

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES – 2019-2020

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To report on the educational experiences of our children looked after during academic year 2019-2020 including the period of school repurposing between March and June 2020 and to provide an update on the support offered by the CLA education service.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of academic year 2019-2020, 162 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 looked after children attend more specialist education settings.

Just over half of our children looked after have additional learning needs and 20% 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 however this is a decrease compared with the previous year. Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a looked after child 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.

There has been a decrease in the incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after as well as the number of individual children who have received fixed term exclusions and the total number of days lost to exclusions when compared with the previous year, however, it is important to note that for 2019-2020, the time period for exclusions covers September to March 2020 only.

In response to COVID 19, the Welsh Government has cancelled all statutory data collections that would have been due to take place in Summer 2020 - 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 2019/20 school year. As such, no end of phase/key stage data in respect of our children looked after is included in this report.

From 20th March 2020 schools were re-purposed in the emergency response to the COVID pandemic. Schools were closed for provision of statutory education and re-purposed as hubs to provide care for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. A joint approach was established between Education and Children's Services to identify those children who needed to attend the hubs along with a process to agree placement.

On 20th April 2020, the Welsh Government published 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning: Continuity of learning policy statement'. To ensure that children looked after were able

to keep learning, Children's Services identified those children looked after who had insufficient access to ICT equipment to enable them to engage in online learning. The parents and carers of all those children who were digitally excluded were provided with funding for a laptop and ensured that there was access to Wi-Fi. Designated laptop models were recommended and support was made available by the CLA education team to help set up the laptops.

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 162 children of statutory school age who remained looked after at the end of the school year 2019-2020 there were more children of secondary school age than primary. This is an increase when compared with the previous academic year when 153 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	77
Secondary aged pupils	85

Educated in Blaenau Gwent	101
Educated outside Blaenau Gwent	61

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	135
Resource Base attached to mainstream school	7
Special School	10
Independent School	8
Tuition	1
Awaiting Placement	1

During 2019-20 a small proportion of our children looked after accessed more specialist education settings however the vast majority continued to attend mainstream school placements. During the year there has been an increase in the number of children looked after accessing special and independent school placements. There has been a decrease in the number of pupils accessing alternative provision and tuition.

The number of CLA attending resource bases attached to mainstream school settings remains in line with previous years. No Blaenau Gwent children looked after attended Pupil Referral Units.

Additional Learning Needs

During academic year 2019-2020, 52% 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 figure is higher when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 43%.

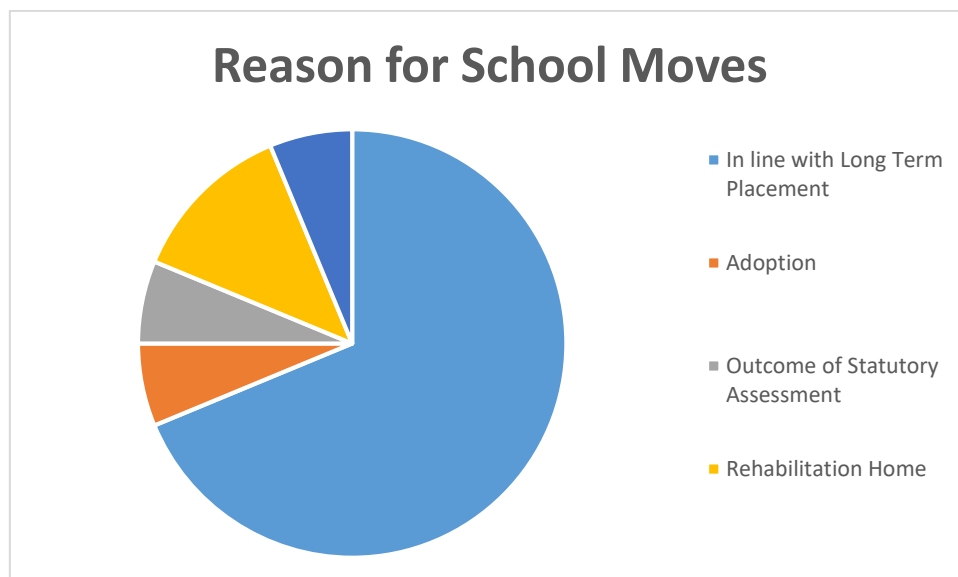
In total 20% of children looked after by Blaenau Gwent at the end of academic year 2019-2020 had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This figure is slightly less when compared with the previous academic year.

Personal Education Plans

During academic year 2019-2020 95% of PEPs for newly accommodated children were updated within statutory timescales. One child did not have a PEP completed within 10 days of becoming looked after.

School moves

10% of Blaenau Gwent statutory school aged LAC experienced at least one or more non-transitional school moves during 2019-2020. This is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 12%.



A total of 16 school moves took place during the course of the year. Almost all moves were planned and in line with individual care plans. Of the planned moves, 1 child was required to change school due to a move to a residential care setting and another as a result of moving between residential care placements. 1 child experienced a change of school following the outcome of a statutory assessment of their educational needs which deemed them to require specialist education placement. 1 child moved school as a result of successfully transitioning out of residential care into a foster placement. 2 children were rehabilitated to the care of their parents and 1 child was placed for adoption. The remaining planned moves were in line with long term foster placements. There were three unplanned moves, two of whom returned to the previous, original school placement.

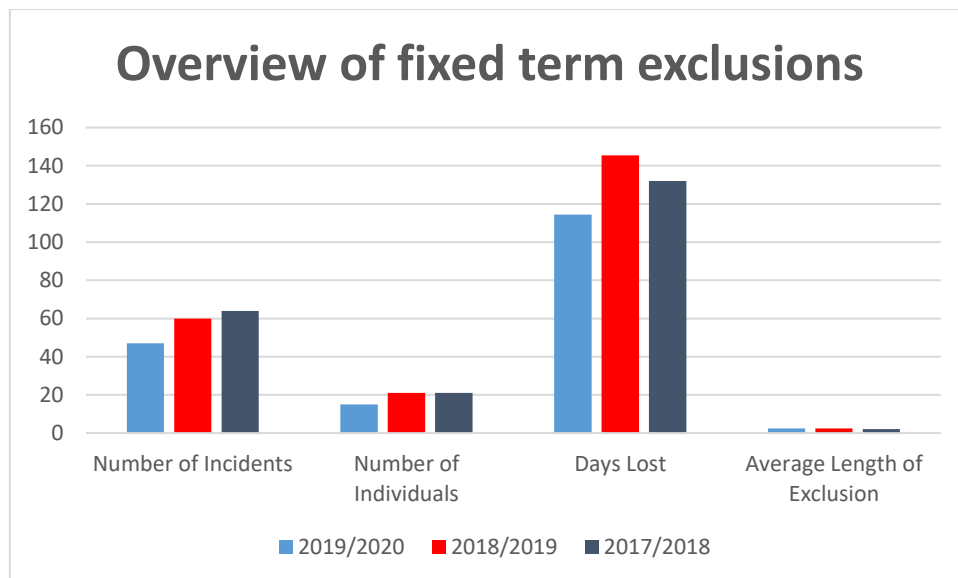
Exclusions

One child looked after was permanently excluded from school during academic year 2019-2020. The exclusion was later rescinded and the child is now on role at another

mainstream school locally where they have access to the school's own alternative provision.

During 2019-2020 there has been a decrease in the incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after. The number of individual children looked after who have received fixed term exclusions and the total number of days lost to exclusions has also decreased when compared with the previous year.

47 fixed term exclusions were issued in respect of 15 individual Blaenau Gwent children looked after during academic year 2019-2020. A total of 114.5 school days were lost as a result. This is compared to a total of 60 fixed term exclusions issued in respect of 21 individuals and a total of 145.5 days lost for the previous academic year 2018-2019.



The average number of days spent out of school for an individual child looked after on fixed term exclusions during 2019-2020 was 2.4 days. This figure is in line with the previous academic year.

Representation from the CLA education team, social workers and foster carers at readmission meetings is good.

Celebration of achievement

The annual celebration award was held in December 2019. The many and varied achievements of children looked after were recognised and celebrated and all present enjoyed the showcase of our children's talents. Due to ongoing restrictions in relation to COVID-19 the annual celebration of achievement event planned for December 2020 will not take place in the usual format. Given the upheaval experienced by our learners in 2019-2020, it is a priority that our CLA will for their achievements through this unprecedented time and plans are in place to hold a virtual celebration of our children's achievements. The launch is scheduled for the January 2021.

Letterbox

Funding from Welsh Government for our children to participate in the Letterbox Club reading programme continued in 19-20. A total of 35 Blaenau Gwent children looked after received parcels.

CLA education team

CLA education mentors continue to support our children looked after in school and at home. Since the onset of COVID, CLA education team has provided a flexible service, responding quickly to support children and carers to move to online learning and to engage in professional dialogue. Detailed communication with residential homes took place to ensure that education provision was in place for our CLA, whether this was a school attached to the setting or a blended learning approach. Dialogue continues with all residential settings to ensure staff are equipped to support blended learning and to ensure that all children resident have sufficient access to ICT equipment. CLA education mentors support with additional packs of resources for staff to use with CLA learners.

CLA education mentors ensured that children and carers were able to access the many and varied online learning platforms as schools re-purposed. Good communication and coordination with schools ensured regular 'check-ins' with CLA learners, and ensured information was shared so that professionals were aware of any emerging issues and could take appropriate action. They maintained ongoing support to children and carers to access and complete a range of online and 'hand on' learning, delivering bespoke mentoring sessions differentiated to the needs of individual children and providing support and reassurance to carers. They continue to provide ongoing support to children and carers and support the blended learning approach as required when 'bubble' groups in schools have been affected by self-isolation periods. Virtual direct mentoring continues to be offered where children are self-isolating.

Case Study one - Continuation of mentoring support at the point of placement move

Learner 1 found the transition from being in school to learning online initially quite challenging. Close liaison between the CLA education mentor and designated member of staff at the school ensured that subject specific support was available promptly when needed. A key focus of the mentoring sessions was on developing organisation skills as well as building confidence to assist with independent engagement with the on-line learning tasks set by the school.

CLA education mentor provided a daily call home to support with logging onto Google Classrooms, developed a timetable and offered explanations in relation to specific pieces of work. A system was established to ensure that all completed work was submitted. Learner 1 returned when the school reopened in June and is now working towards GCSE qualifications.

Feedback from the young person - “This is great, thank you so much!”, “ok, sounds like a plan 😊 I know what I need to do today!” and “Yes, that sounds like an amazing idea, I definitely need to get back on track!”

Effective communication between the CLA education team and Placement team has enabled prompt support to be put in place in response to difficulties raised by carers/parents. This has also helped to identify those carers/parents who find the use of technology a challenge and appropriate support provided to help them navigate the use of ICT. The role of the CLA education mentors has extended to offer support to upskill foster carers so they can better support the on-line learning at home for children placed in their care.

Case study two – Support for foster carers to assist with learning at home

The CLA education service supported a foster carer who cares for 3 of our children, 2 of whom have additional learning needs and were placed early in spring 2020. The carer raised concern about the children’s ability to access the different online learning platforms, and also her own ability to appropriately support learning at home, recognising her own limitations in terms of IT skills.

Prior to Covid-19 one of the children had received weekly mentoring sessions in school. Due to the nature of the virtual sessions not only did this continue but was extended to the other 2 children in placement.

CLA education mentor made direct contact with each of the schools to ensure the provision of more suitable differentiated work, including a paper based pack of weekly resources to assist with engagement initially. Additional resources were provided by the CLA education mentor for the children including fun activities to engage them in working alongside the foster carer. Specific resources and guidance aimed at supporting children’s learning at home was provided to the foster carer and helped to develop their skills in supporting education at home.

With support, the children adapted very quickly to the new style of learning and were able to complete work with a level of independence. Virtual mentoring support is ongoing. There is a well-established routine in the placement and the foster carer is now confident in supporting the children with their homework tasks. All the children have returned to school and are engaged.

Feedback from foster carer “Thank for your support it’s a great help” and “The resources sent have helped me focus on the basics”

Case Study three – Supporting carers with engagement and transition

Learner 3 resides with grandparents who expressed concerns to their supervising social worker regarding the difficulty they were experiencing in getting Learner 3 to engage with school work on line. The CLA education mentor offered support virtually and weekly calls were put in place. Learner 3 and grandmother joined in the weekly CLA education sessions together. There were occasions where Learner 3 found it difficult to understand instructions for completing the tasks set by school. Carer’s confidence was much improved through the CLA mentoring sessions and

with support from their grandmother Learner 3 made good progress, resulting in the sessions being positive and productive. Through the joint mentoring sessions, Learner 3's grandmother was able to learn the maths techniques currently being used by the school and used these for Learner 3 to practice on a daily basis.

Learner 3 transitioned to secondary school in September 2020 and has settled in very well. Learner 3 is enjoying secondary school, has made new friends and is working well in all lessons. Learner 3 is now in receipt of weekly maths intervention offered via the school.

CLA education mentors facilitated virtual mentoring sessions focusing on transition. The sessions have been bespoke to each child's needs and enabled our CLA to be as well prepared as they could have been for transition to secondary school in September 2020. MS Teams was used to facilitate effective links between schools to plan transition. This has been even more useful when different local authorities are involved and has promoted and facilitated good levels of engagement. New schools have been well-informed of the child's needs

Case study four – Mentoring support to assist with transition to secondary school.

Learner 4 resides at home with birth mother. Weekly mentoring support sessions from the CLA education service started in September 2019 when Learner 4 was in their final year of primary school. In spring 2020 the focus of the sessions shifted to preparation for transition into secondary school in September 2020. Sessions moved from face to face in school to virtual sessions at home.

Learner 4 was very anxious about moving to secondary school. The ongoing restrictions re: COVID-19 heightened these anxieties. Learner 4 was unable to visit the secondary school site or meet face to face with new teachers. The CLA education mentor was able to pinpoint particular concerns that Learner 4 had regarding the transition which directed the focus of the sessions. Mother was very encouraging during the sessions which improved the quality and promoted Learner 4's engagement. Sessions focused on secondary school timetables, new subjects, virtual tours of the school including virtual meetings with staff

Throughout the course of the sessions there was regular dialogue between the CLA education mentor and staff from both schools so they were aware of any concerns and able to answer any questions that Learner 4 had in relation to the transition. During the course of the mentoring sessions Learner 4's approach to transition became far more positive.

Learner 4 successfully transitioned to secondary school in September 2020 and has settled in well. There are no longer concerns in terms of attendance. School report that Learner 4 is happy in school and working hard.

Feedback from young person – “the catch up mentoring sessions were helpful if I was struggling on a piece of work”

Feedback from parent – “Mentoring sessions have been great for [name removed] especially helping with transition. I was worried during the COVID school closures as [name removed] wouldn’t be able to visit the new school and attend taster days and the sessions were really beneficial in preparing [name removed] for the transition.

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December 2020