

Summary of the Work of the Virtual School Academic Year 2020/21

In line with DfE standards, the data reported in this summary is based on those children and young people who have been continuously looked after for a minimum of 12 months from April 1st 2020 to March 31st, 2021 – hereafter referred to as the reporting cohort. This summary primarily covers statutory school age but does also refer to outcomes for Early Years and Post 16. For clarity, there were 131 children and young people in the care of Bracknell Forest Council at the end of the 2020/21 academic year (ages 3-18), 33 of whom came into care during the academic year (September 2020 – July 2021). Of these 131 children and young people, 94 were of statutory school age (Reception to Year 11), 73 of whom constitute our reporting cohort.

At the Bracknell Forest Virtual School we are making a difference to the lives of children and young people in care, and we have continued to do so despite the global pandemic which again saw the partial or full closure of many schools and colleges from January to March 2021. Whilst schools and colleges, in the main, remained open for the vulnerable groups, remote learning became the norm. Secondary schools and colleges swiftly reverted to lessons being delivered via online platforms as timetabled whilst primary settings adopted a more blended approach with some remote lessons combined with a variety of online resources. Equally, the Virtual School team continued to be true to their name and ensured that Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings were held “virtually” via Teams which has proven to be invaluable in supporting our transition to working from home.

Looking back over the academic year, the return to school for the Autumn 2020 term was welcomed - albeit with an element of trepidation as there was still uncertainty in relation to what lay ahead. Our initial focus was to support our children to adapt to the different arrangements in place in their various education settings as well as to ascertain the impact that COVID-19 had had on student progress. During this term we worked closely with schools to ensure that our children and young people were supported to achieve positive educational outcomes. As we entered the new year and Spring 2021 term, so too did we enter another lockdown which culminated in schools having to revert to remote learning – although this time they were far better equipped and had become highly effective in delivering lessons via online platforms and our children and young people seemed more able to engage. March 2021 heralded the return to school, but formal assessments and exams were not going to take place and once again our end of Key Stage 1, 2, 4 and 5 outcomes were going to be based on teacher assessment.

Despite the absence of formal assessments, we have still been able to evidence the positive educational outcomes for our children and young people but our data collections in terms of attendance, progress and attainment have been affected. The impact of the lockdown on schools from January to March 2021, rendered teachers unable to effectively monitor and report on educational progress and children and young people unable to sit exams and undergo formal assessments (SATs, GCSEs, A Levels and other external exams). The current situation has, however, not impacted on our ability to reflect on how we can improve our service offer and several changes have been made.

In summary, our Education Support Officers are phase specialists supporting the Early Years and Primary; Secondary; and Post 16 sectors. The children and young people will continue to benefit from consistent support through the different phases, transitioning to another Education Support Officer at the same point as they would naturally through the education phases. Following a thorough audit of our PEPs and listening to our schools, we

revised the PEP format and process, training for which was offered and delivered to social workers, Personal Advisers (PAs), Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and foster carers in September 2020, and to schools in early October. Our new PEP format, however, was short-lived – as the lockdown came into effect, so too did our condensed PEP, which stayed with us throughout the spring and summer terms. We continue to complete full audits of our PEPs – the analysis of which enables us to identify areas for improvement. Post 16 PEPs have been reviewed for 2021/22 and there will be a focus on completing the PEP paperwork in a timely manner and capturing the voice of the child.

In considering further the Local Authority's (LA) desire to widen participation and raise aspirations for our children and young people and recognising the impact COVID-19 has had and will continue to have on the job market, we have focused on ensuring that Elevate become an integral part of the Virtual School. Elevate Bracknell Forest offers careers guidance to 14-16 year-olds who are at risk of NEET (Not in Education, Training or Employment). Elevate also offers careers guidance to young people aged 16-18 who are NEET – the offer extending to the age of 25 for Care Leavers and those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). From September 2020, Elevate rolled out a programme of support for our children and young people looked after from Year 9 – offering careers information, advice and guidance to help them to develop a career pathway and ensure that they all know what they need to achieve to fulfil their career aspirations. This programme of support will continue to be embedded in our service and this year we are allocating Elevate team members to our Year 12 and 13 CLA/Care Leavers to ensure that they have the optimum level of support from the Virtual School team to secure a pathway into employment, training, or higher education.

With the condensed PEP having been utilised for the spring and summer terms of 2021, we ran our PEP Format and Process training again in the autumn term to remind and embed the new processes introduced by the Virtual School with a particular focus this year (2021/22) on completing PEPs in a timelier manner and capturing the voice of the child. Following the success of our Attachment and Trauma training offer in conjunction with the Educational Psychology (EP) Service, we are planning to offer training to the Designated Teachers on Developing Emotional Literacy as well as Developing Resilience. We are also keen to develop our partnership working with our foster carers and in recognising the key role they play in the lives of our CLA (Child Looked After), we are offering training on supporting the education of our children (Early Years to Year 6) and supporting the education of our young people (Year 7 to Year 13).

Progress and attainment this academic year have continued to be monitored through the PEP process with our Key Stage (KS) 1 and 2 outcomes based on teacher assessments, as reported in the summer term and our Key Stage 4 GCSE and Key Stage 5 outcomes based on moderated teacher assessment.

Key Stage 1

100% (3 children) of the Key Stage 1 reporting cohort (Year 1 and Year 2) achieved expected standard across reading, writing and mathematics, with 43% of the entire cohort of Key Stage 1 (Year 1 and Year 2 – 7 children) achieving expected standard in reading and writing and 71% achieving expected standard in mathematics.

In terms of the end of Key Stage 1 outcomes which were based on teacher assessment, there were 2 children in the reporting cohort – 100% of whom achieved expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Key Stage 2

There were 20 children in the entire Key Stage 2 reporting cohort (Years 3-6), 70% of the whom achieved at least expected progress in reading; 55% in writing and 80% in mathematics.

Focusing on the progress of the 8 Year 6 pupils in the reporting cohort, 62.5% (5 children) achieved at least expected progress in reading and writing and 75% (6 children) achieved at least expected progress in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.

Key Stage 4

There were 20 pupils in the KS4 (Year 10 and Year 11) reporting cohort. Focusing on the achievements of the 6 Year 11 reporting cohort, 100% of our young people achieved at least one pass in GCSEs or various equivalent qualifications. Five children (83%) achieved a grade ranging from 3-6 in GCSE English Language and grade 4-7 in mathematics, with 1 young person achieving E3 in English and E1 in mathematics. Four of the young people (66.6%) achieved 4 or more passes in GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics. All 6 of our young people had successfully secured post 16 further education offers.

Key Stage 5

This year there were 26 young adults (care leavers) supported by the Virtual School in Year 13 – 1 of whom had not been in care for 12 months or more in July 2021.

Of the 25 young adults who would constitute our reporting cohort, 5 were studying towards A Level/L3 BTEC qualifications – 3 of whom have taken up places at university with the other 2 pursuing their working career or studies.

We had another 5 care leavers who were following Life Skills courses and will continue to study into Year 14. Two further care leavers were following ESOL courses and again will continue to study into Year 14. We have a further 7 care leavers who will be attending college this academic year. Five care leavers were NEET.

Our Year 12 cohort consists of 23 CLA of whom 5 came into care during the academic year; 3 of whom are engaged in ESOL courses and 2 of whom remain NEET. Of the reporting cohort of 19, 5 are studying A levels/L3 BTEC qualifications, 5 are engaged in education and training ranging from Life Skills through to L2 qualifications, 3 are employed and 5 are NEET.

Attendance and Exclusions

We are delighted that as a result of strong partnerships and swift support and intervention by the Virtual School in partnership with social care, there have been no permanent exclusions of children looked after for at least the last six years.

The overall attendance for looked after children has remained consistently high since 2014, although our attendance data has been impacted by the pandemic and the change to codes used to mark students' attendance engaging in the remote delivery of education. In

2020/21, 42% of the cohort of all children looked after achieved 95% attendance or above, with 21% achieving over 98% attendance and 3% below 50%.

Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium

In the autumn term there were 139 children and young people in our entire cohort who were eligible for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) of which 139 were undertaken – this includes 3 Early Years and 47 Post 16 PEPs.

In the spring term there were 146 children and young people in our entire cohort who were eligible for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) of which 146 were undertaken – this includes 6 Early Years and 51 Post 16 PEPs.

In the summer term there were 157 children and young people eligible for Personal Education Plans PEPs of which 155 meetings were undertaken with the young people (2 meetings being professionals only in attendance) and 157 documents completed. The PEPs undertaken in the summer included 12 Early Years and 50 Post 16 of which 17 were care leavers.

Pupil premium came under review this academic year and whilst progress and attainment data suggest that PPG is having a positive impact, we were very conscious of the differing needs that our children and young people had post lockdown and the return to the new normal at school. We were mindful that whilst the educational achievement gap may well have widened and every child will, in some way, have been impacted in terms of progress, we were also aware of the social and emotional impact the various lockdowns and changes to education may have had on our children. Schools were very supportive of our children and young people and worked collaboratively to ensure that students were able to re-engage with education and any social and emotional needs were addressed. The autumn term was very much a time of settling into the new norm and assessing levels of achievement to identify areas for support. The NTP programme was used widely by schools with PPG being used to support further tuition and, where necessary, social and emotional needs. PPG will continue to remain under review to ensure that it is being used to target individual needs and provide the most appropriate support.

Young People Aged over 16 and Care Leavers

Recognising the good practice of PEPs for CLA from Reception to 11 and the value of having a supporting network for our young people aged over 16 and care leavers, we held PEPs for all our young people until the end of Year 13 culminating in 3 PEP meetings per year. Despite the document being entitled Personal “Education” Plan, it was not a requirement for our young people to be in education, instead it was an opportunity to support our young people to achieve success on their chosen pathway or offer advice and guidance should they find themselves NEET. Previously, we ceased PEP meetings when a young person became a care leaver – i.e., when they turned 18 but this is no longer the case. In the main, the service offer has been taken up by our young people and we have adapted our PEP format to better support them this year.

Over the past 3 years, the impact of the increased focused approach when working with children looked after at post 16 and care leavers has been the increase in the proportion of young people in education and training. Over the past year, we have seen a rise in the

number of relevant, qualifying and former relevant young people becoming EET, although the number of NEET eligible young people has increased.

This year has continued to be impacted by COVID-19 with many people having been furloughed and the increasing number of job losses leading to a concern that our care leavers would be NEET. However, the figures as at the end of August 2020 would suggest otherwise, with a number of young people not only securing employment but also returning to education. As a team, and Local Authority, we have encouraged many of our young people to remain in or return to education with a view to them upskilling and preparing themselves to compete in the currently shrinking job market and an uncertain future landscape.

We continue to remain extremely conscious of the barriers to learning many young people faced throughout their educational career and are fully aware that a return to education or indeed remaining in education is a daunting prospect and one that they fear will culminate in failure. We will work closely with the DWP as mentioned earlier in this report and have been in talks with the John Lewis Partnership who approached us with their vision for creating lasting change for care experienced young people. They are looking to set up a new project, subject to final agreement, whereby they will offer job opportunities to care experienced young people who are work ready and work experience and training in employability skills for those who are not quite work ready. The John Lewis Partnership are mindful of the barriers that many care experienced young people may need support to overcome and are planning to establish a buddy system, teaming up a young person with an advocate to support them in the workplace. We are hoping that this project will receive the green light this year and we will work with the Leaving Care Service to ensure that this opportunity is capitalised upon.

Consequently, our aim continues to be that we want to get the best outcomes for our care leavers by working with them as individuals, ensuring wherever they are placed, they are engaged in education, employment or training commensurate to their ability and aspirations.

Government Response to the Pandemic

The disadvantaged cohort of children has been considered in the Government's Education Recovery programme, consequently supporting and continuing to support the educational experiences and outcomes of our CLA cohort and those children with a social worker.

The NTP – National Tuition Programme supported schools by providing access to high-quality tutoring to help pupils whose education has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence has shown that tutoring can boost progress by up to five months, with extensive evidence showing that tutoring is one of the most effective tools to support learning and accelerate pupil progress.

As part of the Education Recovery programme, the government also invested a further £1bn to support up to six million 15-hour tutoring packages for pupils who need help. The support included £222m to fund an extension to the 16–19 tutoring provision in addition to training and resources for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme.

The success of the National Tutoring Programme 2020/21 has resulted in the programme being continued for the academic year 2021/22. The programme this year, however, provides flexibility to schools in addressing the varying needs of their pupils.

Our CLA will continue to benefit from this package of support throughout the academic year 2021/22, as will other disadvantaged children whose educational outcomes and progress have been impacted by the pandemic.

A further response to the pandemic's impact on education has been the publication of the DfE Guidance "Promoting the education of children with a social worker – Virtual School Head role extension" – June 2021. In acknowledging that "Coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected all children and for many of the most vulnerable has increased barriers to education, it is essential that the cohort of children with a social worker are supported to recover from the pandemic". Consequently, from September 2021 the Virtual School Head took up a strategic leadership role in promoting the educational experiences and outcomes of the cohort of children with a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker who are aged from 0 up to 18. A Senior Education Advisor has been in post to work with the Virtual School Head to develop and implement a council-wide strategy to support this cohort of children.