Promoting the educational achievement of children and young people in care

City of York Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2023/24 academic year

Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of City of York Virtual School and the 2023/24 educational outcomes of York children looked after (CLA). It reflects on achievements and identifies areas of development to achieve the best outcomes for our CLA. The virtual school also has extended duties to provide advice to adopters and to promote and enhance partnerships between agencies to raise aspirations for the cohort of children who have a social worker.

Introduction

City of York Virtual School champions care-experienced children and young people. We work with corporate parents, carers, parents, social workers, early years settings, schools, FE colleges and other professionals to support looked after and previously looked after children so that they:

• Attend a school or setting which best meets their needs
• Attend regularly
• Make progress and achieve
• Have a voice that positively impacts on the services they receive
• Have stability in home, care and education placement
• Receive good advice and guidance to progress into further education, employment and training and, where appropriate, university
• Are prepared for adulthood
• Receive recognition for their achievement and have their successes celebrated.

These key areas of work include:

- Ensuring that all initial Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings when a young person comes into care – or has turned 2 and started to attend an early years setting for the first time – are swiftly put in place to ensure that there is a clear plan for the education of the child or young person. A member of the virtual school team attends all initial PEP meetings.

- Reviewing attainment and progress data submitted through the electronic PEP system by education settings on a termly basis to identify levels of need. Advice is provided to target interventions through analysis of data to enable planned support.
- Providing challenge following PEP review submissions to ensure that an appropriately ambitious plan for education is in place according to need and liaising closely with social workers and designated teachers in these cases.
- Providing advice and guidance to designated teachers and quality assuring individual targets and support for our children and young people to accelerate their progress in education. Specific pupil level interventions are funded through Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) and the impact is reviewed as part of the PEP process.
- Strengthening partnership working with senior managers in children's social care to ensure that education is central to any decision taken about our children and young people in care.
- Closely monitoring attendance and suspensions/exclusions and implementing plans to improve engagement.
- Offering support, guidance and training to foster carers, headteachers, designated teachers, social workers and independent reviewing officers to enable them to work together to improve educational outcomes for our children and young people.
- Being proactive in working with social workers to make school applications (where a school move is unavoidable) and supporting the transition into the new educational placement.
- Make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children and young people.

Cohort Information 2023/24 (statutory school age)
Numbers below are for statutory school age children and young people who were on the roll of the Virtual School *during* the academic year 2023/24. It is presented by gender, school type and location and SEN status.

Gender and year group

Year Group	Girls	Boys	Total	%
Reception	6	10	16	8
Year 1	6	7	13	6
Year 2	5	7	12	6
Year 3	7	5	12	6
Year 4	8	9	17	8
Year 5	9	9	18	9
Year 6	7	9	16	8
Year 7	8	9	17	8
Year 8	7	7	14	7
Year 9	12	10	22	10
Year 10	13	13	26	12
Year 11	8	17	25	12
TOTAL	96	112	208	

Comment regarding cohort numbers.

32 children and young people entered care during the academic year 2023/24. 39 children and young people of statutory school age left care during the academic year 2023/24. 6 children and young people both entered and left care during the academic year 2023/24.

The total number of children in care of statutory school age at the end of the academic year was 165 which is a fall from 187 the previous year. These numbers demonstrate the fluidity of the cohort however the virtual school works to support all CLA during their time in care whether this is for just a few weeks or over their whole school journey. 54% of the cohort are boys which is rise of 1% from last year.

School area

Numbers below show the number of children and young people by school area at the end of the academic year 2023/24.

Year Group	In York school	In OOA school
Reception	11	1
Year 1	5	2
Year 2	9	4
Year 3	4	4
Year 4	11	5
Year 5	7	5
Year 6	8	5
Year 7	6	8
Year 8	8	3
Year 9	8	10
Year 10	12	7
Year 11	13	9
Total	**102**	**63**

Comment regarding School Area.

In 2022/23 there were 109 children and young people attending schools within City of York, this number has fallen to 102 in 2023/24. There were 78 children and young people attending schools in other local authorities in 2022/23, this has fallen to 63 in 2023/24. Over two thirds (62%) of York CLA are educated in York schools which is a rise of 58% from last academic year. The cohort are on roll in 84 schools across the country. 38 York schools and 46 schools in other local authorities. 34 children are educated across North Yorkshire and East Riding. The other 29 children are further afield, in Doncaster, Lancashire, Kirklees, Calderdale, Co Durham, Cheshire East, Wiltshire, Bradford, Birmingham, Wales, Stockton on Tees, Liverpool, Kettering, Leicestershire, Sheffield, London and Hull.

