



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

25TH JANUARY 2021

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER (CLA) EDUCATION OUTCOMES

REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR AND INCLUSION SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an Improvement Strategy for CLA Educational Outcomes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- 2.1 Considers the information contained within this report.
2.2 Comments on the information contained within this report.
2.3 Considers if any further information is required.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To raise the awareness of Corporate Parenting Board of a joint proposal from Education and Children's Services to develop a strategy to improve CLA educational outcomes in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) by 'doing things differently'.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 This report aims to provide an update on current data available in relation to CLA pupils together with an overview of the systems that are currently in place in RCT to promote the educational outcomes for CLA, outline the

data available for CLA pupils in relation to attendance, exclusions and destinations in the academic year 2019-2020.

- 4.2 It will also provide an overview of a proposed new strategy to improve the educational outcomes of CLA students in RCT which incorporates the recommendations from the recent paper - *An integrated approach to improving educational outcomes for looked after children in Wales* written by Sir Alasdair Macdonald in May 2020, commissioned by Welsh Government (WG).

5. CURRENT CONTEXT

- 5.1 Any overall data for the academic year 2019 – 2020 needs to be viewed with caution due to the impact of school closures in Summer Term 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which means that direct comparisons with previous academic years are not possible. It is also important to note that in line with Welsh Government directives local authorities in Wales are no longer to publish data relating to pupil attainment.

5.2 National Data

National data considers all looked after children regardless of where they are placed in their respective care placements. The local data reported relates to children and young people who are looked after and educated in Rhondda Cynon Taf only. The scope for making direct comparisons between local and national data sets is therefore restricted.

- 5.3 National data detailed on the Welsh Government Statistics Wales website records that 6,845 children in Wales were looked after on 31st March 2019 - an increase of 15% on the previous year. There is currently no national data published for the year 2020.
- 5.4 In 2019 there were 675 looked after children and young people within RCT. This was the second highest total number of children and young people who were looked after and the second highest number of school aged children (5–15) within Wales.

5.5 Local Data

On the 31st March 2020, there were a total of 717 children and young people within the Local Authority's care. 522 of these children were of

statutory school age. This equates to 1.5% of the overall school population.

Table 1: Numbers of RCT CLA pupils by age and resident both inside and outside of RCT

Age	Number of children
0-3	129
4-7	128
8-11	164
12-14	137
15 – 16	93
17	66

Source: Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report July 2020

- 5.6 In the academic year 2019-2020, 17% of the cohort of CLA pupils in RCT had a statement of special education needs and 57% had identified Special Educational Needs SEN at school action, school action plus and with statements. This is significantly higher than the population of non CLA pupils where around 3% are expected to have a statement and around 20% would have additional needs at school action, school action plus or have a statement of SEN. Approximately 13% of the CLA population attend special school, specialist classes and/or are taught within EOTAS provision.
- 5.7 Table 2 regarding the year 11 CLA cohort (end of KS4) during 2019/20 further highlights the high level of SEN amongst this cohort which will clearly impact upon educational outcomes:

Table 2: Year 11 Destinations

Year 11 RCT CLA pupils in RCT schools	Numbers of pupils	Percentage of CLA pupils
Total	31	
Male	20	65 %
Female	11	35 %

Type of placement		
Mainstream	24	78 %
PRU	1	3 %
EOTAS	4	13 %
Special school	2	6 %
Destinations for this cohort		
Attending college	17	55%
Attending sixth form	8	26%
Traineeship, Apprenticeship and Care2 work programmes	4	12%
Repeating year 11	1	3%
No placement	1	3%

Notes: CLA population with D.O.B. between 01/09/03 and 31/08/04 in the care of Rhondda Cynon Taf Authority and educated in RCT for the period 01/09/2019 to 31/08/2020

5.8 Although it is not possible to report on attainment for this cohort, it is positive to note that that 84% of CLA pupils in 2019/20 are continuing their education in formal settings with a further 12% engaging with work place programmes.

5.9 **Exclusion Data for CLA pupils in RCT**

In RCT during the academic year 2019-2020 the number of fixed term exclusions and number of days lost for all learners decreased. These decreases will be as a direct result of all school closures in Summer Term 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.10 In 2019-2020, there was one permanently excluded CLA pupil in relation to substance misuse. The pupil was in year 10, was registered as School Action Plus on the SEN Register and in receipt of free school meals. She subsequently attended another mainstream school in RCT.

