

Virtual School Report Academic Year 2021/2022

1. Introduction

- 1.1 During this period the Virtual School (VS) focused on the delivery of support to Schools, Carers and Social Workers to ensure the best possible outcomes for children who were looked after (CLA), previously looked after children (PCLA) and care leavers (CL). All interventions were designed to meet this overriding objective and used an evidence-based approach, incorporating national research and local quantitative and qualitative data.
- 1.2 In addition the Virtual School was given extended duties to promote the education of children with a social worker or who had ever had a social worker from ages 0 to 18
- 1.3 East Sussex was selected by the DFE to be part of a Post 16 Pupil Premium pilot and received funding for seventy-two young people attending further education colleges.

2. Children Looked After (CLA)

- 2.1 Last summer the Virtual School was supporting 426 school aged children, 39 Nursery age and a total of 660 CLA year N1 – 13 (756 including year 14) but numbers had been nearer 465 overall as new children came into care and others left. There was an increase of 3% in school aged children and 7% in all children and young people on the previous year. 24% of our school aged children have an EHCP for special educational needs and 11 % attend special schools. In July 2022, there were 132 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and young people in years 7 to 13, 15 of whom were of school age. This was an increase of 30% on July 2021.
- 2.2 The VS was responsible for the management and administration of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) for CLA. In the budget year 2021- 2022 each CLA was allocated £2,300. Funding from the PPG was pooled to ensure the best outcomes for our children as outlined in 1.1 and according to the school priorities. Pupil Premium funding for PCLA was also £2,300 but was held by the child's individual school.
- 2.3 The main areas of spending last year were on casework staffing, training, short term home to school transport, Alternative Provision for children struggling to manage school, inclusion projects in schools, academic tuition, extra curricula activities and interventions from specialist services e.g., Behaviour & Attendance (ESBAS), Education Psychology Service (EPS), Communication Learning and Autism Support Service (CLASS) and the English as Another Language Service (EALS).
- 2.4 The VS employed a Head Teacher (VHT), Four full time equivalents (fte) Education Officers (Caseworkers with supervisory and additional responsibilities), an Advisory Teacher, 3 fte caseworkers and a Teaching Assistant. The VS also employed casual Intervention Teachers of which ten work with us on a regular basis. In addition, two Personal Advisers (PAs) were funded to work within the Through Care Service. One PA focused on working with young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and on increasing youth participation in local and national issues; the other on supporting the education of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). In addition, a VS Extended Support Assistant was employed to work within the East Sussex Behaviour and Attendance Team (ESBAS).

2.5 Caseworkers in the VS had an average caseload of between 80 and 100 CLA each depending on the numbers of CLA and capacity of the team. Last year we had one member of staff on maternity leave and two members on long-term absence from illness.

3 PEPs

3.1 Personal Education Plans (PEPs) remained critical to raising educational outcomes for our children. Any applications for Pupil Premium funding to support CLA and their learning continued to be made via the PEP. PEP meetings took place online and in person. In terms 3 and 4 of this academic year 95.53% of students had had PEPs and we had received the paperwork for 91.44%. We have a robust system in place for chasing up on PEPs that have not been completed and/or paperwork that has not been received. There have been some specific challenges in some schools where key staff have been off long term. We worked with these schools to ensure that planning and reviews remained in place despite these difficulties.

3.2 PEP quality audits last year (May 21 – May 22) rated 42.31% as green overall (good or better), 46.15% as amber overall (satisfactory) and therefore 88.46% as satisfactory or above. A total of 78 PEPs were audited and responses to each section analysed. The results have been used to inform planning. Strategies to improve the quality of PEPs included individual discussions with designated teachers, caseworker focus within PEP meetings, general feedback shared to schools and focus within CPD sessions.

3.3 Last year the Standards and Effectiveness Service worked with schools to redraft the Additional Needs Plan (ANP). We have adapted the PEP in line with these changes and provided updated exemplars.

4 Outcomes

4.1 These statistics cover the attainment of pupils who took assessments in summer 2022. These pupils experienced disruption to their learning during the pandemic. This is the first summer exam series since 2019. Results are, therefore, compared to 2019 rather than 2020 or 2021, when there were different methods of assessment. The statistics are provisional and will be updated with revised data in December.

4.2 Key Stage 1 The percentage of children in care in East Sussex reaching expected standard in Reading was 57.1% compared with 46.0% of children in care nationally. The percentage of children in care in East Sussex reaching expected standard in Writing was 42.09% compared with 35.0% nationally. The percentage of children in care in East Sussex reaching expected standard in Maths was 50.0% compared with 45.0% for children in care nationally. Unfortunately, we had no children working at greater depth. Nationally there have been fewer children reaching greater depth in writing and Maths but not in reading. This will be a focus for next year.

		Reading	Writing	Maths
East Sussex CLA	2022	57.1%	42.9%	50%

National CLA	2022	46.0%	35.0%	45.0%
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- 4.3 **Key Stage 2** There was an increase from 2019 of 19% in the percentage of our children reaching expected levels in reading, an area which has been a key focus. There was little change in the percentage of children reaching expected levels in writing but a small drop in Maths. There were some excellent progress scores in all areas, the highest progress scores being 27.34 in reading, 10.87 in writing and 14.03 in Maths.

		Reading	Writing	Maths
East Sussex CLA	2019	25.0%	37.5%	45.8%
East Sussex CLA	2022	44.0 %	36.0%	41.0%
National CLA	2022	52.0%	43.0%	45.0%

4.4 Key Stage 4

- 4.41 The use of Progress 8 as headline measures and the complex formulas that these involve means that it is not possible to predict these outcomes from the data held by the VS. This data is not yet available.
- 4.42 The percentage of students gaining a level 5 and above in English and Maths increased from 4.2% in 2019 to 16% and a level 4 and above from 8.1% to 27%.
- 4.43 There were some excellent individual results. 7 and 8 is equivalent to A and above. One student achieved a 9 in Maths and English and an 8 in French, another 7s in core subjects and all other subjects. Another student achieved a 7 in physics. One student gained a 9 in Persian and another a 9 in Sport. Several of our students gained distinctions in practical BTecs.

5 Exclusion and Suspensions

- 5.1 The Virtual School worked with schools and LA services to ensure that there were no permanent exclusions of CLA last academic year. This included the funding of a range of interventions including additional adults, alternative provisions and placement support. 56 CYP (13%) received one or more suspensions since September 2021. This is a 2% increase on last year. NCER data shows that our CLA Cohort has a fixed period exclusion rate of **14.02** in 2021/22, which is **6.55 greater than** the National CLA Rate of **7.47**. This will, therefore, be an area of focus for the Virtual school, working in partnership with schools, ISEND and SLES next year.
- 5.2 The VS worked with all schools to support children who were in crisis to avoid exclusion where possible. This has included funding ESBAS support, Educational

Psychologist consultations, Extended Support Assistant classroom support and Alternative Provision.

6 Attendance

- 6.1 The Virtual school tracks attendance of school aged CLA weekly. This enables us to identify any attendance issues and intervene at an early stage. Overall Attendance was 90.22% (June 2022) 77% of our children and young people had attendance of above 90%. NCER data for last academic year (CLA 12 months) shows our attendance as 93.2% and national CLA as 93%. It shows our persistent absence as 16.9% as compared to a national figure of 18%.
- 6.2 We have also tracked the attendance of our post 16 cohort as part of the Post 16 pilot. The collation of this data and the pupil premium funding has enabled us to identify any dips in attendance and intervene accordingly. For example, when A's attendance dropped, they received support from the Additional Learning Support Team and changed the level of their course. This led to an improvement in attendance from 65% to 94%. Student B received English as Another Language tuition and the Virtual School funded gym membership both which contributed to an improvement in attendance from 33% to 100%.

7 Key Provisions

7.1 Teaching and Learning

The Virtual School delivered 176 blocks of tuition to 118 children and young people. We also funded EALS tuition for 45 young people during the academic year and 22 academic interventions to post 16 students as part of the Post 16 Pilot. Teaching last year was a mixture of online and face to face to tuition.

- 7.2 Tuition was provided by our own tutors and a small number of private companies. We struggled to source tutors at times and have needed to use more tutors from external providers. This has been the case nationally.
- 7.3 75% of the CYP who received tuition met all three targets and the remaining 25% achieved at least one target and partially met the others. 100% of all children and young people said their confidence against their targets had increased.
- 7.4 Literacy development is a key focus of our work. All CLA in school years reception to Year 6, receive a book parcel containing three books, 6 times a year. The parcels are accompanied by a newsletter which sets the children challenges aimed at increasing engagement with reading. Older children are sent a letter with a list of 6 available titles from which they choose 2 books.

'Thank you for all the parcels you send us. We love the books and magic cards.'
(Child feedback)

8 Alternative Provisions

- 8.1 Partnerships between the VS and local providers continued throughout the year. These organisations mainly delivered services to young people who were not engaging with school. Eggtooth and the Education Futures Trust, both based in Hastings, South Brockwell Farm, Audio Active and Develop Outdoors provided educational and therapeutic interventions.
- 8.2 Last academic year 22 young people accessed Alternative Provision and 10 young people received Placement Support. Alternative provision included supported work experience in a beauty salon and at a stable, forest skills, music production, farm-based activities, bike maintenance and art activities. 100% of evaluation responses showed that at least 2 out of 3 targets had been achieved and that all young people recorded an increase in confidence against their targets.

9 Extra Curricula Activities

- 9.1 The VS organised a range of extra curricula activities including a Film workshop, Glyndebourne Performances, University Spring school and a summer holiday 'Ready to Learn' for children entering reception in September 2022

10 Information, Advice and Guidance

- 10.1 The Youth Employability Scheme (YES) offered a universal service to all young people from year 10 and worked intensively with those who required more support in identifying future pathways. YES staff work in partnership with the Through Care Team and Virtual School caseworkers.
- 10.2 The percentage of Looked after Children (LAC) participating in education, training or employment with training (RPA) at (Year 12) and (Year 13) (March 2022) was 81% for year 12 and 70 % for year 13. The percentage in education or employment (EET) was 83% for year 12 and 73% for year 13.
- 10.3 In May 2022 the year 12 RPA was higher than the percentage of the wider group of young people supported by YES and only 2% lower than last year. The EET figure was higher than the wider YES group and 1% higher than last year.
- 10.4 In May 2022 the year 13 RPA was 10% higher than wider YES but 10% lower than last year. The percentage of YP in EET was 5% higher than wider YES and 6% higher than last year. This reflects the wider context in which young people are opting for employment over employment with training.
- 10.5 Evidence from YES casework shows positive outcomes for young people.

Case Study A: The YES caseworker had a referral from the VS. He reported getting to know Young Person A and working with them to develop a plan of action to redress lack of education and qualifications. The VS funded and organised 1:1 English and maths tutoring

YP completed applications for two local colleges and sat Functional Skills exams with a training provider. YP secured college place for September 2022.

11 Boarding School Partnership

- 11.1 The VS continued to work closely with Bede's school as part of the Springboard boarding project. Five students completed their studies at Bedes school at the end of the year. Four students joined Bedes in September 2022.

12 The Children in Care Awards

- 12.1 The awards took place virtually last year. Fifty-six children and young people were nominated in the categories of educational achievement, positive contribution, personal achievement and skills and talents.
- 12.2 The overall winners in the four categories received their award for positive transition to secondary school, determination to help others, sports leadership, community volunteering and educational achievement in terms of both attainment and progress.

13 Strategic Partnerships

- 13.1 The Virtual School worked closely with other Local Authority services to develop policy and practice across East Sussex.
- 13.2 We continued to work strategically with partners in the local authority re mental health and emotional wellbeing, in planning to meet the needs of children and young people in schools and colleges and in the planning and delivery of the ISEND Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing conference in July 2022.
- 13.3 We met monthly with LACAMHs to support partnership working between health, care, and education.
- 13.4 We were involved with developments of a Vulnerable Learners Protocol and with the SEND Community of Practice which develops good practice re information, advice, and guidance for young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND).
- 13.5 We have been involved in strategic reviews on exclusion in East Sussex (Rethinking Exclusions) and on College Central Provision and will attend Inclusion Partnerships meetings and sit on the SABDEN Alternative Provision Quality Committee, both group supporting the inclusion of vulnerable students including looked after children and children with a social worker.

14. Training

- 14.1 The Virtual School delivered and organised a range of training last academic year focused on developing staff understanding of the needs of children in care the role of the designated teacher and effective personal education planning, understanding the care system and attachment and trauma.
- 14.2 The VS commissioned two training courses Journey Through Care course and Change Your Mind, Change Your World for Teachers, Social Workers, Other Professionals each involving weekly sessions over 6 weeks. The courses each had 40 regular participants and were rated highly by all participants.

15 Children with a social worker

- 15.1 In July 2021 the Head of the Virtual School was allocated extended duties from the Department for Education to provide a strategic lead to improve the educational outcomes of children with a social worker. This follows the national Children in Need Review (2019) that highlighted how poor the educational outcomes of children with social workers could be and how the leadership and expertise of Virtual School Heads was helping to raise aspirations and improve outcomes for children in care. This is a strategic responsibility and does not involve any direct work with children.
- 15.2 The first phase of the new duties involved consultation with partners. The consultation involved Social Workers from the Youth Support and Family Support Team and managers from across the service. Staff from 30 schools across the Authority were consulted incorporating Primary, Secondary and Sixth Form phases and both mainstream and special schools. Discussions were also held with managers across ISEND Services.
- 15.3 Alongside this consultation, Virtual School staff provided information and advice to social workers. The Head of Service for Locality Social Work and team managers identified children on the edge of care where education was a key contributing factor to their vulnerability. Virtual School staff were also involved in multi-agency work to preventing the permanent exclusion of children on the edges of care.
- 15.4 Strategic planning around attendance, exclusions, SEND and mental health and emotional wellbeing was extended to include a focus on children with a social worker.
- 15.5 An Extended Duties Adviser has now been appointed and an action plan in place for the coming year.
- 15.6 Our Children in Care role includes providing information and advice to parents, social workers and schools on previously looked after children. Last year we developed a partnership with Family and Friends Service who support special guardianship families. The Family and Friends keyworkers have reported that the partnership has resulted in them feeling informed and empowered to liaise with schools directly, and to advocate for the educational needs of children cared for under special guardianship orders.

16 Post 16 Education

- 16.1 We are pleased with post 16 results. Students gained A stars in Art and Psychology A-level and Distinction stars in ICT, music and art production and sport. Other students are either continuing onto a level 3 course or moving into employment.
- 16.2 Eleven young people secured University places although two are deferring.

- 16.3 East Sussex was successful in becoming part of a pilot for funding Post 16 provision. We are one of 30 LAs in the country and three in the southeast received funding based on the number of young people enrolled in Further Education Colleges. The pilot included training for staff in FE colleges and in the Through Care Team, the development of guidance for teachers and social workers re post 16 provision and effective education planning as well as an offer of additional English and Maths lesson. The Virtual School has funded the delivery of 22 interventions in English and Maths.
- 16.4 20 young people have been referred for coaching and feedback from key staff and young people has been positive.

I have been amazed, gratified, and surprised at just how quickly B connected and engaged and how much he achieves. You have not only boosted his confidence, but his enthusiasm for learning and his ability to do it well.

The advice and support provided is humane, responsive, and very practical. You are not telling him to not worry and just get on with it, you are telling him why his brain is worrying, how to manage it and always making it clear that well-being is the partner of great learning and productivity. This focused, quiet, diligent and goal orientated approach is having a real impact on him.

- 16.5 The pilot also included a focus on delivering quality education to UASC from the point of entry to the Authority. This has included provision of English as an Additional Language lessons, language for Maths and for ICT lessons. Also support for carers to help develop English language in the home and the community. Twenty-eight referrals for EAL teaching were made over the year and 20 YP received regular weekly sessions.
- 16.6 The DFE has recently announced that the pilot will be extended in its current form and that East Sussex will, therefore, receive a further year of funding.

17. The wider National context

- 17.1 The Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) collaborated with the national cohort of VHT's on a range of national priority areas.
- 17.2 The VS Head Teacher and Designated Teacher from Bedes school accepted an invitation to join the Broadening Educational Pathways Programme Expert Advisory group. The invitation was in recognition of the well-established partnership between Bedes and East Sussex which has been in existence for 10 years. They attended an inaugural meeting at the DFE attended by the then Education Minister, Nadim Zahawi and later in the year, an event at the House of Lords where East Sussex represented the Virtual School Head Teachers on a panel.

18 Governor priorities for the Virtual School 2022/23

- 18.1 To further improve the educational and wider outcomes for Looked After children
- 18.2 To improve outcomes for children and young people with a social worker, including academic progress, attendance, and wellbeing
- 18.3 To improve outcomes for post 16 children in care and care leaver
- 18.4 To increase the knowledge and understanding of the care system by education staff and education by care
- 18.5 To develop further partnership working between care and education to the benefit of all vulnerable groups.