



OVERVIEW OF THE ATTAINMENT OF CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN ABERDEEN CITY SCHOOLS

Education Operational Delivery Committee

25 November 2021



SECTION 1 -

Local Structures to support improvement in outcomes for Care Experienced Children and Young People

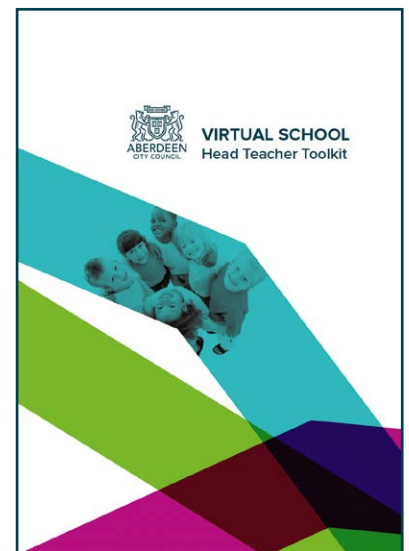
The Local Authority has a range of approaches to securing improvement for Care Experienced Children and Young People which span the organisation and wider partnership. In real terms it is difficult to separate those driven by education as our approach to supporting those with experience of care is collaborative in nature. There is a real commitment across the partnership to deliver on Plan 21-24 which references the need to ensure that “Care experienced children and young people will receive all they need to thrive at school. There will be no barriers to their engagement with education and schools will know and cherish their care experienced pupils”. The structures outlined below, are those which predominantly influence educational outcomes but should not be seen as exhaustive as the needs of Care Experienced Children and Young People inform all of the work of the service.

Key documents and policy drivers influencing the work being taken forward include [The Promise](#), [Plan 21-24](#), [Change Programme One](#) and [Angela Morgan review of ASN](#).

Virtual School - What is it and what does it do?

Education authorities have a statutory responsibility to secure improvement in the quality of school education (Standards in Scotland's Schools Act, 2000). The local authority must promote the educational achievement of the children they look after, regardless of where they are living. The Virtual School is one of the key ways in which Aberdeen City Council discharges that legal obligation.

The core purpose of the Virtual School is to be relentless in driving up improvements in the educational progress and attainment/achievement of all children Looked After by their authority, including those who are educated in other local authorities. Because children who are looked after are being educated across a large number of schools, the Virtual School has a powerful role in tracking their progress as if they were in a single school. This complements work at school level to review the impact of approaches on particular groups of children and young people.



The five key areas of responsibility of the Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) are:

- To make sure that there is a system to rigorously track and monitor the attainment of children who are Looked After.
- To ensure that all children who are Looked After have a robust and effective plan that supports access to appropriate and timely support and is in keeping with the Children and Young People's Act.
- To champion the educational needs of Looked after Children across the authority and those living out-of authority.
- To line manage a team of professionals supporting Looked After Children.
- To provide support and advice to schools and to the service and provide advocacy for children and young people who are looked after.



The Champions Board – what is it and what does it do?

The Champions Board supports young people with experience of care to work alongside those who make decisions about the care system. In this way, they are in the position to influence decisions being made that can affect their lives and the lives of others. Young people are supported to build their capacity to influence change and mirrors the approach outlined in The Promise.

The Champions Board is co-chaired by a Champion and a Young Person. The young people who attend the Champions Board set the agenda, learn leadership skills and advocate on behalf of their peers. There is a real focus on genuine participation to ensure a move from 'doing to' to 'doing with'. The work of the group is driven through the [Champions Board Plan 2021](#). The Aberdeen Care Experienced (ACE) report for May 2020 March 2021 provides a comprehensive overview of the key themes addressed with Champions and the progress made.



The vision for the refreshed Champions Board Plan 2021-2023 remains unchanged 'our Care Experienced children, young people and care leavers have a right to participate in decision-making about their own lives and have their voices heard'.

The Champions Board has identified a number of improvement priorities including the need to:

- Increase access to mentoring opportunities
- Increase engagement with online Corporate Parent training
- Embed trauma recovery approaches
- Promote the Write Right About Me approach to improve how experiences are narrated in individual records
- Increase access to digital connection opportunities
- Extend the use of the Mind of My Own app

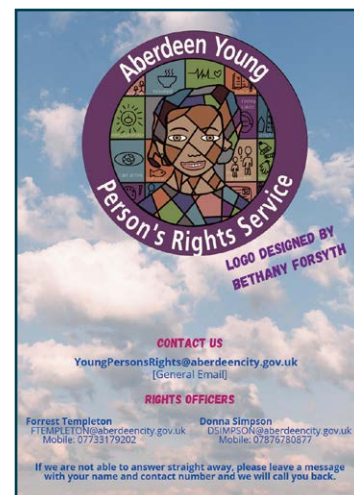
The Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service

The Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service (AYPRS) has been shaped by care experienced children and young people and supports those involved in child protection processes up to the age of 26. The service supports children and young people to engage in Child Protection Case Conferences and Risk Management Meetings and is helping to ensure that their voices are heard.

The Children's Rights officers provide information about a range of services including the Virtual School and proactively gather the views of children and young people including their experience of education to help education services improve.

Mind of My Own App

The purchase of the Mind of My Own App by Children's Social Work has enabled an increasing number of young people to engage with professionals with ease. The Virtual School Education Support Officer is working alongside key social work leads to raise awareness of it with Education colleagues and to look at ways in which Education could further support its use.



Sharing of best practice nationally and locally to learn from others

A number of local authorities have now implemented the Virtual School model or similar and in 2020, the Scottish Government awarded additional funding to CELCIS to formalise and strengthen the support provided as the host of Scotland's VSHT Network. As part of this increased support, the VSHT in Aberdeen City, joined CELCIS's Education Team part-time as a National VSHT Advisor to develop the network even further. In 2021, The Scottish Government awarded further funding to CELCIS to invest in the continued development of Scotland's VSHT Network.

This key role within the Network has meant that we are well placed to influence the direction of travel in terms of support across the country for our Care Experienced Children and Young People. Connections made in other local authorities have resulted in smoother, more timely transitions for our young people between schools and education provisions as well as receiving support from other Virtual School Head Teachers to progress education plans for children and young people Looked After by Aberdeen City. As 233 of our Looked After children are educated in another local authority, this supports their journey into a positive destination.

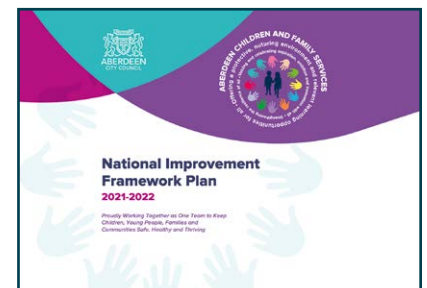
Evaluating our approaches to determine next steps

Good mechanisms are in place to evaluate the attainment and achievement of individual children and young people who are care experienced. Individual progress is evaluated at learner level by making use of Child's Plans which set personalised outcome targets for individuals. The Virtual School keeps records of those who are on track or in need of an additional support.

Review of the needs of individuals allows the service to identify broad themes for improvement and commission services to support. The extent to which interventions successfully address barriers is carefully tracked to inform future commissioning arrangements.

Holistic and ongoing evaluation is undertaken over the year as different education data sets become available, this means that evaluation is an on-going and agile process. This process involves collating a high volume of quantitative and qualitative data and drawing conclusions based on local knowledge of the cohort of learners. Direct comparison from year to year is not possible due to the changing nature and quite individual needs of this group.

The service is rigorous in its use of qualitative and quantitative data and is effective in identifying common barriers. Improvements are detailed in the education National Improvement Plan to ensure that the needs of our care experienced children and young people are at the heart of our decision making.



SECTION 2 – Key successes 2020/21

Virtual School

Of the children and young people who required a more intensive and extended level of support from the Virtual School (97), 39% were looked after at home, 48% were looked after away from home and 10% had no legal order (informal kinship, previously looked after or care leavers). 3% of those supported were also looked after by another local authority.

One third of the 97 children and young people who required intensive and extended support were educated in another local authority with over half of the issues raised relating to appropriateness of education provision or supporting transitions. This meant there was a need for the Virtual School to have knowledge of procedures across a variety of local authorities as well as having the ability to build positive relationships with key education colleagues such as the Virtual School Head Teacher in the other local authorities.

The Virtual School effectively ensures that robust education protocols are in place (Individual Education Plans, CSPs, timely enrolment in school, young people attaining, appropriate education provision – mainstream /residential/ special school) and that funding is agreed to support interventions in other local authorities. Significant focus has been given to supporting successful transitions as well as reassurance for children, young people, parents, carers and professionals alike and the situation has been successfully moved forward in almost all cases. Support for parents, foster carers and kinship carers from the Virtual School includes help to navigate the educational landscape, including understanding qualifications, supports and pathways.

Qualitative feedback from young people, parents, carers and professionals has been positive:

“It is good to have support to understand the procedure for funding support out with the city”

Social worker

“I (HT) am so grateful for the advice and feel reassured now”

Head Teacher - ACC

“The collective efforts of the multi-agency team have supported this young person to achieve and progress through secondary onto a positive destination – I wish all of our young people had the same supports”

Social Worker for child in another local authority school

“I am so thankful for the support from the Virtual School for my son and me”

Parent

“(child) was so delighted to be back in school”

Social Worker (transport arranged to support attendance as part of the plan)

“I am so delighted with her (child) progress with all the support”

Parent of a child who had been struggling to attend school

“I am quite emotional reading this, thank you. I truly believe that we have a solid window to form a different future for this wee boy and really appreciate this”

Social Worker – plan was progressed through the Virtual School to support transition from Nursery to P1

“I am delighted to hear this (agreed education plan- nursery/primary) thanks for your input and support with this, child has made great progress, delighted his wellbeing is being truly supported”

Early Years Practitioner, supported Nursery to P1 transition



Last year saw increased collaboration with colleagues in the Early Years Team to implement the universal roll out of PEEP. There has been extensive work done to promote the uptake of the 1140 hours with eligible 2s. 50% of our Looked After Children are accessing their entitlement already with 36% ready to start and 14% awaiting a placement following their 2nd birthday. All children who are looked after and eligible for anti pre-school and pre-school nursery provision are tracked by the Virtual School to ensure supports are in place. 100% of those children (living in Aberdeen City and other local authorities) are accessing a place (October 2021).



