

**Report of the Head of the Virtual School for Looked After Children**

**Report to LEEDS ADMISSION FORUM**

**Date: June 2011**

**Subject: EDUCATION OUTCOMES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: 2009 – 2010**

**Report author: Alun Rees**

**Contact telephone number: 75078**

---

**Does the report contain information which has been identified as confidential or exempt?**

**Yes** (if exempt, please see the public interest test in section 4)  
Relevant section of the report:  
In accordance with Access to Information Procedure Rule:

**No**, this report does not contain information identified as confidential or exempt.

---

**Is the decision eligible for call-in?**     **Yes**             **No – exempt**             **Not applicable**

---

**Summary of main issues and corporate governance considerations**

1. There are no nationally agreed, or required, performance indicators relating to looked after children's admission to school. This report summarises the outcomes of looked after children and care leavers against the educational performance indicators that have either been defined by national government or by the local authority as helpful in tracking the performance of services and agencies working with looked after children and care leavers. The data is for the most recent academic year (2009-2010) and is compiled annually each Autumn. It provides a context for the annual consideration of available admissions data for looked after children.

**Recommendations**

2. The Forum is asked to consider the main findings of this report and whether, in future, it should include an annual analysis of admissions data for looked after children completed each Autumn for the previous academic year. This would allow up-to-date admissions data to be included in the annual report to the Elected member Corporate Carer Group. It would, though, require a change in recent practice which has been for the Vulnerable Children's sub-committee to request a report in May.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

This report provides a context for the report on the admissions of looked after children to school which has been presented to the Vulnerable Children's sub-committee. It outlines the performance of looked after children and care leavers against the educational benchmarks either required for government returns or defined by the Elected Member Corporate Carer Group &/or the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership. The data is for the last complete academic year (2009-2010) and the report also identifies strategies for the continued improvement in those outcomes.

There are many Looked After Children in Leeds who make good progress against a range of educational benchmarks, and some of them achieve exceptionally well. Though overall progress remains below that of their peers it is broadly in line with available national comparative data. There have been significant changes in the way in which partners across Children Leeds collaborate to address the needs of looked after children and care leavers and this has been championed by the elected member Corporate Carer Group and other arms of the council.

There is evidence that the strategic and operational changes made in Leeds have helped to deliver improvements to outcomes for looked after children. There is also evidence of a continued narrowing of the gap between the attainment and progress of looked after children and their peers, and between looked after children's potential and actual achievement. However, this is matched by recognition of the need to continue the significant focus on improving outcomes for looked after children. The current transformation programme in Children's Services reflects this.

## **2 Background information**

Improving the outcomes of Looked After Children and Care Leavers (LAC) has been highlighted as a key issue in evaluations and Local Authority inspections

Since 2007 there has been a concerted effort to integrate and coordinate work with and for looked after children across the local authority and its partners. These changes have raised the profile of looked after children across the city; built closer working relationships between partners; raised expectations for the outcomes of the children and young people; and developed a more strategic approach to improving outcomes.

In addition to the frontline staff working across children's services to support looked after children every day, a number of senior posts and arrangements give leadership support and representation to this work. Since 2007 Leeds has had a seconded headteacher leading the Virtual School for Looked After Children. In the summer of 2010 Children's Services also appointed a new Head of Service for looked after children. Taken together these roles are helping to champion the welfare and progress of looked after children and move towards a more integrated service delivery model.

Chaired by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services, the Elected Member Corporate Carer Group acts to support and challenge services working with looked after children and care leavers. The profile of looked after children is raised through the collective and individual advocacy of Members in other areas of their work including at Area Committees.

Over the 2009-2010 academic year the Elected Member Corporate Carer Group has:

- increased the scope of its monitoring beyond those looked after children in residential care to those in other care settings, particularly in foster care;
- supported the changes that enabled the Fostering Service to continue its transformation into a service judged good across all aspects of inspection;
- supported the range of educational support now offered to looked after children, and scrutinised the impact of the Virtual School;
- challenged in those areas where looked after children continue to have outcomes below those of their peers; and,
- developed increasingly close working relationships with the Children in Care Council ('Have a Voice'). This has enabled them to hear direct from young people about the issues that concern them.

Additionally the Vulnerable Children's sub-committee of the Admissions Forum now receives annual reports each May which monitors the in-year admission of looked after children to schools.

