termly 1:1 meetings with the team and termly designated teachers forum)
- Improving Personal Educational Planning – see 5.0
- Tracking attendance, exclusions, attainment, and progress
- Direct learning support for pupils
- Providing challenge and support to schools and social care teams to ensure that pupils receive the best possible support, including careful monitoring of any modified timetable arrangements
- Helping to remove barriers to school admissions and inclusion with schools, SEND and Admissions teams both within and outside Wolverhampton
- Termly training and other support to foster parents
- Interventions and wider activities to promote learning, raise aspirations and celebrate achievements
- Development of policy and procedure to ensure that children and young people in care are properly prioritised and supported

4.2 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 £2.530 per pupil, per annum. It has been clearly stated by the DfE that, for children and young people in care, the Pupil Premium should be used to support the child's individualised learning targets as contained in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). Currently, 360 pupils in Wolverhampton are eligible for the funding. In the financial year 2022-23, Wolverhampton received £956,770.

4.3 Approximately a third of the grant (£384,023 in 2022/23) was utilised to fund the majority of the Virtual School Team staffing. We allocate the majority of the remaining funding directly to schools in termly instalments. The exact amount varies depending on needs and priorities but is usually £600-700 per child per term. We retain the remaining amount for specific projects and interventions

such as those listed below. The amounts spent on these interventions in 2022/23 are included in brackets:

- 'Britannica School;' an online Encyclopaedia Britannica subscription for all CYPIC (£2000)
- 'Beanstalk;' a volunteer reading help programme for selected pupils at primary phase (no cost in 22/23 due to previous underspend)
- 'Aspire2Uni' – see below (£32,370)
- Additional tuition, alternative provision and classroom support (£88,019)
- Musical instrument tuition and group workshops for seventeen of our young people through Wolverhampton's Music Service (£14,643)
- A local and regional arts and culture offer for care experienced children & young people through an organisation called 'Artslink' (£9,425). The Virtual School Team have applied for 'Artsmark', a national quality mark, in recognition of our growing arts and cultural offer.
- Training and professional development of virtual school team and designated teachers (£7,634)
- Attendance and attainment monitoring of pupils educated outside Wolverhampton by 'Welfare Call' (£11,920)
- Specialist SEND Teacher Service (£5,727)
- Inclusion Support (£19,000)

4.4 In addition, the school-led tutoring (SLT) grant is part of the tuition offer from the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and it is intended to help close the education gap which widened as a result of COVID-19. For children and young people in care, the grant is passed directly to local authorities for the Virtual School Head (VSH) to allocate. Wolverhampton received a total of £83,340. The support funded through this grant can include a wider range of support than just traditional 1:1 academic tuition, such as mentoring, targeted teaching assistant support, appropriate enrichment activities or interventions of a therapeutic nature. All of the grant was used for support of this nature in 2022/23 in line with Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) above.

4.5 A key programme funded by Pupil Premium Plus is 'Aspire2Uni' (A2U), a partnership with Wolverhampton University and virtual schools from four other local authorities within the West Midlands for children and young people in care from Year 7 upwards, designed to raise aspirations and increase the numbers of care leavers in EET and especially at university. A2U has been running successfully since 2015. Participants are mentored by undergraduates from the university and offered outreach days and other enrichment events to support them on their journey toward further higher education. Children's University awards are delivered as part of the scheme, as well as A2U's own gold/silver/bronze awards for participation and progression, helping to reward and motivate pupils.

4.6 29 young people from Wolverhampton are currently participating in the programme, from year 7 to year 13. One pupil (year 8) graduated with a bronze

award from the Children's University scheme (having completed 70 hours and 30 minutes of appropriate, structured activity). Four participants achieved the A2U progression award at either gold, silver or bronze level. Six participants in year 13 completed the programme in 2023; five of these are currently in education, employment or training (EET) including one who is doing voluntary work. There were no young people graduating from this year's cohort who entered university this year, however two of the three A2U 'graduates' of 2022 started university in that year. Ultimately, A2U seeks to promote positive EET outcomes for care leavers, whether that be university or a different pathway.

4.7 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 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. Resources such as the 'Britannica School' online learning resource are also made available to our adoptive parents.

4.8 In addition, the Education, Employment and Training (EET) Co-ordinator and her team of EET Advisors has become part of the virtual school team, working with further education settings and other colleagues in Skills and Employability teams to promote the EET of children and young people in care at post-16 and care leavers. The support offered to this cohort includes:

- Designated officers in local colleges and a Virtual School 16+ partnership agreement in place
- Dedicated Connexions Advisor
- Young People's Advisors working alongside Job Centre Plus Work Coaches
- EET Coordinator, EET advisors and the EET Apprentice deliver direct support to CAYPIC/care leavers
- Weekly EET drop-in service
- Supported employment team and the Wolves at Work team offer support for care leavers with EHCP's and young people looking for employment
- Care leavers have internal access to apprenticeship vacancies across the Council
- Bimonthly EET panels to support young people who are NEET
- Bespoke work experience and five ring fenced apprenticeships
- Partnership working with the Care Leaver Covenant
- For young people in Higher Education (HE) - support with UCAS, personal statements, ongoing support while at university including dedicated HE

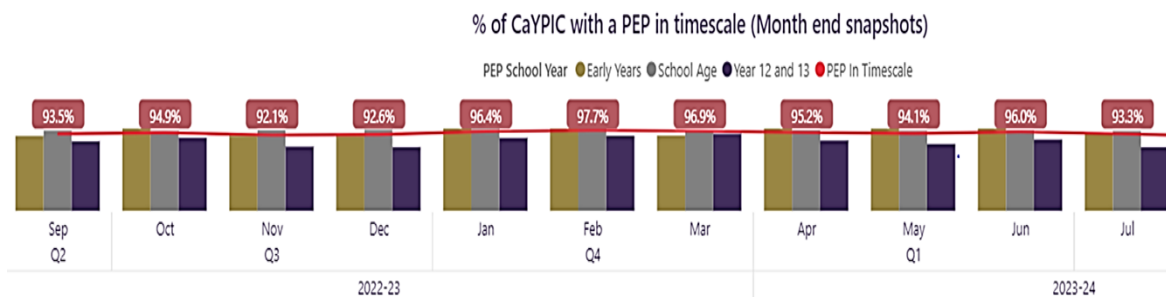
PEP and post-graduate employment support. CWC is a member of the NNECL HE forum

