

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**30<sup>th</sup> JULY 2020**

**CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER (CLA) EDUCATION OUTCOMES**

**REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR AND INCLUSION SERVICES**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the educational outcomes of Children Looked After (CLA) in Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2018 /19.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

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

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board is kept informed and up to date with progress and achievements by Children Looked After (CLA) in schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT).

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Developmental Trauma is a term used to describe childhood trauma such as chronic abuse, neglect or other harsh adversity in their own homes. Many children who are in care have experienced such trauma. Early childhood trauma can cause neurobiological changes that impact human development and cause significant changes in brain function. These

changes in brain structures are responsible for cognitive and physical functioning as well as altering neurobiological mechanisms involved in mediating the stress response. Traumatic experiences before entry into care can cause developmental difficulties, which often affect a child's behaviour, self-esteem or trust in authority figures and their capacity to engage in formal learning processes.

4.2 Research by the Institute of Public Care showed that a significant proportion of care experienced children and young people will have:

- a recognised disability or a diagnosed attachment disorder or stated emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- less opportunity to achieve good educational qualifications;
- behavioural issues resulting from the trauma of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences); and increased risks of coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

4.3 Much of the research outlines that outcomes for children looked after are less favourable than for other children outside of the care system (Gypen et al., 2017), including in relation to their:

- Mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- Educational achievement.

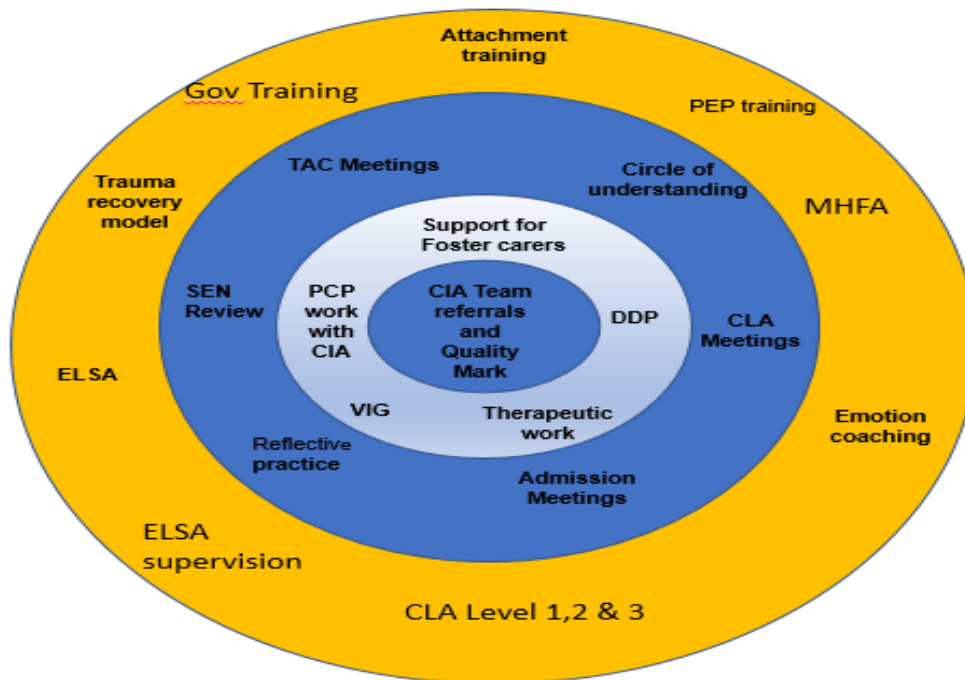
4.4 Research has shown that children and young people looked-after are several times more likely to have a statement of special educational needs, to be excluded from school, and to leave school with no qualifications compared with children in the general population. All-Wales performance indicators have identified that educational outcomes, even when compared to other children with similar backgrounds, are poorer for children in care.

4.5 However, some children and young people in care do have positive experiences in school and achieve educational success. Research highlights that children and young people who do better are more likely to be female, and experience placement stability within a foster care setting where the carer is committed to helping and supporting the young person in their studies. There is also some evidence that young people who have had several placements can achieve educational success if they remain in the same school.