There is a clear intention as part of the current Children's Services transformation programme to further strengthen integrated support to looked after children.

### **3 Main issues**

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COHORT**

The number of children and young people in the care of Leeds has risen from 1370 in November 2009 to 1434 in November 2010; the number peaking at 1445 in June 2010. At any time over the last year between 260 and 280 of this total have come from BME groups. Statistical comparisons are calculated in the rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 children in the general population. At 93 per 10,000, Leeds has one of the highest rates among comparator authorities. In January 2011 there were 1434 looked after children, 47 of whom are unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Of the total population approximately 24% (344) are aged 0-4 years; 25% (359) are aged 5-10 years; 32% (459) are aged 11-15 years; and 19% (272) are aged 16-17 years

The reasons children and young people become looked after are overwhelmingly related to 'abuse or neglect' (82%) while 9% result from aspects of family dysfunction/parenting issues. Of the remaining looked after children approximately 4% (up to 60 children) are unaccompanied asylum seekers and the rest comprise small numbers of disabled children (less than 20) or children of disabled parents (approximately 20) or children exhibiting socially unacceptable behaviour (less than 20)

13% of primary and 18% of secondary aged children and young people are placed outside Leeds which is an increase compared to 2009; but the large majority continue to live in, and go to school in, Leeds.

46% of school age looked after children who go to school in Leeds are in primary schools, 47% in secondary schools, and 5% in Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres. The

remaining 2% is made up of children on mainstream school or SILC rolls who are, at any one time, temporarily educated in either Pupil Referral Units or in secure establishments (Secure Children's Centres, Young Offenders Institutions or Secure Training Establishments).

The proportion of looked after children in a special needs category has fallen by 4% since 2009 to approximately 66% but this is still very much greater than the proportion among Leeds pupils as a whole (19%). The proportion of looked after children with a statement of SEN or registered as School Action Plus has fallen by a similar amount to 46%. The main need remains behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) also being significant.

53% of looked after children are in foster placements; 22% with Family Network Carers; 13% Placed with Parents; 10% are in Residential Placements and the remainder comprise those children who are either in placements awaiting the completion of the adoption process or in a secure placement at any one point in time.

In addition there are approximately 400 older care leavers aged 18-20, and nearly 50 aged 21-25.

## **EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR THE 2009 – 2010 ACADEMIC YEAR**

Both the announced inspection of services to looked after children (OfSTED, January 2010) and the recent inspection of the Fostering Service (OfSTED, June 2010) judged provision to help looked after children and young people enjoy and achieve as good. The Adoption Inspection (Ofsted January 2011) judged this element as outstanding.

Contextual Value Added (CVA) provides a way to compare groups of children and young people with different previous educational experience. It provides an estimate of progress that allows one year group to be compared with another group, even though the groups might have differing 'academic' potential.

The calculated CVA between Key Stages 1 and 2 was estimated for the first time in 2009 and yielded a value of 99.1. A score of approximately 100 is usually accepted as evidence that a cohort of children is achieving in line with expectations. The value for the 2010 looked after cohort is higher than in 2009, at 100.1.

The calculated CVA between Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2008 was 960 and in 2009 had risen to 980. In 2010 it reached 985 which, while still short of the 1000 which would suggest that the cohort was achieving as expected, does show a positive trend of improvement. It would place the Leeds Virtual School for Looked After Children 28th in a league table of Leeds High Schools based on the most recent data available, compared to 30th in 2009.

The funding provided by Education Leeds, AimHigher, and direct to the Virtual School has allowed the seconded headteacher to ensure a wide range of additional educational support and guidance has been available to looked after children which includes:

- 1-to-1 tuition by a trained teacher outside the school day;
- Saturday activities for carers and looked after children;
- homework clubs/study support supervised by undergraduates;

- individual mentoring;
- grants to schools to support children at risk of exclusion;
- book bundles distributed through a partnership with the libraries service to every Year 3 and Year 5 looked after child in a Leeds mainstream school;
- direct work with for children failing to engage with learning.

By the end of the Foundation Stage the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and reached a good level of achievement had almost tripled (from 11% in 2008, when the data was recorded separately for the first time to 30% in 2010). Though it remains significantly lower than the Leeds average (53%) the rate of improvement is markedly greater and the gap has narrowed from 37% in 2008 to 23% in 2010.

