

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2 NOVEMBER 2015**

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the role of and work undertaken by the Leicestershire Virtual School in supporting the education of Leicestershire's children in care.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Local Authority has a duty to monitor the results of children in care. 2015 results referred to in this report are provisional only and no national benchmark data is available for KS4 measures at the time of writing.

Background

3. As at October 7 2015, the number of children in care in Leicestershire of statutory school age is 288. Key Stage test and examination results in schools are not at the desired level as children in care experience a range of challenges and difficulties but the County Council needs to have the same high aspirations for children in care as it has for all other children.
4. As corporate parents, the County Council must maintain high ambitions for children in care, ensuring that all schools, settings, relevant services and partners maintain high expectations and do the best to improve educational outcomes. Members who are School Governors visibly support this agenda in schools and at related governor and leadership forums and discussions.
5. The County Council actively engages with education in all forums it is involved in, supporting and encouraging better progress. Members' input is crucial and relevant in meetings and panels where children in care are involved but is also relevant at other forums and committees, considering the implications for education, where discussions take place about children in care. As corporate

parents the County Council, must ask itself, and Members ask themselves, the question of 'is this would be good enough for my own child?' The answer should determine the Council's actions.

6. Appendix A provides additional information about key stage tests and examinations including year on year trends compared with national and local trends. Also included is some feedback from stakeholders, information about the numbers of children in care in good or better schools, current numbers of children in care, the breakdown of SEND and information about Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Pupil Premium Plus (PPP).

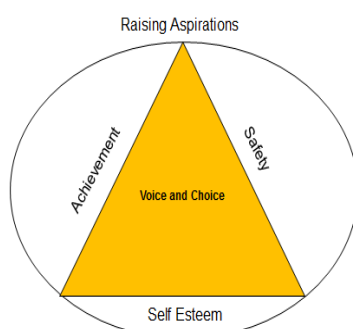
Particular Difficulties Experienced by Children in Care which impact their Education

7. Children in care are not a homogenous group and their needs are many, complex and varied. Whilst some children in care do achieve at school over time, many others do not and this is evidenced in the national, regional and local attainment gaps between children in care and all other pupils.
8. *A Better Education for Children in Care* from the Social Exclusion Unit (September 2003) states that the five key reasons why children in care under achieve at school are:
 - a) Their lives are characterised by instability;
 - b) They spend too much time out of school;
 - c) They do not have sufficient help with education if they fall behind;
 - d) Primary carers are not equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development;
 - e) They have unmet emotional, mental health and physical needs that impact on their education.
9. These same issues still apply to the Council's children in care today. These are key drivers for the underachievement currently experienced by the majority of children in care and were recently exemplified by HMI at the Ofsted East Midlands regional conference on improving educational outcomes for children in care.
10. The majority of children in care have not had stable home lives and the most common reason for children becoming looked after is as a result of physical/emotional/sexual abuse and/or neglect. This in turn may mean that children in care may have unmet attachment and trauma needs which can negatively impact on their readiness to learn and which can be triggered at different points in their school lives.
11. In common with other Local Authorities regionally, there is an increase in the number of children taken into care during their secondary education which is evidenced in the Council's Virtual School numbers over the last three years. A

number of these children may already have been struggling to cope before being taken into care and the outcomes for pupils at risk of being taken into local authority care before the decision was made may already be poor. The damage to their education may already have been done before they became an 'official' statistic. Accordingly, and often in spite of average or better KS1/2 outcomes, some older young people enter care with large deficit models in terms of education, engagement and attendance. It is much more difficult for schools and settings to make a perceived difference in terms of educational outcomes in these circumstances within the given timeframes.

The Role of the Leicestershire Virtual School (VS)

12. In an effort to narrow achievement gaps over time for children in care, the 2014 Children and Families Act stated that every LA must have a Virtual School Head (VSH) for children in care in order to:
 - a) Discharge the LA's duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care wherever they live or are educated;
 - b) To work in partnership with all agencies to ensure appropriate education provision;
 - c) Ensure quality Personal Education Planning (PEP);
 - d) Manage the Pupil Premium Plus funding for children in care.
13. The Virtual School (VS) for children in care (cic) to Leicestershire has been named *The Fox Academy* by Leicestershire children in care and care leavers.
14. The Virtual School is 'virtual' in the sense that it works to support children and young people in care in many different schools, colleges and settings as if they were in a single school. In accordance with the statutory duty as outlined in *Promoting the Education of Looked After Children 2014*, children and young people are placed on the Council's Virtual School roll and are supported by members of a team acting as corporate parents with specific focus on education.
15. The primary aim of the VS is to promote educational achievement and positive outcomes for all children in care to Leicestershire, regardless of where they are living in the country, in an effort to support schools to narrow the attainment gaps between children in care and their peers.



16. The VS is an essential advocate for the importance of education for all children and young people in care and care leavers and is concerned to raise self-esteem, expectations and aspirations, to remove barriers to learning and to work with schools, colleges and settings to enable Leicestershire's

children and young people to improve their educational outcomes and life chances. As the Golden Triangle exemplifies, the VS expect adults involved in a child in care's life to aspire for the very best for children and young people in terms of educational success.

17. The VS does not teach the Council's children in care; responsibility and accountability for this rests firmly with schools and settings. The VS's remit has significantly extended beyond the 5-16 age focus and now support to a group of pre-school children in care in partnership with the Early Years Service is offered to ensure effective transition into Primary provision. Additionally, since 2013 the VS have been supporting an increasing number of young people in Years 12, 13 and 14 and in Higher Education and provides support to all Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People (UASCs).
18. Statutory Guidance is clear that improving educational outcomes and reducing achievement gaps for children and young people in care must necessarily be a collaborative focus of all corporate parents involved in their education and care. Whilst work is undertaken with a full range of key stakeholders and school leaders, including Head Teachers, Behaviour Partnership Heads and Designated Teachers in schools (a statutory post to support children in care in all schools), the VS work with School Governors who are vital to securing accountability for this agenda and achieving greater successes for children in care.
19. The role of the Lead Member is absolutely crucial in terms of raising expectations, promotion and influencing this agenda. All Members, many of whom are School Governors, are able to impact positively on the education of Leicestershire's children in care. The Virtual School is keen to involve all Members more fully in their work and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Key Aspects of the Virtual School's Work (See Appendix A for supporting data and stakeholder views)

20. In robustly monitoring the attendance, exclusions and the attainment and progress of Leicestershire's children and young people we obtain unique oversight of their education which is shared with relevant partners with the aim of securing accountability for their educational outcomes, supporting and challenging partners as necessary to help children and young people to achieve their full potential.

How does the VS support children and young people?

21. The VS has a unique, specialist and strategic perspective on children's education which is used to:
 - a) Advocate on their behalf and champion their right to the best education;
 - b) Nurture recovery and progress over time;
 - c) Understand their needs and promote understanding of these in others.
22. Through effective partnership and collaboration, the VS ensures that children placed out of county receive the right support for their education, travelling to conduct their PEPs. The aim is to ensure that the emotional and mental health needs of all children are recognised and met and that their education is stabilised enabling them to learn effectively. The VS supports transition points and works with relevant services to ensure early interventions are identified and in place. Children's attendance at PEPs is encouraged and a range of participation opportunities as part of the Raising Aspirations and Pupil Voice Programmes is offered, e.g. University Taster Days, the Geese Theatre Project and the Tall Ships Challenge.
23. Whilst the majority of the Council's children and young people in care attend 'good' or better schools, overall, achievement gaps are not narrowing and they need to make better progress over time and in relation to starting points.
24. The VS collaborates to support Early Years children to make positive transitions into schools. As at 16 October 2015, 120 young people in care and care leavers between the ages of 16-19 in Y12-14 have provided their consent to the VS, enabling the tracking and monitoring of their progress and attainment over time in partnership with schools, colleges and services. The numbers doing so continues to increase with new entries into care and has increased over the last two years. This means that the VS now support more young people in Y12 than last year and this rolling programme also includes support for all unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

