



Promoting the educational achievement of children and young people in care

Virtual School Headteacher Report 2019-2020 academic year

Context

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 February 2018*. York virtual school currently works with all young people in the care of York from the age of 2 through to age 18 when they become care leavers. This is delivered by the virtual school headteacher (VSHT) and a full time Learning and Wellbeing worker, supported by colleagues in the SEN (Special Educational Needs) and EPS (Educational Psychology Service) teams, Early Years Adviser team, School Effectiveness and Achievement team and the Learning and Work Adviser and Specialist ETE (Education, Training and Employment) teams.

The virtual school supports and challenges schools and other professionals to enrich the learning experience of our children and young people in care by striving to close the achievement gap through targeted support and intervention when needed. These key areas of work include:

- Being proactive in supporting social workers with school applications (where a school move is unavoidable) and supporting the transition into the new educational placement.
- Ensuring that all initial Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings when a young person comes into care – or has turned 2 – are swiftly put in place by social workers to ensure that as much support is in place as soon as possible within their school or educational placement.
- Reviewing attainment and progress data on a termly basis to identify level of need and intervention and using this data to plan support.
- Providing educational challenge following PEP review meetings according to need and liaising closely with social workers and designated teachers in these cases.
- Providing advice and guidance to designated teachers and scrutinising individualised targets and support for our young people to accelerate their progress in education. These are funded through Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) and their 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 establishing 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 put education at the centre of all work with our children and young people.

As you can see from the above this role is crucial during this unprecedented time and it has very much been “business as usual” for the virtual school even though the world feels to be a very different place as a result of the Covid pandemic.

The responsibility for a young person's education rests with their education provider. Our children and young people should have attended their education provision throughout the pandemic or there should have been a risk assessment in place detailing how work appropriate for the individual young person was being set and monitored, and what support was being offered to them. During the first lockdown in March 2020 the majority of children in care remained at home in their placements however there was a gradual return to face to face school from the end of April onwards and overall school attendance for 2019-20 despite the pandemic was 84% (2018-19 overall attendance was 89%).

The virtual school role was to support and challenge all providers to deliver education during this exceptional period with each individual young person at the centre of our approach.

These were some of the areas of focus:

Contact and support for carers

- During the lockdown a questionnaire was emailed via the fostering team to all carers to ascertain what support they needed with home education and online learning
- The learning and wellbeing worker extended her remit from working with schools to providing advice and support directly to carers
- Links to the DfE suggested resources for home learning were sent out via the fostering team to enrich those being provided to them directly from school.



Contact and support for children and young people.

- The ePEP system allows the virtual school to support young people through the setting of targets; funding can be requested at any time and resources supplied for them by their school or education provider.
- Targets were creatively set and managed to take account of the need to continue to support the education of those young people who were not accessing a provision based offer.
- Many of our young people already had the electronic devices and resources that they need at home.
- The local authority took advantage of the DfE digital devices scheme to ensure that all children and young people in care had access to a device and these were delivered by social workers by mid July 2020.

Risk Assessments

- Social workers were asked to coordinate and complete risk assessments for all young people who were not attending a provision in the first lockdown and the virtual school contributed to all requests.
- There was a particular focus on how the schools are “keeping in touch” and monitoring work - offering challenge and support.
- A learning conversation questionnaire was issued to schools to use in their keep in touch conversations with children and young people
- In most cases the support offered by social workers and schools was very positive

Young people not on a school roll

- During 2019-20 there was one young person of statutory school age not on a school roll – the virtual school contributed to risk assessments and planning for home tuition with the social worker as a priority and continue to support the social worker to apply for suitable provision.
- It is the role of the virtual school to work with other professionals to secure education provision asap.

Covid-19 PEPs

- The VSHT worked with Welfare Call Ltd (the ePEP system provider) and other virtual schools nationally to produce a Covid-19 Contact PEP section that enabled relevant information to be collected during the PEP meeting for a young person who attended their provision, or who was being educated at home.



- The virtual school monitored all PEPs during the summer term 2020 (some were joint skype meetings but others were a collation of individual conversations). It is not possible for the virtual school to attend PEP meetings routinely, although the VSHT and the learning and wellbeing worker did attend several PEP meetings for individual children and young people on request and as an exception in some cases.
- The ePEP system ensured that there was at least one completed PEP for all our young people between March and July 2020.
- The questions for the children and young people to respond to were tailored specifically to capture the young person's views in response to being educated during the Covid-19 school closure period.

