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| Virtual School Annual Report – 2020/2021  (Report completed August 2021) |

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# executive summary

There has been significant progress with the Virtual School during the academic year 2020/21.

**Headline of process changes within Virtual School**

* The Virtual School will be launching a new model in September 2021; there is a need to increase its remit and have a more strategic overview, which means additional capacity is required. The new proposal reviews the way in which the Pupil Premium funding is distributed and that the amount to schools is amended so that the top-slice amount of Pupil Premium funding held centrally increases from £175 to £550 per child, per year.
* The new model includes qualified teachers for both primary and secondary, providing additional expertise and support for children with particularly challenging needs.
* From September 2021 we will launch a new attendance monitoring tool through Capita One to capture daily attendance of all our looked after children, particularly focusing on those placed out of borough.
* From September 2021 we will launch the new PEP pro-forma through Liquid Logic’s delegation portal to enable designated teachers to take a lead, chair and complete termly PEPs, ensuring each document is a robust, working and living document.
* In January 2021 the Virtual School launched the Nurture Provision framework which will have a range of tuition and mentoring providers who will be able to offer a bespoke package of 1:1 tuition or mentoring.
* The Virtual School Head effectively maintains an up-to-date roll of all Bolton’s looked after children; we have increased the school match between the One System and Liquid Logic from 80% in December 2020 to 99.5% in September 2021.
* Termly Designated Teacher Forums for Primary and Secondary schools.
* Training packages have been designed which ensure key people are informed of the processes of monitoring LAC performance. The Designated Teacher Forum was launched within the summer term for all DTs in Bolton and those out of borough. VSH is a key member of social care staff engagement sessions, running regular training sessions for social workers, including ‘Voice of the Child’ and ePEP training.
* The Virtual School Head is now line managed by the Assistant Director of Education and Inclusive Learning.
* The Virtual School Head attends SSMT (Staying Stay Management Team) and contributes within the Social Care Forum.

# Introduction

The statutory duties of the Virtual School Head include the production of an annual report to inform key stakeholders about the work of the Virtual School over the course of the academic year. The following report is a summary of work undertaken and the achievements of looked after and previously looked after children whose education we oversee.

The 2020/21 academic year has been unprecedented in the challenges that our social workers, schools and pupils have faced due to Covid-19 and the resulting school closures. In the Virtual School we have been required to rethink the way we work, from considering the availability of technology for our children and their access to home learning, to working with colleagues to ensure that effective Personal Education Plan meetings can continue to be held ‘virtually’.

Looked after children have been eligible to attend school throughout the lockdown period and the Virtual School has offered support to social workers and schools to encourage attendance to school, however, we understand that each family would have individual circumstances that would need to be considered. With so many of our children home learning, the Virtual School recognised the important role a tutor or mentor might play in supporting children and carers, and we launched the Nurture Provision in January 2020 which gave us easy access to a range of tuition and mentoring services. By the end of the summer term, 25 children were accessing the Nurture Provision through online or face-to-face tuition.

The Virtual School also recognised the importance of communication with designated teachers during this challenging period and in July 2021 we launched our first ‘virtual’ Designated Teachers’ Forums for both Primary and Secondary. Our first Designated Teachers’ Forums were well attended with over 70 schools represented at the sessions, and feedback was extremely positive with one designated teacher commenting, “thank you for the introduction, it’s really exciting to hear all the changes”. The Designated Teacher Forum will continue to run virtually on a termly basis throughout the next academic year with one annual face to face forum for both primary and secondary designated teachers.

Bolton’s Virtual School knows how important it is to be part of the national conversation, engaging with partners to promote the education of looked after and previously looked after children. We are now a member of the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) to ensure we are kept up to date with changes to statutory guidance and to offer additional training and support to the team and other key stakeholders. The key charitable objectives of NAVSH are supporting research and continued professional development for Virtual School Heads and others who work with looked after and previously looked after children. During the course of the year NAVSH has developed research on the impact of Pupil Premium funding, supported a post-graduate qualification in the education of care experienced pupils and completed a ‘peer review’ pilot of virtual schools to get a better understanding of what a ‘good’ virtual school looks like.

As Bolton’s Virtual School moves into a new academic year, we continue to focus on our core objective – to promote the education of Bolton’s looked after and previously looked after children, whether this is through developing more robust PEPs, offering training and support to schools, social workers and carers, or offering bespoke support to individuals who are at important stages of their education such as Reception, Year 6 and Year 11.

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| ***“All children to have the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed and be happy”.***  ***Bolton’s Vision 2030*** |

# Virtual School Team structure

Bolton’s Virtual School has recently undergone a review to ensure our department supports the Bolton Vision 2030, wanting “all children to have the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed and be happy.” This is of importance to those children and young people who are in the care of the local authority and for whom Bolton is the Corporate Parent.

