

Virtual School Annual Report for August 2023 -August 2024



Annual quotes from our young people

'The Virtual School gave me encouragement to aim high, and strive to achieve my dreams and aspirations, taught me commitment, determination. The best lesson I learnt was to take opportunities when they come.' Young person now in employment

'He had the best day ever and was successful in his football team trials recently and made the football team so he's very happy!! We are very grateful and thankful for the experience!' Young person engaging with Leicester City in the Community opportunities

Annual Statement from Director of Children's Services

I am delighted to present the Annual report of the Virtual school that celebrates the educational experiences, offer and attainment of our children and young people.

I am particularly proud of the services successful ARTSMARK journey and steadfast contribution to raising the ambition and attainment of our children and young people. The duties of the Virtual school have successfully extended to include all children and young people who have the involvement of a social worker, as well as children in care and those formerly looked after.

In April 2024 the work of the service was recognised in our OFSTED inspection. The service has contributed to the OUTSTANDING judgement we were awarded, of which we are immensely proud. The Virtual school is aspirational and ambitious for all of the children and young people we support, and this report outlines the many ways in which we enable our children and young people to reach their potential and learn to enjoy their educational experiences.

Annual statement from the Virtual School Head

There has been so much happening across all ages within the Virtual School this academic year, from our hugely successful Artsmark journey to our young people's progress in and out of school. We have increased our offer for our children and young people, to ensure they have a varied and wide offer of opportunities to be a part of. Our aspirations remain high, and we have really focused on ensuring our young people are in education, employment, or training, with continued support and advocacy to reach their aspirations. With the launch of our partnered work with the Attachment research Community (ARC), we have been able to support our schools on their trauma informed journeys, which has played a huge part in supporting our young people to remain in education and be supported to achieve.

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to outline the work of the Virtual School in Leicestershire for the academic year August 2023 – August 2024 and analyse the data for the academic year. It will also look at the key priorities for the following academic year 2024-2025. National benchmark data for 2022-23 was published in April 2024 and is considered in this report, however academic year 2023-2024 data will be added after publishing in April 2025. 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'.

In Leicestershire we have a team of highly skilled professionals who work passionately to support this role, its duties and advocate for our young people.

We bring 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.

We are committed to putting our young people first and supporting them to achieve in all aspects of their education and life.

The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship.

The Virtual School has a non-statutory strategic

leadership role for children who have or have had a social worker (in the last 6 years). This commenced from 1st September 2021. This role moved over to the

our promise
to children in care and care leavers

by Leicestershire County Council and Partners

Our Children Our Future

- We will support you**
 - Provide emotional support
 - Whatever you do we will be there
 - Ensure all your needs are met
 - Provide advice, information, practical and financial support
 - We will make sure that you know what your rights are
 - We will not judge you if things go wrong. We all make mistakes!
- We believe in you**
 - We will value your strengths and talents
 - Support you to overcome any stumbling blocks you face
 - Support you to achieve your goals
 - Embrace your individuality
 - Encourage your aspirations
 - Support you to succeed in life
- We will respect your identity**
 - We will respect your unique identity
 - Support you to develop your own personal beliefs and values
 - Accept, respect and celebrate your identity, culture and heritage
 - Value, respect and support important relationships
 - Encourage you to express your identity positively
- We will listen to you**
 - We will listen and respect you
 - Strive to understand your point of view
 - Place you at the heart of all decisions
 - Support you to talk about your worries and happy times
 - Support you to seek independent advocacy
- We will support you to find a place you can call home**
 - We will do our best to find you a home near to people who are important to you
 - Ensure you feel safe and secure
 - As you grow we will support you to learn new skills to support your independence
 - We are here to support if things go wrong
- We will inform you**
 - Legal entitlements and services
 - Up to date and accurate information
 - Support you to access your care records
 - Provide information throughout your journey
 - We will support you if you need to make a complaint
- We will be a lifelong champion**
 - Support you break down barriers to other agencies
 - Work together with other services to better meet your needs
 - Encourage and support you to make positive life choices
 - We will make sure you know how to get support when you need it
 - Trust and respect you

Virtual School this academic year and will be discussed in this report. The Virtual school moved this academic year to sit within Education and has strong links with both social care and education staff.

The infographic features a light green background with a white arrow pointing right. At the top right is the Leicestershire County Council logo. Below it, the 'Core Values' section lists 'Aspirational', 'Being Curious', and 'Collaboration'. The 'Behaviours' section lists 'Professional Kindness', 'Active Listening', 'Outcome Focused', and 'Being Accountable'. A quote reads 'Achieving excellence through purposeful practice'. At the bottom left is the Ofsted Outstanding Provider logo. On the right is a photograph of seven diverse children smiling.

Leicestershire County Council

Core Values

- Aspirational
- Being Curious
- Collaboration

Behaviours

- Professional Kindness
- Active Listening
- Outcome Focused
- Being Accountable

“
Achieving excellence through purposeful practice
”

Ofsted
Outstanding Provider

Our Guiding Principles

To be Trauma-Informed

T

Trained staff and training offer for all stakeholders.

R

Respectful and non-judgemental interactions with colleagues, young people and carers.

A

Awareness and openness to others' values, opinions and vulnerabilities.

U

Understanding the need for self-care and colleague support and supervision.

M

Mindful, supportive and empathic approach to challenges.

A

Acceptance, advice, and advocacy.

Our Vision

We are here to work with you, your school, carers and social workers so you can reach your potential, be ambitious and aim high!



Forest School



University Days



Careers Days



Your voice



Care to Dance



Bookclubs



Artsmark



Aspirations



Pedestrian Arts and Crafts



Sport

Our Model

All young people have access to education

To support with wider opportunities and targeted support where needed

To create a trauma informed whole school culture across the whole of Leicestershire that embeds relationships and inclusion into policy and practice



PEP meetings

Our School
And all the things we do together

Early Years (ages 0-4)

About you

138 of you are on roll at the end of the year.

Listening - Your Voice

we have worked with settings to adapt PEP templates so we can better hear your voice

Building Relationships

we continued working with the Dollywood project so you each get a book every month until you are 5

Outcome focused - What you learnt

You started your journey using the early years framework, learning lots of new things. We adapted the PEP so we can add your observations and see what you have been learning.

1810 books have been sent out to you, supporting with your early reading.



School Age (age 5-16)

About you

453 of you are on roll at the end of the year.

Your overall attendance was **86.4%**.

Listening - Your Voice

You want us to consider our language when you are being spoken to in meetings and at school.

Building Relationships - We did

We have shared the new language that cares toolkit within the team and begun to share in PEPS with schools.

Outcome focused - What you learnt

50% achieved a 'Good Level of Development'.

57.1% of you achieved the expected standard in your phonics screening.

66.7% of you achieved the expected standard for reading in Year 6.

31.8% of you achieved the expected standard for Reading, Writing and maths in Year 6.

29.1% of you achieved a 9-4 grade in English and Maths

Post 16 (age 16 to 18)

About you

474 of you are on roll at the end of the year.

65.2% of you are in education, employment, and training at the end of academic year

Listening - Your Voice

We listen at PEP meetings and follow up any issues raised ie support in changing courses/colleges, chasing up missing bursary payments and generally directing you to where you might get support.

Building Relationships - We did

We have introduced PEPS for those of you who are not in education, employment or training.

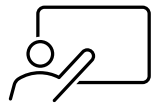
Outcome focused - What you learnt

Post 16 results – pending

This Academic Year we have

Next year our key priorities to support you are:

Trauma Informed



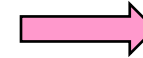
Trained **38** of your schools



Held **6** sessions of training for foster carers



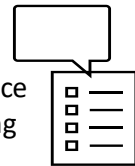
Held **4** sessions of training for social workers



- Support more of your schools to become Trauma informed so that they can support you better

Pupil Voice

86.4 % of you expressed your voice in your PEP meeting



14 of you chaired your own PEP meeting

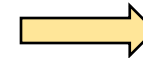


- Continue to listen to your voice and use the language of care toolkit within PEPs

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion



Increased our offer in wider opportunities in special schools and for our Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking young people.

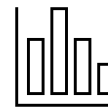


- Action research and projects involving looking at culture and identity for different groups.

Collaboration



Quality assured **92%** of your PEPs to a green or gold standard which means they are the best working documents to support you



Used data to create dashboards so we know who needs help when



- Work closely with all other teams you may work with to ensure you are receiving timely education and the right provision to meet your needs

Participation



Achieved **PLATINUM** in our Artsmark award, meaning we value the Arts within your education.



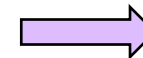
- Continue to partner with wider curriculum and participation activities to increase your opportunities in a variety of areas.

