

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES – 2020-2021

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To report on the educational experiences of our children looked after during academic year 2020-2021 and to provide an update on the support offered by the CLA education service.

INTRODUCTION

During this period, there has been continued disruption to school operations: local Blaenau Gwent school closures at the end of the autumn term followed by a further national period of school closure in the spring term. Schools were re-purposed again as hubs, for most of the spring term 2021. Remote learning took place during periods of school closures. From March 2021 there was a gradual return of learners, with schools reopening to all learners at the start of the summer term.

In response to COVID 19, the School Performance Information (Wales) Regulations 2011 has been amended to remove the duties on governing bodies to provide data to local authorities and Welsh Ministers, respectively, on teacher assessment outcomes and authorised or unauthorised absence for the pupils registered at schools in the 2020-21 school year. As such, no end of phase/key stage data or attendance in respect of our children looked after is included in this report.

SUMMARY

At the end of academic year 2020-2021, 154 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our children looked after attend more specialist education settings.

Personal education plans for all newly accommodated children continued to be updated in line with statutory timescales.

Just under half of our children looked after have additional learning needs and 21% have a statement of special educational needs.

A small proportion of our children looked after experienced a change of school during the course of the year. This is a further decrease when compared with the previous year. Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a child looked after moves placement and transport is provided where necessary to ensure stability of schooling. When a child does have to move school,

processes are in place to ensure that delays in admissions are avoided, wherever possible.

During 2020-2021, incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after have remained in line with the previous year. The number of individual children looked after who have received fixed term exclusions during the year has increased, however the total number of days lost to exclusions has decreased when compared with the previous year.

Almost all learners achieved recognised qualifications at the end of their statutory school studies in 2020-2021 with the majority engaged in post 16 educational and/ or training opportunities.

BACKGROUND

The CLA education service continues to sit within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team in Children's Services and is line managed by the Safeguarding in Education Manager. The team structure comprises of a coordinator and two education mentors, who work term-time only.

The CLA education service continues to work closely with schools; colleagues within children's services, education and foster carers as well as outside agencies to ensure that children looked after by Blaenau Gwent have access to a good quality appropriate education.

The CLA education mentors continue to support both the curriculum and pastoral needs of our children looked after. In addition to the support offered to those children looked after by and placed within Blaenau Gwent the team also monitors the education of those children looked after by Blaenau Gwent and placed outside the local authority area.

PRESENT POSITION

Overview of current CLA school aged population

Of the 154 children of statutory school age who remained looked after at the end of the school year 2020-2021 there were more children of secondary school age than primary. The overall figure is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when 162 children of statutory school age were looked after at the end of the year. The majority of Blaenau Gwent children looked after continue to be educated in the area.

Primary aged pupils	64
Secondary aged pupils	90

Educated in Blaenau Gwent	115
Educated outside Blaenau Gwent	39

The educational settings of all Blaenau Gwent CLA of statutory school age at the end of the academic year were

Setting Type	Number of CLA
Mainstream	127
Resource base attached to mainstream school	4
Pupil Referral Unit	1
Special School	9
Independent	9
Alternative	4

During 2020-2021 a small proportion of our children looked after accessed more specialist education settings however the vast majority continued to attend mainstream school placements. The number of children looked after accessing special and independent school placements remains in line with the previous year. The number of children looked after attending resource bases attached to mainstream school settings has reduced when compared with the previous year.

Additional Learning Needs

During academic year 2020-2021, almost half 49% of all statutory school aged children who were looked after by Blaenau Gwent had additional learning needs sufficient for intervention at School Action, School Action Plus or Statement level. This is slightly less when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 52%.

In total, 21% of children looked after by Blaenau Gwent at the end of academic year 2020-2021 had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This figure is a slight increase when compared with the previous academic year.