VS Local Partnership Work

25. A developing information management system is essential to effective performance, enabling the tracking of attendance, exclusions and progress and attainment of all children and young people on the VS roll to inform effective and timely interventions. The VS works with Designated Teachers to identify strengths and gaps to maximise support and provide opportunities for children and young people to be involved in extending their engagement in learning and related participation projects.
26. The VS undertakes ongoing work with schools/settings, the local Behaviour Partnerships, the Educational Psychology Service, School Admissions and Pupil Services, Foster Carers, SENA and Social Care to ensure education is prioritised, also arranging, chairing and writing up multi-agency Personal

Education Plan (PEP) meetings to ensure educational targets and provision and pathways are clear and robust for each child in care. The VH is a member of Leicestershire Secondary Head's forum.

27. The Virtual School manages and distributes (through finance) the Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) funding, asking schools to complete a plan for each child in care outlining intended use and impact of the funding against specific PEP targets. This is monitored by the VS on an ongoing basis.
28. It necessarily promotes the importance of the emotional well-being of children and young people on a daily basis. By working with relevant professionals on the innovative ongoing *Attachment Aware Schools Project*, it supports others to understand important research and practice developments to better help it's children and young people to overcome barriers which may impact on their educational achievement over time.
29. The VS develops and delivers a range of well-received training packages for key stakeholders including bespoke training for whole school staff groups, foster carers, school governors and Designated Teachers in schools and colleges. Effective collaboration with the child and a range of stakeholders and wider services is essential to the work and it can only be effective if it listens to and works with other relevant professionals as part of the team around the child.

VS Regional and National Work:

30. The VH/VS reach extends beyond Leicestershire as it is actively influencing and shaping regional and national debate and legislation. The VH collaborated with the Regional HMI School Team which shaped and influenced regional workshops and Ofsted/LA meetings, leading to good practice visits to schools and ongoing dialogue with the HMI Lead for children in care.
31. Earlier this year, the VH was asked by another LA in the region to undertake a peer review of the VS. This work and the subsequent report was well-received and regarded as very helpful. The VH has strong peer support mechanisms in place to support ongoing work.
32. Building on the good practice and success of local project work with schools, the VS is one of only five in the country leading on a national Attachment Awareness project involving local schools feeding into action research with Bath Spa University.
33. Along with another VH college, the VH represents the East Midlands on the National VH Steering Group, working to shape policy, practice and legislation alongside the DfE lead for children in care. The VH is also involved in work

around the development of this body into a national registered charitable organisation which will be launched soon.

34. Leicestershire is one of six LAs involved in current research with the Rees Centre which also involves a small group of post-16 young people and their views concerning the education of children in care (forthcoming).

2015 Key Stage Test and Examination Results for Children in Care

All data is provisional and subject to change. Unless stated otherwise, all data is based on pupils who were in care for at least one year prior to March 31st of the year of attainment.

Foundation Stage (age 5)

35. The percentage of children in care to Leicestershire achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) is 30% which represents a good increase of 19% against the 2014 figure of 11%. This rise is above both the national rise of 5.9% for all pupils and the local rise for all pupils in Leicestershire of 5.4%.
36. The cohort number is so small (10 pupils) that comparison with all pupils nationally and locally is not worthwhile. Figures for the 6 months financial cohort are slightly higher at 33% for GLD as there are 15 pupils in the cohort.
37. This is a fluid cohort, reflecting the mobility that exists in Early Years with regard to children in care as many children in adoptive placements experience a lack of stability which can impact on educational progress.

Key Stage One (age 7)

38. The percentage of children in care achieving the Phonics benchmark at Year 1 is 40% (4 out of ten pupils) against 75.9% of all pupils in Leicestershire and 77% of all pupils nationally. One more child than last year achieved this measure.
39. There were 21 pupils in the 6 months financial cohort of which 10 pupils, 47.6%, achieved the Phonics benchmark. Whilst figures are below local and national figures, there is some good progress being made. As cohort numbers are very small, it is difficult to draw meaningful comparisons.
40. There have been good improvements on last year in reading, writing and in numbers of children achieving in reading, writing and maths; the majority of the 12 months financial cohort (8/11 pupils) achieved at Level 2 in reading, writing and maths, including 1 child who achieved a L3 in reading. 3/11 children were working below the test levels.