The virtual school team pride ourselves on the ability to swiftly build strong working relationships with staff in schools out of York to ensure there is good communication and information sharing so that our children and young people are well supported wherever they live.

School Type

Year Group	Mainstream School	Special School	Independent School	Pupil Referral Unit	Accessing some Alternative Provision	Awaiting new provision/EOTAS	Secure Unit
Reception	11	1	0	0	0	0	0
Year 1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Year 2	12	0	1	0	0	0	0
Year 3	8	0	0	0	1	0	0
Year 4	15	0	1	0	2	0	0
Year 5	12	0	0	0	1	0	0
Year 6	13	0	0	0	0	0	0
Year 7	13	1	0	0	2	0	0
Year 8	8	2	0	1	3	0	0
Year 9	12	5	0	1	4	0	0
Year 10	15	1	0	2	9	1	0
Year 11	17	4	0	0	7	1	0
Total	143	14	2	4	29	2	0

Comment on school type.

The vast majority of the cohort attend DfE funded mainstream schools. Permanent exclusion is very rare. The virtual school ensures that positive relationships are developed and sustained with all settings, schools and FE Colleges. Stability in education is a key priority and any change of setting always involves the virtual school providing advice and support.

It is positive that 88% of the cohort are educated in mainstream classrooms. The impact of our joint working with SEN colleagues and schools means that most of our children in care are on roll in mainstream schools. However, as we noted in 2022/23, an increasing number of children and young people across the cohort are unable to access a full curriculum offer in mainstream and now also access some form of alternative provision.

There has been a slight reduction in the number of children who are educated entirely outside a school setting (EOTAS – educated other than at school). In 2022/3 this number was 4 children. The number of children and young people in special schools had doubled since last

academic year. This is appropriate to the significant needs of these children as described in their EHCPs.

There has been a rise in the number of children and young people requiring school places outside the normal school admissions rounds for new starters in Reception and Year 7. These school moves have been as a result of EHCPs being issued, children moving to IFA carers out of York and new children (UASC). Supporting school moves requires additional capacity from the team to liaise with SEN teams both in and out of York, and school admissions teams in other local authority areas. Increasingly, schools are refusing to admit new children to their roll and this leads to delay whilst directions, appeals and negotiations take place.

SEN Status

Year Group	EHCP	SEN K	% of year group with SEN overall
Reception	3	2	42
Year 1	0	0	0
Year 2	1	7	62
Year 3	2	3	63
Year 4	5	6	69
Year 5	0	5	42
Year 6	5	3	62
Year 7	4	2	29
Year 8	5	4	82
Year 9	11	3	78
Year 10	5	7	63
Year 11	9	7	73
Total	45	49	27% EHCP/30% SEN K

Comment on SEN status.

57% of the virtual school cohort have either an EHCP or are identified as needing SEN support (SEN K code) in school. This is compared to 52% last year. The virtual school works with schools to swiftly identify and assess children and young people so that the right support can be put in place without delay.

Outcomes 2024

Raising attainment and improving the life chances of children in care is the most important priority of any virtual school. The information below is unvalidated data and provides an overview of outcomes for each key stage at the time of writing.

Early Years Foundation Stage

There were 12 children in the reception cohort by the end of the academic year 2023/24:

- 4 children were on the SEN register, 1 has an EHCP and 3 are undergoing statutory assessment
- 2 children achieved all 17 early learning goals and a good level of development
- 1 child achieved 16 ELG
- 1 child is remaining in reception and will be report against ELG in 2025
- In 2023 4 children out of 11 achieved GLD at the end of reception
- The outcomes appear less strong than last year however the cohort is small with a greater number of high needs children who have made progress in line with their peers of similar starting points. Progress in early years remains a key priority for the virtual school.

Key Stage One

There were 7 children in the Year 1 cohort.