Attendance and monitoring overview

- Welfare Call provided daily attendance reports and these were monitored to keep an overview of the ever changing situation for our children and young people
- This was been coordinated across the service with input from the virtual school, children's social care managers, Welfare Call and the York attendance data from schools.
- The information was collated, updated and circulated weekly across the service.
- On 17/07/20 87/163 (53%) school aged young people were attending their provision

Initial PEP's

- Between 20.03.20 (lockdown) and the end of the summer term in July 2020 there was an increase of 32 children and young people coming into care and onto the virtual school roll
- Initial PEPs were particularly important during this period of lockdown to ensure that children, young people and their carers had access to all the support and resources they needed as soon as possible on entry to care.

York Virtual School self-evaluation - strengths

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) outcomes are above national for children in care for both GLD and prime areas (2019 data)
- All children and young people in care have a PEP from aged 2 until the age of 18; these are needs assessed and of good quality – signed off by the virtual school headteacher to ensure this quality and consistency.



- Embedding processes and understanding of quality of education for children 2-5.
- All young people in care in Year 12 and 13 have a PEP (for the first time in 2019-20)
- The monitoring of attendance by the virtual school is strong and concerns are addressed promptly. Overall attendance for the 2019-20 academic year was 84% despite the pandemic and school closure period from March-June 2020.
- There has been no permanent exclusion of a child and young person in care for a number of years. This is testament to the collaborative approach to supporting those with challenging behaviour and the access to effective support services that ensure those pupils at risk of exclusion receive appropriate intervention.
- The electronic PEP system enables the virtual school to monitor the completion and quality of PEPs and allows for systematic application, authorisation and monitoring of PP+ funding for individual pupils. All designated teachers and social workers have access to this system and can contribute to the PEP process. This process is used to challenge schools to support pupils' individual needs and is currently quality assured by the VSHT who signs off all PEPs. All previous targets must be reviewed in terms of impact before further targets are set.
- PEP completion in termly timescale – 100% summer term 2020
- The VSHT oversees school changes and makes sure the new school is 'good' and will meet the curriculum needs for the young person.

York Virtual School self evaluation – Key Challenges

- Increase in the number of young people in care and on the roll of the virtual school by 47 in 2019-20
- Linked to this is the stability of cohort – placement moves present a potential barrier to accessing learning. The virtual school continues to focus on supporting schools when children move placement or school as a key priority
- The cumulative effect of this is that there are more young people overall. Many young people entering the system who need a high level of initial support and intervention.
- KS2 outcomes and progress continue to be an issue (data 2019).
- Extension of the age range working with Year 13 for the first time and considering next steps post 18 as young people become care leavers.



- Supporting a shared understanding of processes, timescales and expectations across the wider service.
- Capacity of VSHT to drive forward necessary improvements whilst single-handedly quality assuring over 200 PEPs every term currently.

Cohort summary 2019-2020

Data is for statutory school age children and young people who were on the roll of the Virtual School as at 17.07.2020. It is presented by gender, school type and location, SEN status, length of care episode and placement stability.

Gender

Year Group	Boys	Girls	TOTAL	%
Year R	8	4	12	7
Year 1	6	6	12	7
Year 2	5	8	13	8
Year 3	7	7	14	9
Year 4	6	7	13	8
Year 5	7	6	13	8
Year 6	7	3	10	6
Year 7	9	6	15	9
Year 8	6	9	15	9
Year 9	4	4	8	5
Year 10	10	9	19	12
Year 11	11	8	19	12
TOTAL	86	77	163	

Key Stage	Boys	Girls	TOTAL	%
Reception	8	4	12	7
KS1	11	14	25	15
KS2	27	23	50	31
KS3	19	19	38	23
KS4	21	17	38	23
TOTAL	86	77	163	

School Area

Year Group	In York Schools	In OLA Schools
Year R	9	3
Year 1	9	3
Year 2	11	2
Year 3	10	4
Year 4	11	2
Year 5	9	4



Year 6	5	5
Year 7	9	6
Year 8	11	4
Year 9	5	3
Year 10	8	11
Year 11	14	5
TOTAL	111(68%)	52