Support to return to education

15 of you attended University this year



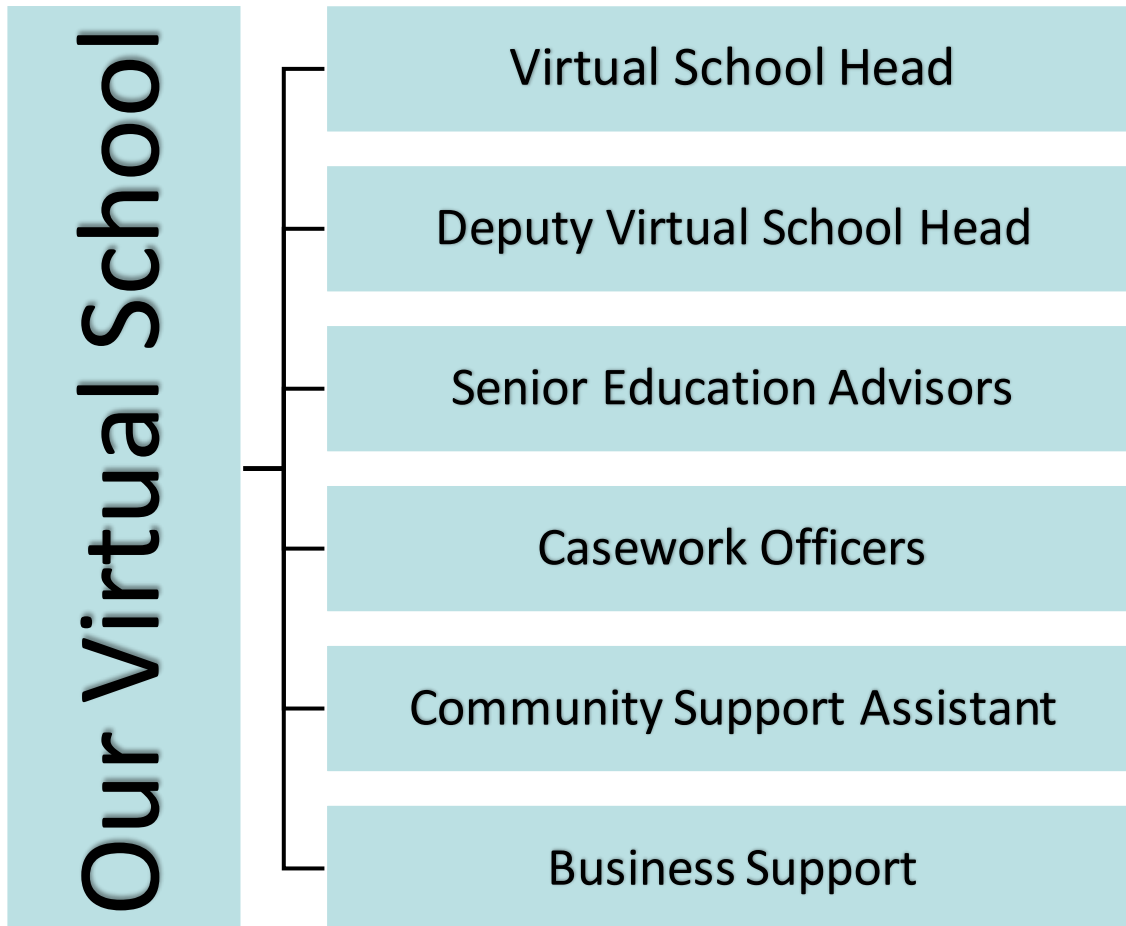
13 of you have attended a NEET PEP to reengage in education



- To develop our offer to support those of you who are Not in Education, Employment or Training through study support programmes.

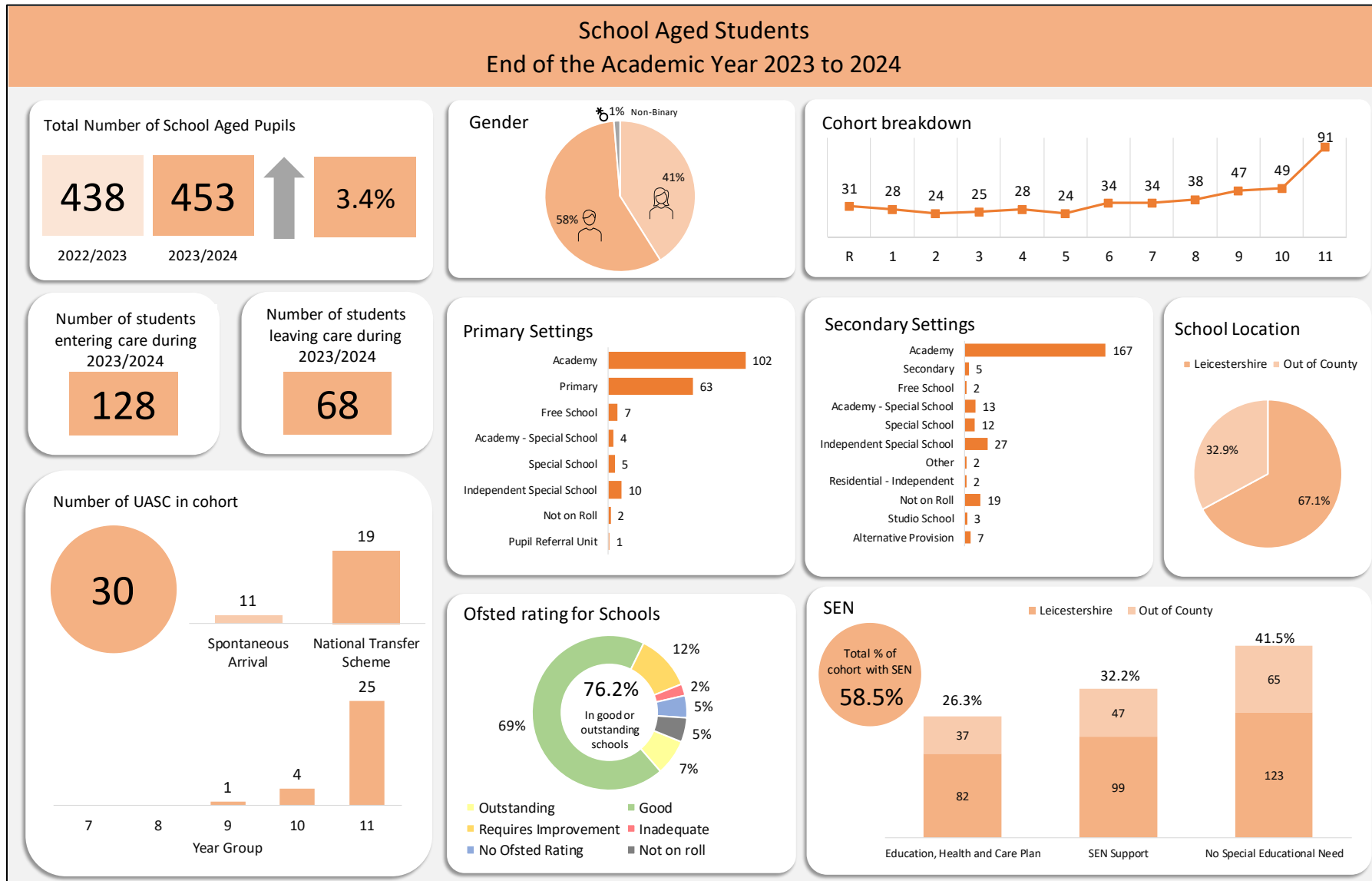
Who we are

These are some of the people you may meet in your PEPS or at participation events



Portraits from a team meeting, without looking at the paper!

Contextual Data for Children in Care



Appendix 1 - Contextual Data - Aca

Appendix 1: Virtual School Contextual Information 2023-2024



Appendix 2 - Alternative Education

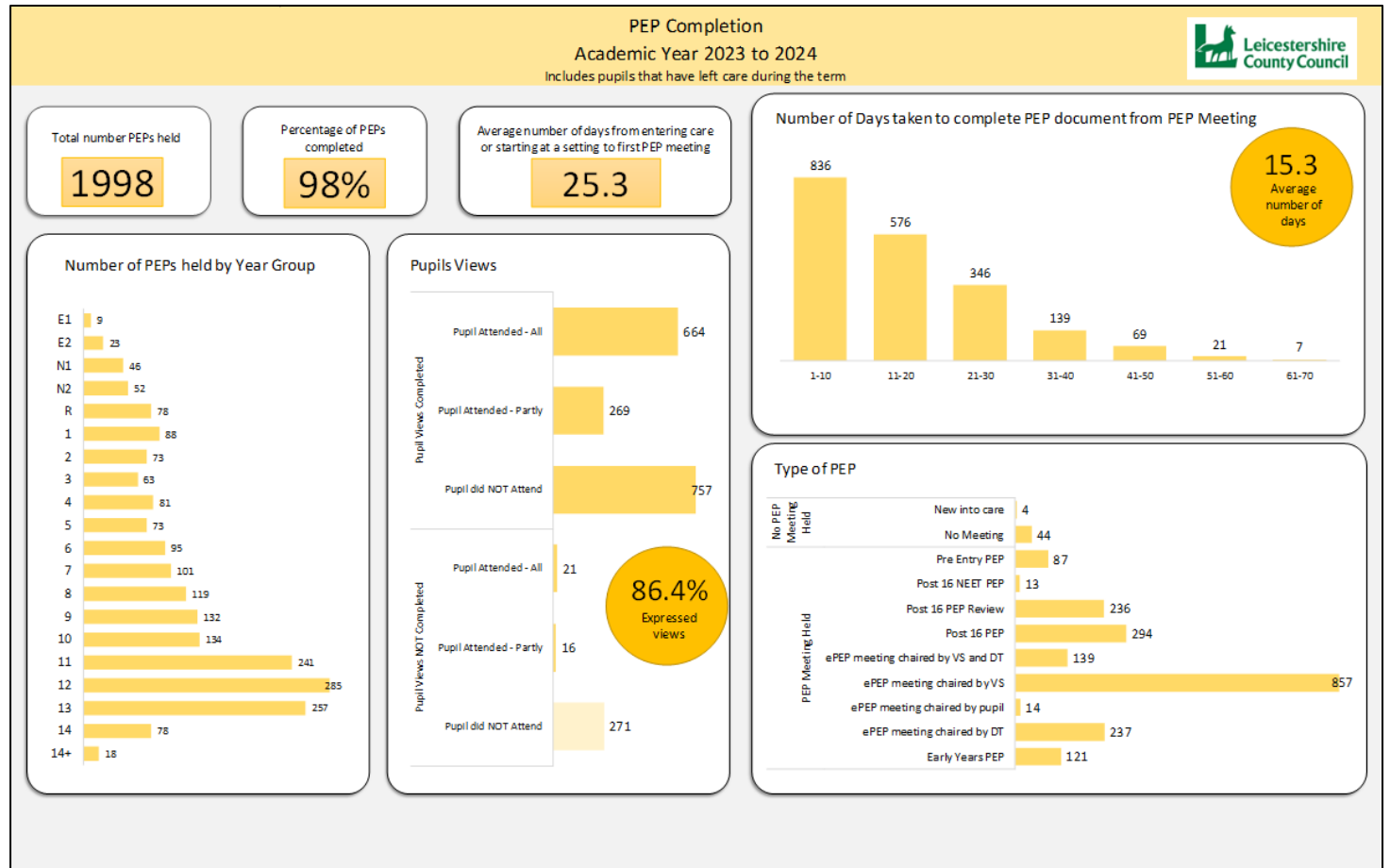
Appendix 2: Alternative Education 2023-2024

Personal Education Plan (PEP)

The Virtual school has a duty to ensure the quality of Personal Education Plan (PEP) and arranges PEP meetings for Early Years children attending a nursery or setting, in primary and secondary schools and in post-16 education. Leicestershire PEPs are led by the school, with attendance from the Virtual school, social worker, carer and engagement with the young person. The Virtual School quality assure every PEP. Each section is rated (red, amber or green) and feedback provided.