The Virtual School will be launching a new model in September 2021; there is a need to increase its remit and have a more strategic overview, which means additional capacity is required. The new proposal reviews the way in which the Pupil Premium funding is distributed and that the amount to schools is amended so that the top-slice amount of Pupil Premium funding held centrally increases from £175 to £550 per child, per year.

The new model includes qualified teachers for both primary and secondary, providing additional expertise and support for children with particularly challenging needs. The Virtual School team will continue to ensure every child has a sense of belonging and feels part of a school setting or college community irrespective of background, needs or culture, to enable them to achieve positive outcomes.  The VS team plays a key role in delivering The Belonging in Bolton Strategy, to ensure that all young people are ready for the next phase of their learning or transition, and to support them in developing a new sense of belonging in their new environment.

The new model includes a Deputy Virtual School Head, who will line-manage the Primary PEP Lead, Secondary PEP Lead, Post-16 Advisor and SEND Lead. One of their main responsibilities will be to ensure termly PEP meetings take place and that PEP meetings are useful and purposeful, ensuring the PEP document is a robust, living and working document. Both Primary and Secondary PEP Leads are accomplished, trained teachers and can demonstrate strong subject and curriculum knowledge. They will oversee, attend and support schools in the completion of PEP meetings, ensuring each Bolton LAC has a termly PEP meeting.

To ensure that our most vulnerable cohort is supported, the role of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Lead will be the main link between the Virtual School and SEND team. The SEND Lead will support children through the Education, Health & care (EHC) Plan assessment pathway, working with other local authorities and ensuring there is no drift or delay.

Our Post-16 Advisor is vital for children to achieve future aspirations and to prevent our most vulnerable young people from becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). The Post-16 Advisor will oversee pupils aged 16-18 years old living in Bolton, including our out-of-borough young people. They will ensure termly PEP meetings are completed and that the Post-16 PEP document is a robust, living and working document. They will work closely with the Leaving Care Team and link directly with Connexions, ensuring that we are supporting the educational needs of our post-16 cohort and continuing to work towards aspirational targets.

From September 2021 the three existing Looked After Children (LAC) Education Advisors will each focus on a particular specialism: Early Years Lead and well-being mentor, Transitions Lead and KS4 Mentor, Previously Looked After Lead and Education Opportunities Coordinator. Our Early Years Lead and well-being mentor will oversee the Early Years looked after children cohort of around 60 children aged between 2 and 4 years old, supporting early years providers, ensuring that termly Early Years PEP meetings are completed and that the PEP is a robust, living and working document. The early years providers will ensure each school child has a well-planned transition to primary school and there is structured support from agencies when required. The advisor will lead on emotion coaching, 1-1 mentoring, focusing on the emotional literacy program, supporting the mental health of some of our most vulnerable pupils.

Our Transitions Lead and KS4 mentor will support KS4 pupils, preparing our young people for adulthood and ensuring we continue to have high aspirations within post-16. The advisor will oversee and monitor KS4, focusing on year 11 pupils, ensuring each one has an identified post-16 destination, including young people placed out of borough. The advisor will also support both the transition of year 6 pupils into secondary education and year 11 into post-16 education, training or employment.

The Previously Looked After Lead (PLAC) and education opportunities coordinator will offer advice and guidance to schools within Bolton, supporting senior leads within school to develop practice and the PLAC offer within school. In the first 12 months the focus will be building relationships and becoming a member of the Greater Manchester PLAC working party linked to Adoption Counts and other North-West Virtual Schools. The advisor will also play an important role in raising the profile of Bolton’s Virtual School, leading on education opportunities for our looked after children. From September 2021 we will offer at least two university visits for our year 11 and 12 pupils, engagement and mentoring events including a range of primary activities such as literacy interventions.

**Virtual School Team Structure – September 2021**

# Virtual School roll

## Our cohort

At the end of 2020/21 academic year there were 564 looked after children on Bolton’s Virtual School roll. At the end of the academic year there were 403 looked after children in Reception to Year 11 attending 168 separate schools in 25 local authorities.

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| Cohort Range  (data collected 10th August 2021) | Total number of pupils |
| **Early Years (from birth to pre-school)** | **109** |
| **Primary School Age** | **188** |
| **Secondary School Age** | **215** |
| **Post-16** | **53** |

## Ofsted ratings

The statutory guidance ‘Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children’ states that schools judged by Ofsted to be ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ should be prioritised for looked after children in need of a new school and that, unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, looked after children should never be placed in a school judged to be ‘Inadequate’. At the end of the academic year, 80% of Bolton’s looked after children in Reception to Year 11 attended ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ schools, 18% of Bolton’s looked after children attended schools rated to be ‘Outstanding’.

