

Meeting date: 2nd March 2023

Report to: Children's Services, Education & Skills Scrutiny Board

Report title: Educational Outcomes for Children Looked After (CLA) compared to their non-Looked After peers.

Report from: Pete Campbell, Director of Children's Services

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Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
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Public/private report: Public

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Virtual School, in partnership with schools and social care, are responsible for improving the outcomes for our children who are looked after - this includes attainment and wider social outcomes and closing the attainment gap between children who are looked after and their non looked after peers. Appendix 1 shows the trend data at the end of each key stage against national figures.
- 1.2 The latest unvalidated outcomes data summer 2022, shows that attainment has declined in some areas, partly as a direct result of children and young people not being in school during the pandemic. However, our Solihull children who are looked after have performed better than other children looked after nationally.
- 1.3 To improve overall attainment, the local authority partnership in Solihull will need to continue to champion and prioritise our children who are looked after. Timely access to services, including health and specialist support continue to be fundamental.
- 1.4 The Virtual School needs to continue to champion our children who are looked after in ensuring they are given the highest priority across partner agencies, to enable them to

reach their full potential.

2. Decision(s) Recommended

To note the contents of the report and offer advice on any further mitigating actions which can be taken to narrow the gap between children who are looked after and their non-looked after peers.

3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 The pre-pandemic attainment data (2019) shows that outcomes for Solihull CLA were on an upwards trajectory and outperforming this cohort nationally. The attached table in appendix 1 shows the outcomes from 2016- 2022. There is no national data for 2020 & 2021 due to the pandemic. Please note that the attainment information reflects the performance of children that have been in care for a year or more.
- 3.2 In most areas in 2019 national outcomes for CLA were exceeded in Solihull. These include:
 - Early years good level of development
 - Year 1 phonics
 - Key stage 1 reading, writing and maths
 - Key stage 2 reading, writing, maths, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
 - GCSE Maths and English at 4 or above and 5 or above
- 3.3 The table in appendix 1 also shows that in some areas the outcomes were closer to that of all children.
 - Year 1 phonics
 - Key Stage 1 reading
 - Key Stage 2 reading, writing, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- 3.4 In 2019 there was a notable increase in GCSE outcomes locally. Previous data for 2018 shows 18% of CLA achieving level 4 in GCSE maths and English. This improved to 32% in 2019. which made Solihull the highest achieving authority nationally for CLA. The results for 2020 were 31% and 2021 30%. There was no requirement to record these nationally in these years, however our performance team continued to track this information which shows that these outcomes had been maintained.
- 3.5 It is clear from the data, the gap between the outcomes for Solihull CLA and all children, was closing up to 2019.
- 3.6 Improvements were achieved through consistency of practice from schools and ensuring that the statutory functions were delivered (e.g., termly personal education plan meetings taking place, improvements in personal education planning, minimising the number of school moves and improving attendance.
- 3.7 Post-pandemic (2022), the unvalidated data shows that there has been an impact on outcomes, but Solihull remain higher than national CLA in most areas. The data in appendix 1 shows that the outcomes for 2022 which are more in line with the national

CLA attainment data, except for the measure in early years (9% below the national CLA data).

- 3.8 There will be a return to ensuring all 'non-negotiables' are being adhered to by schools - these include termly personal education planning (PEP) meetings are taking place consistently, PEPs are of good quality with clear targets and reviewed regularly. There are suitable English and maths targets, appropriate use of the pupil premium plus, which is funding to promote the attainment and achievement for looked after children, home routines are supported, including reading, minimising school moves etc.
- 3.9 The Virtual Education Governing Board (VEGB) has agreed a priority around literacy to ensure the Virtual School is focused on supporting children and schools with communication needs. This includes a home and school-based pilot around the use of storytellers to improving communication skills. Schools report this is positively impacting on pupils' literacy skills, pupils' engagement at story time and development of new vocabulary has increased. There will be ongoing use of storytelling to target specific children.
- 3.10 Another priority is supporting social, emotional, and mental health needs (SEMH) of pupils. There has been an increase in pupils presenting with SEMH needs post-pandemic, with schools requesting additional support. The Virtual School has commissioned additional SEMH support from the Specialist Inclusion Support Service (SISS) to support schools and children. All schools with five Solihull looked after children or more receive additional SEMH support from a specialist teacher on top of any traded hours schools' purchase. This could be ten or twenty additional hours per term. Schools with 4 children or fewer can access the Virtual School's 1½ days per week offer, which is also able to provide support for CLA placed outside of Solihull who could also benefit.
- 3.11 All CLA aged 3-18 years have an allocated Virtual School worker, who is allocated set year groups to provide consistency. The worker remains the same and moves with the child, which enables them to know the child's educational situation well – which in turn enables the team to effectively support, advocate and challenge.
- 3.12 The Virtual School is committed to working with young people until the end of year 13 no matter when in the year they turn 18 years. From year 11 they also have a Virtual School careers adviser allocated as well. This has proven to be an effective model as the improved outcomes up until the pandemic illustrate.
- 3.13 All schools are required to adhere to the Gatsby benchmarks to ensure that every young person receives high quality careers guidance to make informed decisions about their future. There are 8 Gatsby benchmarks that indicate good career guidance, which schools need to reflect and implement. Alongside this the virtual school provides more personalised information, advice, and guidance through the 1.6fte specialist careers advisers. They help to ensure that the young person, and their network, are aware of the choices/options available and how to access them. Students are accessing a range of college courses, 6th forms and apprenticeships.
- 3.14 The Virtual School capacity has not increased in recent years, despite the growth in CLA numbers, which has meant the number of children being supported by each worker has seen a marked increase, with the Virtual School headteacher also holding

