

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES
CABINET PANEL
TUESDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 9.30 A.M.**



THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Author: Felicity Evans, Virtual School Head.
Tel: (01992 555926)

Executive Member: Teresa Heritage, Executive Member: Children, Young People and Families

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To place before the Cabinet Panel the 2018-29 Annual Report of the Hertfordshire Virtual School Head.

2. Summary

2.1 The annual report of the Hertfordshire Virtual School Head sets out:

- The progress and attainment for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.
- The detail of the performance data for Children Looked After by Hertfordshire and Care Leavers in 2018-19 is in Appendix 1.
- Progress against the County Council's priorities for improvement and plans for future development.
- The development of the response to the new duty placed on the Virtual School to provide advice and information for Previously Looked After Children and the evaluation one year on.
- The implementation of the DfE Innovation Grant funded project, to improve the attainment and progress of children subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan in year 6.

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Cabinet Panel is asked to note and comment on the summary of performance in 2019, attached as Appendix 1.

4. Background

- 4.1 Children who have ever needed a social worker do significantly worse than others at all stages of education. Controlling for a range of other factors such as special educational needs (SEN), birth parent low income, ethnicity, English as an additional language, past school moves and where a child lives, children looked after in particular during the year of GCSEs are half as likely to achieve a strong pass in English and Maths than those who were not in care or on the edge of care ([link here](#)).

The 'gap' in attainment between children looked after and their peers continues to be wide both nationally and in Hertfordshire as noted in the data published by DfE in the statistical first release 2018.

| | Progress 8 | Attainment 8 |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| National CLA | -1.24 | 18.8 |
| HCC VS | -1.29 | 17.7 |
| National all schools | 0 | 44.3 |
| HCC all schools | 0.15 | 47.6 |

Outcomes for children attending Hertfordshire schools are generally higher than the average for schools in England so the attainment gap looks wider. However, the gap in Hertfordshire is narrowing and provisional outcomes for children looked after at Key Stage (KS) 4, have shown improvement for the fourth year in a row. Progress has improved between KS1 and KS2 in writing and mathematics albeit from lower starting points at the end of KS1.

- 4.2 Research has studied the neuroscientific evidence of the impact of trauma and attachment on the brain development of the child which in part explains the nature and origin of the gap in achievement ([link here](#)).
- 4.3 In support of this, the Hertfordshire Virtual School has developed a wide range of approaches, that promote better understanding of the impact on learning and all future life chances of a poor early start. This work is often in partnership with other services across the local authority. Better outcomes are achieved through informed and cross-service planning.
- 4.4 The outcome evidence of the concerted action to promote the educational achievement of Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers is that more children and young people are engaging in, continuing and sustaining their educational journey through all phases of education. The positive outcomes we are collecting, particularly for care

leavers and as young people mature, corroborate the research from the Rees Centre, Oxford University, that concludes that '*children in care take longer to do better.*'¹

- 4.5 As an example, there has been a notable rise in the number of young people staying into school 6th Form over the past three years, with numbers rising from 3 students in year 2016-17, (years 12 and 13 combined) to 32 in autumn 2019. In response, the Virtual School has developed a comprehensive 6th Form 'Offer' that gives support to both the student and the school. In the year 2018-19 there were no 'drop-outs' from 6th form studies.
- 4.6 Results in higher education continue to be strong and exceed neighbouring Virtual Schools with 19 care leavers graduating in the summer of 2019. All students passed at 2.1 or higher and there were also 4 First Class Honours degree students as also in 2018. There are 64 students at University overall with 2 care leavers on a gap year. A further 5 students are studying for a postgraduate qualification. A further 24 referrals have already been received from prospective undergraduates for September 2020.
- 4.7 Informal research with all Virtual Schools in the Eastern and South Ofsted regions revealed that they typically send between 4 and 5 students to University each year, whereas Hertfordshire send an average of 20 care leaver undergraduates annually. The drop-out rate for care leavers nationally is 37% whereas, for the Hertfordshire care leavers it is less than 4%.²

1 *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data.* Sebba et al, The Rees Centre Oxford University 2015

<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Linking-Care-and-Educational-Data-Overview-Report-Nov-2015.pdf>

2 *Falling off the ladder: Using focal theory to understand and improve the educational experiences of young people in transition from public care.* Hollingsworth and Jackson: 2016