4.9 The virtual school team have received many compliments from colleagues in for their work in 2022/23. A few are summarised below:

- Many thanks for your support and securing these great activities for N and N. You are so amazing. I am looking forward to going to watch their shows (social worker).
- X has always been available and supportive, answering any questions that I may have and guiding me when I have been unsure. In recent months one child in particular has experienced a significant change to her home... X understood, stepping in to attend the meetings, feeding key information back to me as well as linking in with SENAR [Birmingham's SEND service] to keep them up to speed. Thank you, X (teacher).
- Just wanted to say a massive thank you for all your help to get H into School, we are really pleased we have managed to find H the most amazing school which she starts on Wednesday (foster parent).
- You have been so very committed and worked so very hard with the plans for education with R... A huge thank you and what an achievement for Ricky/Bex has successfully completed their GCSEs recently too - just amazing and thank you so very much for making such a huge, huge difference (foster parent).
- Over the past two years, I have been working closely with Y and Z and can openly say that Y has gone above and beyond around the level of support she has been providing to E. Thank you. I have learned so much from you (social worker).

5.0 Personal Education Plans

5.1 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). Overall, in 2022/23, 94.4% of the cohort had a PEP completed within statutory timescales (based on an average taken from completion rates at the end of each month). A further breakdown of PEP completion rates, as illustrated by the chart below, reveals that the completion rate varied, month to month, from 92.6% to 97.7%.



- 5.2 It is imperative that this key document is of high quality. The majority of PEPs for Wolverhampton children are good and a high % are completed within statutory timescales. Audits have evidenced a slow, incremental improvement, but quality can still be variable. The virtual school have strengthened their programme of training and quality assurance of PEPs in 2022/23. New PEP audit tools have been developed, analysing all key areas of the plan. While the past only the virtual school team audited PEPs, now all children and young people in care managers and some senior colleagues across the Inclusion and SEND services also audit PEPs on a termly basis. School age and post-16 PEPs are audited separately which enables us to understand the strengths and areas for improvement for these different cohorts. Audit results are shared with the child's social worker and their manager, and with the child's designated teacher. Team managers discuss audit outcomes in supervision and team meetings, and findings and recommendations will be fed back to the Quality Assurance Triangulation meetings.
- 5.3 Two termly audits were completed in 2022/23 – spring and summer term. A comparison with the spring term results is illustrated below.

School age PEPs

Term	Total completed	% Outstanding	% Good	% Requiring Improvement	% Inadequate
Spring	60	5	55	28	12
Summer	37	5	60	21.5	13.5

Post-16 PEPs

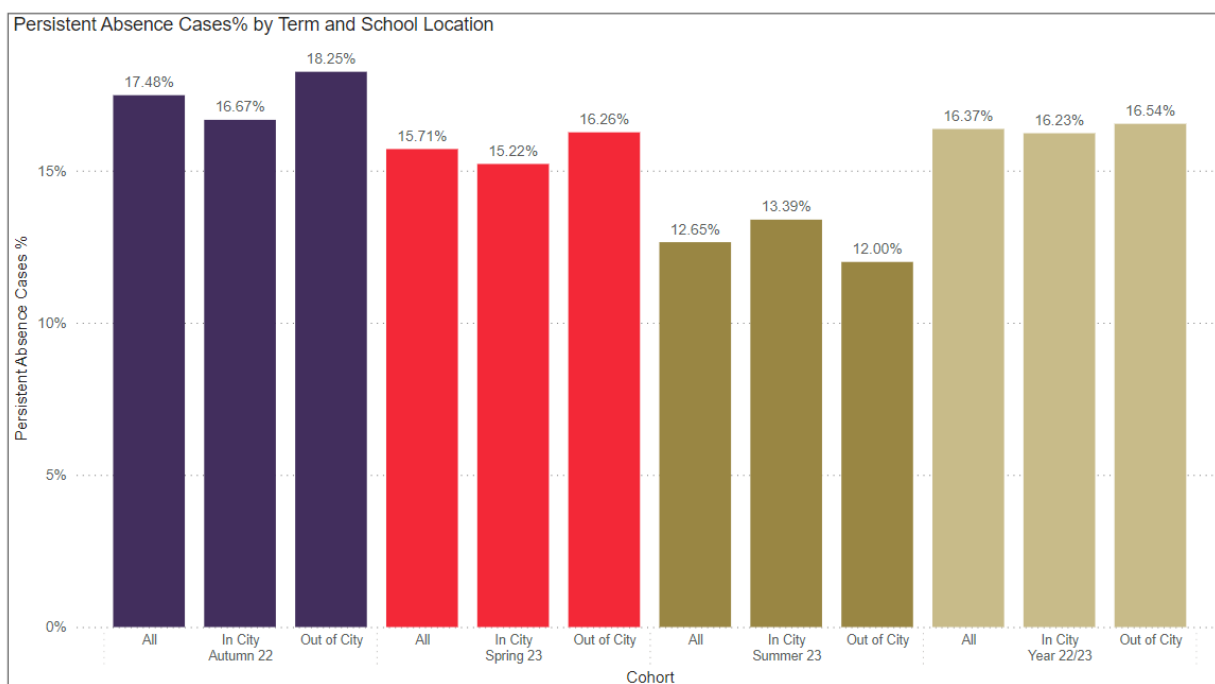
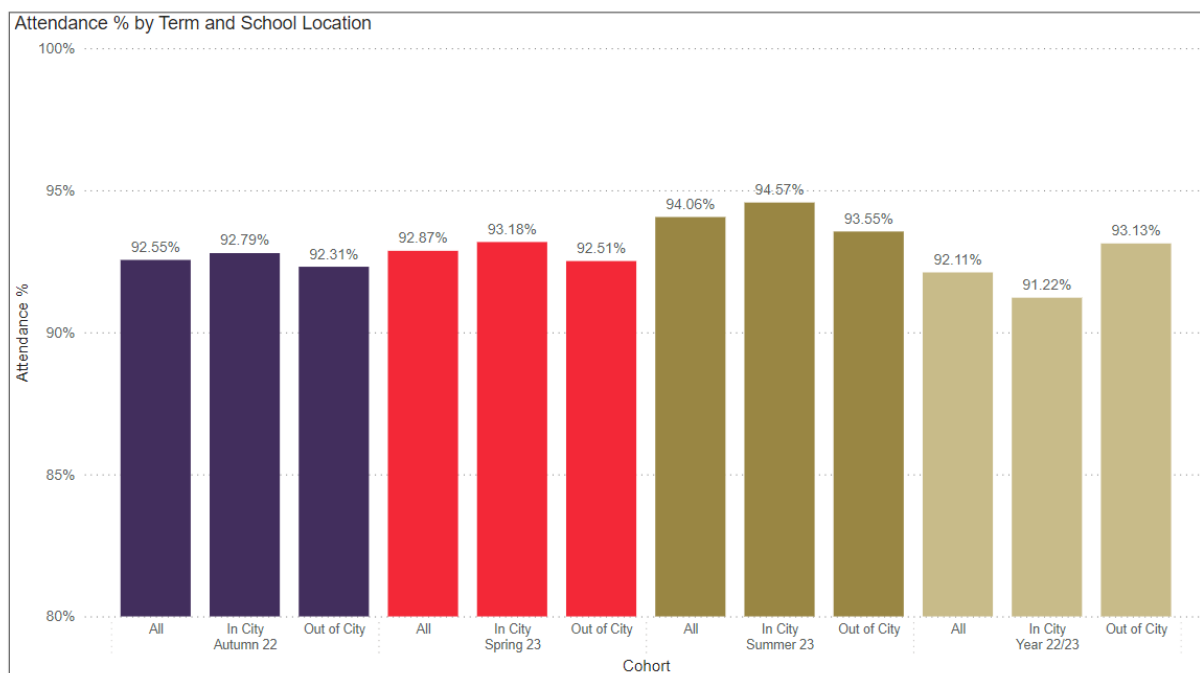
Term	Total completed	% Outstanding	% Good	% Requiring Improvement	% Inadequate
Spring	10	0	30	60	10
Summer	12	17	33	25	25