By the end of Key Stage 1 the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and achieved level 2 or above in the core subjects (61%, 54% and 63% in Reading, Writing and Maths, respectively) remains lower than all children (82%, 78 and 86%, respectively). However, Reading, Writing and Maths have increased by 12%, 11% and 14% respectively, since 2007. This is compared to broadly steady attainment over recent years by all children in Key Stage 1 indicating a narrowing of the gap between looked after and all pupils since 2007. The gap between looked after and other children in Leeds is now 4-6% narrower for each of Reading, Writing, and Maths than for England as a whole.

By the end of Key Stage 2 the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and achieved level 4 or above in the core subjects (48% in both English and Maths) remains lower than all children (80%). English and Maths have risen by 8% and 12% respectively since 2007. While the percentage achieving Level 4+ in both subjects has varied significantly since 2007 there has been only a slight upward trend since 2007. The percentage achieving level 4 in Science had risen from 48% in 2007 to 58% in 2009 but Science ceased to be tested or reported in 2010. There has been broadly steady attainment by all pupils against these measures in recent years which has led to a narrowing of the gap at the end of Key Stage 2 between looked after and all pupils. The gap between looked after children and other children in Leeds is now 4% narrower for English than for England as a whole, while for Maths it remains 2% larger.

By the end of Key Stage 4 the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and sat at least one qualification rose from 66% in 2008 to 90% in 2010. Those achieving 1+A\*-G rose from 62% in 2007 to 82% in 2010 and those achieving 5A\*-G from 39% to 57% over the same period. Those achieving 5A\*-C increased from 13% in 2007 to 35% in 2010 and those achieving 5A\*-C, including English and Maths, rose from 4% to 14%. In Leeds the gap in attainment between looked after and all children is now 4% narrower for the 5A+-G benchmark than for England as a whole. For 5+A\*-C is 8% narrower and for 5+A\*-C (including English and Maths) it is 5% narrower than for England as a whole.

Only 35% of the 2009-2010 Year 11 cohort were not on the SEN Register, 10% were at the School Action level of intervention; 30% at School Action Plus and the remaining 25% had Statements of Special Education Needs.

Primary school attendance by looked after children (96.0%) has changed very little since 2007 but remains 1.7% higher than that of all children (94.3%). Persistent Absence among looked after children in primary school has declined further in 2010 (to 0.8%) compared to 2.5% among all children (all attendance data available for half-terms 1 – 4 of the last academic year). Attendance is very similar for every year group in the primary phase.

Secondary school attendance by looked after children (89.7%) remains lower than that of all children (91.6%) but has improved by 1.1% since 2007 compared to a 0.1% increase for all pupils. This narrowing of the gap in secondary attendance is also reflected in the rate of Persistent Absence among looked after children in secondary school. Though it remains high at 12.4% but this is a significant decrease from 13.2% in 2009 and 18.0% in 2007 and illustrates a narrowing of the gap with all pupils from 8.2% in 2007 to 5.0% in 2010 (all attendance data available for half-terms 1 – 4 of the last academic year).

The number of looked after children permanently excluded from Leeds schools has been reduced from eight in 2006-2007 to zero in 2009-2010 (there were, though, two permanent exclusions from an Academy).

Rates of fixed term exclusion remain significantly higher for looked after children however the total number of days that looked after children lost to exclusion continued to fall, from 1094 in 2007 to 665.5 in 2009.

Analysis of the outcomes of Year 11 in the Summer of 2010 have confirmed the value of specific educational support to looked after children in that their CVA (a measure of how close they came to meeting their potential) was higher than that for the cohort as a whole (approximately 985):

- Tuition during Key Stage 4: CVA was 998
- Mentoring: CVA was 1020
- Study Support: CVA was 1012

Looked after children are prioritised by Connexions Personal Advisors (PA) working in schools. Every Year 11 looked after child was offered appointments with a Connexions PA and the great majority accessed the service.

The percentage of looked after children who reached the end of Year 11 in the Summer of 2010 and were in education, training or employment (EET) in September 2010 was 88% (116 young people). This is a rise of 3% from the figure of 85% at the same point in 2009 and 9% higher than in 2008. While this is still well below the EET figure for all children it is another significant improvement and is most likely related to the significant improvement GCSE or equivalent qualifications.