cases. This risk has been identified and currently the school are using grant funding to recruit a Virtual School Officer, fixed term for two years to reduce the case holding levels and to develop the extended remit of the team. The latter will focus on previously CLA and all children with a social worker. Capacity will be monitored to ensure CLA continue to be supported appropriately.

3.15 Supporting schools to access timely specialist support has been a long-term priority. A bank of resources and details of providers have been developed. Pupils receiving pupil premium plus funding in schools have successfully accessed support recommended. These resources have been used for our pupils both in Solihull schools and out of borough schools. The Virtual School has funded several pilots using these resources and interventions to improve pupil outcomes. This work is targeted at CLA and previously CLA after as well as children with a social worker.

3.16 Three specialist pathways have been developed for CLA to access:

- the Community Education Psychology Service (CEPS),
- SISS SEMH Team
- SISS Communication and learning difficulties team (CLD).

3.17 We are currently developing a speech, language, and communication difficulties specialist. Through the Health and Education group led by social care, there will be a pathway to support pupils identified with high scores from the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a behavioural screening questionnaire and there is a requirement for local authorities to submit SDQ data to the DfE. Another pathway for those children where foetal alcohol spectrum disorder is suspected is also being developed.

3.18 Improving the quality of life of Solihull children by accessing enrichment activities is one of the key areas to enable our children to develop further. The Virtual School is funding music lessons, encouraging carers to access the West Midland Virtual School Heads' Foundation regional arts and sports programme, providing funding for catch up swimming lesson for non-swimmers who would have missed lessons during the pandemic (specific year groups), access to high quality internship opportunities, access to the National Citizenship Service (NCS) and Aimhigher university activities. These types of activities will ensure children are having positive learning opportunities and experiences, outside of the classroom.

4. Implications and Considerations

4.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the Council Plan:

| Priority: | Contribution: |
|---|---|
| People and Communities: 1. Improving outcomes for children and young people in Solihull. | Supporting the education of CLA Narrowing the attainment gap for these pupils and reporting this information to all our corporate parents. |

| Priority: | Contribution: |
|--|---|
| 2. Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for Adults in Solihull when they need it. 3. Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities. 4. Enable communities to thrive. | |
| Economy: 5. Develop and promote the borough's economy, with a focus on revitalising our town and local centres. 6. Maximising the opportunities of UK Central and HS2. 7. Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable. | Improving outcomes will enable more positive choices in education, training or employment and help young people transition successfully into an adulthood of independence, choice, and control. |
| Environment: 8. Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions. | Enter text. |
| 9. Promote employee wellbeing | Enter text. |

4.2 Financial implications:

4.2.1 The funding used to meet the needs of the children (known as Pupil Premium Plus), is received as part of the Pupil Premium Grant based on £2,410 per looked after child (£910,980 for 2022-23).

4.2.2 Pupil premium funding which is not used in the financial year would be subject to recovery by ESFA, but this has not occurred historically. This risk is appropriately managed within the service.

4.3 Legal implications:

4.3.1 Full details of the legal implications can be found here - [Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101422/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children-and-previously-looked-after-children.pdf)

4.4 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

4.4.1 There has been a marked increase in the number of CLA, which has increased caseloads. Additional funding for the growing remit is supporting the recruitment of more workers. Capacity will continue to be monitored, with a low-risk appetite given

the LA role as a corporate parent.

4.5 Equality implications:

4.51 The Virtual School actively seek to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for CLA, previously CLA, and children with a social worker.

4.5.2 The team provides strong leadership and collaboration with education settings, community and voluntary services, the ICS and health providers, to ensure an effective service.

5. List of appendices referred to

5.1 Looked after children reporting results 2022