

OPEN

**Cared for Children and care leavers
Committee.**

03 December 2024

**Virtual School Headteachers Annual
Report 2023/24**

Report of: Claire Williamson Director of strong start and Education

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report presents an overview of the operation and impact of the virtual school during 2023/24. The role of the virtual school is clearly defined in Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance for local authorities 2018. The Virtual School supports all children in care regardless of their length of time in care, however the educational attainment data in the report relates to those who have been in continuous care from 31 March 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 2 The Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report details the progress and achievements throughout academic year 2023-24 for cared for children and care leavers' education. It relates to the delivery of pledge two of the cared for children and care leavers strategy, that 'We will improve education, training and employment outcomes.'

Executive Summary

- 3 During 2023/24, the virtual school has continued to support all cared for children/care leavers to ensure it is meeting its statutory duties while providing effective support to children and young people, families, carers, schools, and settings. Every child and young person has an allocated worker within the virtual school to ensure effective oversight and support is in place. The head of service for inclusion fulfils the role of head teacher at the virtual school and leads on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- 4 Most of our cared for children are educated in good or outstanding schools (85% in July 2024). 12% of schools are without an updated Ofsted rating due to academy conversion or results not being published yet.
- 5 Most cared for children have good attendance at school (92.3% in 2023/24) which is higher than figures recorded in 22/23 both nationally and regionally for looked after children. We saw a rise from 7.4% (22/23) to 18.86%(23/24) for CYP achieving 100% attendance at school.
- 6 No Cheshire East cared for children have been permanently excluded for over four years.
- 7 Data, including GCSE, attendance and suspension data is currently provisional/unvalidated. Once published, validated data will be provided with local and national comparisons.
- 8 50% of the eligible cohort in Reception have achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD).
- 9 Year 1 Phonics: As of July 2024, there were 12 cared for children in total and 6 were within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2024). Of the 6 in the eligible cohort, 3 passed the phonics test and 2 were disapplied but can be entered in Year 2.
- 10 Key Stage 2 SATS: As of July 2024, there were 19 cared for children with 12 within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2024).

A total of 16 children (11 eligible children) were entered for the SATS tests meaning 84.2% of our Year 6 cohort were entered for their SATS this past academic year.

The 3 remaining children did not sit SATs as it was not appropriate for the child due to their academic profile and/or their specific Special Education Needs.

75% of the children achieved standard in reading, early data indicates this was above the percentage achieved for all children both regionally and nationally

42% achieved standard in Maths, 58.3% in Grammar, punctuation and spelling.

- 11 At the end of the academic year July 2024, there were 47 Cheshire East cared for children. Of the 47 there were 30 in the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2024).

Of the 47 cared for children, 26 were entered for GCSEs. Of the 30 in the eligible cohort, 17 of these were entered for GCSEs.

Approximately a third of our Year 11 cohort were either not entered for any examination, sat a reduced number of qualifications, or followed an alternative curriculum to the standard GCSE pathway. Of the children not entered for GCSEs, a number of these gained a range of other functional skills qualifications or awards

- 12 At the end of the academic year 2023/2024, there were 79 students in total in year 12. Of this, 14 were not in education, employment, or training (17.72%). 10 young people were re-engaged through various activities, including Venture with Confidence, Post 16 tutor and work experience opportunities.

Of the 79 young people, 68 had clear pathway plan for September (86.07%) These next steps and pathways included, employment, apprenticeships and further education and training or re-engagement activities.

- 13 A Level results and HE destinations: 11 young people completed their A Levels/ Level 3 qualifications.

One young person has a high-level apprenticeship in Insurance.

One young person is working full time for an insurance company.

9 young people have gained a place on their preferred choice of university

One young person wants an apprenticeship, is currently NEET and actively looking and receiving support from the apprenticeship co-ordinator

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care leavers Committee is recommended:

1. To endorse the Virtual Headteacher's Annual Report 2023/24

Background

- 14 The annual headteachers report outlines the educational progress and update from academic year 2023/24. The LA are required to develop an improvement plan following the outcome of our ILACS inspection which will include specific areas of focus and actions directly in relation to Education. The improvement plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will assess progress and impact against the plan.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 15 The Cared for Children and Care leavers Committee is an advisory group to the Children and Families Committee and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Cared for Children and Care leavers Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 16 The role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) is set out in the statutory guidance for local authorities Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked after children.
- 17 The statutory guidance must be followed unless there are exceptional circumstances that justify departing from it. The guidance sets out the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under s22 (3A) of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children. The guidance also sets the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duties under s23ZZA of the Children Act 1989 where a local authority must make available advice and information for the purposes of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked-after children.
- 18 It is the role of the VSH to report regularly on the attainment, progress and school attendance of looked after children through the authority's corporate parenting governance structure.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

There are no financial implications of the report. Finance advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues

Policy

- 19 <Please indicate the policy implications of this report and its recommendations/decisions here, including reference to the policy framework and any deviations. Please refer to the priorities in the [Corporate Plan](#) that the report supports (this will be used for performance management purposes) and refer to any of the Council's key strategies that relate to the recommendations/ decisions.>

An open and enabling organisation (Include which aim and priority)	A council which empowers and cares about people (Include which aim and priority)	A thriving and sustainable place (Include which aim and priority)
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 20 Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood; the cared for children and care leavers strategy prioritises these areas, alongside our new improvement plan.

Human Resources

- 21 NA

Risk Management

- 22 NA

Rural Communities

- 23 NA

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 24 Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding, additional needs not being identified and met and transition/preparation into adulthood; the cared for children and care leavers strategy prioritises these areas, alongside our new improvement plan.

Public Health

25 NA

Climate Change

26 NA

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Laura Rogerson Head of Service Inclusion
Appendices:	Virtual School annual headteacher report 2023/24
Background Papers:	