- 5.4 A comparison between the spring and summer term audits reveals:
- 65% of school-age PEPs were judged as good or outstanding in the summer. This is a 5% improvement on spring term audits.
 - The vast majority of these were good, but very few (5% of audits) were outstanding. This is the same as spring term.
 - Post-16 PEP quality is lower than school-age, though the summer term audits showed improvement on the spring term for post-16. A higher number of post-16 PEPs need to be audited, however, in future rounds.
- 5.5 Analysis of the individual areas of the PEP reveals some common findings in both terms:

- In school age PEPs, the strongest area is pupil attitude/effort & strengths/achievements – 91% outstanding/good in the summer, suggesting that professionals know their children well, and that PEPs celebrate positive areas effectively. Attainment recording and pupil voice are also strong.
- A weaker key area for the school-age cohort is none-core targets, with only 47% outstanding/good, indicating that none-core subjects and areas for development are being overlooked.
- The strongest areas in 16+ PEPs were student comments, learning targets and timetable details. The weakest area is recording prior attainment (GCSEs etc).

6.0 Attendance

- 6.1 The Virtual School team monitors school attendance on an ongoing basis and it is discussed in PEP meetings and termly meetings with designated teachers. The service also commissions an external provider, Welfare Call, to closely monitor the attendance, inclusion, and attainment of all of our children and young people in care who are educated outside Wolverhampton. Schools are contacted daily to request attendance information and reports are made available via a secure online portal. This helps to ensure that, where attendance becomes an issue, it can be addressed in a timely a timely manner. The council's EWO service also prioritise children and young people in care within the cohorts of pupils they support.
- 6.2 The council's Children and Young People in Care policy was updated in 2022. In response to concerns over increasing levels of persistent absence, the updated policy includes additional detail and clarity about how services will respond at each stage of school absence, and the range of strategies that are used such as Wolverhampton's Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) pathway.
- 6.3 Average attendance and persistent absence (attendance below 90%) by school term and overall, for 2022/23 are illustrated in the charts below:



6.4 Average school attendance for 2022/23 for the whole cohort is 92%, while persistent absence is 16.5%. This is below the national average level of persistent absence for children and young people in care, which is 19.1% using the most recently available data,³ as well as being lower than that for all pupils nationally (22.3%).

³ 2022/23 attendance data for Wolverhampton pupils in care cannot be compared with the previous year due to differences in the data collection (in 2022/23, attendance for year 11 pupils during the study leave period have been removed from totals, in line with DfE methodology. In the previous year, it was included. This does, however, enable a proper comparison with national data.

