



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 4  
NOVEMBER 2025**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL 2024 – 2025**

**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 the work and data of the Virtual School (VS) for the academic year 2024-2025. This report is a statutory requirement and will be published onto 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'.
3. This report highlights the work of the Virtual School for Academic year 2024 – 2025. A copy of the full annual report is appended to this report.

**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.
5. The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship. This has now been extended to include those in Kinship care.
6. 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 1 September 2021. This role is being considered under the Childrens Wellbeing bill to become statutory.

## **Service Priorities**

7. Last academic year's priorities were:

- 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; and,
- v. To maintain a resilient, vibrant, informed, and knowledgeable team.

## **What's working well**

### **Data Presentation**

8. The visual dashboards help to support with analysis and scrutiny so that the VS can use this data to drive its work and target support. The data in the report shows the school aged cohort who the Local Authority has a statutory duty to report on, but also in the appendices is a wider analysis of all children and young people from Early years through to post 16. This now includes more detailed data for children with a social worker which will enable the VS to focus on school attendance and suspensions and target schools for more focused work.

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

9. The VS continues to hold a high standard of PEPs and their completion, with a 98% completion rate for PEPs held 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)**

10. PPP (Pupil Premium Plus) allocations have been highlighted and the impact it has had for young people. This has helped the VS work with schools around SMART targets in PEPs and how best to allocate funding to ensure significant impact is being made. Analysis shows that 82.7% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2024-25 were successfully achieved, compared to 79.1% the previous year. 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 2026. This will update this data once published and added to this report.

12. There remains a significant gap in attainment for the VS young people, with their being an increase in suspensions and exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour, children out of education and awaiting SEND assessments, all of which impacts on outcomes.
13. The VS is therefore working more closely with schools around their trauma informed practice and the training offer, tripling the uptake compared to the previous year. The provisional data shows an increase in Early years, KS1 and KS2 data. There has been a reduction in those young people achieving 1-4 at GCSE; this is cohort specific and largely due to the significant needs of the Year 11's and increased suspensions and Alternative Provision use for Social Emotional Mental Health needs this year.

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

14. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children cohort continues to increase, and the VS is adjusting its work to ensure it can respond to the increase in demand. The Council has a statutory duty to provide the same level of support to unaccompanied young people as to any other child in care to enable them to fulfil their educational outcomes. This, however, is proving a challenge as college places are filling rapidly, and provision is limited. The future aim is to support this cohort further by looking at other educational options the VS can partner with, including working with the new Post-16 Service manager to develop new opportunities. At the end of academic year 2022-23, there were 34 UASC students at 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, and this year this has increased further to 285 in total.

### **Achievements and Participation**

15. The VS has supported children and young people to have access to a wider curriculum offer this academic year. This has grown and the VS has worked hard to gain a Platinum Artsmark award to ensure the Arts and wider curriculum is developed and as important for the children and young people as other areas of their education.
16. Childrens Voice work has been part of the focus this year to ensure more of the children and young people can share their views about education and the support of the VS. Snippets of voice from different aspects throughout the year have been included in the report, including participation events, impact report and book clubs.
17. Plans for this academic year include advocating and striving for raising aspirations and attainment for the children and young people, as well as partnering with those that can support and offer experiences. This also includes a recent partnership with Leicester Grammar school and the national springboard foundation to look at ways to get more of the young people into independent schools with fully funded bursaries.
18. The VS has also been involved in a number of pilots/projects around the arts looking at how music can support belonging, including how taiko drumming can support with belonging through Year 6 transition.

### **Key Challenges**

19. A rise in the number of UASC has meant that colleges are getting full earlier than in previous years. A new Post-16 Service manager is in post and will aim to develop additional further education opportunities.
20. There has been a continued use of suspension across schools, in secondary in particular, although data from the summer term shows a decrease compared to previous years.

### **Future Plans and Developments**

21. Involvement in the SEN investment fund in order to train more senior leaders in trauma informed practice and policy
22. A pilot in supporting schools to set up nurture provisions. This is a project to support schools to develop and maintain Nurture Groups across Leicestershire. Training and support will be offered to interested Primary Schools by the VS
23. The Service is continuing to embed the Arts into the VS offer by extending the Artsmark journey and has reapplied to work towards the award again when the current Platinum Award runs out. In addition, the Service will be continuing to support the Care to Dance Programme, offer Theatre experiences, develop a Taiko drumming and work on a pilot project with Coram Shakespeare as well as signposting and raising the Arts profile.

### **Background papers**

24. None

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

25. None

### **Equality Implications**

26. The work of the Virtual School actively seeks to reduce inequalities.

### **Human Rights Implications**

27. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

28. Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25.

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

Jane Moore  
 Director Children and Family Services  
 Tel. No. 0116 3052649

[Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk)

Sharon Cooke

Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care

Tel. No. 0116 3055479

[Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk)

Tim Browne

Assistant Director, Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs

Tel. No. 0116 3057429

[tim.browne@leics.gov.uk](mailto:tim.browne@leics.gov.uk)

Beth Clements

Head of Service, Education Quality, and Inclusion

Tel. No. 0116 3051251

[Beth.Clements@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Beth.Clements@leics.gov.uk)

Donna Chapman

Virtual School Head Teacher

Tel. No. 0116 3052174

[Donna.chapman@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Donna.chapman@leics.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank