

OPEN

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

02 December 2025

**Virtual School Headteachers Annual
Report 2024/25**

**Report of: Iain Peel Interim Director of Education, Strong Start and
Integration**

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report presents an overview of the operation and impact of the virtual school during 2024/2025. 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 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 2 The Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report details the progress and achievements throughout academic year 2024-25 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 The Virtual School continues to deliver statutory duties for cared-for children and extended responsibilities for children with a social worker and those in kinship care. The service operates on a locality model, enabling strong partnerships with schools and agencies, and has strengthened leadership capacity with interim deputy headteachers
- 4 Most of our cared for children are educated in good or outstanding schools (80% in July 2025). 14% of schools are without an updated Ofsted rating due to academy conversion or results not being published yet. For the coming academic year, Ofsted grading has changed and there will be no overall grade. We are awaiting DfE guidance, but in the interim are making decisions based on our knowledge of the schools and assessing the judgements in the separate sections

- 5 Overall attendance fell to 88.3% (from 92.3% 23/24); Primary attendance remains strong at 95.1%; secondary attendance dropped to 81.5%. Persistent absence affects 34.2% of the cohort which is an increase of 4% from same time last year.
- 6 No Cheshire East cared for children have been permanently excluded for over seven 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 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessments: Children are defined as having reached a good level of development (GLD) at the end of the EYFS if they have achieved at least the expected level for the ELGs in the prime areas of learning and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy. There were 22 children within the overall cohort

7 out of 22 children achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD), which is 31.8%. Eligible children: 3 achieved GLD (27.2%)

The overall GLD attainment is low, with less than one-third of children meeting the expected level. This is a key focus this year we will be working alongside our early years teams to ensure targeted support and actions are incorporated into our Best Start for Life Local Plan which is due to be finalised by March 2026.

- 9 Key Stage 2; As of July 2025, there were 19 cared for children with 12 within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2025).

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

KS2 combined Reading/Writing/Maths attainment more than doubled from the previous year from 16.6% to 46.2%. Early data indicates this was above the percentage achieved for looked after children regionally

- 10 As of 31 August 2025, we had 55 young people in our Year 11 cohort. However, not all of these were entered for examinations or sat GCSEs for various reasons: 4 are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who came into the care of Cheshire East between the exam window, 7 were attending specialist provisions and were enrolled on alternative pathways.

39 (32 of whom are classed as being in the eligible cohort) of our Year 11 cohort were entered for at least one GCSE subject with the average number of entries per child being 6.4 GCSEs.

Standard pass (Grade 4+) in English & Maths rose from 16.7% to 21.8% for the eligible cohort. English standard pass improved from 23.3% to 31.2%; Maths from 23.3% to 28.1%.

- 11 At the end of the academic year 2024/2025, there were 66 students in total in year 12. Of this, 29 were not in education, employment, or training at the end of the academic year. 20 young people were re-engaged through various activities, including Kings Trust, Venture with Confidence, Post 16 tutor and work experience opportunities.

Of the 66 young people, 51 had clear pathway plan for the start of September 24; These next steps and pathways included, employment, apprenticeships and further education and training or re-engagement activities.

- 12 A total of 86 students were enrolled in Year 13. As of September 2025, 58 of the 86 students (67%) have secured a positive destination. These include Higher Education (University), Further Education (College/Training), Employment or Apprenticeships.

Four students are currently undertaking apprenticeships in the following areas: Hairdressing – Completed Level 2, progressing to Level 3, Decorating – Working towards Level 2 qualification, Early Years Education – Working towards Level 2 qualification, Car Body Repair – Working towards Level 3 qualification

14 young people completed Level 3 qualifications, including A Levels, BTECs, and T Levels. Achievements include Distinction grades in Health and Social Care, Public Services, and Business Studies. A Level highlights: Art and Design (A), Textiles (A*), English Language (C), Sociology (D).

University destinations secured in first choice destinations/courses: Children's Nursing (Huddersfield), Law (Brighton), Policing (Chester), Sports Journalism (Oxford Brookes), UCLA Preston, English and Philosophy (Nottingham), Fine Art (Loughborough).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care leavers Committee is recommended:

1. To endorse the Virtual Headteacher's Annual Report 2024/25

Background

- 13 The annual headteachers report outlines the educational progress and update from academic year 2024/25.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 14 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

- 15 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.
- 16 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.
- 17 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

- 18 There are no financial implications of the report. Finance advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues. For context the 2025/26 Virtual School Head expenditure budget is £1.226m which is mainly funded by grants (net base budget of £0.058m).

Policy

- 19 Please refer to the priorities in the [Cheshire East Plan](#) 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

Unlocking Prosperity for All	Improving Health and Wellbeing	Being an Effective and Enabling Council

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

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Statutory Officer (or deputy):			

Chris Benham	Deputy S151 Officer	21/11/25	24/11/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	21/11/25	27/11/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Jennie Summers	Head of Legal Services	21/11/25	21/11/25
Kathy Oliver	Principal Accountant	21/11/25	21/11/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director, Children's Services	21/11/25	21/11/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Laura Rogerson Head of Service Inclusion
Appendices:	Virtual School annual headteacher report 2024/25
Background Papers:	

Appendix 1

Approvals trail: to be removed before Committee

Name	Title	Comments	Date
Contributors:			
Approvers:			