The chart below shows the proportion of pupils attending schools with identified Ofsted ratings:

Where a child already attends a school which is judged to be less than ‘Good’ before becoming a looked after child or the school receives a lower grade at inspection whilst the pupil is already at the school, the Virtual School Head must consider whether a fall in Ofsted grading would justify disrupting a child’s education with a school move.

## ATTAINMENT 2020/21

## Phonics Screening Test

The Phonics Screening test became a statutory requirement in 2012, however this year the screening did not take place due to school closures. The test is usually taken by pupils in Year 1 and aims to assess a child’s ability to decode words using only his or her phonic knowledge. The test is an indictor as to whether children have met expected standards at the end of year 1.

**Attainment at Key Stage 2**

In 2021 SATs exams did not take place due to school closures, but pupils were allocated results based on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). Pupils in Year 6 would have been assessed in Reading, Writing and Maths, had final assessments taken place. Pupils are either assessed as working towards expected standard, working at the expected standard or working at greater depth at the expected standard. There were 39 pupils looked after on roll at the end of the Summer Term 2021.

## Attainment at Key Stage 4

This report was compiled with the data received in respect of the GCSE results for the cohort of year 11 pupils in the academic year 2020/21. In 2021 GCSE exams did not take place due to school closures, but pupils were allocated results based on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). It has been reported that GCSE results nationally have been relatively stable at grade 4 and above compared to 2020 (76.9% in 2021 compared with 75.9% in 2020, and 67.1% in 2019).

**Year 11 characteristics**

* There were 37 looked after pupils in Year 11 this year who were due to sit GCSE exams.
* There were 31 pupils who had been looked after for 12 months as of 31st March 2020 and will be within our measured cohort which would have been reported nationally.
* 75.6% reside in Bolton with the remaining 24.4% living out of borough.
* 62.2% of the cohort were male and 37.8% female.
* 60% of Year 11s were accessing mainstream school in Year 11.
* 24.3% of Year 11s have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
* 6 year 11 pupils (16%) were on roll at an alternative provision.
* 95% of the year 11 cohort received a GCSE or registered qualification.

**English and Mathematics**

The percentage of pupils who achieved a Grade 4 or above in English and Maths increased significantly this year for our full and measured cohort. This is particularly important for our children as this means they will no longer be required to study these subjects in Further Education.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Number of pupils in GCSE cohort | % 9-4 in English | % 9-4 in Mathematics | % 9-4 in English & Mathematics |
| **2021** | 37 | 32% | 24% | 22% |
| **2020** | 50 | 18% | 18% | 18% |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Number of pupils in GCSE cohort | % 9-1 in English | % 9-1 in Mathematics | % 9-1 in English & Mathematics |
| **2021** | 37 | 59% | 68% | 68% |
| **2020** | 50 | 50% | 52% | 50% |

The below graphs show the distribution of GCSE grades attained across the full year 11 cohort for English Language, English Literature and Mathematics.

**Measured Cohort**

The measured cohort (looked after for 12 months as of 31st March 2021) achieved higher grades in English and Maths than those who had become looked after more recently.

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| Measured Cohort | Number of pupils in GCSE cohort | % 9-4 in English | % 9-4 in Mathematics | % 9-4 in English & Mathematics |
| **2021** | 31 | 35% | 24% | 24% |
| **2020** | 37 | 16% | 16% | 16% |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Number of pupils in GCSE cohort | % 9-1 in English | % 9-1 in Mathematics | % 9-1 in English & Mathematics |
| **2021** | 31 | 65% | 81% | 65% |
| **2020** | 37 | 51% | 51% | 51% |

The below graphs show the distribution of GCSE grades attained across the measured cohort for English Language, English Literature and Mathematics.

**Attainment 8**

Attainment 8 is an average score across eight subjects taken at GCSE, which includes English and Mathematics. Bolton’s average Attainment 8 score this academic year was 44.5, in line with last year. In 2019, the national average Attainment 8 score for looked after children was 19.1.

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|  | Number of Pupils in Cohort | Average A8 | Number of Pupils CLA 12 months cohort (measured cohort) | Average A8 |
| **2021** | 37 | 16.04 | 31 | 17.25 |

**Post-16 - Next destinations**

95% of the year 11 cohort have an identified post-16 destination; we currently have two young people identified as being NEET in September, the Virtual School team is working closely with the Connexions team and Leaving Care to support both young people to identify an appropriate next step. The Virtual School team has a newly appointed Post-16 Lead and Key Stage 4 mentor who will work in partnership with Connexions to identify any pupils at risk of being NEET to help support them into education, employment or training. We have a further 8 young people who have been identified as being at risk of becoming NEET within the autumn term; our Post-16 Lead will prioritise these young people, attending their Post-16 PEP meeting to offer additional support and to identify any potential risk or concerns.

We have two young people who are to continue their education within sixth form to study A-Levels; we have 15 young people who have enrolled into college to study a level 2 course, and 9 pupils who are studying level 1; 3 young people will be starting an apprenticeship or traineeship.

**Good News Stories**

During lockdown, one of our year 11 pupils completed online lessons and was fully engaged with his timetable, lessons and learning. Unfortunately, once he returned to school he struggled to engage in lessons, and soon became at risk of exclusion. The Virtual School Head worked closely with the social worker, foster carer and Headteacher to prevent further exclusions and Bobby accessed 6 hours or weekly tuition through the Nurture Provision to help support Bobby within school. The additional tuition offered 1:1 tuition within school, supporting teaching staff to complete outstanding coursework. On results day, pupil A achieved his expected target grades, achieving GCSE 4s in both English and Maths! We are proud to say that he has recently enrolled at Burnley College to study a level 2 Engineering course to help achieve his long-term goal of becoming a commercial driver.

Another year 11 pupil achieved amazing results this year, achieving GCSE 7 in both English and Maths! Throughout year 11, she has worked tirelessly to achieve her target grades and we are really proud to say she has enrolled at Pendleton College to study A-Levels and has ambitions to study Law at university to achieve her long-term goal to work within family law.

# Attendance

## Attendance during Covid-19

In March 2020 we had 447 Primary and Secondary looked after children in Bolton; the Virtual School team worked closely with our schools and social workers to closely monitor the attendance of our children. School attendance during the spring term lockdown has been positive with around 57% of our children continuing to attend school on a full or part-time basis. This is in comparison with around 45% of children with a social worker nationally.

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| **Primary** | **Total of children - 202** |
| In school full-time | 143 – 71% |
| In school part-time | 11 – 5% |
| Learning from home | 48 – 24% |

**Primary attendance data**

**Secondary aged pupils**

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| **Secondary** | **Total of children - 225** |
| In school full-time | 88 – 39% |
| In school part-time | 13 – 6% |
| Learning from home | 124 – 55% |

Following further lockdown restrictions in January, the Virtual School team continued to monitor the attendance of all Bolton’s looked after children. The team worked with schools, carers and social workers to identify our children who have continued to attend school on either a full or part time basis and the reasons for the cohort of children who have worked from home.

In line with updated DfE guidance, the Virtual School provided operational advice and support to social workers, foster carers and all designated teachers, alongside an attendance decision-making tool to help support professionals in deciding what is in the child/young person’s best interests. The Virtual School monitored weekly attendance of all school aged children within primary and secondary school, identifying all children who have continued to attend school and those who have been learning from home. Alongside the weekly monitoring, the Virtual School Head worked closely with social care team managers and social workers to include a risk assessment of each child and include the social worker’s visiting regime.

## Attendance

A key area of development is to ensure the Virtual School has an effective and robust attendance monitoring system in place to monitor daily attendance of all Bolton’s looked after children, including those placed out of borough. From September 2021 we will launch a new attendance monitoring tool through Capita One to capture daily attendance of all our looked after children, particularly focusing on those placed out of borough.

The Capita One tool will allow the Virtual School team to monitor daily attendance of all looked after children. All schools in Bolton already send weekly attendance data for all their children and this is imported into LCS (Liquid Logic system for social care staff to view). This updated tool will provide a portal to school to input daily attendance data; it will collect data for out of borough schools, including alternative provision. Improving our attendance monitoring system will enable us to proactively identity attendance trends for individual children, challenge exclusions and offer additional support to our children and young people who are at risk of persistent absence.

# Exclusions

There were no permanent exclusions in 2020/21, but there were a number of cases where the Virtual School Head intervened, in line with the national guidance on exclusions, to support or coordinative an alternative package of education to avoid a permanent exclusion.

The rate of Fixed Term Exclusions was lower this academic year due to school closures. Over the last academic year, we have had a total of 209 days of fixed term exclusions, with the majority being 1 day FTE. The Virtual School launched the Nurture Provision in January 2021 to offer additional and wraparound support for any looked after children at risk of exclusion, in partnership with the Re-Engagement team. We have started to see a reduction in exclusions and schools are becoming more pro-active in involving the Virtual School at an early point to support with preventative interventions before the point of exclusion. The Virtual School Head is a key member within Bolton’s School Support Reform agenda to improve inclusive practice within Bolton’s schools.

# Personal Education plans (pepS)

The updated guidance, ‘Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children’ was published in February 2018. This statutory guidance emphasises the importance of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) as an integral part of the Care Plan for all looked after children. The quality of the PEP is a joint responsibility between the local authority which looks after the child and the school they attend. Guidance states that PEPs must be updated on a termly basis by the Designated Teacher for all children from pre-school to the age of 18.

PEP meetings usually take place at least once a term, however, the current model within Bolton is at least every six months. Our biggest focus from September 2021 is the improvement and development of our Personal Education Plans (PEPs), ready for the new academic year. There will be three differentiated documents: early years to reception, year 1 to year 11 and Post-16. The PEP document will provide opportunities to capture the voice of the child throughout and will include a minimum of three SMART and outcome focused targets - with pupil premium funding directly linking to appropriate resources, clearly showing how identified resources will raise attainment. The new PEP pro-forma will be designed within Liquid Logic’s delegation portal to enable designated teachers to take a lead, chair and complete termly PEPs, ensuring each document is a robust, working and living document. The newly appointed Deputy Head, Secondary/Primary PEP caseworkers and post-16 advisor will directly support schools with completing PEP meetings on a termly basis.

The Virtual School is unable to attend all PEP meetings and the criteria for Virtual School involvement in PEPs is as follows:

1. New case on Virtual School roll.
2. School placement move.
3. Pupils educated out of borough
4. ‘Red’ rated case (concerns raised at education referral meeting (ERM) or due to poor attendance/engagement/school rated less than ‘good’ by Ofsted.
5. Need for independent chair due to professional disagreement (e.g Pupil Premium)
6. Key year groups such as Year 11 or Year 6.

At the end of the academic year the PEP completion rate was 80%. There are currently 84 pupils with a PEP not updated in the last 6 months; the newly allocated PEP caseworkers will unsure these pupils are prioritized and ensure an autumn term PEP meeting is arranged.

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| **Team** | **No PEP Recorded** | **PEP not updated in last 6 months** | **PEP up to date** | **Total** |
| **Assessment Team 3** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** |
| **Children with Disability Team** | **0** | **6** | **22** | **28** |
| **Court Team 1 (Safeguarding)** | **0** | **6** | **20** | **26** |
| **Court Team 2 (Safeguarding)** | **0** | **6** | **6** | **12** |
| **Leaving Care Team** | **0** | **22** | **49** | **71** |
| **Looked After Children Team 1** | **0** | **19** | **81** | **100** |
| **Looked After Children Team 2** | **0** | **8** | **100** | **108** |
| **Looked After Children Team 3** | **0** | **11** | **78** | **89** |
| **Safeguarding Team 2** | **0** | **5** | **2** | **7** |
| **Safeguarding Team 3** | **0** | **1** | **5** | **6** |
| **Safeguarding Team 4** | **0** | **0** | **3** | **3** |
| **Total** | **0** | **84** | **363** | **451** |

## Quality Assurance

From September 2021 the Virtual School will start to use the Ofsted grading system to quality assure completed PEP documents throughout the academic year. There will be a particular focus on target setting which is expected to be SMART and outcome focused with identified impact measures to evidence process. Through the quality assurance process the Virtual School will be able to identify schools with PEPs rated ‘Requires Improvement’ or ‘Inadequate’ and the Virtual School Head and Deputy Head can target bespoke group or 1:1 training with designated teachers.

# PUPIL PREMIUM FUNDING

The conditions of Grant for Pupil Premium state that funding for looked after children should be managed by the Virtual School Head. This means that Bolton’s Virtual School is responsible for monitoring and auditing the use of this funding and ensuring that the money makes a real difference to the individual children looked after by Bolton local authority. Pupil Premium for looked after children cannot be carried forward into a new financial year and must be spent before the end of March or returned to the Department for Education.

This academic year has seen the Virtual School establish a clear budget; this leaves the Virtual School in a strong position to track spending against outcomes moving into the next academic year. The Virtual School has monthly meetings with finance to ensure that the budget is managed appropriately and that the outcomes for our looked after children are evidenced and targeted. In April 2021, following consultation with key stake members, the top-slice of PPG was increased to £550 per child per annum, to establish a new Virtual School team and increase its overall capacity.

Schools are currently allocated the £1795 in two instalments. However, schools make requests for additional funding. The breakdown of costings is directly linked to SMART targets within the PEP document, enabling the Virtual School to evidence outcomes effectively, using a focused approach to intervention.

**TRAINING**

In the Summer term the Virtual School started to develop a range of training programmes ready to launch in the new academic year for foster carers, designated teachers and social workers.