41. This is a highly mobile cohort but outcomes are good and improving over time at L2+. Whilst gaps against national remain, they are narrowing slowly and there is some pleasing achievement for individuals at L3.

Key Stage Two (age 11)

42. There were 18 pupils in the 12 month financial cohort and 55.56% (10) pupils achieved L4+ in Reading, Writing and Maths. Whilst gaps between all pupils local and national remain wide, the performance of children in care achieving L4+ in Reading, Writing and Maths rose by 1.3% to 55.6%. This is similar to national and local levels for all pupils but this is a very small cohort and skews results against local and national percentages.
43. L5 achievement was also up against 2014 figures as 1 child achieved L5 in Reading, Writing and Maths and 2 children secured L5 in Reading, GPS and Maths. Within the whole VS cohort 1 child achieved L6 in Maths. However, securing L4+ in Reading, Writing and Maths remains a priority for children in care to ensure a good grounding in English and Maths on which to build at Secondary School.
44. Overall the percentage of pupils making expected progress in English and maths over time and in relation to starting points is good for this small cohort.

Key Stage Four (age 16)

45. The figures for GCSE results are provisional and in line with schools' predictions: within the full cohort of 47 young people 5/47 pupils (10.64%) achieved 5A*-C EM; within the 12 month financial cohort of 26 young people 2/26 pupils (7.7%) achieved this measure. The latter is the same result as in 2014. Locally, 56.1% of all pupils in Leicestershire achieved this measure – a decline of 0.4% from 2014. There is no national or statistical neighbour information available yet.
46. Gaps remain high at Key Stage 4. Appendix 1 provides a summary of 2014 results and trends over time.

Key Stage Five (age 18)

47. VS cohort Key Stage 5 results are drawn from a range of schools, colleges and settings and cover a wide range and level of qualifications. There have been some very pleasing individual results and achievements this year with a small group of young people going off to university.

LA Support for Children in Care who are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET)

48. LCC has commissioned Prospects to support post-16 young people to find appropriate destinations as at 1st September, improve numbers who are in employment, education and training (EET) and to support vulnerable groups, including children and young people in care and care leavers, until they are 18 years old.
49. NEET figures from Prospects for August 2015 are as follows:
- The numbers of Children in care in Years 12, 13 and 14 who are NEET is 15.2% (12 young people)
 - The numbers of Care Leavers in Years 12-14 who are NEET is 38.6% (22 young people) as against the overall LA NEET figure of 3.1% which is high.
 - NEET care leavers aged 17-21 years are monitored by social care.
50. The NEET Strategy sets out five main actions to ensure NEET figures for children in care and care leavers in Years 12-14 are reduced:
- a) Minimise the number of times children in care need to move to a different school during their education by establishing better joint planning between children's social care and education services;
 - b) Commit the local authority to upholding the highest possible education expectations as a corporate parent for any child in care pre and post 16 such as attending parent evenings, showing interest in their homework, inspiring expectations and finding mentors who have succeeded into work from being a child in care;
 - c) Identify new ways of measuring positive progress in emotional resilience and wellbeing of children looked after;
 - d) Improve the Information advice and guidance support to children looked after at the end of Key Stage 4 to ensure they make a successful transition into learning and then stay in learning up to the end of Key Stage 5;
 - e) Improve attainment figures for children looked after across Key Stage 4 and 5
51. In terms of VS work:
- a) The VS is considering how to raise expectations around education for corporate parents and has enhanced its training package for use with Foster Carers and is about to begin work with School Governors. The Council's Attachment Awareness and Trauma training promotes the importance of strategies to secure emotional wellbeing;
 - b) Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is delivered by schools for young people aged 14-16 years. LCC has commissioned Prospects to provide careers IAG support to all young people post 16 as part of raising levels of participation in EET. The VS has contributed to this work and a

teenage parent has achieved well this year following our support. The VS also holds Prospects to account through discussions, data reporting and reports at Strategy Group;

- c) The VS liaises with YOS to ensure that educational pathways for young offenders are in place;
- d) Joint Solutions Forum supports joint planning on placements and education;
- e) From September 2015 all new children into care post-16 will receive a PEP from the VS to inform their Pathway Planning for education and this will include all NEET young people.