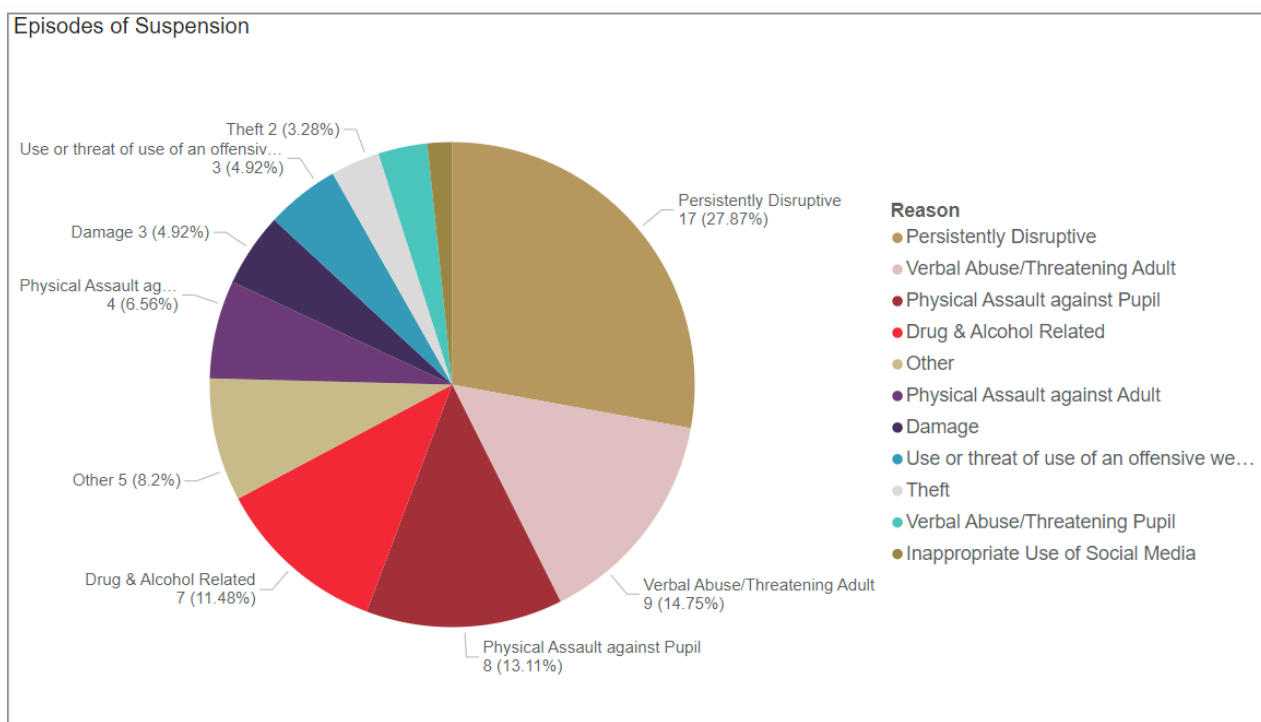
6.5 The attendance % of pupils who have been care for 12 months or more is some 3% higher than that for all pupils in care. This indicates that being in care is having a positive effect on attendance for the children in question.

7.0 Inclusion

7.1 There were no permanent exclusions for Wolverhampton children and young people in care in 2022-2023. Permanent exclusions are extremely rare for Wolverhampton children and young people in care – there have only been two in the last 5 years.

7.2 There were 64 suspensions (temporary exclusions) for Wolverhampton children and young people in care, which is 12 fewer than the previous year. 31 pupils received one or more suspension; 13 fewer than 2021/22. While the pupil numbers in the cohort have reduced since 2021/22, which has contributed to a reduction in the number of suspensions. The % of pupils who received one or more suspension – 11% - is also a 5% decrease from 2021/22.

7.3 The chart below shows the reasons for suspensions. Once again, persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason:



7.4 The virtual school will continue to work closely with schools and other partners to reduce exclusion, promote inclusive practice, and ensure that the right support is in place, particularly for pupils at risk of exclusion. Evidence-based interventions that the team have implemented include the Turnabout Programme (executive functioning and problem-solving skills), Drawing and Talking (therapeutic intervention), Catch-up Literacy, Lego therapy, the use of tools such as ABC charts, and training for school staff in attachment and trauma-informed approaches such as Emotion Coaching.

8.0 Attainment

- 8.1 At early years foundation stage (EYFS), 57% of in-city children (four out of seven with results reported) in the cohort achieved a good level of development in all areas. 25% (2 out of 8) children living outside Wolverhampton achieved this. However, with such small cohorts, year-by-year outcomes are likely to be subject to random fluctuations.
- 8.2 The table below outlines the % of children and young people in care who achieved age-related expectation (ARE) in assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) or year 6. Performance has improved in the majority of areas compared to 2021/22, though not in writing which is the weaker area. Early years and primary results are subject to fluctuations, however, due to the small cohorts:

KS2 Results	Students	In City	Out of City	%
Total with Results	12			
Maths	9	6	3	75.00%
Reading	8	7	1	66.67%
Writing	4	4	0	33.33%
All subjects at Expected	4	4	0	33.33%

- 8.3 The table below shows the % of pupils achieving grade 4 and 5 at GCSE in 2022/23. These GCSE results are the best we have ever had for CYPiC in Wolverhampton, apart from one year when pupils did not have to sit exams due to COVID19. They are above national averages, using the most recent available national data (2021/22) for pupils achieving grade 4 in English/maths (22.1% nationally) and grade 5 in English/maths (11% nationally).

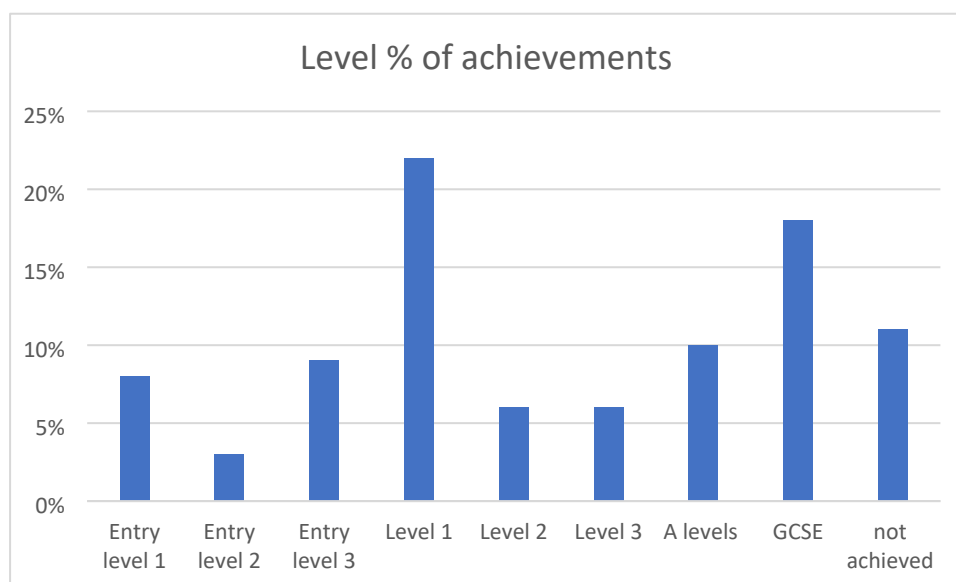
Grade 4 and Above	English	Maths	English & Maths	Difference to 21/22
Out of City (19)	47.37%	42.11%	26.32%	-0.96%
In City (13)	38.46%	30.77%	30.77%	19.23%
All Students (32)	43.75%	37.50%	28.13%	9.38%