## Foster Carers

The Virtual School Head is now working in partnership with the fostering team to develop a termly two-hour training session which will sit within the foster carers’ training framework. The session will be interactive and will focus on empowering our carers to be confident advocates for Bolton’s looked after children. The session will provide carers with the opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, discuss barriers and how to overcome these. The training session will also provide a good understanding of the role of the Virtual School, how to use the PEP document within the home and the important role of the foster carer in supporting our children’s education.

## Designated Teachers

The Virtual School also recognised the importance of communication with designated teachers during this challenging period and in July 2021 we launched our first ‘virtual’ Designated Teachers’ Forums for both Primary and Secondary. Our first Designated Teachers’ Forums were well attended with over 70 schools represented at the sessions and feedback was extremely positive, with one designated teacher commenting “thank you for the introduction, it’s really exciting to hear all the changes”. The Designated Teacher Forum will continue to run virtually on a termly basis throughout the next academic year, with one annual face to face forum for both Primary and Secondary Designated Teachers.

This academic year we will be offering online PEP training, specifically focused on SMART target setting and ensuring the child’s voice is evident within the PEP document. The session will discuss why we set SMART targets to monitor progress and measure impact. From the autumn term, the team will start to visit schools to offer bespoke 1:1 training to offer additional advice and guidance regarding: special educational needs, alternative education, emotional well-being and reviewing the statutory roles and responsibilities of the designated teacher.

## Social workers

Throughout the academic year the Virtual School Head has attended social care team meetings to develop relationships with social workers and raise the profile of the Bolton Virtual School. The Virtual School Head works closely with the Principal Social Worker to develop education training, and during the summer term completed a two-hour training session during practice week, focusing on the voice of the child. From September 2021 the Virtual School will offer a one-hour training session to socials workers new in post, focusing on the role of the Virtual School, support they can access, statutory guidance, and the role of the social worker in supporting the education of looked after children.

**NURTURE PROVISION**

In January 2021 the Virtual School launched the Nurture Provision Framework which will have a range of tuition and mentoring providers who will be able to offer a bespoke package of 1:1 tuition or mentoring. The Nurture Provision will only be used in exceptional circumstances and led by the Virtual School Head. The Nurture Provision should only be used as short-term support whilst long-term options are implemented. The purpose of the Nurture Provision will be to support pupils who are at risk from becoming disengaged within their education. There are various reasons why pupils may need to access the Nurture Provision such as to support the transition of a placement move, wraparound support to stop exclusions or to help support in the interim where a pupil may be struggling to access mainstream education.

The Virtual School now has a greater range of flexibility in the bespoke package we can coordinate whilst continuing to ensure that the provision we commission is of high standard and cost effective. From January 2021, approximately 389 sessions of tuition took place with 22 pupils. This support was provided by six different providers.

**Use of the Nurture Provision**

The Nurture Provision is intended to offer a package of tuition or mentoring services bespoke to the child/young person’s needs. The Nurture Provision will only be used in exceptional circumstances and led by the Virtual School Head. The Nurture Provision should only be used as short-term support whilst long-term options are implemented.

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***Nurture Provision is not intended to replace, duplicate or substitute the services or support that the local authority, schools, carers or other practitioners already provide for looked after children or as universal services for all children in their area. The Nurture Provision is intended to provide additional, personalized support to looked after children who have been identified as at risk of becoming disengaged within education. Support should be tailored to their individual needs.***

**Criteria**

The Nurture Provision should only be used in exceptional circumstances when all other resources have been exhausted or to prevent a child/young person from reaching crisis point.

Examples of criteria are below. Please contact the Virtual School team for any case-level discussion before submitting a referral.

* **Any child/young person at risk from exclusion.**
* **Transition support during a placement move.**
* **Out of borough children/young people who are not able to access school.**
* **If a child/young person is struggling to access mainstream school and waiting for an SEN school to be identified.**

**Applying for Nurture Provision**

A PEP meeting must take place prior to a referral being made (unless in exceptional circumstances). The PEP document should set out their progress to date, identify their strengths and needs and set individualised learning targets. The PEP should include a pupil’s wider progress and wellbeing, as well as purely academic achievement.

* **Referral to the Education Referral panel**
* **Contact Virtual School Head directly**

A request form (Appendix A) should be completed by the social worker and signed off by their line manager. This can then be forwarded to the Virtual Head via the Virtual School inbox. The PEP should clearly identify what the needs of the individual child/young person are and why these cannot be met through other sources of funding e.g. PPG.

**Education Psychology**

(Report written by Education Psychologist, Julie Alfrey. August 2021)

In the last academic year before the COVID pandemic restrictions on schools, Bolton EPS delivered 411 hours of educational psychology time for the Bolton Virtual School. Educational Psychology services were delivered by a specialist LAC EP, senior EP and an assistant EP.