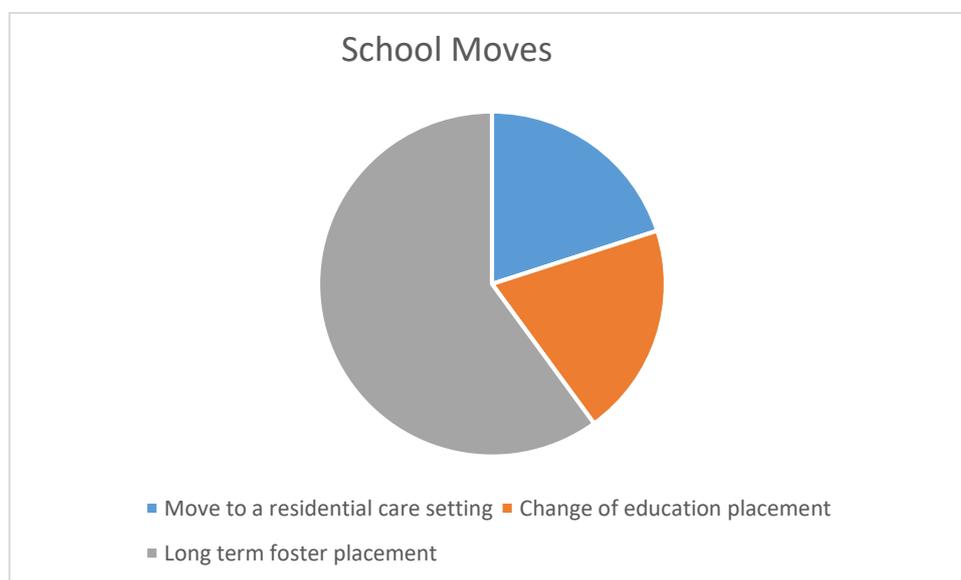
Personal Education Plans

The Social Services & Well Being Act notes the duty on the Local Authority to ensure that a personal education plan is in place for each child who is looked after. 'Except where a child enters care in an emergency, the PEP must be initiated as part of the Part 6 care and support plan before the young person becomes looked after. In an emergency placement, the PEP should be initiated within ten working days.

During academic year 2020-2021 all PEPs for newly accommodated children were updated within statutory timescales.

School moves

A total of 5 children looked after (3%) experienced at least one or more non-transitional school moves during 2020-2021. This is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 16 children (10%).



A total of 5 school moves took place during the course of the year. All moves were planned and in line with individual children's care plans. One child was required to change school due to a move to a residential care setting. One child experienced a change of school following the request for a change of education placement which was agreed by the Local Authority's Additional Learning Needs Panel. The remaining planned moves were in line with children moving to long term foster placements.

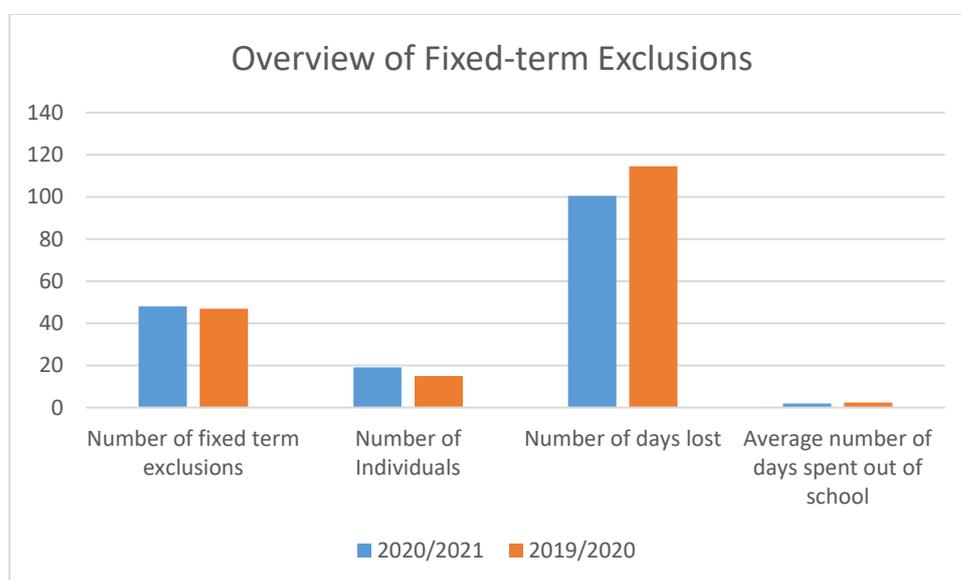
Exclusions

No child looked after by Blaenau Gwent was permanently excluded from school during academic year 2020-2021.

Incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after has remained in line with the previous year. The number of individual children looked after who have received fixed term exclusions during the year has increased however the total number of days lost to exclusions has decreased when compared with the previous year.

48 fixed term exclusions were issued in respect of 19 individual Blaenau Gwent children looked after during academic year 2019-2020. A total of 100.5 school days were lost as a result. This is compared to a total of 47 fixed term exclusions issued in respect of 15 individuals and a total of 114.5 days lost for the previous academic year 2019-2020.

The average number of days spent out of school for an individual child looked after on fixed term exclusions during 2020-2021 was 2 days. This figure is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year (2.4 days lost).



Academic attainments

The academic progress and attainment of our children looked after continues to be monitored by the CLA education team. In 2020-2021 end of Key Stage 4 assessment arrangements were changed due to COVID and centre determined grades were awarded to learners.

In 2020-2021, 19 children looked after completed their statutory studies. All but one of the children in this cohort achieved recognised qualifications. The one learner who did not achieve recognised qualifications has since completed and submitted work with outcomes expected in Spring 2022.

9 of our children looked after who completed their statutory studies in 2020-2021 had additional learning needs and 4 had a statement of special educational needs.

14 of the 19 children attended mainstream school settings. One child attended an independent school setting outside the Local Authority area, three attended local authority maintained special school settings for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and one child was educated at a school based alternative setting.

Celebration of Achievement

The annual celebration awards were not held last year due to the COVID restrictions in place. Children's achievements were recognised individually and a collective message prepared for all children, to recognise their achievements.

This year, the awards are incorporated with the Winter Wonderland Event held on 1st December 2021. The event recognises the many educational successes of our CLA through the continued period of Covid disruption.

A significant number of our children looked after, 113 in total, are being recognised for their achievements both within school and in terms of their participation in extra-curricular activities. Schools both within the local authority and neighbouring authorities nominate our children looked after with further nominations being made by independent and special school settings.

The event recognises those children of primary and secondary school age as well as those young people who have completed their statutory studies and moved onto post 16 education and training opportunities. A specific focus is given to those young people who have successfully completed college and university courses and those who have now moved on to further and higher courses.

Letterbox

The Welsh Government has continued to provide funding for a set number of children to participate in the Letterbox Club each year. The Letterbox Club encourages reading for pleasure and learning at home. It helps to improve the educational outlook for children who are looked-after.

Parcels have continued to be distributed to our children on a monthly basis between October and May with an additional festive parcel provided in December. A total of 30 Blaenau Gwent children looked after between the ages of 5 to 13 have received parcels throughout the year.

CLA education team

The CLA education team continues to provide a flexible service, responding quickly to support our Children looked after and their carers. Detailed communication with carers and residential settings helps to ensure that they are equipped to best support the educational needs of our children looked after. CLA education mentors continue to support our children looked after in school and at home, delivering bespoke mentoring sessions differentiated to the needs of individual children and providing support and reassurance to carers.

All Blaenau Gwent Children looked after continue to be allocated to an education mentor. Where possible and deemed to be necessary our children looked after are offered direct mentoring support. The take up of mentoring support continues to be good. CLA education mentors continue to provide ongoing support to children to access the blended learning approach as required where children are self-isolating.

Case study one – supporting transition from primary to secondary school

Learner one resides at home under placement with parent regulations. Learner one attended a local mainstream primary school before transitioning to a secondary school in the local area. Learner one has additional learning needs with their primary need being in relation to their social, emotional and behavioural needs and received a level of in class and pastoral support whilst at primary school.

The CLA education mentor supported in coordinating an enhanced transition between the primary and secondary school. In addition to supporting with the development of reading and numeracy skills weekly direct mentoring sessions for focused on ensuring the learner understood the daily routine and expectations of secondary school. Time was spent between the CLA education mentor and the learner researching the new school, familiarising the learner with the new school setting and getting to know key members of staff.