4.6 Improving the outcomes of children who are looked after continues to be a priority within the Local Authority.

- 4.7 The Access and Inclusion Service has responsibility for meeting the educational needs of all CLA pupils who reside in RCT, including those placed from other local authorities. On 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2019 75 school aged pupils were placed in RCT from other local authorities.
- 4.8 This information shows that many CLA pupils experience a range of learning and social emotional difficulties that warrant additional assessment and support in schools. Many require specialist provision. This information is relevant when considering and comparing attainment levels.
- 4.9 Recognition of the contributing factors of any identified additional needs and awareness of the impact of developmental trauma will increase the effectiveness of approach to meeting the learning needs of CLA pupils in school. An individual approach tailored to the pupil's particular circumstances is needed.
- 4.10 The strategy for the CLA education team who seek to support and raise the achievement of children who are looked after is focused on key areas:-
- Supporting early intervention and inclusion and developing approaches that promote effective cooperation between agencies.
  - Promoting education and having high expectations.
  - Listening to children and young people and ensuring their voice is central to all discussions.
  - Using data collected through Capita and from evaluations of work completed to inform priorities and to target support effectively.
- 4.11 All CLA pupils have access to universal support systems available to their school. There is an expectation that schools will engage these services and make referrals where necessary to Access and Inclusion central services.

Figure 1 – Range of interventions provided by the CLA education team.



- 4.12 Figure 1 shows the range of interventions and support provided by the CLA education team, ranging from direct work with individual pupils in school, supporting carers at home, providing bespoke training for schools and supporting a planned programme of training within the Central South Consortium region.
- 4.13 The CLA team continues to support schools to achieve the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark. To date 14 schools have been successful in achieving the quality mark with 5 schools attaining gold and 9 schools attaining platinum awards. An additional 14 schools are currently undertaking the quality mark.
- 4.14 In 2019, 11.49 % of CLA pupils experienced a move of school that was not due to expected transitional arrangements. This is higher than expected (compared with 3.62 % of the overall school population) and is often around change of placement but can also be due to accessing specialist provision such as special classes.

**Case study**

*A year 4 pupil was transferring into RCT from a neighbouring authority. His local mainstream school was approached. The pupil has a statement of SEN and was attending a smaller class provision. School were concerned that he would struggle in a larger class. A placement was awarded to Tai Education Centre for 2 days and 3 days in mainstream*

*provision. Information was shared with school and concerns were listened to and considered. Additional support was agreed through SEN panel. A meeting with carers, the CLA team and the social worker was held at school. Visits and a start date were agreed and time for a circle of understanding meeting was arranged*

- 4.15 The transition from Primary to Secondary school (from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3) is an important stage of the development and educational experiences for young people. At this time there are biological, psychological and emotional changes occurring and a change in school also introduces a wider peer group, more independence and access to a wider curriculum, amongst other factors. Although an exciting time, it can be an anxiety provoking and daunting experience for children, parents/carers and school staff. Research suggests that some vulnerable children need and benefit from intervention prior to transition (McGee et al., 2004).
- 4.16 In the academic year 2019/20 28 pupils are approaching a planned transition from primary to secondary.
- 4.17 Research has concluded that there is no single factor or single set of factors that would support CLA pupils when moving from primary to secondary school. It identifies four key principles to facilitate transition. These include:
- Principle 1. There should be an emphasis on planning and information sharing by key stakeholders
  - Principle 2. Support should be holistic
  - Principle 3. Children's differences should be minimised
  - Principle 4. Support should be individualised
- 4.18 The Children Looked After (CLA) Education Team have developed a transition project based upon the above 4 principles that develops awareness of the challenges of transitioning from Primary to Secondary school and seeks to identify effective transition support for CLA pupils.
- 4.19 CLA pupils after should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is part of the child's care plan. This is an important document that should:-
- ensure access to services and support;
  - signal particular educational needs;
  - establish clear goals; and
  - act as a record of progress and achievement.
- 4.20 Local guidance has been developed and training provided to improve the

effective completion of PEPs by relevant professionals within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The CLA Coordinator works with partners from the Central South Consortium and across Wales, to ensure that RCT processes are consistent with those in neighbouring local authorities and nationally.

- 4.21 PEPs need to be given a greater significance and the information collated through the PEP needs to be used to identify need and progress. This can currently be done at an individual pupil level. Both Children's Services and Access and Inclusion are working together to develop the PEP as an on line system to enable data and progress in learning to be identified and to be easier to update and collate information across groups of pupils.
- 4.22 A report on the evaluation of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Looked after Children (LAC) was presented to Corporate Parenting Board in January 2020. This outlines the level of funding available from Welsh Government and how it is used to support CLA pupils in Rhondda Cynon Taf within clusters of schools and as a local authority.

## **5. CURRENT POSITION**

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

### **5.2 National Data**

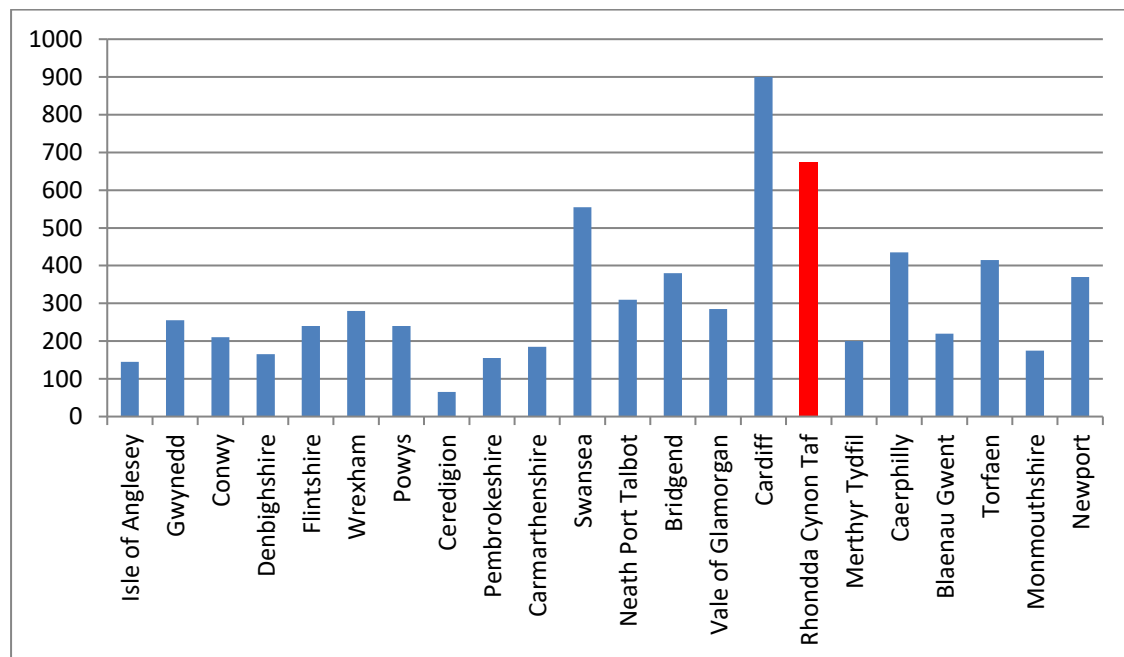
National data detailed on the Welsh Government Statistics Wales website records that 6,845 children in Wales were looked after on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 - an increase of 15% on the previous year. Of the above cohort, there were 675 looked after children and young people within RCT. Table 1 and Graph 1 provides an overview of the national context and suggests that RCT had the second highest total number of children and young people who were looked after and the second highest number of school aged children (5–15) within Wales.

- 5.3 Number of pupils who are looked after has remained stable in RCT in the last two years (from March 2018 – March 2019), at 675 against a national increase in the last year of 890.

**Table 1: Children Looked After as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 by LA**

	All Welsh local authorities	Isle of Anglesey	Gwynedd	Conwy	Denbighshire	Flintshire	Wrexham	Powys	Ceredigion	Pembrokeshire	Carmarthenshire	Swansea	Neath Port Talbot	Bridgend	Vale of Glamorgan	Cardiff	Rhondda Cynon Taf	Merthyr Tydfil	Caerphilly	Blaenau Gwent	Torfaen	Monmouthshire	Newport
Total Looked After Children	6845	145	255	210	165	240	280	240	65	155	185	555	310	380	285	900	675	200	435	220	415	175	370
Number of CLA of 5 – 15 years	3920	100	160	120	105	145	170	135	35	90	100	355	210	230	175	535	415	115	260	145	245	110	210

**Graph 1: Children Looked After as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 by Local Authority**



5.4 Table 2 below outlines the number of CLA per 10,000 population in each local authority on 31<sup>st</sup> March over the last 2 years. The figure for 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 indicates RCT had the fourth highest rate of CLA per 10,000 population which is an improvement on third position held in March 2018.