5.11 Table 3 below reports that 47 RCT CLA pupils were excluded in relation to 81 incidents in the Autumn and Spring Terms of 2019/20. The data

highlights that an RCT CLA pupil is 3 times more likely to be subject to a fixed term exclusion than that of their mainstream non – CLA peers.

Table 3: Incidents of Fixed Term (FT) Exclusions in Autumn and Spring term 2019/2020 involving RCT Children who are Looked After

Cohort	Number of FT exclusions	Number of students with a FT exclusion	Cohort of pupils of statutory school age	% of statutory school aged pupils excluded
CLA	81	47	522	9%
Non CLA	1428	889	33,186	2.7%

Source: Plasc Jan 20 (33,708)

5.12 Attendance Figures for Children who are Looked After (CLA)

Table 4 highlights that the attendance levels of children and young people who are looked after are comparable to the general population of children in schools. This data shows that CLA attendance is similar and better in certain school types when compared with non CLA pupils.

Table 4: Attendance Levels of Children who are Looked between 02/09/2019 and 20/03/2020 compared with Non CLA

Overall attendance in RCT schools	
CLA pupils	Non CLA pupils
93%	92%
Primary school attendance	
95.9%	93.3%
Secondary school attendance	
91%	91.4%
Through school attendance	
90.9%	90.8%
Special school attendance	

95%	88.1%
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6 CURRENT SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

- 6.1 The CLA Education Team works to support pupils who are looked after at a strategic level through training and consultation, considering whole school systems and practice. The team supports professionals who work directly with CLA pupils, advocating preventative approaches and building resilience. The team works directly with individual pupils who present with more challenges to provide intervention and assessment.
- 6.2 The CLA Education Team promotes and encourages schools across RCT to achieve the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark. To date 25 schools have been successful in achieving the quality mark with 16 schools attaining gold and 9 schools attaining platinum awards. An additional 22 schools have expressed strong interest with 12 schools currently undertaking the quality mark to be completed in 2021. There will continue to be a focus on the roll out of our CLA friendly school process focusing on the 44 key indicators that will support pupils to engage with education. The related training provides a whole school approach that will support the understanding of the needs of children who are looked after and help shape interventions that promote their engagement.
- 6.3 In response to the disrupted educational experience due to COVID -19, PDG LAC money has provided an offer of online tuition in Maths or English for all Key Stage 4 pupils taking exams. It began in October 2020 and will continue until courses are completed this year.

Table 5: Pupils who have engaged with tuition in Years 10 and 11

Year group	No of pupils participating
11	16 out of 25 eligible pupils
10	23 out of 31 eligible pupils

Progress with tuition is being monitored. If successful we plan to continue to prioritise the PDG LAC grant for this cohort next year.

- 6.4 In response to Covid -19 restrictions the referral process provides increased accessibility and service delivery has included drop-in sessions

for social workers and cluster group sessions for schools designated persons for CLA to discuss casework and general areas of concern.

7. **STRATEGY FOR IMPROVEMENT ‘DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY’**

7.1 With a clear ambition to improve the educational achievement of our CLA pupils, Education and Children’s Services recognise that there is a need for change. However, any strategy for improvement must be based on effective research-based practice where there is clear evidence of impact.

7.2 The recent paper commissioned by Welsh Government - *An integrated approach to improving educational outcomes for looked after children in Wales* written by Sir Alasdair Macdonald looks at integrated local authority approaches to supporting CLA, with a particular focus upon how the Virtual School model in England and Scotland could be used as a basis for local authorities in Wales to promote the educational achievement of CLA. A virtual school does not have a physical environment for pupils to attend. It is described by Macdonald as an ‘organisational tool’ which has been created for the effective co-ordination of support for CLA at both a strategic and operational level, including CLA who access out of county placements. In England, under the Children’s and Families Act 2014, local authorities have a statutory duty to appoint a Virtual School Head (VSH) whose key role is to promote the educational achievement of CLA which differs from the model in Wales where the key person to undertake this role is the LACE Co-ordinator.