Grade 5 and Above	English	Maths	English & Maths	Difference to 21/22
Out of City (19)	31.58%	21.05%	15.79%	6.70%

In City (13)	23.08%	23.08%	15.38%	11.54%
All Students (32)	28.13%	21.88%	15.63%	9.38%

9.0 Post-16 Education, Employment and Training (EET)

9.1 Between the 106 young people at key stage 5 (years 12 and 13), of whom 65 are male and 41 female, 92 qualifications of different types and levels were achieved. Three are continuing in education and aren't due a qualification until 2024 (A levels and extended BTECS). 11% did not achieve a qualification as expected. This could have been for a multiple of reasons; not passing the work at the required level, non-engagement, change of establishment or home circumstances or becoming NEET throughout the academic year. The % of different levels of qualifications achieved is illustrated in the chart below:

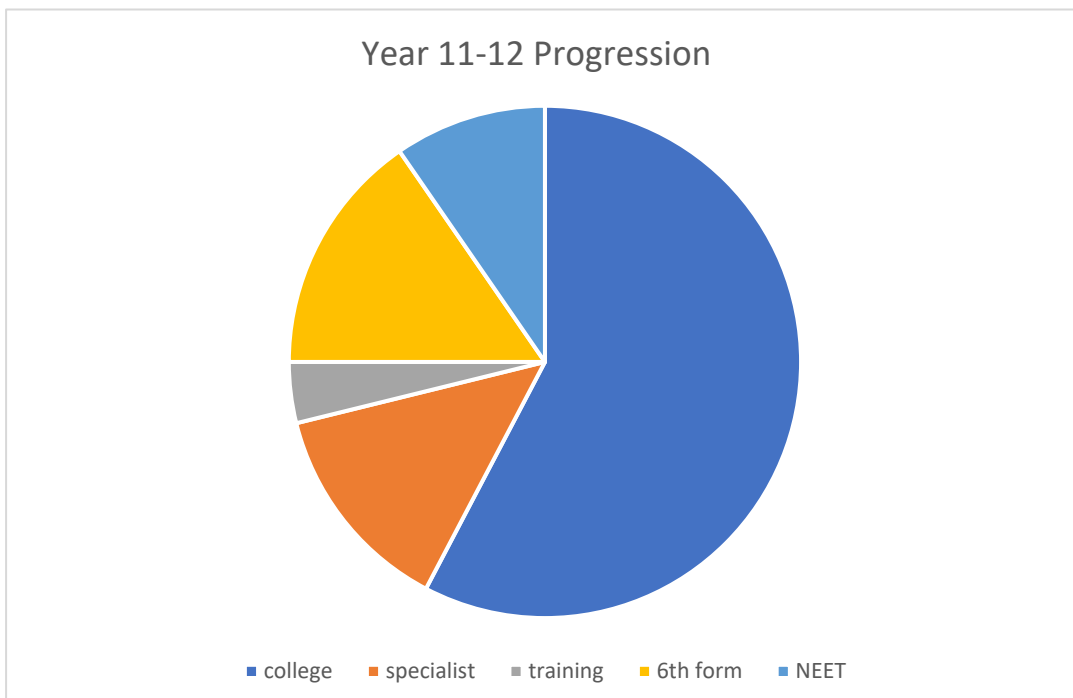


9.2 There are also 29 young people in this cohort with Education Health and Care plans (EHC Plan) and 15 have achieved qualifications:

- 7 achieved entry level qualifications.
- 5 achieved level 1 qualification.
- 2 achieved level 2 qualifications.
- 1 achieved level 3 qualifications.