Of the 85% who were EET in October 2009 the significant majority remain engaged with education, employment or training (77%) a year later. This is particularly true of the young people who had had statements of special educational needs while at school. All but 4 of the 27 children with a statement remain engaged with EET a year after leaving school.

There is significant support through AimHigher programmes that has resulted in 32 care leavers being in higher education or embarked on higher degrees. This includes 10 first year undergraduates in October 2010.

The agreed protocol between the Leeds Colleges and CYPSC has been in place for nearly 3 years and has led to better partnership working with FE providers. There is now specific training offered to the Colleges by the Virtual School and a 'Designated Tutor' has been identified in each college to act as a focus for support to looked after children and as an advocate for them. The Virtual School also provides the colleges with information that enables them to identify looked after children at 16+.

## **FOCUS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

The pattern of attendance at secondary school is very similar for looked after children and their non-looked after peers. It is only in Year 10, and markedly in Year 11, that the gap widens significantly. This does not reflect a falling off of attendance among looked after children who had attended well through primary school. Significant numbers of young people who failed to attend regularly in Year 10 and 11 had come into care in Year 9 or later and many had records of poor attendance prior to coming into care. There is good evidence, therefore, that it takes several years of stable care to impact on school attendance but it may also indicate that the Virtual School and its partners should invest more attention in teenagers who come into care in year 9 or later.

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) process has been thoroughly reviewed in partnership with the Independent Reviewing Officer team to sharpen its form and function and streamline plan completion through more effective links to existing school planning processes. It also reduces the administrative burden to schools and other professionals. The year from January 2011 will see the new process implemented as care reviews become due, with a review of the revised process at the end of the Summer Term of 2011.

One-to-one tuition by a trained teacher had a direct positive effect. The contextual value added (CVA) of the 27 Year 11 students who received tuition during their GCSE programmes was 998 compared to 985 for the whole Year 11 cohort.

Despite the very significant in-year cut in the area based grant in the Summer of 2010 (which removed 40% of the budget allocated to one-to-one tuition) up to 80 looked after children continued to benefit from tuition at any one time. This is, though, a marked decline from the 200 children and young people who were receiving tuition at any one time prior to that cut and is likely to impact on future outcomes if the funding is not maintained.

## **4 Corporate governance considerations**

### **Risk management**

While the changing governance arrangements being offered to schools will change the relationship of the local authority with them there are no published plans to significantly change the statutory obligations of schools to looked after children.

### **Public Interest Test**

Not applicable

## **Forward Plan**

Not applicable

## **Scrutiny process: Call-In**

Not applicable

## **Constitution and legal matters**

Not applicable

## **Financial and resource implications**

The support of the educational outcomes of looked after children described in this report has been prioritised for funding over recent years. The case for continued prioritisation on the basis of value for money will be made through the current budget re-basing process within Children's Services.

## **Equality and Diversity and Cohesion and Integration**

Additional analysis of educational outcomes has been provided to the Children's Services Equalities Board.

While the number of children from BME backgrounds in any looked after children's year group is too small to allow for a statistically significant analysis their progress is monitored through the year in collaboration with their schools.

A complete analysis of the outcomes of looked after children at different stages of the SEN Code of Practice is completed annually and their progress monitored in-year.

Additional analysis is completed annually which compares the outcomes and progress of children of different genders, those from different care placement types and those with coming into care at different ages.

## **Council policies and City priorities**

Looked after children remain a high priority for the City as reflected in the current Children and Young People's Plan.

## **Consultation**

Not applicable

## **5 Recommendations**

The Forum is asked to consider the main findings of this report and whether, in future, it should include an annual analysis of admissions data for looked after children completed each Autumn for the previous academic year. This would allow up-to-date admissions data to be included in the annual report to the Elected member Corporate Carer Group. It would, though, require a change in recent practice which has been for the Vulnerable Children's sub-committee to request a report in May.



## 6 Background documents

None are attached but the complete statistical analysis of educational outcomes is available from the report's author.

The separate report to the Challenging and Vulnerable Children's Sub Committee on **'Trends in the Admission of Looked After Children 2008 – 2011'** should be considered alongside this broader contextual report.