NB:

- Year 14 and 14+ PEPS are only held on request of the young person and therefore, not included in overall percentages.
- The young people included in the No Meeting figure, are those young people who have not had the required number of meetings in the academic year.
- New into Care - are those young people who came into care within the last month of the summer term.
- As well as the 1998 PEPs that were held, the officers of the Virtual School attended and recorded 173 additional educational meetings which are not included in the PEP report.



Appendix 3 - PEP Completion - Academ

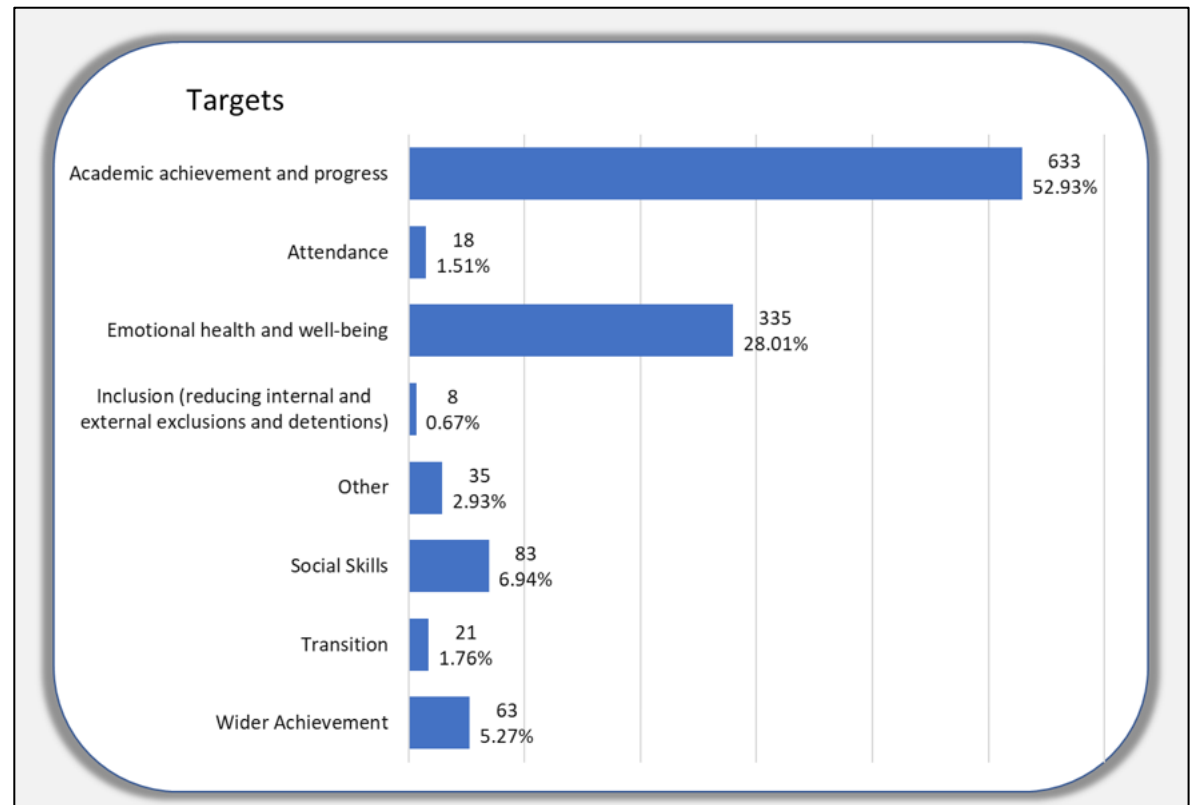
Appendix 3: PEP Completion 2023-2024

Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) Allocation to Schools (2023-24)

The VSH manages the Pupil Premium for looked after children and monitors closely its use and impact, ensuring that schools allocate funding to interventions that support the individual needs of the child. Schools are held accountable for the results of children in care and for using the PPP grant appropriately and effectively to support and improve educational outcomes. Schools complete a PPP plan within the SMART Targets section of the PEP which is monitored by the VS, who support and challenge PPP decisions on an ongoing basis via termly progress review meetings and data returns.

The impact of PPP allocated to schools during one term is monitored at the PEP meeting in the following term, i.e., the impact of PPP allocated in the final term (summer) of 2023-24 will be reviewed in the autumn term of 2024 - 25.

Analysis shows that 79.1 % of targets linked to PPP spend during 2023-24 were successfully achieved, compared to 80% the previous year. 69.4 % of those targets made significant or moderate impact on the outcomes for our young people in a range of areas. We have been working within our team and with schools to make targets SMARTER to ensure the impact increases moving forward.



[Pupil Premium Plus \(PPP\) – Pooled Resource](#)

The PPP grant was set at £2,530 per eligible pupil and allocated for the Leicestershire VS to manage on behalf of its looked-after children. £430 top-slice is retained by the VSH to support pupils whose educational needs exceeded the per capita grant. This increased to £2570 for the 24/25 financial year and £470 was top sliced. When the termly PPP allocation is insufficient to meet a child’s needs, additional funding can be applied for from this pooled PPP funding. The VS encourages schools to take on the responsibility for arranging any support required for pupils. This means that pooled funding is allocated to schools for them to commission provision for complex cases. This might typically be for higher-cost ongoing provision such as employing a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) to provide support for effective transitions, academic progress and emotional stability in class, ongoing 1:1 tuition or agreed therapeutic input where needs do not meet CAMHS thresholds. The VS continues to use the pooled resource to commission provision for pupils temporarily not on roll of a school e.g., 1:1 tuition and to fund VS book parcels, participation activities, incentives and rewards and to fund a bespoke service from Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service.



Appendix 4 - Use of
Pupil Premium - Acad

[Appendix 4: Use of Pupil Premium - Academic Year 2023-2024](#)

[Additional funding in support of Catch-up](#)

The government has provided additional grant funding to support a range of “Disadvantaged pupils”, amongst whom are looked-after children. In addition to the ‘regular’ Pupil Premium Plus (PPP), there have been the “LAC Recovery Premium” and the “School-Led Tutoring” for LAC grants.

[Pupil Premium Plus \(PPP\) – LAC recovery premium 2023-2024](#)

ESFA allocated provisional amounts of £145 (primary) and £276 (secondary) per eligible child in a mainstream setting, and £290 (primary) and £552 (secondary) per LAC pupil in AP/special schools and special units to be used for the benefit of the looked-after child’s educational needs as described in their personal education plan. As with PPP funding, it was to be managed by the designated virtual school head (VSH) in the local authority that looks after the child. This was in addition to the ‘regular’ PPP grant and offered additional support for schools to help LAC children catch up on education missed during the pandemic. The needs of each child were identified during termly PEPs and funding allocated accordingly, ensuring all the funding was distributed by the end of the academic year.

School-Led Tutoring 2023-2024

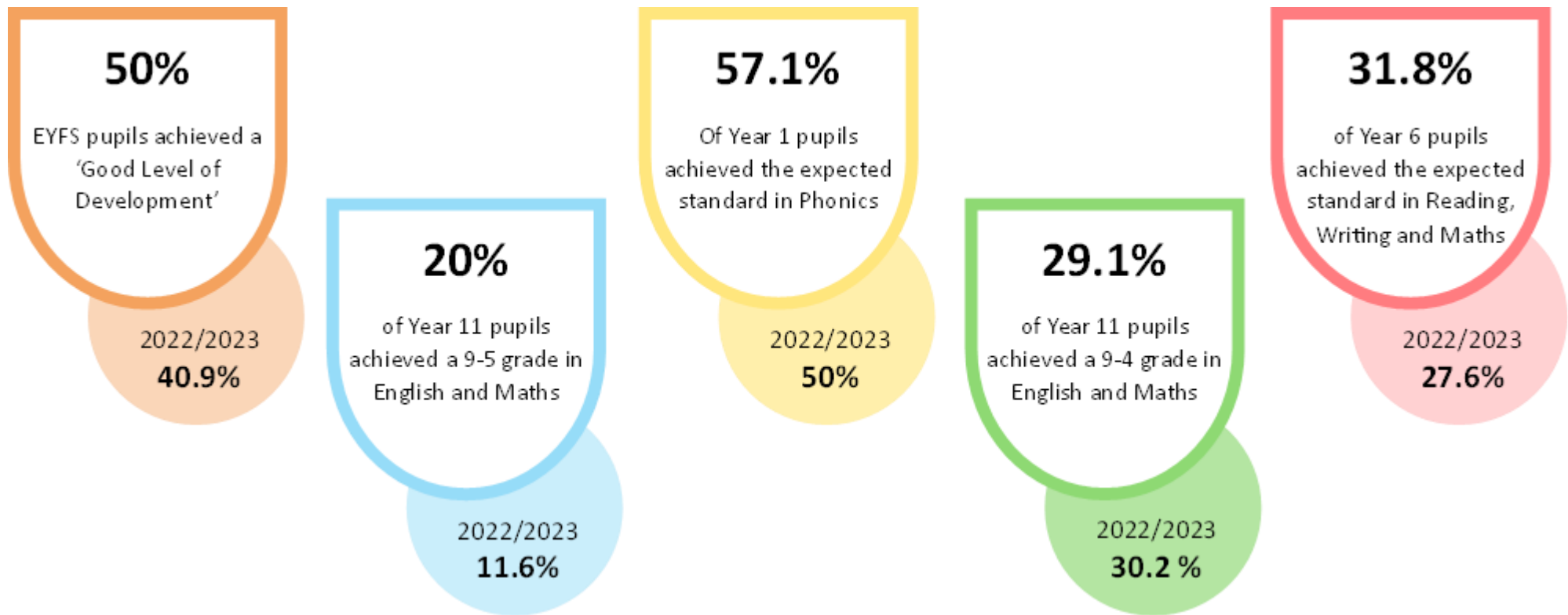
School-led tutoring (SLT) grant is part of the tuition offer from the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and is intended to help close the education gap between vulnerable children and their peers which widened during COVID-19. The VS was provided with SLT funding specifically for their LAC pupils with the requirement that schools contribute 50% of the cost of tuition from the Pupil Premium Plus grant, adding up to a total of £270 per pupil in a mainstream school or £705 per child in AP/special schools and special units for a 15-hour block of tuition. Funding was released to schools based on need identified in the termly PEP meetings with tuition being arranged directly by schools or, in the case of children not currently able to attend school, arranged by the Virtual School. The VS can signpost tutoring providers from their standing list should schools require.