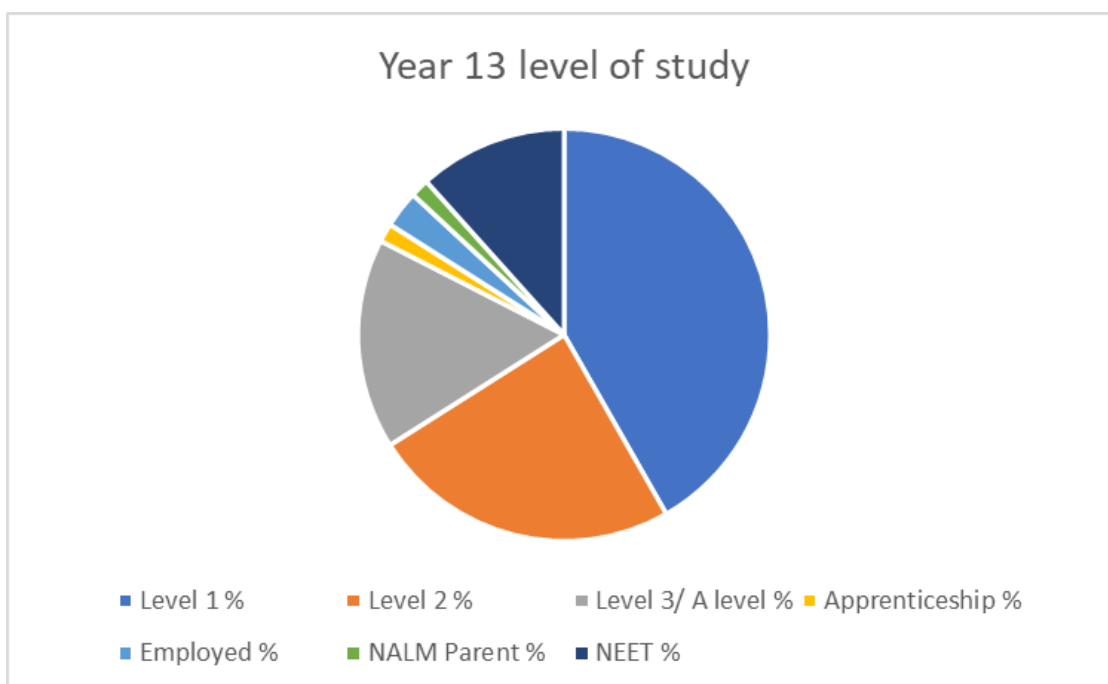
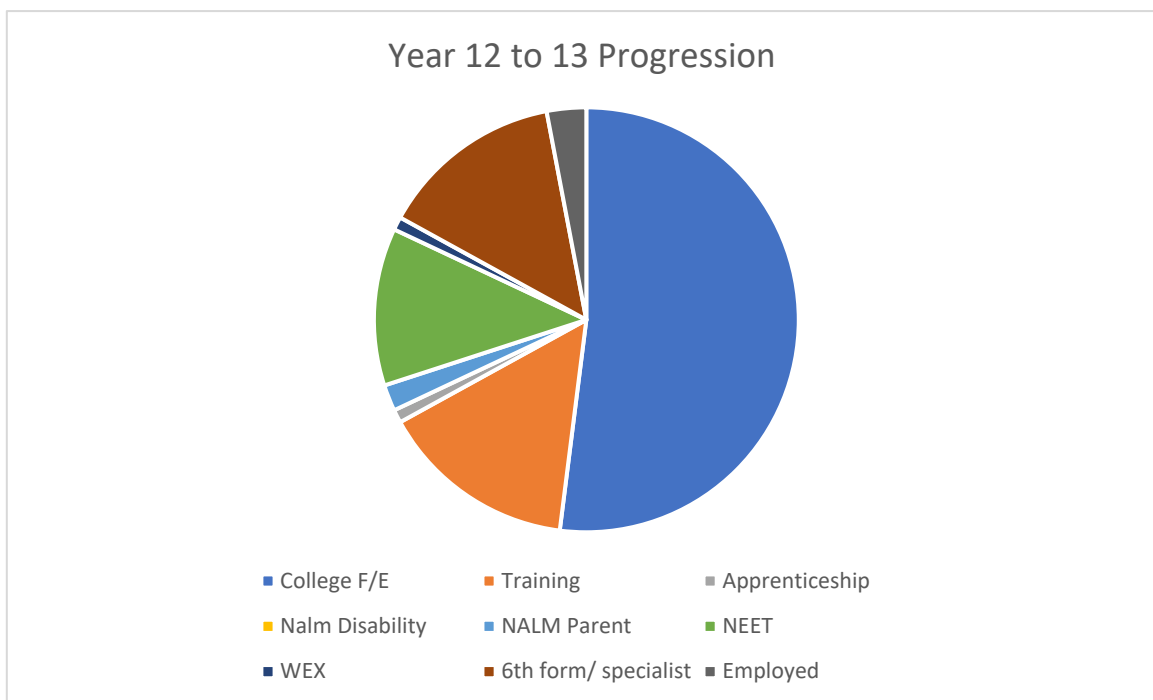
9.3 There are 52 young people in our current year 12 (age 16-17) cohort of children and young people in care and care leavers, of which 27 are living in Wolverhampton and 13 have EHCPs. 90% of these young people progressed to EET after leaving school in 2023. 57% have transitioned to college, F/E, 13% into specialist provision, 4% into training and 16% into 6th form, as illustrated in the chart below.

9.4 By way of comparison, the same cohort in 2021/22 was made up of 57 young people of which 96.4% made a positive progression into EET. However, as the data for 2022/23 has been collated earlier than last year, the EET % is likely to increase. Of the young people who are currently NEET, two have an EHC plan and are currently in the consultation stage, one is on a waiting list to start college and two are refusing to engage in any EET activity who will be offered EET support to engage and source appropriate provision.



9.5 Of the 67 young people in this cohort 89.5% of young people in our year 13 (age 17-18) cohort remained in EET, either progressing to the next stage of their learning or remaining in employment. 68% of young people progressed in 6th form or college or training of which 20% are in specialist provision, 15% are engaged in training, 1.5% is an apprentice, 1.5% is a young parent, 1.5% is completing work experience, and a further 3% are employed. We have 12% of young people who are NEET (not in employment, education, or training). NEET support is ongoing with the 8 young people to establish a suitable provision.

9.6 Compared to 2021/22 progression rates of 87.2% into EET, we have seen an improvement this year of 2.3%. As the September guarantee has not yet closed there is still time for young people to engage in EET. The data last year was collated after the September guarantee (November 2022).



9.7 As of September 2023, The City of Wolverhampton Council have 22 Care Leavers attending **Higher Education (HE)** with three young people having deferred their studies to 2024. 4 care leavers started university this academic year. The table below shows the numbers of Wolverhampton care leavers who have graduated over the last 5 years:

Academic Year	Total in H/E	Continuing, Carry over	New Starters	Graduates	Withdrawn/ on hold

23/24	22	17	5	9 expected TBC	1
22/23	27	18	9	2	5 (2 on hold) (3 withdrawn)
21/22	32	21	11	10	3 (1 on hold) (2 withdrawn)
20/21	27	22	5	3	3 withdrawn
19/20	33	22	11	7	4 (2 on hold) (2 withdrawn)
18/19	29	18	11	5	1 withdrawn

- 9.8 The numbers of care leavers starting university this year has slightly reduced. This is because we currently have four young people who have deferred and one young person who did not sit their A levels as expected, so there should have been 5 more this year that have not progressed to higher education at this time. We continue to have high aspirations for our young people and support all young people to make decisions about their education futures that feel right for them.
- 9.9 The City of Wolverhampton are proud to support this year's graduates who have worked extremely hard and have shown resilience through not only their studies but also through the Covid Pandemic with heavily disrupted learning. Two Wolverhampton care leavers graduated in 2023; one with a 2:1 honours degree in physics from the University of Birmingham, and one with a third class honours degree in Early Childhood Studies from the University of Wolverhampton. Both have progressed into full time employment in their chosen sector.
- 9.10 Five young people choose not to progress with their studies in 2022/23. Two are planning to return to HE in the following year 24/25 with a change of degree planned. Two have gone into employment and one is currently applying to the Police Force.