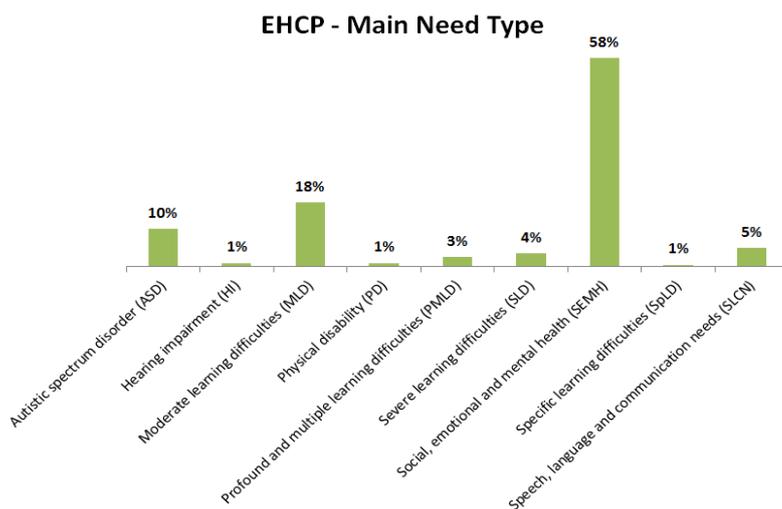
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307149295_Falling_off_the_ladder_Using_focal_theory_to_understand_and_improve_the_educational_experiences_of_young_people_in_transition_from_public_care

and

By Degrees: The First Year: From care to university. Sonia Jackson 2003

4.8 The percentage of children looked after per 10,000 in Hertfordshire is very low at 34.9 as at September 2019, compared to all England at 65 per 10,000, up from 60 in 2015. However, the cohort of children looked after of school age is greatest in the year groups of KS3 and 4³ as young people come into care during their teenage years. The 'Forum for Change' meeting held with colleagues from Ofsted, social care and Secondary Head Teachers to consider the strategy to narrow the attainment at KS4, met twice in 2018-19. In 2018-19, Head Teachers and Virtual School colleagues developed a protocol for transition between primary and secondary schools and also a draft KS3-4 'Offer' of support and guidance for schools ([link here](#)).

4.9 There is a notable and increasing complexity of need (of all types, see graph below), throughout the cohort with 35% of the young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further 25% needed SEN support in school. The greater number is in the category of social, emotional and mental health need but increasingly there is a professional acceptance that all children in the care system will have had adverse childhood experiences and additional needs in education as a result. The Virtual School Attachment [toolkit](#) and associated training that is designed to give schools an introduction to attachment aware and trauma informed practice has been delivered to all staff at 55 schools with over 2,335 school staff trained in 2018-19.



4.10 The incidence of fixed term exclusion is reducing and contrary to the national and local trend for all children. We attribute this downward trend to the prompt, informed and responsive support offered by the Virtual School Education Adviser Team. In a recent poll to ascertain satisfaction with the Virtual School support, 96% of designated teachers were satisfied with the support given and 65% 'completely satisfied' with only 4% identifying that they needed more support.

³ Key Stage 3 is Year 7-9, ages 11-14 and Key Stage 4 is Year 10-11, ages 14 – 16.

- 4.11 It is the policy of the Hertfordshire Virtual School to support and challenge all schools to achieve the best educational outcome possible for all children in our care, regardless of their ability or disability. The Education Advisers or specialist SEND Professional Partners visit all schools to scrutinise the progress and achievement of all children. To support this process, the innovative 'Small Steps Pep' or Personal Education Plan has been developed to capture and record all gains made by children with learning or other disabilities. The Small Steps Pep has been very well received by special schools, some of whom are using it for all their children. Hertfordshire's SEN department and the Department for Education have also expressed interest.
- 4.12 The Government has had a recent focus on a larger group of children, still needing social care support but at home with their parents, whose educational outcomes had historically lacked the same attention and focus as children looked after. The conclusion of their recent research was that almost two-thirds of children who were Looked After in 2017/18 had been on a Child in Need Plan at some point in the previous 5 years and nearly 40% had been on a Child Protection Plan. The Hertfordshire figures are similar at 39% and 25% respectively.
- 4.13 The recent DfE Review of Children in Need published in June 2019 found that; *'children who have ever needed a social worker, either currently or previously, face barriers to education: through adversity and traumatic experiences; known safeguarding risks; and sometimes, a lack of parental advocate. There are also barriers shared with other disadvantaged groups, but which are particularly acute for these children: a poor home learning environment; social, emotional and behavioural needs; persistent absence and disability'*.⁴
- 4.14 Throughout 2018-19 the Virtual School has been leading the education element of the Family Safeguarding [strategy](#) supporting a control group of children on 'child in need' or 'child protection' plans, to research 'what works' in the support of better progress and attainment. The evaluation report of year one indicated some improvement. The project has been adapted for 2019-20 with a greater focus on support for learning at home. The DfE have consulted with the Virtual School Head to support their development of the evidence base of 'what works' to include developing the role and responsibility of the designated safeguarding person in school and to explore whether there is a case for extending and adapting the Virtual School Head role.

⁴ *Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children. DfE 2018*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

- 4.15 The extension of the Virtual School to include Previously Looked After children that became statutory from September 2018 ⁵, has been robustly implemented in Hertfordshire. The key features include:
- Comprehensive written advice and guidance
 - Monthly face to face education surgeries for parents or schools
 - The Attachment Toolkit sent to all schools
 - A contract with Adoption UK to provide mentor support for families in need. The Hertfordshire Virtual School are the first to collaborate with the charity to provide this support.