Data captured through the Virtual School tracking and monitoring system continues to highlight key areas where our children and families need support: transitions, supporting attendance and the need for bespoke education plans and interventions. This insight has helped inform the use of Covid Recovery funding, including Youth Work provision to support primary to secondary transitions. Part of ensuring appropriateness of education plans involves close collaboration with the Educational Psychology service, delivery of key training by the Virtual School including ‘Understanding Trauma’ and the Local Authority roll out of ‘The Compassionate and Connected Classroom (CCC)’.

All schools who had members of staff trained as trainers in Session 2020-21 have included CCC as part of their School Improvement Plans for this session and some trainers are delivering the programme across a number of schools. As CCC is implemented in schools, policies and procedures will be updated. In keeping with national research, implementation of CCC is likely to result in an increase in pupil attendance, alongside a reduction in behavioural incidents and exclusions.

We currently have 60 CCC trainers trained across the city from a range of sectors and disciplines:

- 11 Secondary staff
- 36 Primary staff (covering 34 primary schools)
- 1 Fit Like Hub staff member
- 1 Central staff member
- 1 EP
- 2 Locality Leads
- 1 school nurse
- 1 Senior Lead Social Work
- 2 ESWs



Many schools are beginning the roll out of CCC in November 2021. Qualitative feedback on the programme has been positive to date.

‘I love this, it’s just what we have been needing – my only complaint is that it didn’t come earlier’

‘language changing already’

‘We’re already seeing changes in the language being used in our classrooms’ (after a couple of sessions delivered)

‘Secondary setting – raised at parent response setting – good reception’

‘Secondary setting – have very much enjoyed the discussion aspect of the training, appeal for working groups yielded a very positive response, 9 members of staff coming along to first meeting of group.’

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) amended (2009) requires education authorities to consider whether each individual Looked After Child or Young Person requires a Co-ordinated support plan. Procedures and training have been developed to support the consideration of all Looked After Children for a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP) and these will be implemented across all local authorities where we have children and young people educated. The new procedure was introduced in our city schools in April 2021 and to date this has seen an increase from 3% of the Looked After population in the city being considered for a CSP to 20% in September 2021.

The Virtual School is central to supporting the multi-agency teams around each child with regards to their education and this will be maintained. This ensures effective collaboration and that the child's needs are at the centre of the planning. There is evidence that involvement of the Aberdeen Virtual School Head Teacher in supporting transitions both into and out of the city leads to our Looked After Children and Young People spending less time out of education. As the local authority aims to return as many children and young people to the city as possible, there is a need to diversify the role of the Virtual School to help design and deliver bridging activities to support a positive return to local schools. This will see the Virtual School have a wider multi-disciplinary team to deploy to support children and young people who require to foster positive relationships and build confidence prior to attending a school in the city full-time.

The Corporate Parenting mandatory workforce training digital module has been finalised and a roll out plan in place. A webinar outlining our Corporate Parenting plan and supporting the launch of the training is available here: [Watch the Video](#)

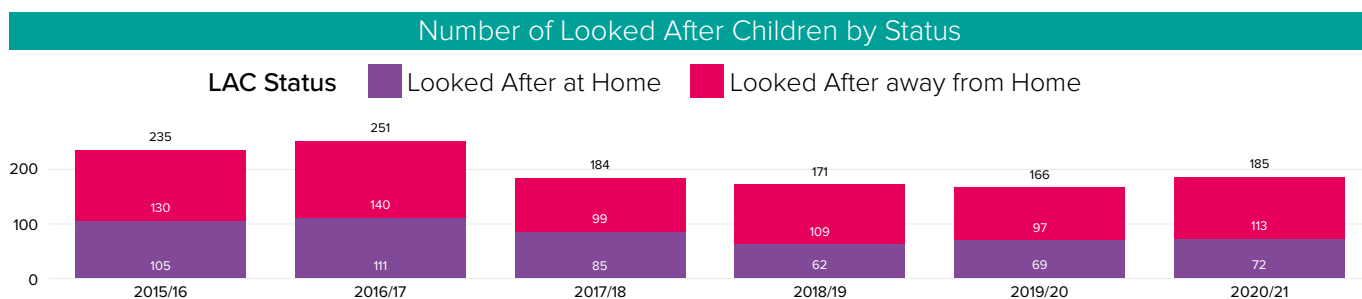
As of September 2021 10% of all council employees have completed the training. Going forward, the Virtual School Head Teacher / Corporate Parent Lead will be working with People and Organisation to review engagement and help plan next steps.

Improved use of data

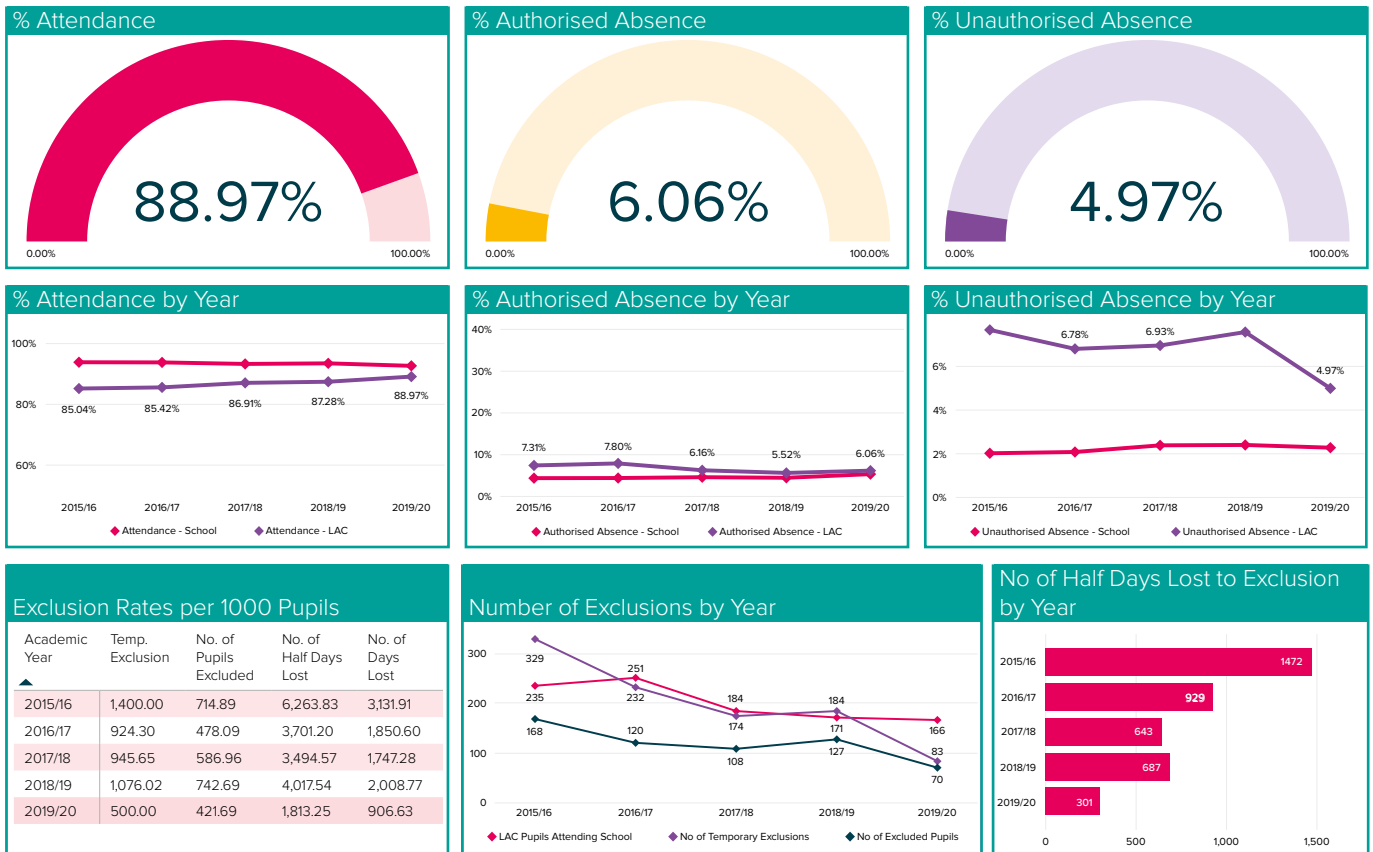
Head Teachers and Officers agreed that investing time in the development of a city-wide live data system would help improve tracking arrangements at school level and this development supported implementation of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) over session 2020/21.

Additional support for schools in relation to the ACM was provided by the Virtual School through the document produced by the National Virtual School Network. The Practice Document provided guidance for SQA Co-ordinators and Designated Managers which related specifically to considerations for Care Experienced young people when collating evidence to support grades.

The improved accessibility of data has supported informed discussions and helped pose challenge questions, resulting in a rich and purposeful interrogation of the data and ultimately helping to inform a narrative around each school's set of results. These discussions will inform quality improvement activity in trios over academic session 2021/22.



Concurrent work to finalise new Power BI School profiles has enabled school staff to view and analyse trend data for groups of children and young people including those who are Care Experienced. This also supports schools to further deliver on their duties as Corporate Parents and on The Promise Plan 21-24 which states "School improvement plans will value and recognise the needs of their care experienced pupils with robust tracking of attendance and attainment so that support can be given early", building improvements into individual school improvement plans where appropriate.



As well as the roll out of individual city school profiles in September 2021, the Virtual School profile within Power BI has been designed to capture attainment data from individual schools across the city for our Looked After Children. This is being further developed to streamline the tracking of wider achievement, attendance, exclusions and impact of commissioned services such as MCR Pathways, Sport Aberdeen as well as the Virtual School. This will help provide the Virtual School with a sophisticated system enabling analysis at individual, school and associated school group level as well as local authority level.

In addition to the developments with Power BI dashboards, live data is being used to determine the effectiveness of policies and procedures through the education National Improvement Framework Plan. There is clear evidence that this approach is helping reduce the number of exclusion incidents. Tracking live data helps us make swift judgements on the quality of interventions in place and take timely action.

Summer of Play Programme

Aberdeen City Council received a grant of £418,000 to help improve the wellbeing of children and young people over the summer holiday period.

The Virtual School along with colleagues in schools, social work and across the partnership supported Care Experienced Children and Young People, who were given priority access, to take up places and participate in activities. 249 Care Experienced Children and Young people took part in activities delivered through Sport Aberdeen with 237 taking part in activities delivered by colleagues in Aberdeen City Council.



Celebrating Success – Awards Ceremony

As a result of the pandemic, our annual Celebration of Success had been hosted on an online platform in September 2020 in order to ensure that the efforts of our young people were recognised. The children and young people were delighted that the event managed to see some in person attendance as well as a live stream in September 2021.

Some of the positive feedback received include:

“I was so emotional hearing what she has achieved. I think this was a great event to have as she felt she belonged, hearing what others had done”

Grandmother

“This was great to be part of and I am so proud. We all tell them how great they are but they don’t always listen to us or school. Being here today in such a special place and being told how proud everyone is was just lovely”

Foster Carer

“It made me feel worthwhile and it was good to hear what I had achieved and for others to hear it”

Young Person

“Being here today and talking to people has given me the opportunity to get involved in helping other care experienced young people”

Young person



Establishment of the 16+ Strategic Group

A 16+ strategic working group made up of key partners ensures information is shared across partnership networks about opportunities for Care Experienced Young People as well as identifying and removing any potential barriers to uptake and engagement. To date, this has included discussions about use of language in relation to The Promise which have been addressed and raised through the Corporate Parent improvement and Performance group, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have provided drop in sessions for those supported by the Throughcare team, follow up support has been offered for young people involved in the co-production of the ABZ works website to help them towards a positive destination and the team in No one Left Behind (NOLB) have provided input to MCR Pathways Co-ordinators and the Throughcare team on what supports are available.

As a result of the collaborative working between meetings, a Care Experienced Young Person has been supported to share her story of being Care Experienced and part of the Kick Start programme. The story was shared via the Youth team Facebook page and reached 6,772 people with 1,444 engagements, 20 shares and 14 comments. The follow up post reached 212 people and had 24 engagements.

ABZ Works

Head Teachers and Central Officers from across Education and City Growth have collaborated with a range of partners to develop a one-stop-employability shop website, known as ABZWorks. The website, developed through Young Person Guarantee activity but designed to provide local accessible information to people of all working ages and school pupils, was launched officially in September 2021 after soft market testing with young people in June 2021.

Issues for Care Experienced Young People when seeking employment were raised through the Champions Board by Young People. A consultation session was held, led by colleagues in People and Organisational Development, in August 2020 with a



group of young people to ascertain their views and ideas about what they would find helpful to have in a website. Through co-production young people were able to inform the design of the ABZWorks website and be part of the ongoing evaluation. Professionals supporting young people, parents and carers with transitions beyond school were involved in sharing the specific needs of Care Experienced Young People as well as identifying what they require as professionals to provide effective support. One young person is actively involved in developing an animation for use on the site and receiving broader employability support through ABZWorks. Another is developing blog posts and an Instagram channel to support the wider ABZWorks programme.

The ABZWorks team is also providing employability support to 16 young people who have identified themselves as care experienced or looked after.

The site will be subject to on-going development and review to ensure that it meets the needs of our Care Experienced Young People. MCR Pathways have provided input to the site and are well placed within the schools to support young people to access and make use of the information to support their journey

'Lift Off!'

All Head Teachers and Officers agreed that the negative narrative around loss of opportunity had to be addressed to support young people into a positive destination. There was also recognition that due to challenges that they already faced, the impact on those with experience of care would be likely to be even greater. This meant that there was a need for all to be sighted on what the potential barriers may be and how support would be scaffolded around them. It was agreed that a senior phase transition event would be most helpful. With the support of DYW Board, Skills Development Scotland and a variety of keynote speakers, including Carl Walz, former NASA astronaut, 50 employers and providers contributed to an extensive menu of recorded presentations for young people to engage with over two virtual induction days.

The event was shared through members of the 16+ strategic group for Care Experienced Young People to ensure those who were Care Experienced and had left school were aware of the event and could be supported to be part of it. 9 digital devices were issued through the Virtual School to any Care Experienced Young Person who did not have access. For those Care Experienced Young People who were accessing their learning through an alternative curriculum, professionals supporting ensured that they were able to join the event and engage.



Feedback from young people who participated on the third day of LiftOff, which was targeted at those who had already left school and which promoted training and employment support opportunities, was largely positive. An in-person event rather than virtual would have been preferred by the majority of young people who engaged, but they accepted that was not possible due to the pandemic. The content was generally well received by young people.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

A guaranteed interview scheme has been in place within the council since 1997 (for applicants who considered themselves to have a disability as defined in the Equality Act). This was extended in 2019, as part of our commitment to developing our young workforce as part of the Council's workforce plan for increasing capacity in targeted areas of our workforce for the future. The scheme was extended to include young people aged 16-24 applying for our apprenticeship roles and includes Care Experienced applicants aged 16-29. In September 2020, the scheme was further extended to any Looked after young person, those that are in continuing care or are a care leaver age 16-29 seeking to gain employment with this Council for all vacancies, not just apprenticeships.



Care Experienced Young People are actively encouraged to 'tick' the care experienced guaranteed interview scheme box on our application forms, and the availability of the scheme is increasingly being promoted as a positive opportunity for them. However, as some young people do not wish to disclose their status as being Looked After or having care experience, it is impossible to say with certainty how many of these young people have secured employment or other support via the Council.

In addition to the guaranteed interview scheme that is in place, there is a number of other support initiatives in place for our Care Experienced Young People.

Working with colleagues in Children and Family Services and Skills Development Scotland, the Talent Team within People & Organisational Development support Care Experienced Young people by providing information about employment opportunities within the Council, career advice, the apprenticeship programme and the ABZWorks employability programmes, with employability colleagues in City Growth as well as support to develop CVs, completion of application forms and interview skills.

Internship Programme

An internship programme is in place which provides ring-fenced opportunities for Care Experienced Young People to undertake periods of work experience within identified areas across the Council. As well as offering an internship that provides a paid work experience placement, the programme also provides a range of support to each young person to help ensure that the internship is successful. Evidence indicates that some of our Care Experienced Young People will come from a range of backgrounds, traumas and experiences and may need significant support to be successful within the workplace and in many cases, this will be their first introduction into the world of work.

In advance of the internship commencing, young people can undertake the 'ABZWorks' employability programme to provide wraparound support before starting in the workplace. This comes with the offer of in-work support for a period of three months while they settle into employment. On completion of their internship, candidates can apply for Modern Apprenticeships or entry level council vacancies under the guaranteed interview scheme.

Kickstart Scheme

The Council is supporting the UK Government's Kickstart Scheme in conjunction with the Scottish Government's Young Persons Guarantee. The scheme provides young people with a six month paid work placement, paid at national minimum wage. Aberdeen City Council has secured approval to provide 155 Kickstart internships within the authority. Young Person Guarantee funding is being used as 'wraparound' to bring the wages of Council Kickstart interns up to £9.34 per hour in line with Council policy. Every intern is also receiving one-to-one support from an ABZWorks employability keyworker, and broader employability, personal and professional development to help broaden their options and long-term employment prospects at the end of their internship.

To date, the Council has employed 31 young people aged 16-24 at risk of long-term unemployment on Kickstart Internships. The recruitment of the second cohort of interns is ongoing at the time of writing. We know that two of these young people are care experienced and one has been working hard to promote the Council as an employer of choice while speaking frankly about her background and the support she has received. All Council Kickstart interns are receiving employability support and personal and professional development to consider their options at the end of the internship; a number of these Interns have already secured permanent roles within the Council. This scheme is still running and we are continuing to create new internships as opportunities arise. The Council is acting as a Kickstart gateway, enabling other employers to access the scheme and has secured c.500 Kickstart posts for young people across the North-east.

Apprenticeship Programme

The Council has an established apprenticeship programme which provides opportunities for young people to 'learn as they earn' by gaining skills, experience and knowledge as well as a formal qualification through modern apprenticeship opportunities in a range of roles across the organisation.

The apprenticeship programme represents a positive opportunity for Care Experienced Young people to access a supported and structured programme with opportunities to develop employment skills as well as to gain a recognised qualification. All apprentices have a mentor and/or buddy as part of their apprenticeship support.

For our 2019 Modern Apprenticeship intake, overall, 104 applications were submitted and 13 of these applicants declared that they were care experienced. Of those 13 applications, 3 were successful in securing an apprenticeship and remain in our employment. Of the remaining 10, 6 either withdrew or did not engage with the recruitment process and 4 were unsuccessful following the selection process.

In addition for young people still attending school, the Council supports Foundation Apprenticeships by providing work placements to enable these young people to gain work experience to achieve their Foundation Apprenticeship qualification.