10.0 Participation and Enrichment

- 10.1 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 function as a real force for change and the improvement of services. A young person-friendly version of this report is shared and discussed with the CiCC as well as with Corporate Parenting Board.
- 10.2 We promote the Children and Young People in Care survey and discuss results with designated teachers, while discussions continue to be had about how we can help to strengthen young people's contribution their PEPs.

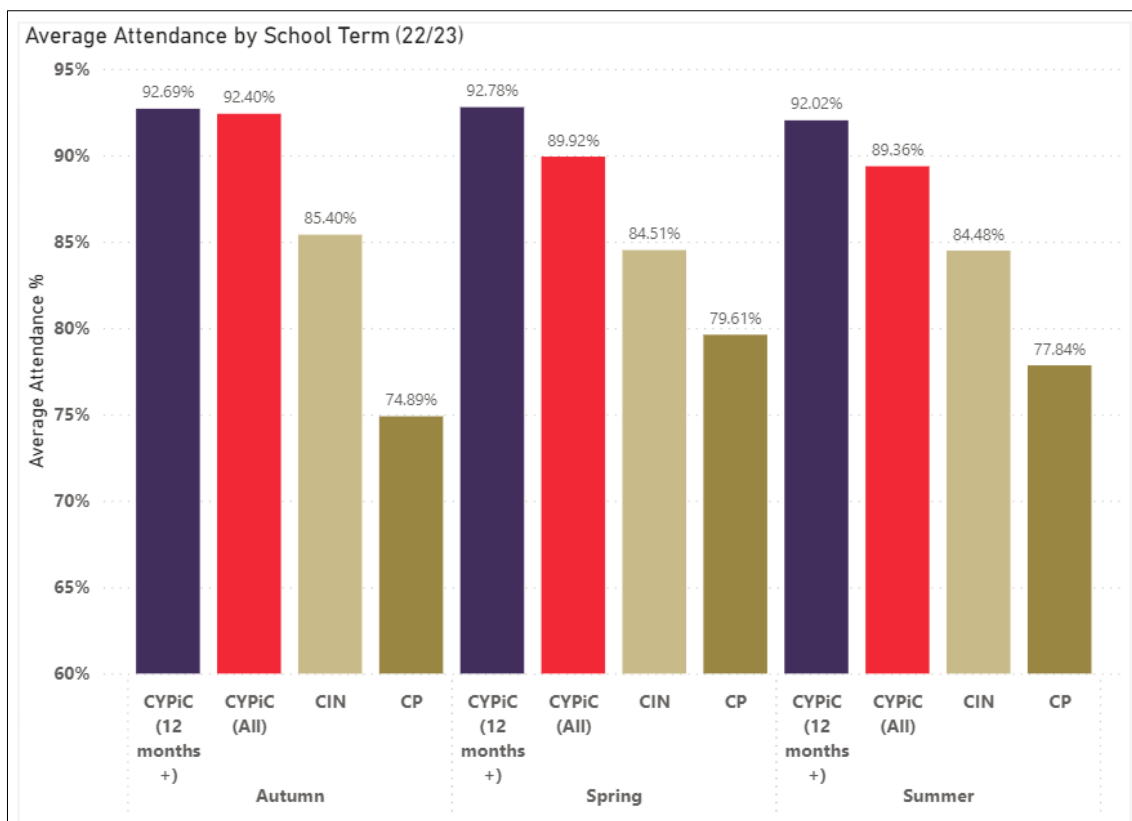
Additional questions were added to the survey in 2023 to capture more specific information about what enrichment / out-of-school hobbies and activities young people access or would like to access. The Wolverhampton PEP form has also been amended to capture more specific detail around enrichment and the pupil's interests.

- 10.3 We continue to promote enrichment and wider learning though, for example, theatre and art gallery visits. We continue to offer 1.1 music lesson though Wolverhampton Music school, funded by Pupil Premium Plus, prioritising children in year 4. This year we have 83% of our in-city year 4 pupils accessing 1.1. lessons. This year we are working with the Music School to produce a 'Virtual School Band' who will perform at the iAwards celebration event in January 2024. Wolverhampton Virtual School also provide positive activities via the regional 'Artslink' and 'Active now' programmes of arts, cultural and sports activity for children and young people in care, providing six events annually. We have built our links with the Cultural Education Partnership, held two stakeholder meetings schools that focus on enrichment, and secured two bursary places on the Arena Theatre drama club for 2023/24. Two STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) events are also being planned for 2022/23 with Collins Aerospace.

11.0 Virtual School Extended Duty – Children with a Social Worker

- 11.1 In 2021 the DfE announced funding and published non-statutory guidance to extend the role of the Virtual School Head to all children with a social worker (i.e. young people with Child in Need or Child Protection Plans), or who have had one within the previous 6 months, so that more vulnerable children in every local authority can benefit from the support and leadership of a VSH. 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.
- 11.2 The extended duty means Virtual School Heads will:
1. enhance the partnerships between education settings and local authorities.
 2. work with agencies to further understand and address the disadvantages that children with a social worker (CWSW) can experience.
 3. 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.
- 11.3 Our response to the above duty in 2022/23 has included:
- A restructure of management roles to enable the VSH to take on these new responsibilities, and employed a new School Improvement Officer for CWSW, who started her role in April 2022.
 - A new data set for this cohort including attendance and exclusions data, giving a clear picture of the cohort in terms of year groups, schools attended, SEND and other vulnerabilities.