The designated lead for CLA learners at the secondary school was introduced to the learner early on in the school year and was invited to join a mentoring session during the summer term. The CLA education mentor accompanied the learner and parent on visits to the secondary school, helping them prepare questions to ask.

The knowledge gained as part of the mentoring sessions was used to share key information with the receiving school about how best to support the learner upon transition. The CLA education mentor supported the learner to complete a piece of work 'all about me' which included detail of hobbies, favourite subjects and areas of learning that the learner found more challenging allowing the receiving school to target support appropriately.

The CLA education mentor also supported the parent to apply for a bus pass and to access the school's online portal to purchase uniform and resources. Weekly mentoring sessions have continued to take place in school and regular contact is maintained with the parent, helping to ensure continued support at home in relation to schooling.

Feedback from parent *'The service you provide is A1 you always on hand to help with anything!'*

Effective communication between the CLA education team, Placement team and carers has enabled prompt support to be put in place in response to difficulties raised by carers/parents ensuring that they can better support the learning at home for children placed in their care.

Case study two – supporting access and engagement with remote learning

Learner two resides with a long term foster carer locally. Learner two has additional learning needs in the areas of cognition and social, emotional and behavioural needs. Learner two attended a resource base for children with complex needs before transitioning to a resource base at a local secondary school. When in school learner two, experienced difficulty in complying with the expectations in relation to COVID. In line with the move to remote learning during the autumn term learner two was expected to access remote learning sessions directed by staff from school followed by independent follow up work. It became apparent that the foster carer found it extremely difficult to navigate the various online learning platforms being used by the school. The learner's reluctant to engage with school work at home coupled with the foster carer's limitations in being able to support put pressure on relationships within the home.

The CLA education mentor linked with school staff daily and supported the learner and their carer to log on to live lessons and to complete the daily tasks set by school. The mentoring sessions were used to discuss the work that needed to be completed and the CLA education mentor acted as the link between home and school resulting

in the learner engaging in the work set. The support continued daily until the school reopened and face to face lessons resumed. Learner two received certificates for engagement online and 'learner of the week' for her work completed in science. Weekly mentoring sessions now take place both in school and at home.

Feedback from school *'We have felt supported by the service. You have worked with the school, the learner and carer. You have helped address the issues by working on choices such as around lunch options to remove this as a barrier. You have also supported school in sharing plans in the hope that the learner fully understands them. In addition home learning, despite huge effort from [school] would have been poorly attended without the support you provided'*.

Case study 3 – supporting access and engagement with remote learning

Learner three returned to a foster placement in locally, after exiting a residential care placement out of county.

The CLA education team supported with the application to a secondary school in Blaenau Gwent and ensured that pre-admission meeting was held to plan for the learner's start at their new school.

In order to ensure that the learner could work towards a full cohort of GCSE qualifications the learner was required to access some subjects and catch up work via a distanced learning programme.

The learner initially experienced difficulty with the level of organisation required to access the online material. The CLA education mentor offered daily support to the learner, breaking down tasks into manageable chunks, ensuring that the learner knew what was required and that completed work was submitted. A bespoke timetable was created each day, dependent on work uploaded by school staff for completion. Check ins via email and Teams were offered throughout the day to support with completion of any activities that the learner found challenging and to offer wellbeing/emotional support. Telephone calls were also made to the foster carer to offer guidance so they too could offer support to the learner. The learner achieved 8 GCSE's in summer 2021 and is now accessing a Level 3 course at college.

Feedback from the young person's social worker *"Just wanted to share that [young person's name] has just been telling me how grateful she is for [CLA education mentor's name] support with home learning, she said that if it wasn't for [CLA education mentor's name] she wouldn't be doing it and she is finding it invaluable."*

Feedback from the young person to CLA education mentor *"Thank you for all your help, I couldn't have made it the end of year 11 without you. It was tough but with all your help I got everything done!"*

Catherine Edwards

Children Looked After Education Coordinator

December 2021