Ambitions for the Education of Children in Care

52. As at June 2015, 83% of children in care to Leicestershire attend good or better schools. A judgement of 'good' by Ofsted does not necessarily mean that a school's approach is best for a child in care. It is the Council's aim, and a key driver for VS work with schools, that all children and young people will belong to a 'good school for children in care' - such schools are inclusive and nurturing in approach, provide 'statutory duty plus', and:
- a) Enable children in care to swiftly access and fully engage in their education to make good progress and obtain good educational outcomes;
 - b) Ensure the Designated teacher is up-to-date with relevant training about children in care and on attachment and trauma so that relevant strategies are put in place to better support our children;
 - c) Provide supportive strategies and targeted interventions to meet educational and emotional needs within the school setting;
 - d) Develop and value effective partnerships with the Virtual School, foster carers, social workers and health professionals, founded on a clear understanding of professional accountabilities and responsibilities.
53. Children in care will benefit from strong and consistent corporate parenting focused on their education - all corporate parents will understand, recognise and actively promote the central importance of education in improving and transforming the lives and opportunities for children and young people in care:
If this was my child, would this be good enough?
54. Children in care and care leavers will be familiar with the work of the Virtual School and how it can support their education - enabling them to feel they know where to go to for additional trustworthy help, support and guidance with their education and training. The voice of young people will better inform planning/shape events for the VS.

55. All children in care will have the very best Designated Teachers to support them so the Virtual School will further develop the capacity of Designated Teachers (and Governors who appoint them) to understand the needs of children in care and will support them to undertake PEPs. Every school has a named Designated Teacher in line with statutory guidance, to advocate and support children in care to effect progress. The Virtual School will spend more time training, evaluating, quality assuring, challenging and tracking the work of others to secure greater accountability for improved educational outcomes in schools and settings for our children in care,
56. Children in care and care leavers will benefit from increased educational stability, teaching practice informed by attachment and trauma and strategies to overcome barriers to learning and a wider set of measures to better understand their progress and successes over time and in relation to starting points.

Conclusion

57. Improving rates of progress between key stages and particularly between KS2-4 remains a priority. There is improvement in progress at EY, KS1 and KS2 in relation to starting points which needs to be built upon.
58. Instability, high levels of complex needs and length of time in/point of entry into care are key factors influencing GCSE attainment at Key Stage 4. Numbers of pupils with SEND and the small numbers within cohorts also need to be taken into account when attempting comparisons with other groups. It is, therefore, very important to recognise the importance of a progress model for measuring the many educational successes and achievements of children in care over time and in relation to starting points.
59. For children in care to Leicestershire the VS remain committed to securing timely access to good quality, stable education provision leading to good qualifications in English and maths. This remains a focus of VS work and challenge in partnership with schools, settings and relevant services.

Background Papers

60. Statutory guidance for local authorities
www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children

Statutory guidance for school governing bodies

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children)

children

The Rees Centre <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

61. None.

Officer(s) to Contact

62. Lesley Hagger, Director of Children and Family Services
Tel: 0116 305 6340 lesley.hagger@leics.gov.uk

Sally-Ann Harding, Virtual Head for Children in Care
Tel: 0116 3055035 sally-ann.harding@leics.gov.uk

List of Appendices

63. Appendix A – Feedback and Results of CiC

Equality and Human Rights Implications

64. The majority of the work of the Children and Families Services is targeted towards vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and families. The priorities for the Virtual School remain: improving progress over time in relation to the often low starting points of CiC; raising end of key stage attainment levels; and narrowing the achievement gap between CiC and 'all' pupils.