The following academic year was more difficult to document as many schools were closed for long periods and there were restrictions on the way all services were working due to the pandemic. In this time period however, EPS delivered approximately 180 hours of Educational Psychology time for the Bolton Virtual School. This was mainly in the form of Educational Psychologists working from home and delivering services via telephone and Microsoft Teams. It has been possible to carry on delivering a service with an increased emphasis on providing consultations to carers and school staff, including a commissioned service from Adoption Now.

In the academic year since April 2021 160 hrs of EPS time were delivered to looked after children’s services. As this is a period of social recovery following the COVID pandemic it may be more useful to look at a wider time range.

In the year since January 2021 (8 months) our services have gradually increased towards pre-COVID restrictions levels and EPS delivered 193 (to august 31st) hours of Educational Psychology time for the Bolton Virtual School. (As a prorated calculation, this is equivalent to approximately 290 hours over a 12-month period).

The work this from January this year has impacted upon the following numbers of children, young people and schools:

* A total of 21 LAC cases were opened with the EPS for direct work or consultation work between January and August 2021
* Of these, 13 children and young people have had Educational Psychology involvement at an investigative plan-do-review level (supporting school with strategies following initial assessments of need)
* Assessment of 8 young people has led to EHCP assessments and subsequent plans
* 15 looked after children and young people have been discussed through joint working with CAMHS on facilitated problem solving meetings with carers, social workers and school staff.

In this academic year we have recruited two new members of staff to our service; one part time EP with capacity for LAC work and one assistant EP with experience in working with emotionally dysregulated young people. Our plan for the following academic year 2021-2022 is to increase capacity building though training for schools and facilitation work with foster carers and young people.

Educational Opportunities

Nurturing the aspirations of our looked after children is something that the Virtual School considers to be critical to instilling the drive to succeed. From September 2021 our Education Opportunities Coordinator will develop aspirational opportunities for our looked after children by working collaboratively with PEP Leads to identify opportunities for individual children, working with local providers to create events and courses.

## A picture containing text, clipart Description automatically generatedPower 2

Teens and Toddlers (Power 2) is a 16-week course, focusing on helping young people to succeed at school by mentoring a nursery child. During the course, they are a role model to a child in a nursery, supporting their learning and development. Pupils also take part in reflective group learning sessions which include specialised coaching to boost their self-confidence and raise aspirations. Upon successful completion, they gain a national qualification in Interpersonal Skills (NCFE Level 1). One of our young people who had previously taken part has gone on to complete the Young Leaders programme. This individual has been involved in the Northern Powerhouse Education, Employment and Skills Summit where some very relevant and interesting questions were asked to TalkTalk’s Chief People Officer Daniel Kasmir and Andy Burnham, Metro Mayor of Greater Manchester.

## Success4Life (run by GM Higher)

Success4Life (run by GM Higher) is a programme designed to enhance self-development, enabling young people to realise their strengths and skills through building confidence and exploring their aspirations. They participate in group work to help motivate and inspire them in their development and progression, raising awareness of Higher Education throughout the programme.

Early Years – LAC School Readiness Project 2017/19

(Executive Overview written by Vicky Lever – Project Coordinator, October 2020)

The project focused on two cohorts of children Cohort 1 EYFS - preschool children and Cohort 2 children in primary school with an SDQ over 17. The aim of the Project was to improve ‘School Readiness’ for LAC by assisting and coordinating social workers, educationalist, carers and other relevant professionals in raising the educational, social, emotional and life skills of Looked After Children (LAC). This was facilitated through the training measures of Emotion Coaching, Wellcomm and Language Through Listening, and Good Adult Child Interaction. The project was measured by using baseline and end data of SDQ, Reading Assessments and data recorded at the PEPs.

The Looked After Children School Readiness Project has had a wide and overarching impact for the LAC of Bolton, their carers, families, and educational settings. The triangulated response of the training delivered to the team around the child, has supported the LAC on the project, other children in placements and had an even wider reach and is now being implemented in nurseries and schools in and out of borough, including support for pre and post adoption children and their forever families. Over the two years the project ran, there was an overall reduction in the SDQ Scores and improvements in the academic progress for most of the children. This included both cohorts, with either early years learning goals and Wellcomm scores, or the national curriculum levels and Nara 2 Reading results improving, with children either making personal progress, closing the gap or being inline. The data would suggest that these improvements, could be a result of the children being better supported and understood, more settled, more emotionally aware and resilient, and therefore further equipped to be School Ready.