Tuition support can include interventions which support improving educational attainment, for example, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) where subjects such as maths and English may not be appropriate. The interventions had to have been completed by the end of the summer holidays 2024 and the VSH is required to report back to the DfE on:

- the total amount spent on school-led tutoring for LAC pupils in the academic year 2023 to 2024 (by mainstream funded pupils and specialist provision funded pupils)
- the total number of LAC pupils who have received tuition through the school-led tutoring grant in the academic year 2023 to 2024
- the total number of hours of funded tuition through the school-led tutoring grant funding in the academic year 2023 to 2024

This is the last academic year we will be receiving Recovery funding and SLT grant funding.

Summary of Children in Care Attainment ([provisional data](#))



All data is provisional and subject to change. Unless stated otherwise, all data is based on pupils who were in care for at least 12 months as at 31st March. NB; Analysis of data will be provided in the April update once final data is confirmed.



Appendix 5 -
Provisional Results - 2

[Appendix 5: Provisional Results Academic year 2022-2023](#)

Previously Looked-After Children

Our duties extend to supporting schools and adoptive parents with advice for previously looked after children. This academic year 136 referrals were made, compared to 92 referrals in 2022/2023; 77 parents, 23 SWs, 33 teachers including HT, DT, SENCOs and 3 professionals. We received 252 calls totalling 58 hours of calls, 245 emails were received, and 11 meetings attended. Compared to 2022/2023 where our calls received were 156 totalling 32 hours of call, 105 emails were sent and 8 meetings attended. This increase has meant a duty desk has been needed to spread the capacity across the team to ensure we are supporting this cohort of young people, families and schools.

Support offered for;	Total number
Parents	38
Transition advice	4
Admissions advice	8
Exclusion and suspension advice	7
PPP	3
Post 16	1
Signposting other professionals	4
Process advice	7
Behaviour advice	43
Communication	6
SEN and EHCP advice	15

The Virtual School offer a duty line which is open every weekday.

- Calls and emails from parents/guardians/DTs or professionals will be logged by our admin team and information will be sent to the Virtual School Senior Education Advisor who is on duty. They will respond within seven working days.
- In the first instance the SEA will offer advice guidance and strategies to the caller which may also include emailing information and signposting to other agencies.
- This may also include supporting with admission and EHCP requests by checking that admissions and SEN are aware of PLAC status to ensure they are being prioritised.
- If there is a particular issue in school the officer may offer to contact school and discuss with them and then feedback to parent/guardian.
- Attachment and Trauma Training will be offered to schools and parents as appropriate.

- In rare instances where the situation in school is very challenging and where there is capacity a Virtual School officer may be able to attend a TEAMS meeting.

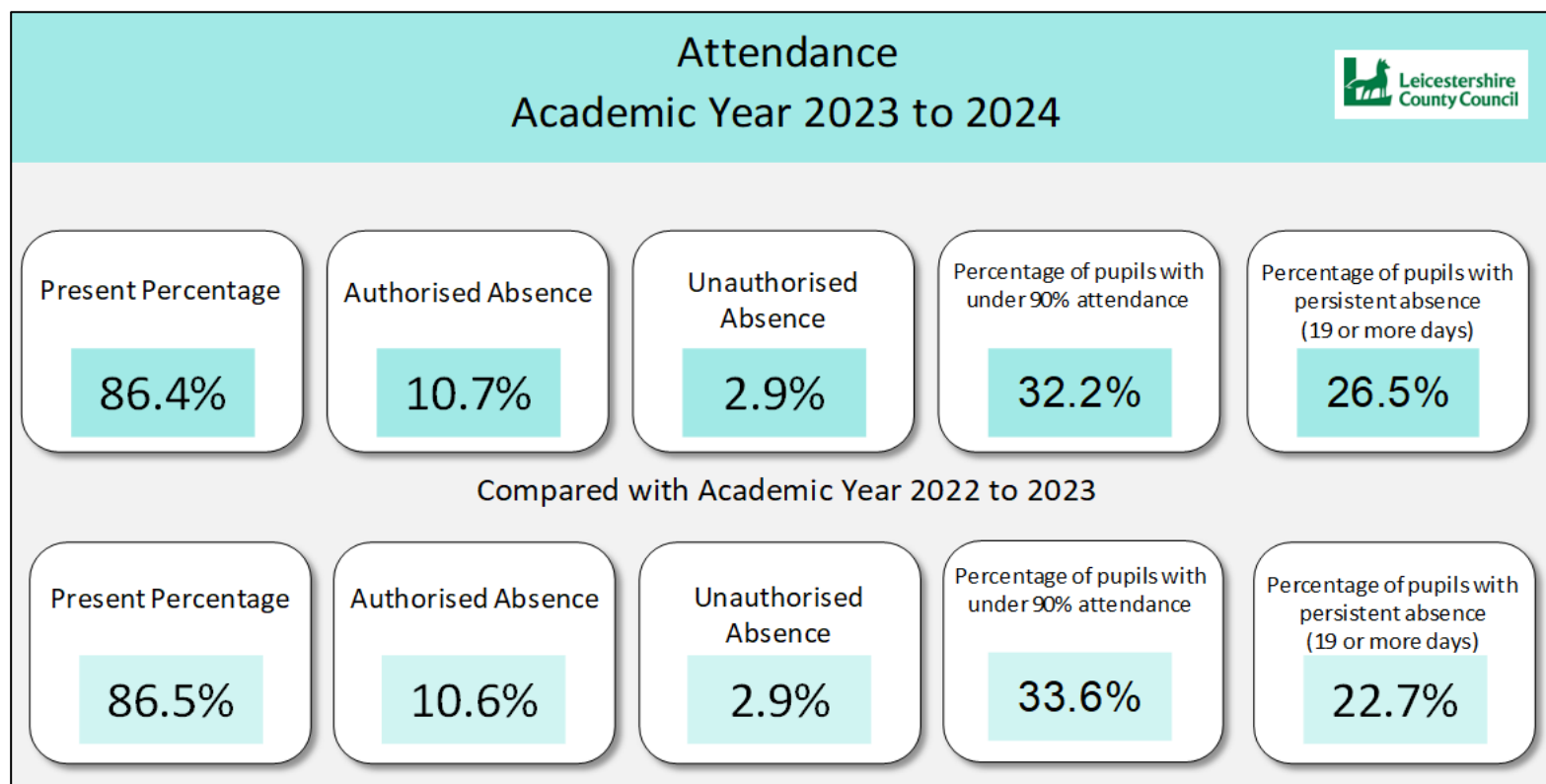
We are unable to attend any face-to-face meetings due to capacity.

Kinship Carers

The extension to duties incorporated Kinship carers from December 2023 and therefore the above support and advice is also now offered for those young people and carers in Kinship care.

Attendance and Suspensions

Reporting is prompt and supported using Welfare Call alerts; weekly and ongoing attendance and exclusion reports allied to termly Social, Emotional and Mental Health RAG reports from schools enable the VS to robustly monitor and respond to issues arising.



In 2022-2023 there were

- 28 young people not on roll at the end of the academic year
 - Of these 13 were Yr 11 UASC, 3 were Yr 10 UASC, 1 was a Year 9 UASC, 6 had an EHCP and 4 had no SEN

In 2023 -2024 there were

- 22 young people not on roll at the end of the academic year
 - Of these 6 were Yr 11 UASC, 1 was a Yr 10 UASC, 12 young people with EHCP required specialist placements, 2 young people were placed out of county on entering care so were awaiting school placements, 1 young person who came into care was home educated.

There have been no permanent exclusions of children in care for several years – this is the result of collaborative work across schools/settings and Behaviour Partnerships with the VS. Reporting is prompt and helped using Welfare Call alerts; other weekly and ongoing reports against attendance and exclusions ensure we are robustly monitoring and supporting this agenda with schools and children and young people.

Overall, suspensions have risen slightly from 58 in 2022/23 to 63 in 2023/24. Suspensions at Secondary phase have risen. Within this figure, there are 54 pupils who received fixed term exclusions (FTE) cross Year 7 to Year 11 at secondary phase, a total of 311 days lost of education between them compared to 281.5 days the previous year. The main reason for suspensions being reported is for persistent or general disruptive behaviour which has increased from the previous year as the main reason.

The Virtual School works closely with Schools/Settings/Services to develop understanding of issues involved and are working to improve and develop the Trauma informed agenda with schools to ensure consistent practise and support is in place for our young people.



Appendix 6 -
Suspensions - Acaden

[Appendix 6: Suspension dashboard 2023-2024](#)



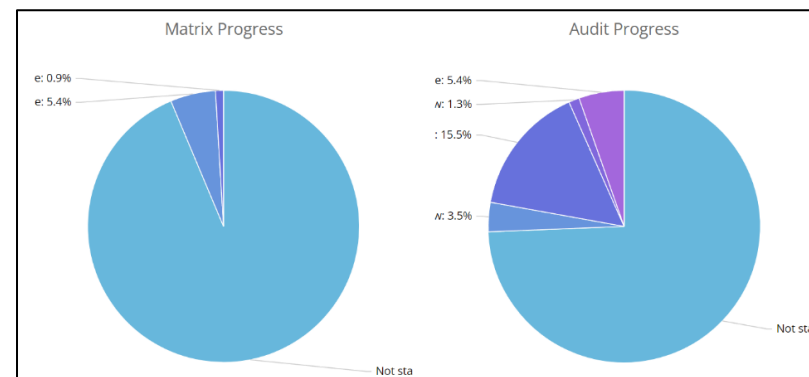
Appendix 7 -
Attendance - Academi

[Appendix 7: Attendance dashboard 2023-2024](#)

ARC – The Attachment Research Community

As a result of the data informing us of the increasing number of suspensions, we implemented the ARC framework for all schools to have access to the trauma informed school’s toolkit this academic year. We launched in January 2024 and from Jan to June, have successfully encouraged 75 of our schools to start their toolkit/complete it to see where their school is on the journey to becoming Trauma Informed. This tool has allowed us to identify schools who are reflecting on their own practice and asking for further support and training. We aim to continue using this toolkit into next academic year with the aim at getting more of our schools on the platform.