Working Rite

City Growth's ABZWorks team has used Young Person Guarantee funding to commission Working Rite to deliver a pilot programme, RiteWorks, providing intensive employability support to Care Experienced Young People. The pandemic impacted on the delivery timelines and so the pilot has been extended to the end of the financial year. Feedback is gathered from the young people throughout and has been overwhelmingly positive. It is used to inform the programme as well as to shape the support to individuals, based on their aspirations, wants, and needs. To date, nine young people (seven care experienced and all vulnerable) have joined the programme, one of whom did not engage. Three have very recently been offered jobs, including one apprenticeship, following successful work experience placements, two have been told they will receive job offers in the coming weeks, one has secured a place in full time education, and the others continue working with the team.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

Young Person Guarantee funding has also been used to create business seed funds for young people. 3 Care Experienced Young People, including one who is being looked after outwith the city, are receiving support to set up their own business, with employability keyworkers providing holistic and broader employability support, and business guidance provided by Business Gateway.

Volunteering Matters

Volunteering Matters has recently moved into the city and, following discussions with the ABZWorks team about existing provision and areas in which they could make the most impact, has agreed to focus its efforts primarily on Care Experienced Young People through a programme of mentoring, confidence building, volunteering, and steps towards employment or further/higher education.



MCR Pathways

Following a pilot of the MCR Pathways programme in one of our academies in 2019/20, the programme was rolled out to 6 of the 11 academies in the city, supporting 217 young people in S1-6.

Current data shows that there is an increase in overall attendance and decrease in exclusions for secondary age pupils over a 3-year period and this is thought to be partially attributable to the programme. As the programme becomes embedded, the impact on positive and sustained destinations of those young people involved in the programme can be shared.

Throughout the pandemic, the Virtual School has worked closely with MCR to respond to the everchanging landscape ensuring young people were effectively supported and develop resilience through the consideration of these key aspects. The MCR Pathways Co-ordinators in our schools have developed strong relationships with the young people from S1 and along with the mentors for senior pupils are acting as role models to support a more positive experience in school. This has resulted in the young people growing in confidence and wanting to be in school and engage in their learning.

The provision of MCR has enabled many of our young people have felt able to speak about how they feel. The following feedback was received from young people in 2 of our schools:

Case Study: St Machar Academy – Ian and Andrew*

When Andrew*, an S4 pupil at St Machar, first joined the YAT programme at St Machar, his attendance was poor and he had no real motivation to excel in his schoolwork. After meeting the school's Pathways Coordinator, however, Andrew realised how much he could benefit with the help of a mentor. It was then that his attendance started to improve and he could then be matched with his now mentor, Ian.

In the first few weeks of the relationship, both the Coordinator and Ian noticed a huge difference in Andrew's attitude towards school and it was a refreshing change. From the moment they met, the pair have enjoyed chatting about creative writing and bouncing ideas off one another. Andrew enjoys hearing about what's going on in Ian's life just as much as he likes speaking about his own. Andrew has been impressing Ian with his capabilities and interesting conversation topics.

Having been meeting for over a year now, Ian has continued to encourage Andrew to take pride in his achievements and, as such, Andrew is working towards gaining the grades he needs to achieve his goals in life.

“It was great having someone who understood my passion for dance and was able to talk to me about what things I could do after school for a job”

“Speaking to (Pathways co-ordinator) helped me realise that it would be better for me to stay on and get more qualifications”

MCR-mentored young people in Aberdeen at point of data collection had a higher staying-on rate (100%) in 2020/21 compared to their peers (87.6%)

Aberdeen City Council will continue to invest in the programme for session 2021/22 and continue to track the impact to inform next steps.

Aberdeen City Council has made a commitment to their Care Experienced Young People by enabling and encouraging employees to take up a mentoring role through the MCR Pathways Programme. By working in partnership with Working Rite and Aberdeen City Council – 2 young people on the MCR Programme have been supported to enrol in the Working Rite programme, both of whom were at risk of not entering a positive destination.

Wider Achievement Programme

The Virtual School has worked alongside our partners at Sport Aberdeen since 2016. The programme supports the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence learners' entitlements to our looked after children and those with experience of care who as a result of their lived experiences, may require an alternative curriculum with a more flexible approach.

Evidence of impact is reported within Child's Plans through the wellbeing indicators, qualitative feedback from professionals and children and young people and quantitative data (attendance and exclusions).

The initiative can boast many successes such as Sport Aberdeen continuing direct 1:1 support and virtual support where in-person was not possible during lockdown. This provided continued connection for children and young people and families and supported the transition back into school.

31 children were supported to engage in physical activities during the summer break (26th June to 15th August 2021) with a focus on sibling relationships, outdoor play and improving wellbeing, with positive outcomes being evidenced.

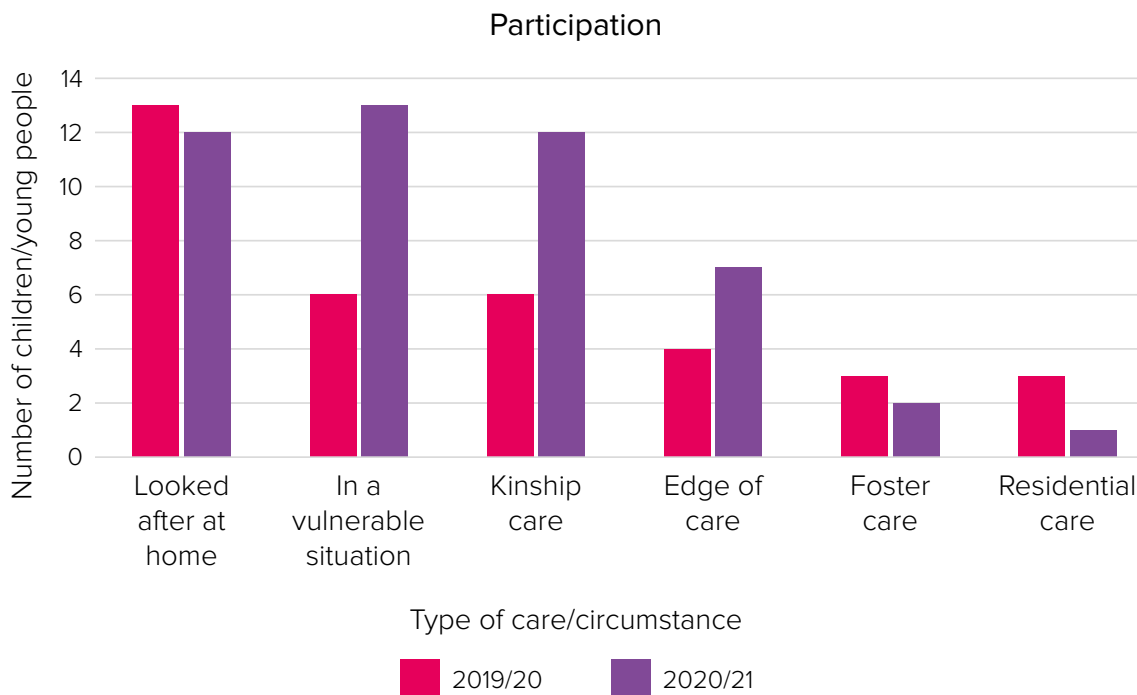
There is clear evidence that agreed outcomes for children and young people referred to the programme are being met, are noted within their Child’s Plan and through the collation of qualitative data. An example of this is the positive impact for a child who was referred in order to support the development of his ability to form friendships and manage social situations. This child managed the transition back to school and has an increased level of confidence within school.

Children and Young People supported through the Sport Aberdeen programme have successfully managed a range of transitions including the return to school after periods of lockdown, returning to mainstream education provision and moving to another local authority school.

Feedback through multi-agency meetings has also provided evidence of improved motor skills in children where this was an identified need.

19 children were supported within Manor Park School (1:1 direct work/small group work/P.7 transition group) as a pilot intervention developed in response to the restrictions imposed because of the pandemic. Embedding a project activator within a Primary School has removed stigma as they are seen by the children and parents/carers as a member of school staff/increased flexibility/strengthened relationships.

Number of Children Supported directly



Feedback on the programme at Manor Park Primary has been extremely positive.

“The P.7 group are buzzing every Wednesday for their sessions. Even [young person] who struggles with group tasks and new people spends all morning asking over and over when you’re coming. They always seem to have enjoyed their time out and are buzzing when they come back to class. Even [young person] who generally seems indifferent or acts indifferent to things is buzzing.”

Pupil Support Assistant

"{Young Person} really enjoys spending time with you and getting to take his friends with him. His peers also thoroughly enjoy spending time with you! He told me today you had a chat with him about his behaviour and I am hopeful he will have a better week this week. I think him spending 1-1 time with you may benefit him more as he doesn't need to be 'a leader' and can be more himself around you. Overall, I think the work you are doing is great!"

Class Teacher

"The project and the relationships built up have supported individual pupils to concentrate, access class, engage in learning and develop positive peer relationships to provide emotional support. The children value the Project Activator input hugely and although at times they seem to be disengaged they are very clear it has been a positive thing from them. It is regularly feedback through CSO Pupil Voice that the Project Activator's work is very much valued."

Head Teacher

"Following a very successful use of a Sport Aberdeen Project Activator we are keen to develop the use of this programme for the remainder of the year. The Project Activator has continued to work alongside children under legal measures to provide opportunities for wellbeing and also social inclusion through peer groups. This has seen a reduction in emotional dysregulation for some and has given them a trusted adult to share their feelings with. This also includes pupils who have tensions at home due to kinship care and have been struggling with the tension/anxiety in the home. Funding has been cut and therefore we are keen to continue this work. We are also using it to support transition for pupils who are requiring additional support, and this includes pupils under CSOs and also pupils with social anxiety"

"I think [the Project] is beneficial because it's really engaging and gets me active. It gets me outside and active and sporty – we play basketball and football and everything. It cheers me up and calms me down when I'm struggling. I like that I can talk to you and get my feelings out which helps me feel better."

P7

"It helps me concentrate, makes me stay in school and is good for me"

P7

A number of indirect impacts are evidence from this pilot. The partnership with Active Schools through the Sport Aberdeen programme has meant children with experience of care/edge of care can be highlighted and supported directly, where agreed, as part of their plan – impact for individuals includes improved attendance in school, improved fine and gross motor skills, increased participation in extra-curricular activities, support for families at points of transition and increased engagement in learning.

The learning taken from the Sport Aberdeen programme has been used to implement the Project Activator model within the Priority Families Team in Aberdeen City. 73 individuals have been supported by the project, with 29 routinely engaging for 3 months or longer.

Key relationships with the project activator have supported young people to access employment, raise confidence and self-esteem and contributed to a reduction in anti-social behaviour reports.

250 memberships to Sport Aberdeen facilities were given to care experienced young people and their families, carers or other relevant person(s). Memberships have also been provided to all children's homes and staff within other support services.

Free places were allocated on our Get Active holiday camps that run across the city and allocated free family tickets to our annual 'Ice Show' and Christmas festivities at the Lynx Ice Arena.

The 'Power Hour' programme, which began being delivered pre-Covid-19 aimed to allow any worker, parent or carer to access facilities with care experienced young people free of charge. This included tennis at Aberdeen Tennis Centre and skiing/snowboarding at Adventure Aberdeen Snowsports Centre.

Provision of 'Get Active' packs during lockdown

Partners speak positively of the programme. A Police Scotland Officer noted, *"Having already worked with the family for in excess of 6 months prior to (Project Activator's) appointment in her role, we struggled to get the boy to take part in any activities either in school or out of school. (Project Activator) built a relationship with the young person and over a period of time and after trying various activities, enrolled the young person in a Dodgeball club where he now plays regularly. The young person in question had previously lived a sedentary lifestyle and frequently self-harmed. The increase in physical activity as well as the social side of being involved with others clearly benefitted the young person."*

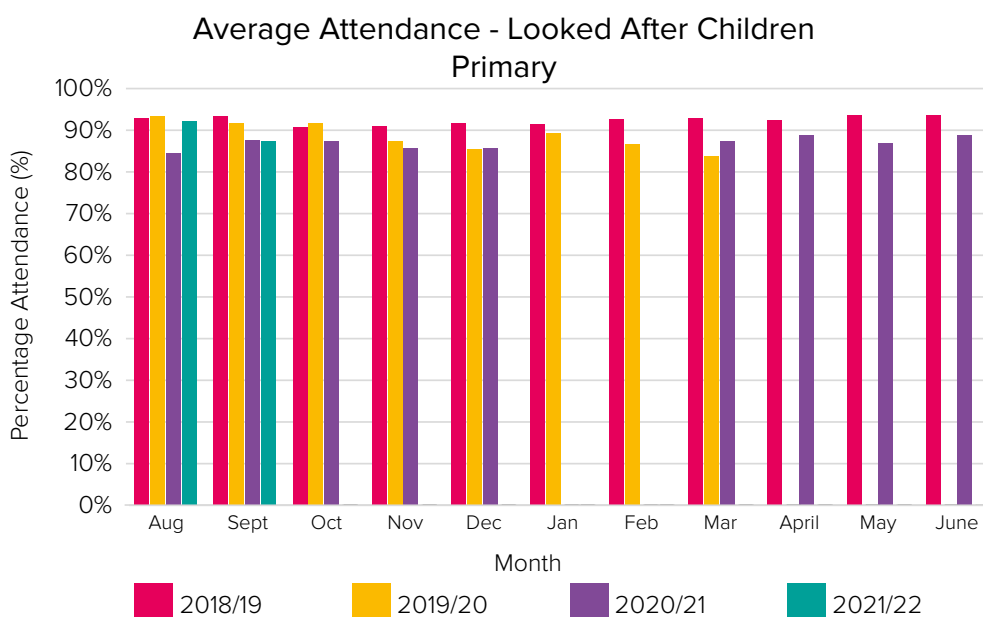
The success has also resulted in priority access being given to all looked after children in afterschool activities in schools, where appropriate. Through our extra curricular activities offered by Sport Aberdeen, agreement has been reached to ensure a number of spaces are held to be allocated to identified individuals with a focus on supporting their wellbeing needs. This will be done in partnership with school leadership teams following review of pupil needs and to offer a targeted approach to meeting these.



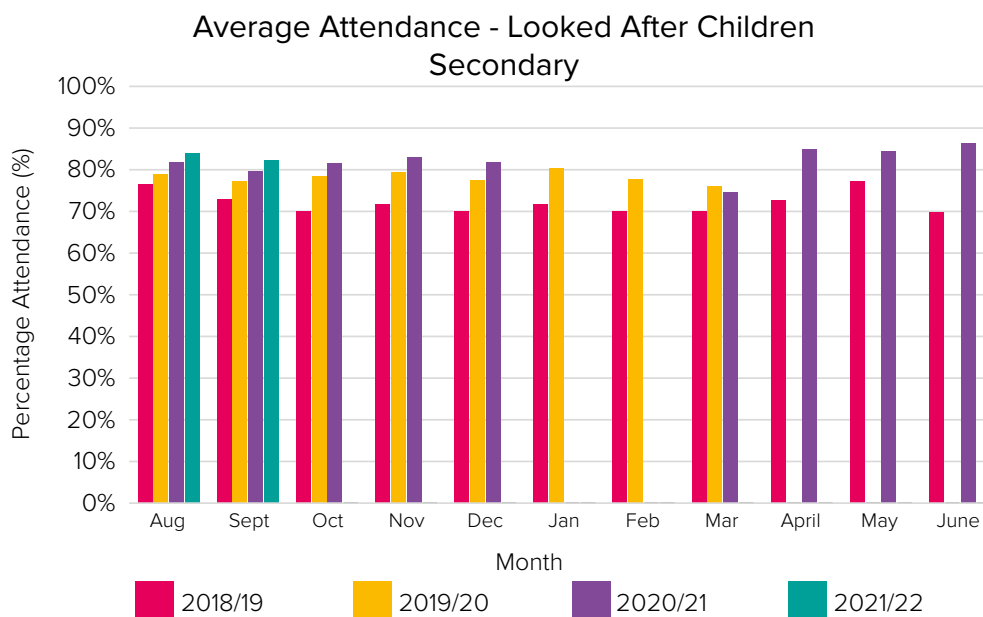
SECTION 3 – What does the data tell us

Attendance

Although not statistically significant, the monthly data shows a marginal decrease in the percentage attendance of primary-aged children over the past 3 years up to June 2020. Analysis suggests that the dip was as a result of children being required to self-isolate as well as concerns shared by families about their younger children and the subsequent rise in August and September data confirms this position. This inability to attend school will have impacted on positive attachments at school. Those who are Care Experienced were given priority access to Summer of Play opportunities to help mitigate this. This potential risk has been taken into account in planning for 2021/22.

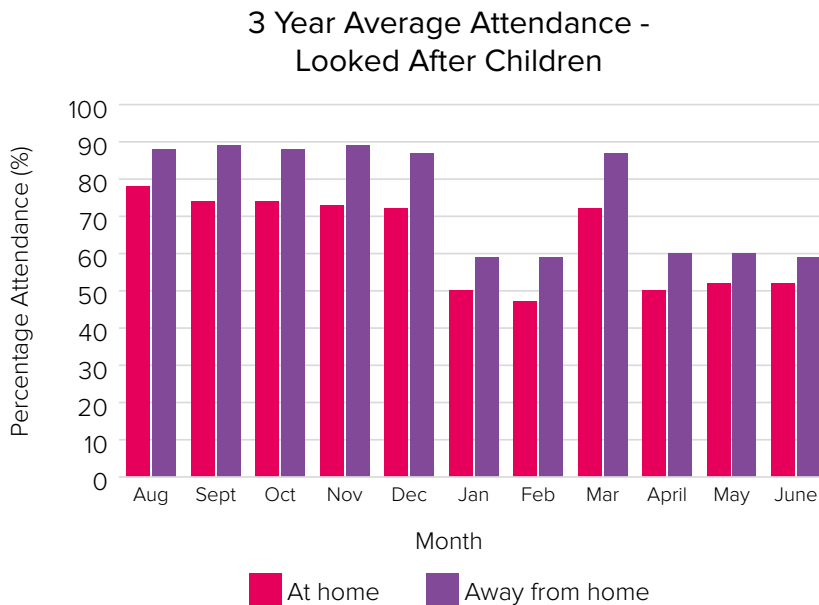


Overall, the attendance for secondary pupils has increased over the last 3 years which is extremely positive. Data for this new academic session indicates that this trend is continuing. There is recognition that young people, especially in the senior phase, may have experienced disruption to certification due to periods of self-isolation, but this has been mitigated well across City secondary schools. Ensuring young people are attending provides structure, increased opportunities and strengthens relationships which support wellbeing. The opportunities include accessing mentoring through the MCR programme as well as support from SDS, DYW and the ABZ works programme. These effective interventions will be maintained over session 2021/22.



Attendance – Looked After At Home / Away from Home

The 3 year monthly average has been used in order to provide a comparative analysis of attendance for those children who are Looked After at home and those who are Looked After away from home. The graph clearly shows that those at home have a poorer rate of attendance which impacts on their opportunity to fully access their curriculum and the life of the school. This gap between those at home and those who have been accommodated is also reflected in the attainment results. The improved accessibility of live data for city Head Teachers enables more focused supports and interventions to be put in place including more effective partnership working across Associated School Groups and communities to support families.



Exclusion

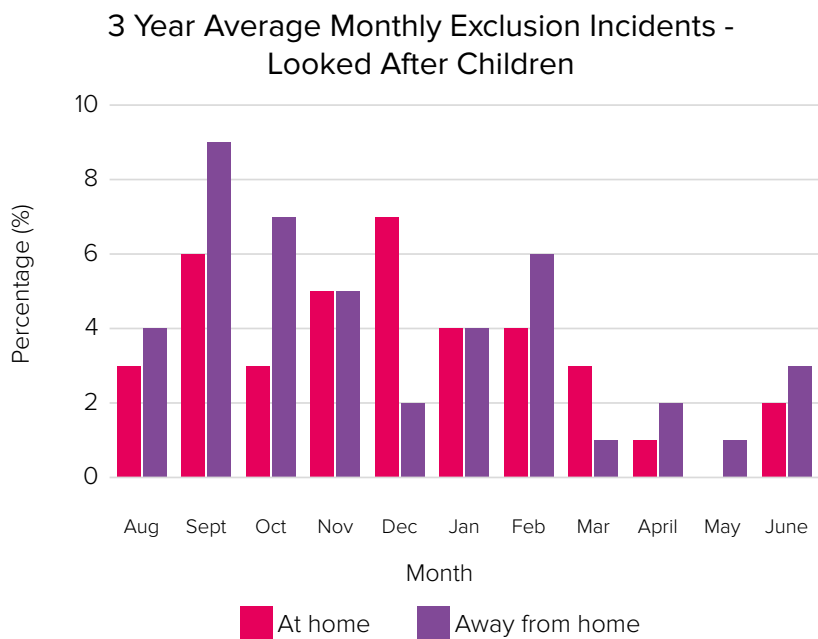
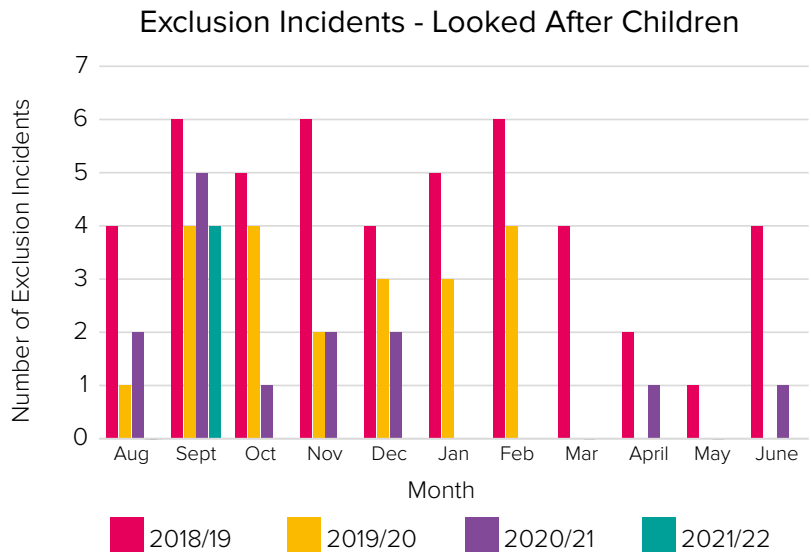
There has been a significant reduction in exclusions over the last 3 years due to a refresh of the Minimising Exclusion Policy, better quality assurance and monitoring of data and a wider range of wellbeing supports available in our schools. The data also shows that exclusions overall have fallen when comparing monthly, excluding lockdown periods. Data for this academic session indicates that there continues to be a fall in exclusion incidents.

There is evidence that for children and young people who are Looked After, the build up to holiday periods can lead to high levels of distress. This is often communicated through their behaviour in school, leading to exclusions. When looking at key months (September, November, March and June), it can be seen that exclusions are in general at their highest.

Careful consideration of the peak exclusion months (September, November, March and June) will be used to help shape our interventions for 2021/22. This more targeted approach is more achievable now that levels of exclusion have reduced.

The average monthly exclusion incidents for the past 3 years evidences the high level of need of both children and young people who are Looked After at home and away from home. In addition to the close monitoring, quality assurance and wellbeing supports in place, the Virtual School works closely with our residential homes, foster care and kinship teams to build relationships and ensure an appropriate curriculum is in place for our young people that will meet their needs and therefore lead to a reduction in them being excluded from school.

Schools are becoming trauma aware and this is positively impacting on levels of exclusion. This approach forms part of the overall work to address the priority in The Change Plan 21–24 that states “The formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from education will end”.



Attainment

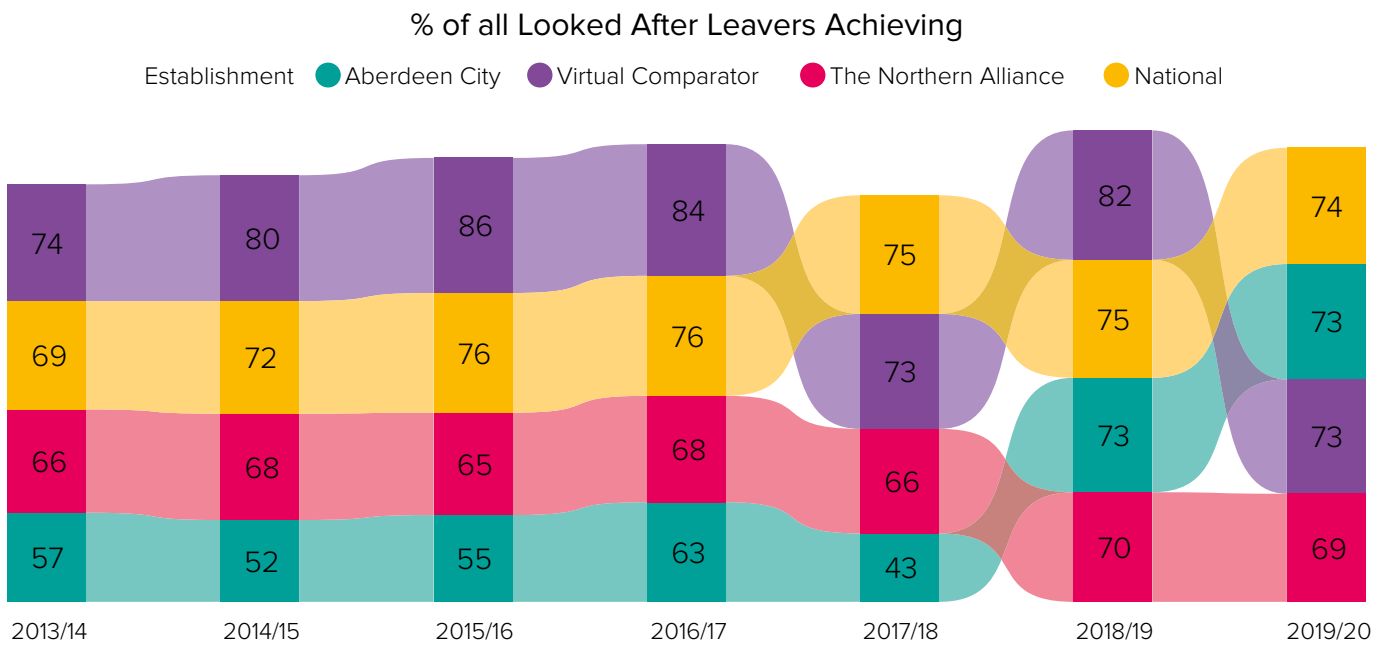
The attainment information relates to the National Benchmarking data for 19/20. Data for 20/21 will be available in February 2022. Local Benchmarking data will be available to be shared in November 2021 as part of the Education Improvement Journey report to committee.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 and resulting disruption to schools at the time of the collection, information on CfE levels was not collected in 2019/20.

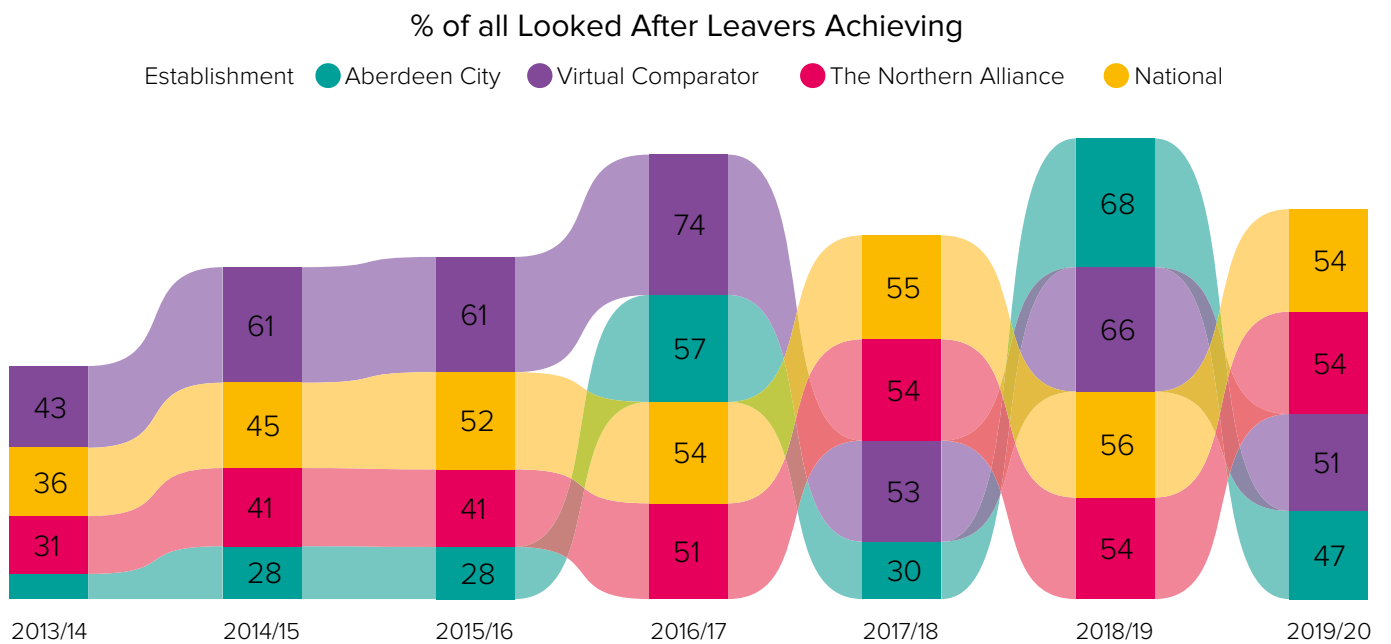


Literacy / Numeracy combined

Graph 1 - Percentage of All Looked After Leavers Achieving National 3



Graph 2 - Percentage of All Looked After Leavers Achieving National 4 in Literacy and Numeracy Combined



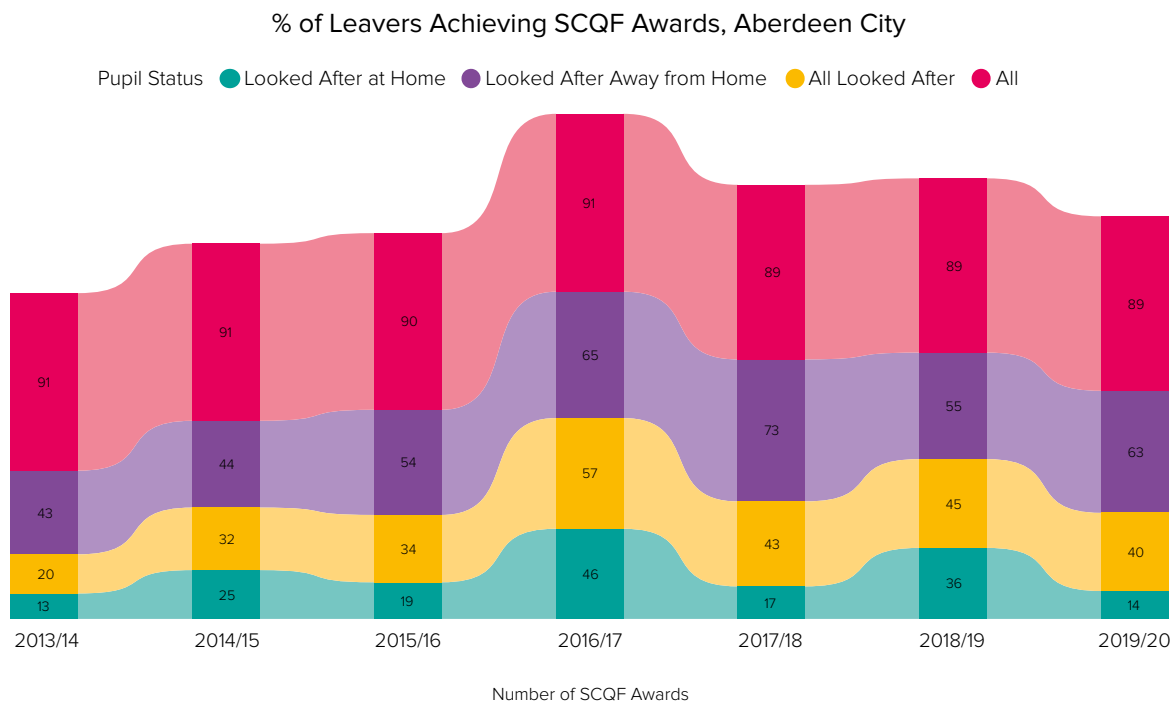
Graph 1 shows that the percentage of Looked After Young people achieving National 3 (SCQF 3) literacy and Numeracy combined has remained in line with the Virtual comparator for the 2nd year and has remained at 73% which is 1% below the National average. 100% of those Looked After Away from Home achieved a National 3 in Literacy / Numeracy combined.

Graph 2 shows that although there has been a decrease in the percentage of all Looked After leavers achieving National 4 in Literacy and Numeracy combined, they remain only marginally below the National Comparator.

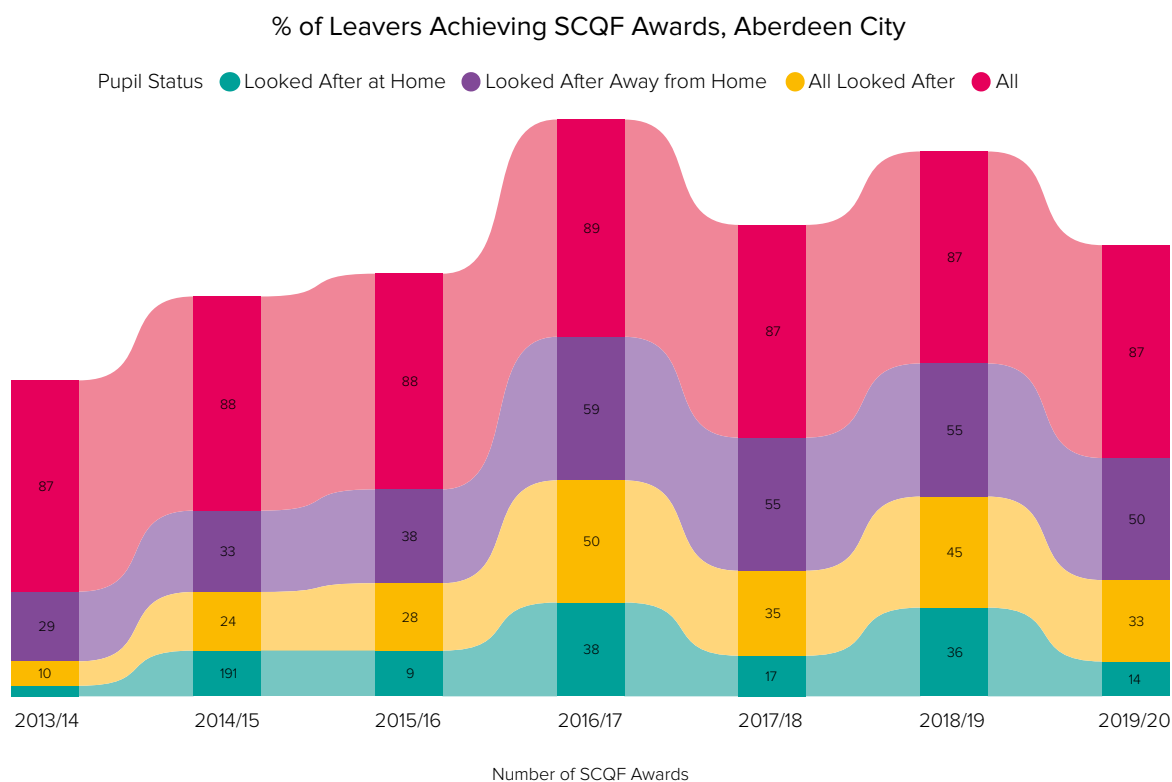
The use of live data by schools as part of their monthly tracking with a focus on those who are Care Experienced is explicit within the National Improvement Framework (NIF) along with the development of the LOIP project focused on improving literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 3 will support the aim to close the attainment gap between Looked After Children and their peers as well as closing the gap between the subgroups of children who are Looked After.

Breadth and Depth

Graph 3 - Percentage of Looked After young people leaving school with 4 or more SCQF awards at Level 3



Graph 4 - Percentage of Looked After young people leaving school with 4 or more SCQF awards at Level 4

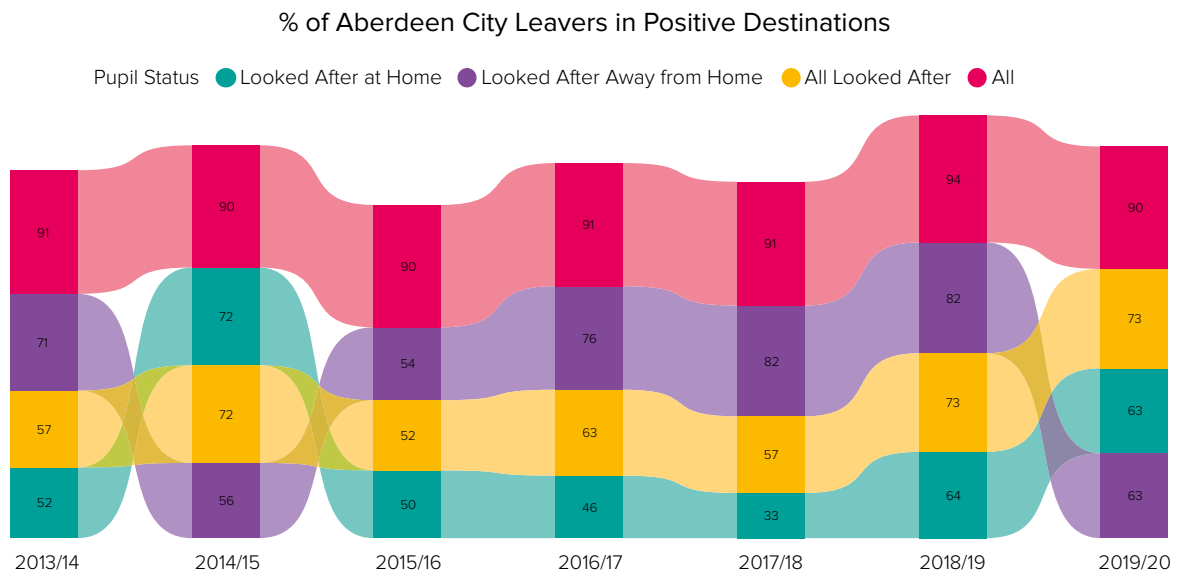


Graph 3 shows that the percentage of Looked After young people leaving school with 4 or more qualifications at level 3 was at its highest in 2017/18. There has been little fluctuation over the last 3 years. There continues to be a gap between our Looked After Children and their peers. It is again important to note that the small numbers of young people (Looked After) mean there are large shifts in percentages.