A development for 2020 will be a weekly telephone advice line. All support offered is evaluated through the use of a 'Smart Survey' with overwhelmingly positive feedback from families and schools.

'I have acted upon the advice given to me during the session, and now have much improved, non-judgemental communication with my son's school. I left with all my questions answered and informed. I found it very worthwhile and would highly recommend'. (Surgery:18.10.2019)

- 4.16 Other developments for the Virtual School include the creation and delivery of the first BU2Z – 'Bringing Underachievement to Zero' Awards for best practice in use of the Pupil Premium Plus. Twenty five schools entered in 2019 as part of their annual CLASEF (children looked after self-evaluation form). The case study evidence will be put onto the Virtual School website, (www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/virtualschool) so that this information may be shared with other schools.
- 4.17 The CLASEF supports schools to develop best practice through planning and offers senior leaders the opportunity to consider their school improvement with regard to disadvantaged children. The format was redesigned for 2018-19 to align to the new Ofsted framework structure of: Intent, Implementation and Impact.

5.0 Next steps

- 5.1 The Virtual School produces an annual 'Priority Card' that is the 'Team Plan' on a page. This is distributed to all schools and settings and also promoted on the website to ensure that the next steps in this work are transparent and widely promoted. The priority card is updated in line with the academic year.

5 Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review June 2019
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809236/190614_CHILDREN_IN_NEED_PUBLICATION_FINAL.pdf

- 5.2 In 2019-20 we will transform the accessibility of all training and conferencing materials. The annual designated teacher conference in October 2019 was filmed and is available on the website with all speaker slides. New for 2020 will be a series of interactive webinars on topics requested by the designated teacher, social worker and carer focus groups:
- The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences
 - Attachment in the Classroom
 - Implementing the 'Attachment Toolkit' in school.

The webinars will also be available on the website for future professional reference.

- 5.3 The Attachment Toolkit will be extended to include information and advice on staff supervision and well-being, links to the new Ofsted framework to include cultural capital and the link between pupil health, well-being and attainment, coaching and positive impact on achievement for children looked after and previously looked after, staff, parents and carers.
- 5.4 To support care leavers in 6th Form, a new residential project will take place at Homerton College, Cambridge in the Easter break. A leading independent school in Hertfordshire has been approached to 'mentor' our 6th form students.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this Report.
- 6.2 There was a small reduction in core budget in 2018-19 but funding was managed without impact on the quality of service to schools, settings and professional colleagues supporting children looked after. The current budget is on target. A small budget has been granted from DfE to support the additional work associated with the new statutory role with previously looked after children and is used strategically to implement the 'offer' of support.
- 6.3 Residential and celebration events for children were supported by charity grant or donation, both financially and in kind in 2019. Of particular note are the generous contributions in kind from Brasenose College, Oxford and UCL, London for the Aim Higher course for year 11 students. Further sponsorship is being researched.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered, the equality implications of the decision that they are making. Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact

of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum, this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) produced by officers.

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- 7.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. There are no implications for any persons with protected characteristics in this report.
- 7.4 Analysis demonstrates that outcomes for children and young people in Hertfordshire are generally good, but that this is not the case for all children and young people. Several 'vulnerable groups' – such as children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), children looked after, some ethnic minority groups and also children from poorer families, especially those who have '*had need of a social worker*' at any point, experience worse outcomes than all children. The early information gleaned from the DfE funded, family safeguarding education project, is that the study of the proportion of children entitled to, and claiming, free school meals is less reliable as a source of information about the impact of disadvantage and poverty. Less than half of the project cohort receives free school meals and therefore Pupil Premium. Changes to welfare benefits may be responsible and there is a perverse impact on school budgets that limits the amount of additional resource for these children.
- 7.5 Children and young people of school age from minority ethnic groups (excluding white other) account for 21.6% of all children in Hertfordshire schools, compared with 25.3% in the country as a whole (2019 school census). The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in Hertfordshire of school age are Asian and mixed ethnic groups. In the CLA school age population the percentage is similar but includes within the cohort, young people who are unaccompanied asylum seeking minors.
- 7.6 There is no EqIA related to this report.

Background information

1. The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data. Sebba et al, The Rees Centre Oxford University 2015
<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Linking-Care-and-Educational-Data-Overview-Report-Nov-2015.pdf>
2. Falling off the ladder: Using focal theory to understand and improve the educational experiences of young people in transition from public care: Hollingsworth and Jackson: 2016
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and

By Degrees: The First Year: From care to university. Sonia Jackson 2003
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4. Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children. DfE 2018
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>
5. Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review June 2019
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Additional Reference Material

Education for Wellbeing: the largest RCT in school-based mental health in England
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/>

Funder: Department for Education
Duration: 2018 - 2021
Lead: Jessica Deighton

The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment November 2014

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370686/HT_briefing_layoutvFINALvii.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf