



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 NOVEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL 2022 - 2023

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of work and data of the Virtual School for the academic year 2022-2023. This report is statutory and requires publishing on the County Council's website.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. This annual report was previously presented to the Committee in April, after the official attainment data was published. However, this meant a long period of time passed for all the information needed to be shared within the previous academic year. The decision has been made to bring this date forward to November, so that it can be published in line with other Virtual Schools, and to submit the official updated data in April when available.
3. This report highlights the work of the Virtual School for Academic year 2022 – 2023.

Background

4. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by them, wherever they live or are educated through the Virtual School Head (VSH). The Children and Social Work Act 2017 added the duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children. These duties are set out in the February 2018 statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children'.
5. In Leicestershire, the Service has a team of highly skilled professionals who work passionately to support this role, its duties and advocate for young people. The service brings together information about children and young people in care to Leicestershire and use this information to support schools, carers, and young people to achieve their best in their education. The Service is committed to putting young people first and supporting them to achieve in all aspects of their education and life.
6. The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship.

7. The Virtual School has a non-statutory strategic leadership role for children who have or have had a social worker (in the last six years). This commenced from 1 September 2021. This role is undertaken within the Inclusion team who work closely with the Virtual School, however currently this role is not undertaken within the Virtual School and will not be included in this report. As of September 2023, this role has moved under the VS and will feature in future annual reports.

Summary of report

Child Focused

8. The report has been adapted this year to be a more visual representation of the work the service carries out. Included in the report are child focused and friendly summary pages to allow young people's voices to be seen. This will enable young people to access this report as well as professionals.

Data Presentation

9. The report has been updated in relation to how the data is presented in the form of visual dashboard. This supports with analysis and scrutiny so that data can be used to drive work and target support. The data in the report covers the school aged cohort for whom there is a statutory duty to report on. The appendix include a wider analysis of all young people from Early years through to post 16.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

10. PEPs continue to be held at a very high standard and completion rates are high (96% completed over the last academic year). This is due to a passionate, dedicated and knowledgeable team who advocate for children rigorously to ensure their education is at the forefront of discussions and decisions.

Pupil Premium Plus (PPP)

11. PPP (Pupil Premium Plus) allocations are highlighted in the report alongside the impact it has had for young people. This has helped the work with schools around SMART targets in PEPS and how best to allocate funding to ensure significant impact is being made. Analysis shows that 80% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2022-23 were successfully achieved, compared to 77.5% the previous year.

Attainment

12. It is important to note that the Attainment data contained in this report is provisional data and not officially confirmed until April 2024. This data will be updated once published and added to the report. Therefore, at this stage the official analysis of the data sets cannot be completed, however, some generic conclusions have been drawn.
13. There is still a significant gap in attainment for children and young people in care as well as an increase in temporary exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. There are also a number of challenges with children out of education and awaiting SEND assessments.

14. More robust systems have been put in place to track the SEND cohort of looked after children and young people and the Virtual School is working more closely with schools around their trauma informed practice and the training offer.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

15. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children cohort is rapidly increasing, and adjustments are being made to the Virtual Schools work to ensure the service keeps up with demand. This however is proving a challenge as college places are filling rapidly and provision is limited. Future aims are to support this cohort further and look at other educational options to partner with.
16. At the end of academic year 2022-23 there was 34 UASC students of statutory school age compared to 14 the previous year and 155 post-16 compared to 50 the previous year, making a total of 189 compared to 64 the previous year. This is a significant increase in the UASC cohort.

Achievements and Participation

17. Over the last year the Virtual School has delivered a wider curriculum offer that has supported children and young people to be a part of. This offer has grown and the service is working hard towards an Artsmark award to ensure the Arts and wider curriculum is developed and is as important for young people as other areas of their education. The impact report from the Care to Dance programme, highlights the voice of young people and the impact this is having so far on their wellbeing.
18. Voice work has been part of the action plan to ensure more young people have a voice. Included in the report are snippets of voice from different aspects throughout the year, including participation events, the impact report and book clubs.
19. The plans for this academic year continue to advocate and strive for raising aspirations and attainment for young people, as well as partnering with those that can support and offer experiences for young people.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

20. None

Equality Implications

21. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

22. There are no human rights implications arising this report.

Appendix

Virtual School Annual Report for August 2022 – August 2023

Officer(s) to Contact

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