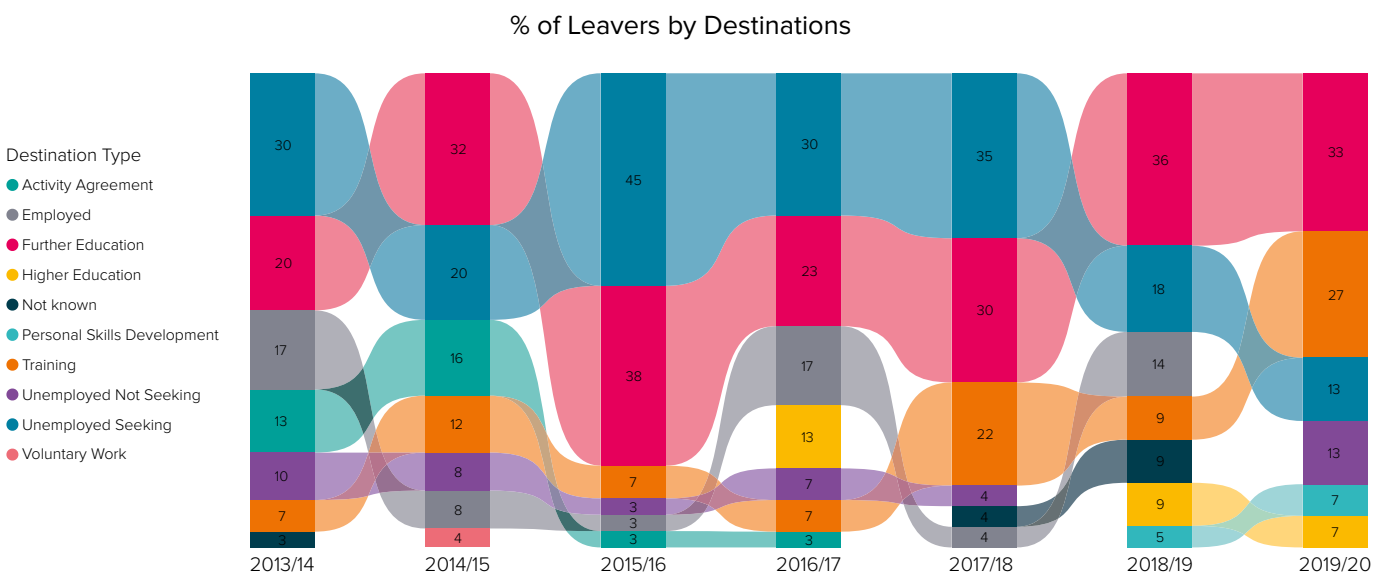
It can be seen in Graph 4 that following an increase in the percentage of Looked After Children achieving 4 or more at level 4 in 2018/19, this fell again in 2019/20. This could potentially be accredited to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, however, again there are small numbers which impact on the percentages.

Part of the design of the service to be offered through the expansion of the Virtual School team has taken in to account how we support young people to be in a place to access their learning within their mainstream environment and what support needs to look like as part of an alternative curriculum offer. This provides young people with the opportunity to access an increased number of subjects at different levels and supports us to deliver on The Promise Change Programme one that states “Care experienced young people will be actively participating in all subjects and extracurricular activities in schools”.

Positive Destinations



Types of Leaver Destinations



The National Benchmarking data shows that although there was a fall in the percentage of young people entering a positive destination across the city, the percentage of looked after young people entering a positive destination bucked that trend and remained the same. For the first time in 5 years looked after away from home was at the same as those looked after at home. However, there was a drop in those Looked After Away from home entering a positive destination. Each young person who had not entered a positive destination was actively supported through Skills Development Scotland, the Employability Team and the Virtual School and this approach has greatly aided our young people. This approach will be maintained over 2021/22.

The destination of all Looked After Young People is known and for the second year in a row, the majority (33%) have moved on to Further Education. There is also an increase in those progressing on to training.

The enhanced tracking and monitoring of Care Experienced Young People within individual schools as well as through the Virtual School, means that early support is put in place through partnership working with others (DYW, SDS and MCR Pathways), increasing opportunities for young people to talk about their skills for life, learning and work. This recognises the ambition of The Promise change Programme one that states “Schools will support and ensure care experienced young people go on to genuinely positive destinations, such as further education or employment”.

Pathway Planning meetings between schools, Skills Development Scotland and ABZWorks focus on pupils at risk of leaving school without a positive destination, and on winter leavers. This includes those care experienced young people who fall into that group, and early interventions are identified to try to secure ongoing engagement and as being at risk of leaving school without a positive destination are included in these discussions, with the aim of ensuring that clear routes are available to them and to reduce the risk of these young people leaving school with no plan in front of them.

The National Benchmarking data for 2020/21 leavers will be available in February 2022. In summary, there are many positives emerging from trend data. This suggests that there are important interventions to be maintained/further improved over the 2021/22 session.



SECTION 4 –

What do we know about the different categories of children and young people?

The total number of Looked After children and young people who are supported through the Virtual School (Early years/ Primary /secondary/ school leavers) is currently 476. 233 are these children and young people live out of city and 40 are school leavers.

The latest national statistics for Scotland for 2019/20 show that educational attainment continues to vary across the types of accommodation in which looked after children are placed. School leavers staying with friends or relatives or in foster care provided by the local authority performed better than those in other care settings. School leavers who were looked after within the last year in 'other residential settings', which includes residential schools, secure care accommodation and crisis care, had the lowest overall levels of attainment. School leavers who were looked after at home with parents also had lower levels of attainment compared with most other placement types. As the cohorts of children and young people are small and are ever changing, National data alongside local data helps to inform our thinking and direction of travel.

Our local data shows that collectively our Looked After Children continue to achieve below that of their peers and that those children and young people who are Looked After at Home have the poorest attainment and lower attendance. However, we are in line with our Virtual Comparator for achievement of Literacy / Numeracy combined at SCQF level 3. With a multi-agency focus on shifting the balance of care toward recognising how we safely support care plans where young people can be supported to be looked after at home and equally, looked after within Kinship arrangements, there will need to be a continued focus on supporting young people within education to achieve.

Ongoing review of education plans for those children and Young People in our local Children's homes is supported by the Virtual School Education Support Officer who is well placed to link in with relevant partners and provide appropriate and relevant advice and guidance on planning for positive destinations. This ensures a joined-up relational approach with Education and Children's Social Work as well as our Employability team, Further and Higher Education and Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

For those Children and Young People who are in a Residential Placement out of authority, the appropriateness of the placement as well as the scrutiny of agreed outcomes is undertaken through the Children's Specialist Service Forum. This also ensures the child or young person is receiving the expected standards of care and education. The Virtual School Head Teacher has oversight of all young people attending residential schools and supports the co-ordination of follow up interventions with the Educational Psychology Service and Residential School head Teachers. The inclusion of a Team Manager from the Children's Social Work Youth team has further enhanced the joined-up planning in relation to Children and Young People moving on from a Residential Placement including returning to Aberdeen.

The national data shows that a slightly higher percentage of leavers looked after within the year with one or two placements achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 3 or better (87%). This compared with 75% of those with three or more placements (75%). A higher proportion of those with one placement achieved qualifications at higher attainment levels (SCQF level 4 or better) compared to those with two or more placements.

Work is being undertaken through the Corporate Parent Performance and Improvement group to develop a minimum data set to support further analysis locally of the impact of placement moves on educational outcomes.



SECTION 5 –

What does this mean for the Virtual School and wider partnership?

The Virtual School continues to support children and young people well but as the cluster works with others to reduce the number of out of authority placements we require to rethink our approach and bolster the individualised interventions that can be accessed through the Virtual School. In order to achieve this the Virtual School and will be allocated additional resource through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and the national increase in teacher numbers to enable the design and delivery of bespoke interventions for Care Experienced Children and Young People who may require a bridge back into full time education in Aberdeen City.

As part of the expansion, the Virtual School will work alongside City Growth who have secured £112,000 from the North East Economic Recovery Fund to provide a programme of activity for young people of school age who have disengaged from education, or who are at risk of doing so, and are too young to leave the school roll. This money will be used to provide an alternative offer to these young people, who are care experienced or at risk of becoming looked after, through a range of activity, including outdoor learning, nature/nurture, recovery from trauma, and more with a view to supporting them to build skills and secure accredited qualifications and the ability to move on to meaningful employability activity on leaving school or to re-engage in education.

The use of live data which distinguishes between those who are Looked After at Home and those Looked After Away from Home will continue to be developed in order to provide access to live trend data to support schools and services to take informed decisions more timeously.

The development of ABZ Works will be subject to on-going review to ensure that the platform meets the needs of young people who are Care Experienced.

The Education Service are keenly aware that children and young people (and particularly those who are Care Experienced) are likely to require significant additional support to thrive in school. Youth workers have been employed to work in our secondary schools for session 2021/22. Being based within the schools will enable relationships to be developed with young people, supporting those on the edge of care as part of an early intervention strategy, as well as supporting those who are already looked after.



Family Learning workers have been employed to support families in predominantly, but not exclusively, primary schools. This resource will help build on the universal roll out of PEEP across ELCs and will help to support families at an early stage. These supports will target those who are looked after at home and on the edge of care, with the aim of reducing the risk of not attending, as well as supporting attendance. It is hoped that this intervention will address the risks associated with the dip in attendance evident in primary schools as a result of periods of self-isolation.

MCR Pathways co-ordinators will form part of the support network for children and families to ensure there is a team around the child and that the most appropriate person is working with and engaging with the child and family.

All schools will continue to prioritise the health and wellbeing of all learners, and this is helping our local system to be more agile and responsive. The universal roll out of the Compassionate and Connected Communities is likely to significantly impact on outcomes for Care Experienced learners and this may result in a need to change our focus.

Quality assurance procedures have been introduced to ensure a shared understanding across Quality Improvement Officers (QIO) and the Virtual School. This focus on reviewing the Looked After population within city schools with a key focus on attendance, exclusions and consideration for a CSP as well as sharing of good practice to support school improvement will help support our delivery of The Promise.

The addition of a QIO with a focus on Additional Support Needs will also support a review of provision for Looked After Children in out of authority Residential Schools with a view to measuring impact alongside the Virtual School. This will help ensure that an appropriate curriculum is being delivered, including provision of wider achievement opportunities and planning for positive destinations. It also provides an ongoing additional layer of quality assurance and scrutiny alongside the Virtual School, so that we can be confident that the support is equitable to that being provided for our Looked After and Care Experienced Children and Young People within the city

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October 2021