- Regular briefings to social care teams and training on meeting the educational needs of CSWS to a range of partners including new head teachers, school governors, early career teachers, designated safeguarding leads, designated teachers and new-qualified social workers.
 - Involvement in the Inclusion Support and Alternative Provision (ISAAP) panel to promote inclusive practice in schools and ensure that CSWS are prioritised and given the most appropriate support.
 - Contribution to other multi-agency panels such as the emotionally-based school none-attendance (EBSNA) panel
 - Regular advice and guidance meeting the needs of individual young people.
 - Reviewing samples of Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) plans and producing additional guidance for schools to help them strengthen the role of education in these plans.
 - Working closely with the Educational Psychology Service, supporting schools to review their attachment aware and trauma informed practice, secured whole-school training on attachment / trauma for fourteen schools in Wolverhampton detailed action plans for twenty schools so far. The aim is for all Wolverhampton schools to develop their practice in this way over the next 5 years.
 - Targeting priority schools for attendance support, in partnership with the Attendance Team
 - Contribution to the council's review of alternative provision and development of a new quality assurance framework and directory of approved alternative education providers.
- 11.4 The cohort of young people on and CIN and CP is particularly complex, due to high numbers (719 CIN and 225 CP at September 2023), limited availability of data (we have accurate educational data on 73% of the cohort, primarily due to some schools not sharing their data with the local authority), and the high level of need for many children.
- 11.5 Though all data on the CIN/CP cohort should be taken with the caveat described in 11.4, the available data does indicate that school attendance is lower for pupils in this cohort than for children and young people in care, as illustrated in the chart below. 42.74% of Wolverhampton CIN are persistently absent from school. While this is high, it is 5.76% lower than the national average for Children in Need at 48.50%. The same indicator for the CP cohort is also lower than the national picture by 1.27%.



12.0 Preparing for independence – financial education

12.1 In recognition that Children and Young People in Care benefit from learning about money management, to support them into adult life, we have invested additional resources in this area. The charity “The Share Foundation” have secured funding to help promote financial education for children and young people in care through delivery of Stepladder Plus, a program of life skills for young people in care aged 15 to 17. Through the programme, a young person can 'earn' up to an additional £1,500 in their junior ISA/child trust fund ISA account ready for access at 18. All stages must be completed by their 18th birthday.

12.2 There are six steps to the programme:

Step 1 - Literacy at entry level 3 or above. (Benefit £150)

Step 2 - Numeracy – as above (Benefit £150)

Step 3 - Financial Capability (1) – the costs of living (Benefit £200)

Step 4 - Planning for the Future – 250–500 words describing their aspirations for the future and how they will use their investment. (Benefit £250)

Step 5 - Financial Capability (2) – *Managing My Money*, an eight-week course with recognised accreditation. (Benefit £350)

Step 6 - Securing future education, employment, or training – working with a mentor such as a teacher, leaving care worker etc. (Benefit £400)

12.3 At July 2023, nine young people had embarked on the programme (at September 2023, sixteen young people have signed up, of which thirteen are still completing it. Two have completed so far, and one withdrawn). We will

continue to enrol new young people while funding is available. Our EET Apprentice offers one to one support for young people on the programme.

12.4 Wider work around financial education has included:

- Training for foster parents on supporting budgeting, banking & financial wellbeing
- More guidance for foster parents is being developed - portal/handbook
- Money Matters booklet & other resources available to all care leavers
- Continued work around exemptions for care leavers
- Working with HSBC to explore delivery of 'money matters' sessions
- The council's PSHE School Improvement Advisor has delivered training and resources to Designated Teachers on promoting financial education for pupils in care
- Links for financial support have now been added as a one stop shop on the portal and CIC website – links to Barclays Life Skills (and excellent resource!) and Princes Trust for advice / interactive tools.

13.0 Conclusions

13.1 There is much to celebrate about the achievements of our children and young people in care, including:

- School attendance is improving and persistent absence is better than national averages for the cohort, and there were again no permanent exclusions for pupils in care in 2021-22 while suspensions have reduced.
- Attainment at KS4 is the highest it has ever been under normal (without being affected by lockdown) circumstances and well above national average for the cohort.
- Progression to education, employment training is good, with a high number of care leavers attending and achieving at university. The virtual school has also expanded to incorporate dedicated support for young people at post-16 with CIN / CP plans or who have SEND, but do not necessarily have a social worker.
- A very high percentage of young people have up-to-date PEPs and quality is improving.
- We are progressing with the extended duties of the virtual school with an increasing level of attachment / trauma awareness among our schools, some of whom are achieving recognition in national awards for this.

13.2 At the same time, of course, there are areas for further development, such as:

- Attainment at early years and primary phase is not as good as we want it to be, especially in writing.
- PEP quality, though good overall, is still uneven in some cases.

- The school attendance of young people on CIN and CP plans, though again better than national averages, is still a cause for concern.
- There are unacceptable delays in securing appropriate, full-time education for some pupils with high levels of need, especially when they move outside Wolverhampton and/or in an emergency. While we work extremely hard with education settings and admissions/SEND/social care teams both in and outside the city and region to avoid drift or delay, this problem is linked to a national shortage of specialist SEND provision, particularly for children with SEMH, and continues to present challenges.

13.3 All of these areas are being addressed and managed, as far as possible, with dedicated action plans.

13.4 Progress on previous priorities, as highlighted in the 2021/22 VSH annual report, is highlighted below:

- Improving persistent absence – this has improved but data is being collated differently (see section 6)
- Improving PEP quality, supported by a new framework for quality assurance and moderation – new framework is in place and quality is improving (see section 5)
- Improving attainment at KS2 – this is still a priority
- 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 – this is in place and still developing
- A review of attachment awareness in Wolverhampton schools, including the impact of attachment and trauma training on school exclusions and inclusive practice – this has been completed and training is ongoing (see 11.3)
- Increasing the participation of young people in our arts/cultural and other enrichment activities – we are seeing development in this area (see 10.3)
- 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 -

13.5 We are extremely proud of the achievements of our children and young people in care and continue to strive to improve the life chances of these and other vulnerable young people.

14.0 **Priorities for 2023-24**

14.1 Our priorities for 2023/24 are:

- Attainment at primary phase will be prioritised in PEP audits and support will be the primary focus of attention for the work of our assistant educational psychologists in autumn and spring terms. This will include interventions to improve writing and other evidenced interventions in PEP targets where required.
- Our School Improvement Advisor for Children with a social Worker is addressing attendance for children on CIN and CP plans in partnership with the Attendance Team and we are ensuring that the needs of this cohort are highlighted in the council's new school attendance framework and training.
- Achieving 60 completed PEP audits per term for school age children with consistently 80% rated good or outstanding.
- Achieving 30 completed PEP audits per term for 16 plus cohort with consistently 65% rated good or outstanding.