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| *‘I use emotion coaching in pastoral every day. Emotion coaching is by far the most useful training package I have ever been on. Emotion coaching has helped many of our young people articulate their feelings and emotions during difficult periods. This training has helped me recognise children in our setting who may have not been nurtured from a young age to learn to empathise, to recognise children who need coaching, to help children begin to control their impulses, to help children learn how to self soothe when upset and to improve their attention and focus.’*  **sCHOOL LEARNING MENTOR**  to control their impulses, to help children learn how to self soothe when upset and to improve their attention and focus. |  |  |

The LAC School Readiness Project has had the benefit of time, to focus on specific cohorts and identify specific children, with a clear focus on individual needs. This was done through the focus on and analysis of SDQ scores, PEP’s, monitoring of Levels and Reading Results. On identifying specific indicators for these children, an individual discussion took place and more specific interventions were implemented. Children with clear specific needs have been supported by discussion and interventions being put in place: additional Emotion Coaching, Emotional Literacy Work, advice from SENCATT, Wellcomm interventions and referrals to other agencies including The LAC Educational Psychologist, Start Well, SALT, Ladywood Out Reach, COG and SEND for consideration of Statutory Assessment.

The first EYFS PEPs in Bolton were created and implemented as part of the project’s development by the project coordinator. This was an extension of the suggested collection of data. The EYFS PEP collected and monitored all the relevant information to best support the child and to address need. The project has improved the School Ready status of our Early Years LAC in Cohort 1, as they entered their reception year and supported the children in Primary Schools in Cohort 2. The training, PEPS and Wellcomm assessments provided support and pathways for settings and carers/parents to support individual children in their development with specific focus on Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Communication and Language. Promoting listening and attention, to support cognition and learning which develops emotional and behavioural regulation with an outcome of engagement and inclusion, enabling our children to attend, settle, learn, and participate in their education.

**Key Actions for 2021/22**

* Emotion Coaching and Good Adult Interaction Training to be offered to Bolton schools
* The implementation of the EYFS PEP to support and monitor children as early as possible, to support them to be School Ready and to avoid delay in identify and meeting need.
* Well-being mentor to offer Emotional Literacy Programme to looked after children

**Evidence of wider IMPACT in Settings**

 

   

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Developing a strong working relationship with SEND colleagues has been an important priority within the Virtual School and a SEND Lead has recently been appointed. The SEND Lead role sits between the Virtual School and Bolton’s SEND team; the two teams will start to build a stronger partnership by attending team meetings, SEND panel and joint working individual cases with SEN caseworkers to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved for looked after children with SEND.

Part of the SEND Lead role will be to visit in-borough and out-of-borough specialist provisions to carry out quality assurance and ensure that these settings can meet the needs for Bolton’s looked after children. The SEND Lead will work closely with the Virtual School Head and SEN team to establish a stronger partnership to reduce any potential drift and delay, the SEND Lead will attend strategic SEN monthly meetings to ensure that no processes adversely impact our looked after children and that any cases where there may be blockages are discussed at the highest level. Building on existing relationships and working together with SEN colleagues will continue to be a key outcome within the Virtual School 2021/22 strategic plan.

Previously Looked After Children (PLAC)

The Virtual School will have a dedicated Previously Looked After Lead member of the team starting in September 2021, following new government guidelines. A key action for the academic year ahead will be assessing the best ways in which to support school staff with the education of Previously Looked After Children. The advisor will spend some time working with other PLAC Leads within Greater Manchester and further across the North-West, making links and building relationships ensuring this role can be as useful and supportive as possible. The Virtual School will join a working party, both at local level within the North-West linked to Adoption Counts, and also as a wider community encompassing virtual schools across the region.

**Key priorities for 2021/22**

* To continue to develop accurate and easy to understand data set for the VS team and key stakeholders, ensuring that data capture systems enable the team to manage milestone data drops.
* From September 2021 the Virtual School will start to use the Ofsted grading system to quality assure completed PEP documents throughout the academic year. There will be a particular focus on target-setting which is expected to be SMART and outcome focused, with identified impact measures to evidence process.
* Bolton’s looked after children will have a good understanding of what a Virtual School is, who is on the team and the support offered, launching a Virtual School website, logo.
* Launch the Early Years ePEP through the Delegated Portal and provide training for Early Years providers.
* Launch education opportunities for our looked after children, including at least two university visits for Year 11 and Year 12.
* Further expansion of the Virtual School team to meet the new responsibilities for CIN and CP.
* Continue to work with schools to further reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions, ensuring professionals involved have a clear understanding of the role of the Virtual School and seek advice and support prior to exclusion.
* Continue to work with SEN to develop processes and reduce drift/delay for looked after children.
* Bolton Virtual School is meeting the extended duties outlined in Statutory Guidance and offers information, advice and guidance regarding the education of previously looked after children.
* Develop further CPD opportunities for the Virtual School team.