7.3 In his paper Macdonald highlighted a number of benefits of the virtual school model in creating a consistent approach to raising the profile of the need to improve the educational outcomes of CLA both within a single local authority and across local authorities. A major strength of the virtual school model includes the effective leadership and management of the school by the VSH whose status and strong background in education enables them to work at a strategic level to influence practice, make evidence-based decisions regarding the effective use of resources, provide effective leadership to a diverse virtual school team, and gives them the authority to intervene on an equal status when head teachers make decisions that are not felt to be in the best interests of individual CLA. The virtual school model also provides an enhanced level of scrutiny and accountability in terms of evaluating systems and processes relating to educational achievement.

7.4 As a result of his review, Macdonald made a clear recommendation for Welsh Government to consider the development of a Welsh virtual school model.

‘Welsh Government should consider requiring all Local Authorities in Wales to appoint a Virtual School Head (VSH) and establish Virtual Schools, for the

purpose of discharging the LAs' duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children' (Macdonald, May 2020).

- 7.5 In the context of RCT, the introduction of a Virtual School Head (VSH) as recommended in the above report would strengthen the strategic approach for CLA at senior management level in education where the VSH would work with other head teachers within the structure of a school system, ensuring a clear overview of the needs of all CLA pupils, a consistency of approach and an enhanced level of focus on all aspects of the curriculum, including wellbeing. A VSH would strengthen collaborative practices and provide proactive targeted support when needed, for pupils on both an individual and group level. The VSH would support the sharing of good practice. Responding to the CLA population of students as a discrete school, with a clear management structure, would enable identified data sets from across RCT schools to be pulled into one place so information around CLA pupils is accessible and can be responded to in a timely way and would facilitate effective systemic evaluation of outcomes and identification of areas for improvement in addition to addressing concerns relating to particular individual schools. The equal status of a VSH and their credibility with other head teachers would enable them to challenge the practice of schools more robustly.
- 7.6 Other recommendations in the report cover the following four areas:
- The level of resourcing required to enable an integrated approach that improves outcomes;
 - The importance of high quality data;
 - The implications for training;
 - The need to broaden measures of what constitutes educational outcomes for LAC.
- 7.7 It is important to highlight that, in his report, Macdonald's recommendations in relation to resourcing and the importance of high quality data are made within the context of a virtual school model, outlining how this model would be effective in support their implementation.
- 7.8 Further themes that emerged from the Macdonald review that all Local Authorities need to address to ensure support for CLA students is effective include:
- strategic work in schools around processes for CLA pupils

- the development of PEP and ensuring that imminent changes around additional learning needs introduced in education reflect and meet the needs of the CLA population
- advocacy and collaboration with other services to ensure the wider needs of CLA pupils are met in a timely way.

7.9 In 2012 Ofsted published their report 'The impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked after children'. They reported that the effectiveness of a virtual school is dependent on a range of critical factors, including:

- a virtual head teacher with good leadership skills, the necessary 'clout' to be able to access resources and a high level of professional credibility
- a well-embedded culture of multi-agency working with effective communication and joint training
- clear and agreed cross-boundary arrangements that meet the needs of children educated outside their home local authority
- a robust data management system that facilitates sound performance management and a clear focus on the progress of individual children
- a consistently high standard of personal education plans
- the scope to provide support to young people in transition, particularly those moving on to higher or further education
- well-embedded corporate parenting arrangements
- ability to reflect high strategic aspirations for the looked after children population in a similarly ambitious approach for each child at an operational level.:

7.10 The introduction of a virtual school head would not only increase capacity within the local authority in relation to supporting educational outcomes but would provide an enhanced voice to advocate for CLA pupils at a senior management level in education – strengthening the corporate parenting role.

7.11 **Practical considerations**

The numbers of statutory school aged CLA in RCT who would fall within the remit of the VSH would be the equivalent to a large primary school/small secondary school. Last academic year (Sept 2019 – 2020)

there were 522 RCT CLA school aged pupils and 92 CLA pupils being taught in RCT but belonging to other LAs.