We also attended the annual ARC conference as a team to enhance our CPD and knowledge around attachment and Trauma



School Admissions (2023-24)

The Virtual School strives to ensure that applications for school places other than at normal transition points are processed without delay with as little disruption to the child's education as possible. In 2023-24, there were 94 applications during the academic year for a change of school for Leicestershire LAC. Admissions authorities of all mainstream schools must give the highest priority in their oversubscription criteria to looked-after and previously looked-after children and cannot refuse to admit a looked after child based on challenging behaviour or refer a looked after child for action under the Fair Access Protocol on the basis of challenging behaviour. Looked-after children can be admitted as 'excepted pupils' in relation to the infant class size limit if they are admitted outside the normal admission round and schools cannot refuse admission on the grounds of being full.

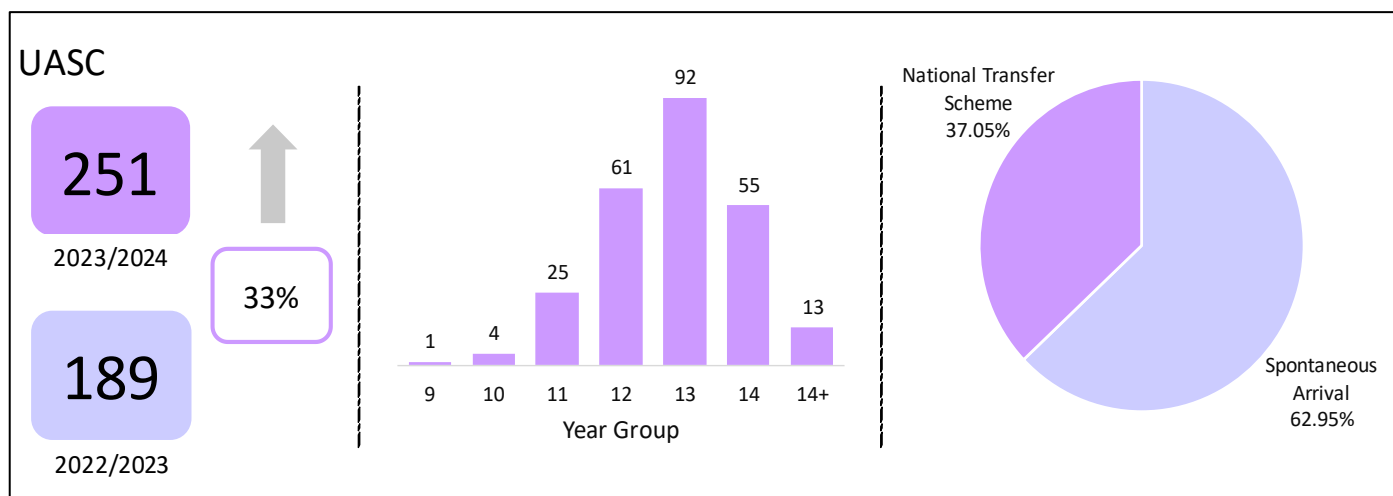
As a result of the circumstances of looked-after children, there tends to be a higher rate of in-year school admissions applications submitted for LAC than their peers. This is more usually due to placement moves.

When a child is removed from the roll of one school and is awaiting a new school place, they are reported as a Child Missing Education. Under these circumstances the VS funds 1:1 tuition to maintain a pupil's engagement in education or negotiates the commissioning of 1:1 tuition by SENA services, so that the impact of the delay in accessing formal education is minimised, and to ensure all children have an offer of educational input.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

The VS has the same responsibilities for UASC as it does for any other Leicestershire looked-after child or care leaver, starting with the identification of appropriate education provision and monitoring of progress once enrolled.

At the end of academic year 2023-24 there was 30 UASC students at statutory school age compared to 34 the previous year and 221 post-16 compared to 155 the previous year, making a total of 251 compared to 189 the previous year. This is a further increase in our UASC cohort. This has therefore meant we have had to continue to adapt our response to number of PEPs and increase a casework officers' role to include UASC PEP work. We are continuing to look at the needs of this cohort of young people and working in partnership with others to ensure the best education and provision is provided.



[Support for Early Years](#)

We have continued to support Early Years settings, to have a greater understanding of the attachment and trauma needs of our youngest children. We have run 3 training courses online over the year.

The SEA also offer advice in 6 monthly PEP meetings, with additional support as needed. We have supported schools, Early Years settings and foster carers with the transition to school, with a transition PEP meeting in the summer term and training for foster carers around transition and starting school.

We have liaised with the FEEE team to look at the changes to Early years FEEE and EYPP with a lot of new advice being given to settings, social workers and foster carers. The EYPP is now available to all LAC who receive FEEE from the term after they are 9mths old.

The children continue to receive the books from the Imagination library each month. These are well received by the carers and children.

[Educational Psychology Service](#)

We have a long-standing relationship with the Leicestershire Educational Psychology team, where we work collaboratively to prioritise and support our children in care with additional educational needs. This year 34 of our young people were seen by EPs, in order to support their assessments for EHCPs. This work not only involves direct work with our young people, but a collaborative shared practice across both of our teams. Together, the new Guidance for reducing suspensions has been written this academic year for our schools, to support them with strategies to use in school. This Guidance will be launched at the start of the new academic year.

[Inclusion and SENA](#)

We also work closely with the Education Inclusion service and SENA, to ensure our young people in care are prioritised and supported in a timely way.

Post-16 Young People and Care Leavers

Priority is given to ensure all young people at the end of KS4 (age 16) have an identified destination and remain in Employment, Education or Training (EET) during subsequent years. College Designated Persons (DP) for looked after children are invited to the summer PEP meeting of Year 11 pupils whose college destination is known to ensure that plans are in place for a smooth transition into college.

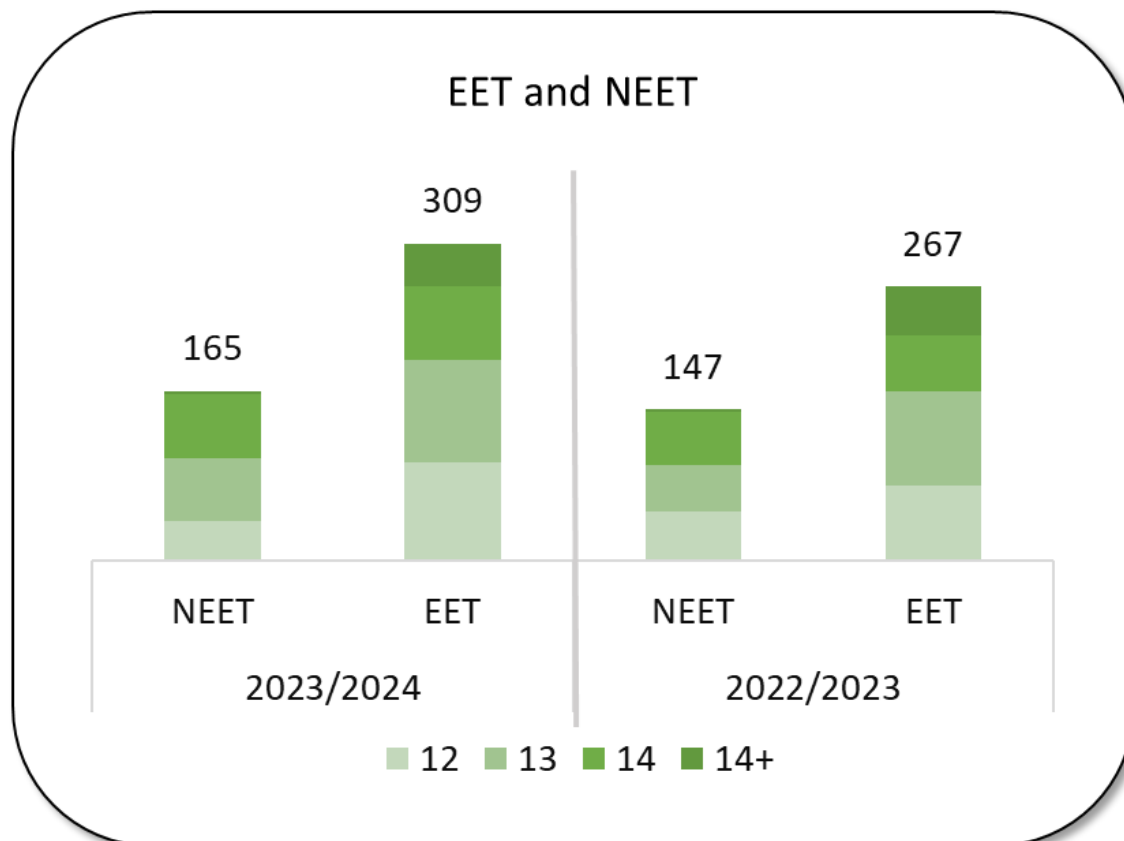
Post 16 Senior Education Advisors conducted 613 PEPs and were much busier supporting a larger KS5 cohort who had more concerns around education as a result of the uncertainty around courses. The close links with all local colleges, forged over preceding years helped to ease the passage of young people into college, and to access appropriate support.

Number of Post 16 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) over the past two years: 34.8 % in 2023-2024 compared to 35.5% in 2022-2023. We will always discuss with the social worker to make a referral where we feel a young person may be NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

The Post 16 grant confirmed from the government came into effect from September 2023 for the next 2 academic years. We appointed a Post 16 casework officer to support with PEPS for this cohort of young people and which allowed us to expand our offer to focus on our NEET young people and apprenticeship drive from January 2024. The number of young people who are EET has risen because of this.

19+ NEET Study Programme

The 19 +Study Support Programme will commence in December and will be part of the Multiply Programme. This will be offered to 19+ NEET YPs. The programme is a 10 week programme offering a day a week of English, maths, Digital Skills and Employability Skills and a day a week of work experience. Towards the end of the programme there will be some IAG sessions and a celebration event. There will also be an opportunity to extend the engagement of any YPs who wish to take a qualification.



Extended Duties

Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

This academic year saw the extended duties for children with a social worker coming over to the Virtual School. We have appointed a lead SEA to focus on working with schools and social workers to ensure high aspirations and progress is supported for all children with a social worker.



VISION

Relationships first

- To support schools to reconsider approach to inclusive education- adopting relational approaches to behaviour or “stress” support. Reducing reliance on internal isolation, detentions, suspensions and exclusions.
- To support schools to remain curious. Wonder aloud.
- For all children to receive *equitable* support in education
- For our children to be happy, creative, safe and supported throughout their school journey

Priority 1

Make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities, including with children’s social care, to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children.

Priority 2

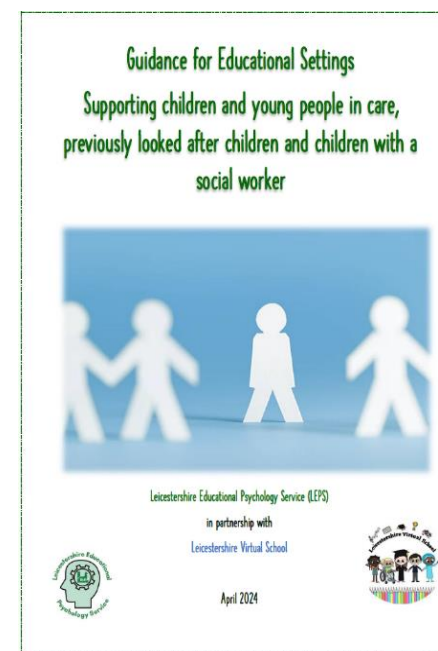
Promote practice that supports children’s engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting is an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm.

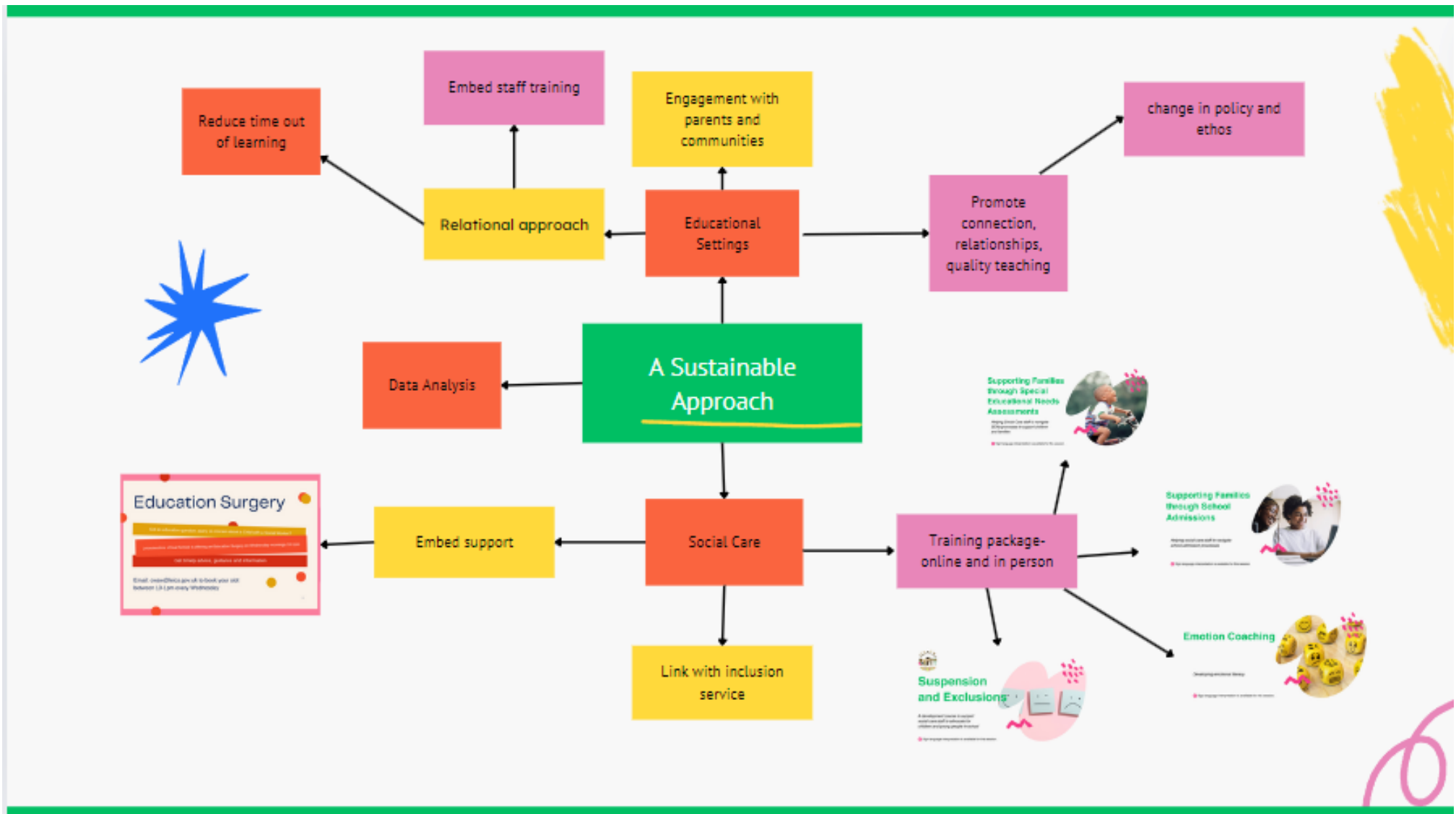
Priority 3

Narrow the attainment gap so every child has the opportunity to reach their potential – including helping to ensure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover educationally from the impact of the pandemic.

Things we have begun to implement;

- ARC membership for all schools across Leicestershire
- Drop in surgery’s once a week for schools and Social workers to call for educational advice
- Launch cluster conference next year for all DT and DSLS
- New toolkit guidance to support schools with preventing suspensions and exclusions
- Utilising available data to support with identifying schools that may need additional support
- The Hinckley Project – add details





Children with a Social Worker

(Not including Children Looked After)

From February 2024 to May 2024

1254

Total Number of Children with a Social Worker

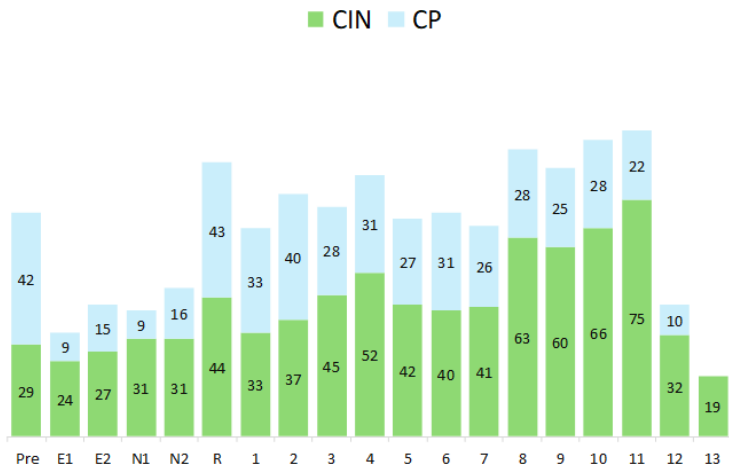
791

Number of Children in Need

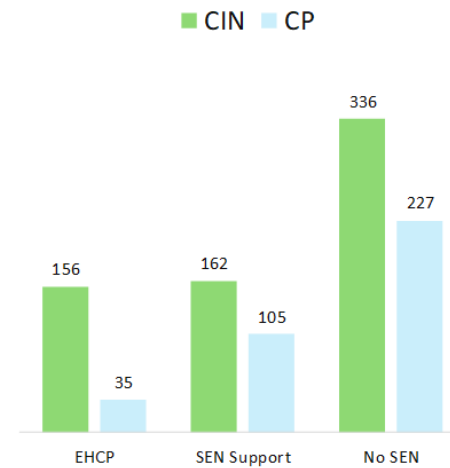
463

Number of Children with a Protection Plan

Year Groups



SEN Status



Contextual Children with a social worker data

We are currently working on a new data dashboard to be able to work live and extract CWSW data. This will help us to drill down into key areas, school and needs so we can identify support in a timely manner. At present we have snapshot data of our numbers of CIN and CP children and which year groups they are in. We can also identify the number of SEN and EHCP per cohort.

NB. This data fluctuates as children come on and off CIN and CP plans so is subject to change.

Training

The VS continues to deliver a wide range of training to schools and college staff, governors, social workers, carers and adoptive parents. The aim of the training is to help all professionals understand the needs of children in care and previously looked after children by identifying the barriers and strategies to support them. We have moved back to face-to-face training where possible as we gain the most engagement from these sessions, and feedback suggests these are valued more in general.

Between September 2023 and August 2024, the VS delivered training as follows:

- Whole school Attachment and Trauma training sessions delivered to 38 schools/mixed staff groups (2x one-hour sessions)
- Attachment and Trauma training to 3 Alternative provisions and the leads of the Leicestershire SEIPS.
- Induction Training for Designated Teachers of looked-after children and previously looked-after children- Autumn ,Spring and Summer term
- DT Cluster sessions with a focus on ARC Audit Autumn and Spring term
- Intro to Virtual School and Emotion Coaching training to foster carers in Summer term
- Training to governors in Summer term
- AYSE intro to Virtual School Training Autumn and Spring term
- Attachment and trauma training for SW Autumn and Spring term
- 2x Early Years training to settings Spring and Summer term
- 2x Training to Adopters, Autumn and Summer term
- 2x ASDAN Training to carers and PA and SW -Spring and Summer term
- Key Adult and Principles of Theraplay courses Secondary and Primary sessions - Autumn and Spring term
- Trauma and support into schools' session for Residential care managers and staff Spring term
- Strategies for a positive transition to Secondary School (PLAC) Summer term
- Transition to School for Foster Carers Summer term
- Principles of Theraplay training Spring term.

Participants have made the following comments in response to the questions, "In what ways haven you benefited from this training and what will you do as a result of this session?"

'Extremely informative as an initial training session. Good sign posting and post training support.'

'Learnt so much and it's made me think about things in a different way.'

'Makes me more mindful of the pupils needs.'

'Lots of strategies to support children and a better understanding of how to help children with trauma.'

