



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**5TH NOVEMBER 2024**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL 2023 - 2024**

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

**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 (VS) for the academic year 2023-2024. This report is statutory requirement and will be published on the County Council's website.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority (LA) 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'. To meet this standard the Service submits an annual report to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. This report highlights the work of the Virtual School for Academic year 2023 – 2024.

**Background**

4. In Leicestershire, a team of highly skilled professionals work passionately to support the role of the VS, 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 our young people first and supporting them to achieve in all aspects of their education and life.
5. The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship.
6. 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 was undertaken within the Inclusion team, however as of

September 2023, this role moved under the VS and will now feature in future annual reports presented to this Committee.

## **Summary of report**

### **Child Focused**

7. The report has been adapted this year to be a more visual representation of the work undertaken. This includes child focused and friendly summary pages to allow for the voice of young people to be seen. This will enable young people to access this report as well as professionals. 'Our Promise' has also been linked as a department and the development plan to ensure joined up working to promote the best education for our children in care.

### **Data Presentation**

8. The way in which data is presented has been updated to feature visual dashboards, to support with analysis and scrutiny so that data can be utilised to drive work and target the support offer. The data in the report shows the school aged cohort who the Council has a statutory duty to report on, but also in the appendices a wider analysis of all our young people from Early years through to post 16.

### **Personal Education Plans (PEPs)**

9. The Service continues to hold a very high standard of PEPs and their completion, resulting in a 98% completion rate for PEPs held over the last academic year, an increase since last 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)**

10. We have highlighted PPP (Pupil Premium Plus) allocations and the impact it has had for young people. This has allowed the Service to work with schools around SMART targets in PEPS and how best to allocate funding to ensure significant impact is being made. Analysis shows that 79.1% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2023-24 were successfully achieved, compared to 80% the previous year, so continues to be consistent. Work has started to support schools further on writing SMART targets in order to increase this further.

### **Attainment**

11. It is important to note that the Attainment data contained in this report is provisional data and not officially confirmed until April 2025. This data will be updated once published and added to the report. Therefore, the Service cannot at this stage officially analyse the data sets, however, can draw some generic conclusions of what is being observed.
12. There is still a significant gap in attainment for young people and the increase in suspensions and exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour, children out of education and awaiting SEND assessments, all contribute towards these outcomes.

13. The Service has therefore introduced more robust systems to track the SEND cohort of children, is working more closely with schools around their trauma informed practice and the training offer. Working closer with education colleagues going forward will support this. Provisional data shows an increase most Early years and Key Stage 1 data. Data relating to GCSE and A-Level stage has not yet been received.

### **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

14. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children cohort continues to increase, and adjustments to practices are being made in order to keep up with demand. However, this is proving a challenge as college places are filling rapidly and provision is limited. The Department aims to support this cohort further and look at other educational options available for partnering with. At the end of academic year 2022-23 there were 34 UASC students of statutory school age compared to 14 the previous year. There were 155 post-16 students 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. This year this has increased further to 221.

### **Achievements and Participation**

15. The next section of the report highlights the wider curriculum offer introduced to further support young people during this academic year. This has grown and the Service has worked hard towards an Artsmark award to ensure the Arts and wider curriculum is developed and as important for young people as other areas of their education. The impact report from Care to Dance, highlights the voice of young people and the impact this is having so far on their wellbeing. The Service has been successful in being one of the first Virtual Schools to achieve the Artsmark award, securing the highest award of Platinum.
16. Voice work has been part of an action plan to ensure more young people are able to express their voice. Work was undertaken to include snippets of voice work from different aspects throughout the year, including participation events, impact reports, and book clubs.
17. Next steps for this academic year include continuing 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.
18. In April 2024, the Department was inspected as part of an inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) and the feedback received from Inspectors cemented and highlighted the significant work and progress of the Virtual School does as being Outstanding.

### **Background papers**

19. None

### **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 from this report.

**Other Relevant Impact Assessments**

23. None

**Appendices**

Appendix A - Virtual School Annual Report for August 2023 -August 2024Annual report 2023 2024

Appendix A.1 Virtual School Contextual Information 2023-2024

Appendix A.2 Alternative Education Report 2023-24

Appendix A.3 PEP Completion 2023-24

Appendix A.4 Use of Pupil Premium Autumn and Spring Terms 2023-24

Appendix A.5 Provisional Results 2023-24

Appendix A.6 Suspensions 2023-24

Appendix A.7 Attendance 2023-24

Appendix A.8 - Artful Alliance Project

Appendix A.9 - ITP Feedback Report

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