- 6 passed the phonics screening check
- Last year 7 children out of a cohort of 11 passed the phonics screening check
- This is an improving trend and evidences the impact of the virtual school priority to challenge schools to continue to focus on reading in Key Stage One

There is no reported data for Year 2 this academic year owing to DfE removal of Year 2 SATS. The virtual school collected teacher assessment data from schools. There were 13 children in the Year 2 cohort at the end of the academic year:

- 3 children were on the SEN register, 1 has and EHCP and another is undergoing statutory assessment

- 6 children were assessed to have met the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths
- Last year 5 children out of 13 children met the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths.
- This is a similar performance to last academic year

Key Stage Two

There were 13 children in the Year 6 cohort at the end of the academic year 2023/4. There were 15 children in the Year 6 cohort at the end of the academic year 2022/3:

- 9 of the children were on the SEN register, 5 of these had an EHCP.
- 3 children achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths compared to 4 last year
- 4 children achieved the expected standard in Writing (Teacher assessed) compared to 10 last year
- 6 children achieved the expected standard in Reading (SATS) compared to 7 last year
- 4 children achieved the expected standard in Maths (SATS) compared to 12 last year
- This is a weaker performance to last year and progress at KS2 remains a key priority for the virtual school.

Key Stage Four

Last academic year there were 22 young people in the Year 11 cohort.

- 9 of the young people have an EHCP and a further 6 were identified as having an SEN need.
- 7 young people achieved 5 GCSEs or more including English and Maths.
- 2 young people achieved a grade 4 in English but not Maths.
- 2 young people achieved a grade 4 in Maths but not English.
- Out of the 15 children who took GCSEs all achieved a grade in Maths but two did not achieve a grade in English Language, however the grades achieved in English Language were generally higher.
- This is a much stronger performance than last year and demonstrates the impact of the virtual school support for interventions at KS4

Celebration of our children's achievements

The virtual school hosted a celebration event at the Guildhall on Thursday 15th July 2024. This was supported by the Speak Up team. All young people completing Year 11, Year 12, Year 13 and University in 2024 were invited to attend. Celebratory comments were collected from social workers, schools, colleges, pathway workers and carers to read out and present to those young people who attended in person. Graduation certificates were also presented. Cllr Webb, Maxine Squire and members of the virtual school team were in attendance. Our guest speaker was one of York's care leavers who is now studying for a Master's Degree. She spoke passionately and eloquently about how continuing to pursue education has led her to be successful and independent. Celebratory comments and certificates were posted to young people who chose not to attend in person.

Attendance

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Overall	84.4%	86.5%	85.3%	88.9%	88.0%
Persistent Absence	50% **	44% *	27%	22%	23%
Number of children with above 90% attendance	88	110	137	130	105

Comment on attendance.

The monitoring of attendance by the virtual school is strong and concerns are addressed promptly. Overall attendance for the 2023-24 academic year was 88% which is similar to 2022-23 (89%) and remains an improvement on 2021-22 (85%).

All schools promote good attendance: it is a national priority. If a child has lower than 90% attendance they are deemed to be persistently absent from school.

Schools report attendance marks to the virtual school via the secure epeponline platform provided by eGov Solutions Ltd. This allows the

virtual school to closely monitor any dips in attendance and to work with schools, social workers and carers to identify barriers to school attendance.

It is expected that schools create attendance targets within termly PEP reviews for those children and young people causing concern and put support in place to improve this. There is a city-wide attendance strategy within York with a graduated response to improving attendance and a multi-agency partnership focusing on this key priority for our children and young people.

Attendance during 2023/24 remained steady at almost 90% overall which is positive. The virtual school meets monthly with the heads of corporate parenting and fostering to closely monitor all children who are absent from school so that actions for social workers, foster carers and schools can be swiftly put in place.

Suspensions/Exclusions

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Suspensions (number of children)	13	12	24	26	26
Suspensions (number of days lost)	62.5	68	121	230	221
Suspensions (number of children with repeat suspensions)	11	8	11	16	21
Permanent Exclusions	0	1	0	1	0

Comment on Suspensions.

16% of the cohort received a suspension during 2023/24 academic which is a 2% rise on 2022/23. This was 26 children and young people. The virtual school was aware of 40 children and young people at risk of suspension during the year 2023/24 and the impact of our support and intervention has resulted in some of these young people having reduced tariff sanctions or no suspension at all which is positive. This can be

evidenced in the reduction of days lost to suspension this academic year.

Reducing fixed term suspensions remains a key priority. The virtual school team responds swiftly to provide training and support to schools both in groups and on case-by-case basis. Advice and/or training is offered to school staff to adopt attachment aware approaches to respond differently to challenging behaviour as opposed to the traditional behaviourist approaches contained within the majority of schools' behaviour policies.

Some children and young people require a reduced timetable for a short period of time, or access to alternative provision. Any changes to full time classroom teaching are negotiated with the virtual school. It should be noted that the number of permanent exclusions issued to children in care is well below the national average. There were no children/young people permanently excluded from school during 2023/24.