Designated Teacher Conference



This years designated teacher conference was focused around our care experienced and previously looked after young people. We had some incredible guest speakers including Nick Barwick, Catch and our Previously looked after lead for the Virtual School. Nicks powerful keynote delved into his own experiences and journey through care, whilst providing key take away messages for professionals to think about in their daily practice. We were able to provide goodie bags with trauma informed and attachment aware books to support our schools and how the Virtual School can also support previously looked after children.

Achievements and participation

Participation in the arts and sporting events is a huge part of our young people's lives. It develops friendships, provides opportunities to experience things they may not have tried before and has a huge benefit in supporting wellbeing and mental health. The Virtual School are committed to providing as many opportunities as possible across a wide range of activities as possible to ensure all young people are given chance to engage in a variety of things.

Artsmark Journey



**Artsmark
Platinum Award**
Awarded by Arts
Council England

It is an absolute pleasure to share that over the last 18 months, our dedication and drive to embed the arts into our Virtual school offer has paid off, and Leicestershire Virtual School has become one of the first Virtual Schools in the country to be granted a **PLATINUM** Artsmark award! This is a testament to all our young people that have engaged with the arts and continue to do so to support in them in many ways.



A massive thank you to all the children and young people who took part in arts activities over the last 18 months. We are so proud of all your work. This has been an incredible journey in ensuring the arts become engrained in what we do in the virtual school. The arts bring a sense of belonging, lifelong friendships and trusting relationships that enable our young people to feel safe and heard and to express themselves through different ways. For some of our young people this opportunity has provided them with life enhancing opportunities and support.”



Artsmark is the only creative quality standard for schools, accredited by Arts Council England. It supports them to develop and celebrate arts and cultural education across the whole curriculum.

Dr Darren Henley OBE, Chief Executive of the Arts Council, said: “I would like to congratulate Leicestershire Virtual School on their Artsmark Award. Becoming an Artsmark school demonstrates that through offering a broad, ambitious and creative curriculum, young people have the opportunity to develop character and resilience, increasing their knowledge, curiosity and skills that will remain with them through to adult life.”

What we did....



We asked our young people, what three words, to describe the Artsmark journey:

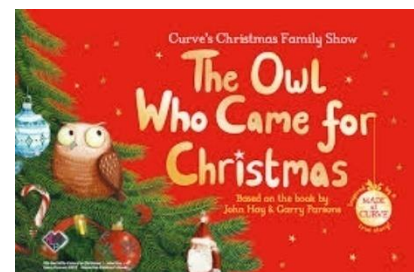
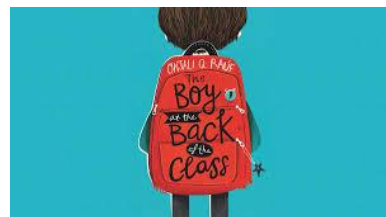
challenging,
triumphant proud

-inspirational,
authentic, creative.

Fun, Exciting
& unborng

Theatre trips

This year we were able to offer tickets to a range of theatre trips as part of our Artsmark award. The shows our young people and their carers got to experience together were sell outs and a huge success. This year we got to see;



- Everybody's talking about Jamie
- Peter Pan . The play that goes Wrong
- The Boy at the Back of the Class
- The Owl who came for Christmas
- Shrek the musical
- Six (as part of our Artful Alliance research)

I just wanted to say a big thank you for the complimentary tickets for the show, The Boy At The Back Of The Class, I really enjoyed the show as did I.

Thank you so much for the Peter Pan tickets. We are just on our way home and we had an amazing time; it was so funny I haven't laughed that much in ages, in fact, I think I enjoyed it more than the children!

Artful Alliance Research

This year Leicestershire Virtual School were shortlisted to take part in some action research with Blue Cabin through the Artful Alliance programme funded by the Arts Council. This project saw 4 Virtual Schools and partner Arts organisations working together to research the impact Arts had for care experienced young people in a variety of ways. We were partnered with Care to Dance and we ran a programme in the Spring term to look at how dance can create belonging and the impact our carers have on this.



The impact report can be found here



To explore the impact a variety of new dance experiences has on Children in Care's sense of belonging and SEMH. Does engagement from carers enhance this impact?

Forest Schools

Outdoor learning and being out in nature has huge benefits. It provides the opportunity to be creative and focus on wellbeing. The Virtual school has ran a forest school project across the year. We have had great engagement from our young people, alongside their carers, providing the opportunity to bond and build lasting relationships. We have trained one of our team as a forest school lead to support with the delivery of forest schools. In partnership with Leicester City and the Community, we have developed and offered a forest school session for those young people in residential care.



Power of the Arts session

Spoken Word Workshop

5 young people in years 6 to 11 attended our Mighty Creatives workshop with the purpose of recording a poem to be the voice over for our CIC video about what the Arts mean to young people in care.

The day involved a shared poem as an intro to poetry writing and writing sentences about what the arts mean to them by passing around paper and then added to, before folding the first one down so the next person could only see the last line. Using senses, such as ‘the arts smell like, taste like’ etc, they were able to come up with an abundance of descriptive sentences and then rearranged them into a more coherent order to make a really flowing poem.

The young people then recorded different aspects of their written work for the voice video. It was a great productive, artistic day with visible confidence growing in the young people and this was backed up by the smiles on everyone’s face as they left. Our finished video is launching next academic year.

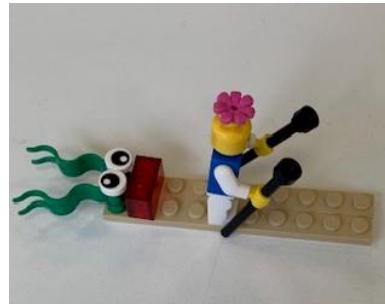
Cricket event

The opportunity arose that The Virtual School was able to take a group of our unaccompanied young people to Leicestershire County Cricket Club for an afternoon to look around the facilities at Grace Road and have an opportunity to take part in some professional coaching. 16 young people attended the event with a range of abilities. One young person hadn’t heard of cricket and had to google it but was very keen to meet other young people and make friends. The afternoon started with a tour of the ground and the facilities. Our young people were very eager to walk on the pitch and play a game. They witnessed the groundsmen preparing the pitch for an up-and-coming event. After the tour was the opportunity to play cricket using the club’s indoor facilities. Our young people had the opportunity to play in the nets and could either bat or bowl. Staff were on hand to offer advice and support. An offer has been made for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young people to take part in coaching sessions in the winter provided by Leicestershire County Cricket Club. This will give them the opportunity to meet and socialise with other young people as well as improve their cricket skills.



University experience

In April, 5 young people had the exciting opportunity to visit Loughborough university as part of the Universities Explore more day. Each young person could bring either a friend or trusted adult along with them and this really encouraged the young people to attend. The day started off with introductions and a campus tour, none of the adults that came with the young people and so it was great to see them interacting with the student ambassadors, asking questions, deciding which facilities they wanted to see. We looked at some of the outstanding facilities including Power Base gym, where we saw the Para Olympic Weightlifting Team training. The tour included accommodation, library, students' union, and lecture theatres. After that, we had a psychology lecture. The young people then got to see where you can buy food on campus. After lunch was the Lego session, we started off making basic structures using 5 pieces of Lego and talking about it with our groups. The aim of the session was to make a university and what we would like to include in it and describe it to our group. Some of the features included, safe, friendly, a nice place to stay, kind people, library, cameras so I feel safe, an escape route when I want to leave. Our foster carers who attended were amazing and couldn't believe how their young people had interacted with other people and would encourage other young people to attend.



Sports festival

Another fantastic partnership we have made is with the Youth Sport Trust and Active together partnerships, to enable us to offer and support our young people in more sporting opportunities across the county. We were invited back to take part as a Virtual School in our second school summer festival.



On Thursday 27th of June 2024, 13 young people joined the 'All-Stars' sports team at Loughborough University, organised by Active Together, for a jam-packed day of noncompetitive sporting activities.

Active Together state, "over the course of the last year, Active Together have begun to work with the Leicestershire Virtual School to develop the sporting provision for children in care. Active Together are committed to continuing to develop this relationship with the Virtual School to ensure the sustainability of opportunities for this group of young people in the future."

The day started with an opening ceremony, welcoming the teams to the event, where 3 of our 'All-Stars' team members joined other competitors for a Drumba session. The day then involved a carousel of non-competitive activities including Axe Throwing, Archery, Quidditch, Disc Golf, Drumba and many more. The 'All-Stars' team consisted of young people based all over the county from different schools, coming together as a team – gaining new friendships by the end of the day. The young people interacted, supported and encouraged their teammates, particularly when motivating each other to have a go at all sports.

The 'All-Stars' team doubled in size from last year and our aim is for the team to keep growing year on year. Team members shared that the day was "great fun" and wanted to join the team for next year. This is a partnership that is continuing to grow in strength and The Virtual School will continue to work with Active Together to ensure as many young people as possible can attend next year.

Care to Dance

This academic year we have continued with our partnership with Care to Dance and run a 12 month programme where our young people have gained dance qualifications, participated at events and celebrations and expanded the programme through pupil voice to enhance the offer of dance.

Care to Dance Application

CARE TO DANCE IMPACT

Care to Dance supports up to 15 children in care and care-experienced young people in one class. Since collaborating with Leicester City Virtual School also, this has provided opportunity to support more young people across classes, between Local Authorities. Since the start of the programmes in February 2023, Care to Dance have supported over 30 young people. We continue to promote our classes as a partnership through emails, attending Team Meetings and events to ensure everyone has the opportunity to attend.

Since the 12 month programme commenced in September 2023, 9 young people have completed their Level 1 Dance Leadership Qualification, accredited by Leadership Skills Foundation and a further 3 have started since January 2024. Additionally, 6 young people have commenced their Level 2 Dance Leadership Qualification since January 2024. All young people above the age of 12 are welcome to complete their qualifications.

In terms of inclusivity, there are three separate classes that will commence from April, one of which will facilitate a safe space where young people can experience more intensive dance training. This arose following feedback from young people who would like space to experience more advanced dance training. This allows a safe space for all young people, no matter their needs and backgrounds. It is open to all young people who are care-experienced aged 7-24 and referrals have continuously been accepted throughout the programme.

In addition to this, Care to Dance have attended a variety of meetings for young people, including PEP Meetings, Review of Arrangement Meetings and adapt their approach based on the needs of the young people. For example, those who are particularly anxious or might benefit from 1-1 time, Beth has visited them at their home or in the community to re-engage them or make them feel comfortable in attending the group classes for the first time.

They provide an Ambassador programme and currently 4 Leicestershire young people are Ambassadors. Two are specifically dance ambassadors and two are music ambassadors. All have had opportunities to support the wider group, the development of the programme through the CTD Youth Board, attending national events with other ambassadors from different regions, such as London and Manchester. The Ambassador programme is open to all young people and is continuously developed, providing others with the opportunity also.



Care to Dance Application

EXAMPLE 1

One young person attended Care to Dance since the programme commenced in February 2023 and is now an Ambassador. She has completed her Level 1 Dance Leadership and is commencing her Level 2. She has ambitions to become a Dance Teacher and Care to Dance will support her towards this goal through undertaking her qualifications, gaining experience in leading the rest of the group and attending mainstream classes during the Intensive Training Programme. This young person has experienced a lot of challenges at school and has returned home, meaning a lot of instability in her life. However Care to Dance has been a consistent space for her to belong, express herself and talk with trained, qualified and trusted adults. She has verbalised the impact of Care to Dance on many occasions, stating 'we are like her family'. Following conversations about her education and goals, it is hoped that she will reintegrate into mainstream school within the next month. This is just one example of how Care to Dance has supported her throughout a difficult journey.

EXAMPLE 2

Another young person who experiences challenges with her mental health was visited by the Care to Dance team who then joined. Since then, she has been connected with local organisations, including Charnwood Arts, Leicestershire Music as well as Frontline. She has since written and made her own music resulting in performances across the country. She has performed at the celebration events, Frontline's events in Manchester and London, and open mic nights in Leicester. She is passionate about pursuing music as her career and continues to use music as a means to express herself. She has also become a member of the Frontline Youth Board and attends their meetings to inform the development of the Social Work Sector, all of which supports her to gain work experience and passion for her future.

DELIVERY MODEL

Due to their unique delivery model, mentoring occurs informally every week. During class, the Support Lead engages with the young people as a group and on a 1-1 basis. They discuss a wide range of topics, including school, employment, relationships, family and their mental health to name a few. They work closely with supporting professionals and carers to provide holistic support as a care team.



Link to the young person's voice video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hq9vR50m1Zk>

Impact report for intensive pilot programme



ITP Feedback Report.pdf

Staff involvement

The Virtual school love to get involved in participation, meeting and supporting our young people. Here are some of the events we have taken part in this academic year;



Forest school



Care to Dance



NAVSH

Uni experiences



Charnwood Arts Workshops



CIC awards



Sports

UASC Resources

We partnered with Bright Path Futures to pilot some exciting language resources for our UASC young people. This included translated resources in 9 languages and Amiko wellbeing cards, to support new arrivals in their English language development. These resources have been given out at pre-entry PEPS and via Pas and used as a supportive tool. Each resource has links to videos that can be easily accessed, and research is being undertaken by Bright Path futures to look at their impact.



‘I have never seen a smile so big as the one x gave me today when I showed him the booklet and amiko cards. He said the booklet was AMAZING, poured over the pages reading in Arabic and practising in English’. Social Worker

We aim to continue our collaborate work and have begun to seek views from schools and colleges round resources that may support in a range of settings.

SYPAC

SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care) is a monthly social meet up for care leavers. The young people get consistent staff, engage with each other in games and activities, input into council business and policy and can access EET opportunities and advice through myself and other visitors who attend meeting throughout the year. This year included 3 of young people attending a council meeting and proposing that Care Leaver become a protected characteristic within the authority, which was unanimously agreed, this was an amazing achievement. There are regular young people who come and have been doing so for many years which means that there is no upper age limit, and we have members beyond 25yrs who find the monthly sessions incredibly valuable and important. The sessions help to alleviate loneliness particularly for those young people who are living independently. By ensuring the VS have input there have been many opportunities to encourage and advise young people to engage in education, employment, and training. For example, one young person returning to college and achieving her English and Maths at Level 2 post 25, greatly improving her employment opportunities. Another young person has agreed to come to a pre-employment programme in the hope of working towards an apprenticeship in the future. The membership of the group evolves regularly, and young people get to share experiences and friendships that last and support each other.

Bamboozle

We partnered with Bamboozle this academic year to offer our special schools a wonderful theatre production within their school settings. The feedback was incredible and some staff commented on 'it being one of the best days experienced during my time in education'.

Leicester City in the Community

We have been working with Leicester City in the Community over the last academic year to offer additional mentoring and support for some of our young people. This academic year, we collaborated with 13 young people. Mentors support young people in our schools and offer a wide range of extracurricular opportunities for our young people in care.



Senior Residential Worker: He really looks forward to seeing Georgia and enjoys going rock climbing.

Project worker: Our young person sometimes struggles to engaged in anything but has started to build a relationship with you and has enjoyed coming to the stadium and the training ground activity days

Head Teacher: "Georgia's visits have become a highlight of his week."

Participant: "I can sit down in class better and do my work. Georgia is really fun and helps me talk about things I find hard."

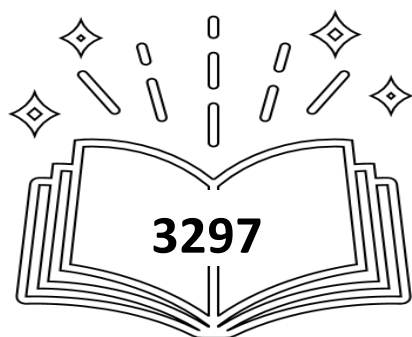
Grandparent of participant (Kinship care): "We are so grateful for the support given to us by Georgia. She is always there for R but has offered us support too. R has had some wonderful opportunities to go on trips and watch LCFC play."



Book Parcels

1810 books have been sent out by the Dolly Parton Imagination Library scheme on our behalf to children in care aged 0 to 5.

1487 books have been sent out by the Virtual School to the primary school aged pupils.



We recognise the importance of encouraging reading. Children with poor reading skills will struggle to access all areas of the curriculum. To promote a love of reading and develop the necessary skills, we run our Book Clubs with monthly parcels being delivered to children in Reception through to the beginning of year 7. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library provides books to all looked-after children aged 0 – 5 years. The increase in the number of children in care, along with the increased cost of living means that the cost of providing high quality parcels to every child increases year on year. The Imagination Library will continue next academic year.

This academic year was our last BookTrust Letterbox parcels for our children in years 1, 3 and 5. These parcels provide children with high quality books, resources and games to promote literacy and numeracy skills. We carefully select and purchase books for our Bookworm and Boomerang parcels. These parcels also contain resources and activity sheets with ideas for activities to carry out at home. Children have noted how much they value the book parcels. Children like receiving their named and addressed parcel in the post. The recent move to an ePEP using Welfare Cloud has enabled the child's voice to be evidenced during the PEP process. This has highlighted how well received all book club parcels are.

Children have made the following comments in response to the question, "What do you enjoy about the book parcels?"

"I like how we discover new words in books and learn new stuff."

"It delivers things that I can do for school and so I can practice."

"Love having the books addressed to them. Loves being read to and makes the story up from the pictures."

"They're for me!"

"Opening the box and seeing what's inside. I like the books."

[Plans for 2024/2025](#)

[LCIC – mentoring](#)

We will continue into our 2nd year contract with Leicester City in the Community to offer their Inspire me and Foster the future programmes to our children in care across Leicestershire. These two programmes work with young people to mentor and engage young people back into education, provide opportunities to experience different opportunities and work together to support aspirations and career opportunities.

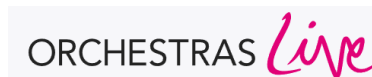


[Care to Dance](#)

We are delighted to share that we are running the Care to Dance programme for another full year starting in September, after the success of our 12-month programme. This is an exciting opportunity for our young people to continue this journey, with the added option of completing their dance leadership award as part of the programme and take dance to the next level with our new additional programme running alongside the core offer.

[Collaborate and Innovate Research project](#)

We have been selected as part of another Arts council initiative to deliver an action research project alongside Orchestra Live! We will be developing our offer and research over the course of next academic year and present our findings in next years annual report.



[Hinckley Trauma project](#)

We have developed a Hinckley trauma informed network of schools in partnership with Futures Teaching Alliance, to build on practice and share expertise between a cluster of schools. This project aims to share and deliver training opportunities, offer post grad course in trauma informed practice for our schools and equip schools with tools and support to develop trauma informed communities.

[Work with the youth sport trust and Arc to raise the profile of sport](#)

We have partnered with the YST and west midlands to begin discussions on how we can enhance the sport and physical education offer for care experienced young people. We will be working closely together next academic year to raise the profile through sports and provide wider opportunities for our young people.



[Year of belonging; through the lens](#)

Next academic years project will follow on from our Artsmark journey with a focus on using photography as a tool to look at identity, culture and belonging. We will be launching our project in the Autumn term and aim to allow our young people to share and develop their photography skills by capturing a range of imagery that reflect what belonging means to them. We hope to hold a photo exhibit at the end of the academic year.

[Careers event](#)

We are busy planning our next Careers event at the King Power Stadium and hope to have a range of providers and business' who will attend to share their expertise, offer and jobs for our young people.

[UASC Events](#) – we are hosting several events including a half term pedestrian event and a summer cricket event next year.

2024-2025 priorities/ action plan

The VS Service Delivery Plan reflects the ambitions and ethos of the Children and Family Service Departmental plan. The priorities and actions underpinning them are under constant review throughout the year. We aim

- i. To raise the aspirations of and for looked-after children (LAC) and previously looked-after children (PLAC)
- ii. To narrow progress and attainment gaps
- iii. To improve stakeholders' understanding of the educational needs of children in care and those adopted from care and strengthen their support of education
- iv. To ensure the views of children and young people are heard, recorded, and inform decisions regarding their education.
- v. To maintain a resilient, vibrant, informed, and knowledgeable team

National developments in the education landscape will always have implications for virtual schools and their support for vulnerable children. Amongst these are the development of PPP funding for post-16, the SEN Review, the Independent Care Review and Social care; stable homes built on love.

Donna Chapman
Virtual School Head,
Leicestershire Virtual School,
Children and Family Services,
Leicestershire County Council.