- 7.12 The responsibilities of the VSH would be largely comparable to any head teacher's role in terms of their knowledge of the pupils, their individual needs and levels of progress and together with their knowledge of the curriculum, pedagogy and other education systems and processes. Open access to pupil data such as progress tracking would enable the VSH to undertake effective analysis of needs and, supported by the virtual school team, would ensure that appropriate research based interventions were implemented in a timely manner to respond to limited progress. The monitoring of this data would be overseen by the VSH and any concerns would be addressed with SMT in individual schools, reinforcing the importance of education's role as corporate parent. Access to wider data, for example data relating to attendance and exclusions, would enable the VSH to identify promptly underlying issues that may impact upon attainment in order to provide early intervention and preventative measures to support pupils and identify common themes that can be addressed at a strategic level.
- 7.13 As a peer, with equal status, the VSH would have the authority to challenge other head teachers regarding concerns over provision, attendance, attainment and wellbeing measures.
- 7.14 The VSH would also be able to support the continued knowledge and awareness around the needs of the CLA students and suggest LA wide initiatives such as relationship based policies and conscious discipline approaches. They would be key in shaping structures and systems that support better collaboration between key services.
- 7.15 The VSH would have a vital safeguarding role in respect of liaising with schools about the wellbeing of CLA students. A virtual school approach would more likely pick up on issues regarding children's safety, bullying and worries about placements and this knowledge can help shape support at a strategic/management level.
- 7.16 The virtual school head would have a key role in supporting pupils who have ALN and ensuring that provision/support is appropriate and that there are high aspirations for RCT CLA pupils.
- 7.17 **Next steps**



Education and Children's Services to draft a joint costed proposal to establish a virtual school model to improve the educational outcomes of CLA learners

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 No consultation exercises have been undertaken.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report. However, it is likely that additional funding will be required to progress with a proposal to implement a virtual school model.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 12.1 Developing the capacity of the CLA education team and enhancing the management structure will strengthen the Local Authority corporate parenting responsibilities and support children who are looked after to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. This supports the Council's Corporate Priorities to build a strong economy and to promote independence and positive lives for everyone and ensures that the Sustainable Development principle and the Wellbeing Goals of the Wellbeing for Future Generations Act (Wales) underpin the vision and working practices of the service.

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 RCT has a large number of children looked after when compared to other local authorities and there are many risk factors which can adversely

impact the educational outcomes of CLA pupils and are often a significant and long term barrier to achievement.

- 13.2 The recently published report (May 2020) commissioned by the Welsh Government 'An integrated approach to improving educational outcomes for looked after children in Wales', written by Sir Alasdair Macdonald, provides a clear rationale for adopting a virtual school model as an effective integrated approach to promoting the educational achievements of CLA learners. In response to Macdonald's recommendation that Welsh Government should consider taking a national approach to introducing a virtual school model, Children's Services and Education are collaborating to draft a proposal outlining the potential benefits of establishing a virtual school model in RCT. Key factors for the successful implementation of the proposed model will be a clear rationale for change, a clearly defined VSH role which will focus upon key strategic responsibilities and priorities that can be subject to a high level of scrutiny and accountability by senior LA officers, and a cross - directorate commitment to implementing a collaborative, integrated approach to support CLA learners within this new model. The funding of the new VSH will also be a key consideration within the proposal.
- 13.3 in the meantime, the CLA Education Team continues to work collaboratively with schools, children's services and carers at a strategic level, to support the team around the pupils and to provide educational and psychological advice for specific pupils who are most in need. Support through the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark will continue with the upskilling of all teaching staff through training.
- 13.4 In collaboration with Children's Services, Access & Inclusion data for children who are looked after will continue to be evaluated in order to inform key areas for further strategic development and improvement. Support and challenge for schools will continue where there are concerns relating to outcomes. Transition support and interventions for pupils at year 10 and 11 who struggle to engage with a Key Stage 4 curriculum will be a priority and an offer of online tuition has been put in place for pupils to help with 'catch up' during a period of interrupted access to school.
- 13.5 The PDG LAC money will be utilised to support CLA pupils who have experienced a transition or gaps in education and require additional support for a time limited period.

- 13.6 The CLA Education Team will continue to develop the use of the PEP and attend CLA reviews, Annual reviews and interim person centred meetings to advocate for CLA pupils and to provide the best possible educational opportunities. This will involve co-ordinating access to high quality information for SEN panels where a pupil may have additional learning needs.
- 13.7 Improvements in attainment and outcomes for CLA pupils require strong collaborative approaches with support and challenge to heads and managers across a number of service areas. We must consider how we use our resources and systems to strengthen our corporate parent responsibilities across the local authority. Collaborative practice must be embedded within the systems we work to ensure that all those who provide a service to CLA children and young people are effective in delivering better outcomes for care experienced pupils.