Schools and settings are encouraged to undertake attachment and trauma awareness training delivered by the Educational Psychology (EP) team or external providers. Pupil Premium Plus funding can be used by schools to access training. In addition to this, the Specialist Inclusion and Wellbeing Adviser supported many teams of staff around understanding and responding to the needs of individual children and young people who struggle with accessing mainstream classrooms.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The 1989 Care Act states that the social worker should arrange a child/young person's first PEP within 10 school days of the new care status. The virtual school now organises and attends all first PEP meetings to ensure education planning takes place swiftly, and in advance of the first child care review for new entrants to care.

The PEP templates are bespoke to City of York. There are early years, primary, secondary and post 16 PEP templates, which each show the evolving educational journey of the child/young person. PEP review meetings take place three times each academic year and it is the joint responsibility of the setting/school and social worker to ensure this happens. All York children and young people in care have a PEP document with up-to-date educational information. Additionally, interim review meetings take place when there are significant issues impacting on the education of the child/young person.

The consistency of PEPS is achieved through the quality assurance process which is predominantly the responsibility of the virtual school headteacher and PEP coordinator. They read every PEP each term and provide a quality assurance judgment summary and feedback to the setting/school. During 2023/4 the virtual school commissioned an independent progress leader (45 days over the academic year) to follow up with schools and support with identifying interventions such as 1:1 tuition, specialist dyslexia support and small group pre-teaching which has proved to have a positive impact on GCSE outcomes this year.

Microsoft Teams enables many PEPs to be held virtually, whilst others are held in the school setting. This hybrid model enabled the virtual school to maintain and develop relationships, and to attend more PEP meetings than capacity allowed in previous years where required. Social workers prefer a hybrid PEP meeting to make efficient use of time, reducing travel to out of area schools. Usually in these cases the school/setting invites carers, children and young people in person and the social worker joins the meeting virtually.

There is a section where the child/young person's thoughts and feelings are recorded prior to all meetings and the virtual school works together with the social worker and school to respond to their views. Children and young people are always invited to attend their PEP review meeting in person. Many choose to provide their views in advance and prefer not to leave lessons.

The electronic PEP contract is due to be retendered during 2024/5 academic year through the gCloud procurement facility for local authorities. The current contract is with eGov Solutions Ltd. Schools and social workers are now familiar with this platform and the virtual school PEP coordinator provides training to new schools and social workers on an ongoing basis. PEPs are completed electronically and are quality assured and signed off by the virtual school team. To support pupil aspiration and achievement Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding is also requested through this system and these targets are reviewed during the PEP meetings. The completed PEP is then uploaded onto Children's Mosaic.

The cohort is well known by the virtual school team. Children and young people's progress is tracked throughout the year and the virtual school responds swiftly to requests for advice, support and training from schools, settings, social workers and carers.

All children and young people in care have a PEP from age 2 until the age of 18 unless they are in employment; these are reviewed termly by settings, schools and colleges and all PEPs are quality assured by the virtual school to ensure consistent application of standards. PEP completion in termly timescale is improving and monitored monthly using both the epep system and KPI dashboard.

Extended duties of the virtual school

Throughout the last two years the virtual school, Inclusion, SEN and education services teams have embraced the extended duties placed upon local authorities to champion inclusive practice, equity of opportunity and prioritisation of children adopted from care and those with a social worker across the directorate. Training and support for schools and social workers is available to support school admissions procedures, fair access protocols, statutory SEN services, attendance and safeguarding for this vulnerable cohort and their families. There is a recognition now to formalise these approaches by appointing an officer to coordinate and lead on this area of work which will be initiated by following due process with HR, Finance and DMT in the next academic year. Further work will be undertaken to ensure that best practice to support this cohort is shared across our schools.

Priorities for 2024/25

- Continue to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence across the cohorts.
- Develop further strategies to support children through home and school moves to address potential barriers to accessing learning with a focus on those children and young people at risk of suspension/exclusion.
- Continue to focus on improving KS2 outcomes and progress.
- Continue to develop a shared understanding of processes, timescales and expectations across the wider service, in particular surrounding SEND, use of alternative provision and reduced timetables.

- Continue to make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities, including with children's social care, to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children.

Abbreviations
CLA – children looked after
PEP – personal education plan
PP+ - pupil premium plus
VSHT – virtual school headteacher
EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan
FTE – full time equivalent
KPI – Key Performance Indicator
SEND – special educational needs and disabilities
DfE – Department for Education
KS1-4 – key stages one to four