School Type

Year Group	Mainstream	Special School	Independent School	Pupil Referral Unit	Alternative provision	Awaiting New Provision	Secure Unit / YOI
Year R	11	0	1	0	0	0	0
Year 1	11	0	1	0	0	0	0
Year 2	12	0	0	1	0	0	0
Year 3	13	1	0	0	0	0	0
Year 4	11	2	0	0	0	0	0
Year 5	10	2	1	0	0	0	0
Year 6	9	0	1	0	0	0	0
Year 7	10	2	3	0	0	0	0
Year 8	13	2	0	0	0	0	0
Year 9	7	0	1	0	0	0	0
Year 10	12	1	1	4	0	1	0
Year 11	12	1	0	4	2	0	0
TOTAL	131	11	9	9	2	1	0

SEN status

Year Group	EHCP	SEN K	% of each Year Group with EHCP / SEN K
Year R	2	3	42
Year 1	0	4	33
Year 2	5	3	62
Year 3	1	6	50
Year 4	3	3	46
Year 5	4	4	62
Year 6	2	3	50
Year 7	7	3	67
Year 8	6	2	53
Year 9	2	4	75
Year 10	5	7	63
Year 11	3	8	58
TOTAL	40	50	55% of cohort



Length of care episode

Year Group	New into care during the academic year 2019-20	In care 12 months or more	Leaving care during the academic year 2019-20
Year R	5	7	2
Year 1	4	8	2
Year 2	3	10	
Year 3	7	7	
Year 4	2	11	
Year 5	3	10	
Year 6	3	7	1
Year 7	4	11	2
Year 8	1	14	
Year 9	1	7	2
Year 10	5	14	1
Year 11	9	10	2
TOTAL	47 (29% increase)	116	12

Placement moves during 2019-20 academic year

Year Group	Number of children moving placement at least once during the academic year	Number of children in placement 12 months or more at 20.7.20
Year R	3	9
Year 1	7	5
Year 2	3	10
Year 3	5	9
Year 4	2	11



Year 5	5	8
Year 6	2	8
Year 7	3	12
Year 8	2	13
Year 9	1	7
Year 10	4	15
Year 11	10	9
TOTAL	47	116

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The social worker should arrange initial PEPs within 10 school days of a young person coming into care for all children aged. Timeliness of initial PEPs in York is an area for improvement currently. Schools are responsible for co-ordinating PEP reviews on a termly basis and the virtual school is responsible for reviewing the information in PEPs and attending PEP meetings as appropriate using data to target support for our children and young people as necessary. There is a section where the child'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.

PEPs are completed electronically using the Welfare Call digital system and are quality assured and signed off by the VSHT. To support pupil aspiration and achievement 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 by the social worker. For reporting processes, the VSHT does not sign off a PEP until it is completed to a high quality through the QA processes. This may be some time after a meeting has taken place.

100% of PEPs have been completed within the Summer Term in-line with the new termly processes following a reduction in the Spring Term due to the impact of Covid-19. Monthly reports on PEP completion and overdue PEPs are shared with children's social care SMT and the IRO team.

Training Delivery

The Virtual School has delivered the following training over the last 2 years:-

- ePEP Training for designated teachers and social workers
- Designated teacher network meetings
- Early years practitioner network meetings



- Foster carer specific educational sessions
- Attachment training is offered for designated teachers and school staff by the Educational Psychology Service as a traded service
- Bespoke training for individual schools as required
- Social Worker Academy introduction to the virtual school

Collaborative Working

The VSHT regularly works with partner services and agencies across the Local Authority and wider areas to support and challenge schools to improve outcomes for our children and young people in care. This might be initiated through the PEP process or through direct contact with social workers, designated teachers and/or the SEN Team. During 2019-20 the VSHT regularly attended and contributed to multi agency, corporate, regional and national meetings:

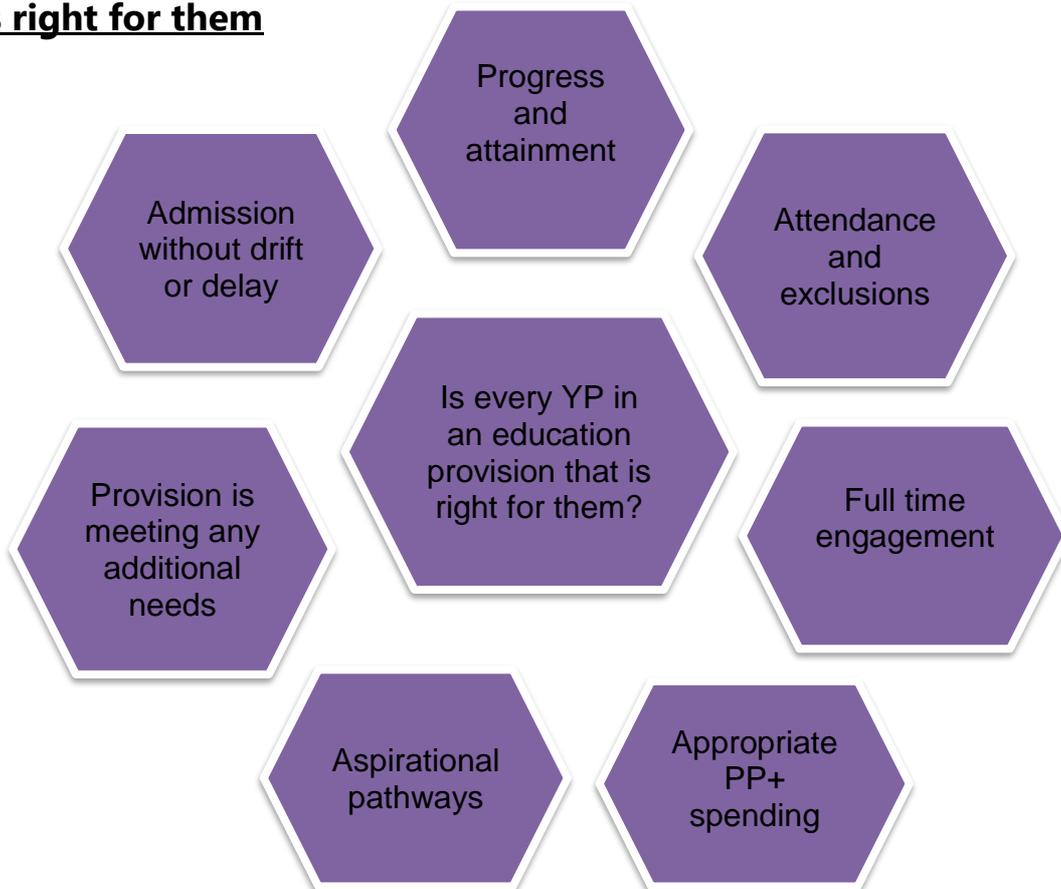
- York Head Teacher meetings
- A range of children's social care meetings, including, SMT and Extended SMT, Permanence Panel, Improvement Board
- Regional VSHT meetings
- Regional Adoption Group
- Early Years Improvement Board
- Children in Care Strategic Partnership
- Fostering Panel
- School Effectiveness and Achievement Team meetings
- Secondary school pastoral leaders meetings
- York and North Yorkshire Care Experienced Network meetings
- PEP meetings for complex children in care

Key priorities moving forwards

- Ensuring all children and young people in care are in an education provision that is right for them
- Ensuring all children and young people in care have a high-quality PEP, completed within timescales, that meets their needs
- Continue to focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people in care with particular focus on KS2 attainment and progress.



Ensuring all children and young people in care are in an education provision that is right for them



In order to assess whether a young person is in the right provision it is important to ensure:

- Progress and attainment are at least in line with expectations
- Attendance is good and exclusions are low
- Reduced timetables are only used in exceptional circumstances
- Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is used appropriately
- There is a suitable pathway in place to ensure aspirational outcomes
- Additional needs are identified, and appropriate support secured

Where the agreed professional view is that a provision is not the right place for a young person it will be important to ensure:

- Changes in provision are monitored and achieved without drift and delay

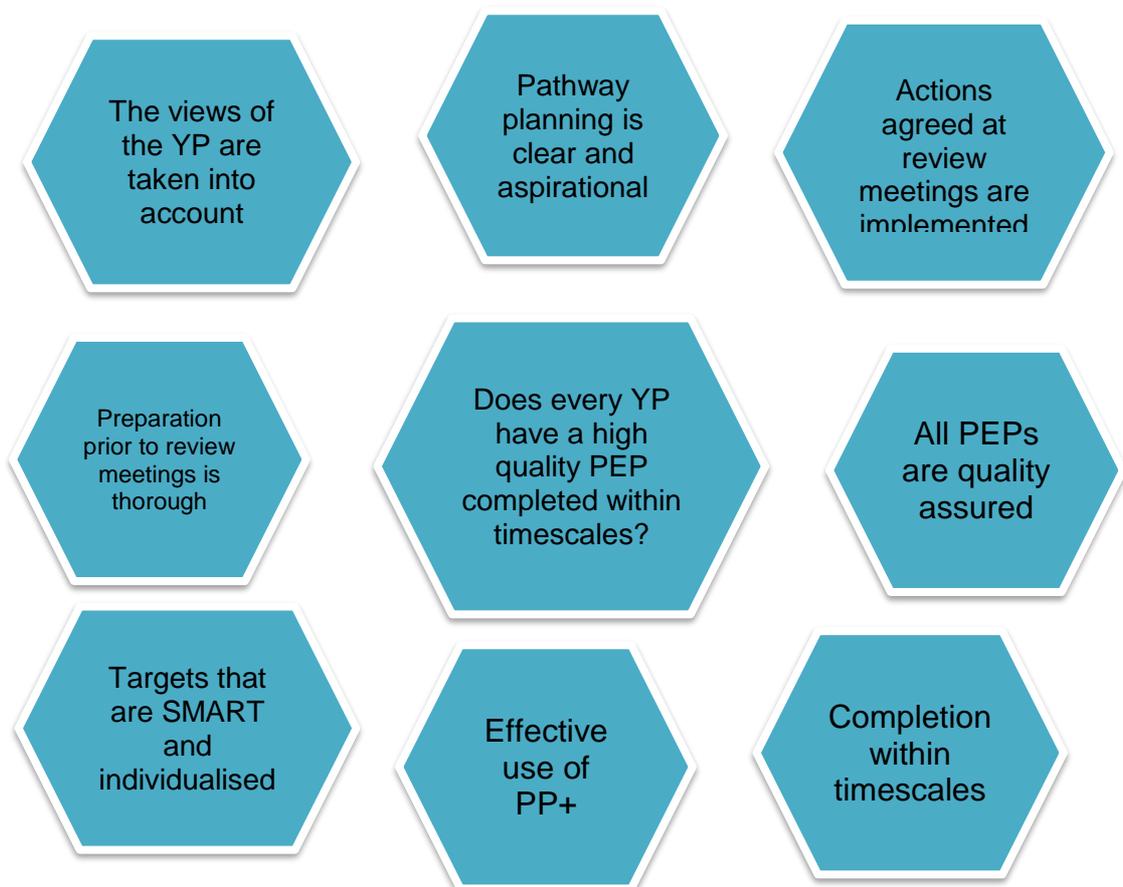
Measuring Virtual School Impact

- All children and young people have an identified provision



- Year on year decrease and in line or below national percentages for persistent absentees
- Year on year decrease and in line or below national percentages in the number of fixed term exclusions
- No permanent exclusions
- All learners making good academic progress
- Year on year decrease and in line or below national percentages of learners with a less than full time offer
- PEP targets are effective with appropriate funding requests
- Increased Y12 and Year 13 participation
- Minimal drift and delay in securing provision where change is necessary

Ensuring all children and young people in care have a high quality PEP completed within timescales that meets their needs



In order to assess whether a PEP is of high quality the virtual school will need to ensure:

- Initial PEPs meetings are organised within 10 working days and termly PEP reviews take place subsequently



- Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is used appropriately
- Targets agreed at review meetings are relevant, achievable, measurable and regularly reviewed
- In preparation for a PEP meeting all relevant information is available in ePEP and key issues / concerns are identified
- Children and young people are consulted and invited to contribute to their PEP; their views are considered and taken into account
- There is a clear progression pathway identified, taking account of the young person's ability, hopes and aspirations
- Any agreed actions are followed up and reviewed at subsequent meetings
- All PEPs are quality assured and where necessary appropriate challenge is made and / or action is taken

Measuring Virtual School Impact

- A consistently high completion rate of Initial PEPs in advance of the first child care review, and PEP reviews take place within the termly timescales
- Clear evidence that PP+ is used effectively through monitoring of individual PEP targets
- Targets have clearly identified outcomes / improvements and are reviewed before new targets are set
- PEP's are submitted for sign off at the meeting as a result of good preparation
- Pupil views are clearly considered and taken into account during the PEP meeting
- There is a clear progression pathway identified, taking account of the young person's ability, hopes and aspirations in all PEPs
- Agreed actions are clearly followed up and reviewed at subsequent PEP meetings
- All PEPs are quality assured and where necessary appropriate challenge is made and / or action is taken
- All PEPs have all appropriate sections completed before sign-off.

Improving outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2

Historically the outcomes for York children in care at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) have been poorer than for all children in care nationally, for both measures - attainment and progress.



What can we do to address this?

At a strategic level:

- Early intervention – ensure that as many of the cohort as possible take up their entitlement to early education and care from age 2 so that early learning is prioritised and children are being supported to achieve and make progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Training for carers – a programme of foster carer training is to be rolled out focusing on their role in supporting learning at home

At cohort level:

- Teacher assessment and progress data is submitted termly from individual schools and Early Years providers for each pupil and is the focus for the challenge and support provided by the virtual school through the Personal Education Plan reviews. Attainment and progress is tracked and monitored by Virtual School for all children from age 2 and reported on termly. Trends and areas of concern are identified and form the basis for decisions around whole cohort needs/interventions/training.
- Going forward there will be an expectation that termly targets are set for reading, writing and maths for all primary aged children where below expected progress is recorded
- Ensure that targeted cohorts are a key priority for schools, social workers and carers, particularly those who achieved age related expectations at prior key stage assessment points (a good level of development at Reception or at least expected in one or more of the core subject areas (reading, writing and maths) at the KS1 assessment point.)

At individual child level:

- Bespoke targets (funded and non-funded) set and reviewed at least termly for each child to support individual attainment and progress in the core areas of reading, writing and maths. Targets also take account of the child's wider interests, preferred learning styles and build on strengths as well as areas for development.
- Progress and attainment of each child could be discussed in supervision meetings between by managers and social workers
- Link to systemic practice across children's social care – every conversation starts with the child – how are children doing in school on a day to day, week by week and term by term?

Measuring Virtual School Impact

- Attainment and progress improves and the gap with national narrows.



Outcome data and analysis 2018-19

Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic there are no reported outcomes at EYFS, KS1 or KS2 for the academic year 2019-20. KS4 outcomes were based on Centre Assessed Grades and not exam results. The data is for children who have been in care for at least 12 months so that it can be compared to national data. Appendix A contains a spreadsheet showing data and trend information for EYFS, KS1, KS2 and KS4.

In summary:

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

All 3 and 4-year-old children are entitled to a free part-time 'early education' place within an early years setting. Policy initiatives such as free early education for disadvantaged two-year-olds (for which all children and young people in care are eligible) and the early years 'pupil premium' for disadvantaged children offer huge potential to improve access to – and the quality of – early education for children in care. The majority of children in care aged 2 to 4-years-old access free early education and care in York. Where they are not accessing their entitlement, the reason is known and discussed with the child's social worker. The early years PEP is initiated as soon as a two year old takes up an early education place.

Outcomes at the end of the early year's foundation stage (Reception class in the first year of school) in 2019 were above those of children in care nationally. This is an area of strength.

Key Stage One (KS1)

Outcomes at KS1 show a fluctuating trend however over time there are improvements in writing outcomes but not in reading and mathematics. Outcomes were below those of children in care nationally in 2019.

Key Stage Two (KS2)

Performance at KS2 is reported as a combination of attainment and progress. Attainment outcomes have improved over time however they are still below those of children in care nationally. Children in care in York in KS2 do not make good enough progress compared to children in care nationally. In 2018 children in care at KS2 made much better progress however reversed in 2019 which is concerning. This is a priority for the city.



Key Stage Four (KS4)

KS4 outcomes for children in care in York are historically stronger than at primary key stages which mirrors the pattern seen in the York school system (and differs in general from the national trend across the country). Outcomes in 2019 were better than national in both attainment and progress measures for the first time in four years.

Pupil Premium Plus

Please refer to Appendix B for the 2019-20 PP+ policy, which details the rationale for allocating funding to schools to support education outcomes for children in care. Increasingly over the last two years, schools have requested funding to pay for therapeutic interventions such as Art or Play therapy. Such requests are challenged by the VSHT as in all other local authorities in the region therapy is agreed at complex case panels and on the recommendation of clinicians rather than schools and social workers. An action for 2020-21 will be to audit and evidence the number of requests of this type to discuss with the clinical commissioning group so that children's presenting SEMH needs can be better supported outside the classroom.

Karron Young, Virtual School Headteacher

Appendix 1 – CLA Performance 2016-19

Appendix 2 – York Pupil Premium Plus Policy 2019-20