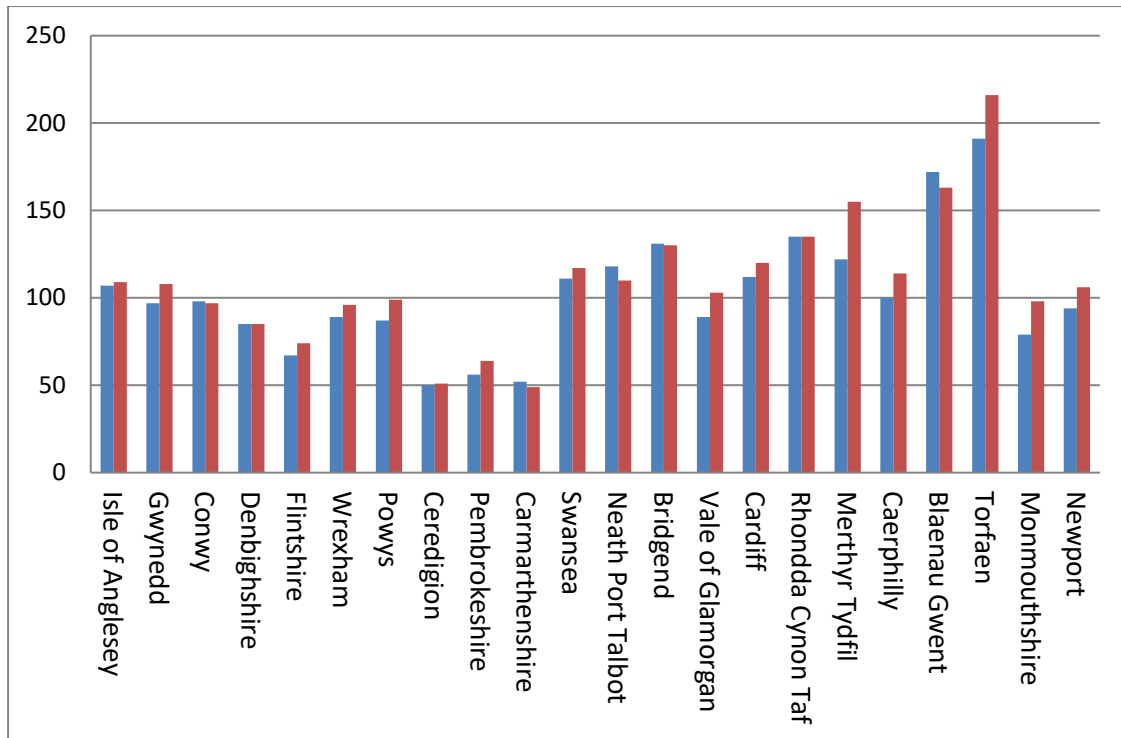
**Table 2: Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population aged under 18 by local authority over two years as at 31st March 2019**

<b>Children Looked After per 10,000 Population</b>			
<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Children Looked After per 10,000 population 2017-18</b>	<b>Children Looked After per 10,000 population 2018-19</b>	<b>% Difference</b>
Isle of Anglesey	107	109	1.83%
Gwynedd	97	108	10.19%
Conwy	98	97	-1.03%
Denbighshire	85	85	0.00%
Flintshire	67	74	9.46%
Wrexham	89	96	7.29%
Powys	87	99	12.12%
Ceredigion	50	51	1.96%
Pembrokeshire	56	64	12.50%
Carmarthenshire	52	49	-6.12%
Swansea	111	117	5.13%
Neath Port Talbot	118	110	-7.27%
Bridgend	131	130	-0.77%
Vale of Glamorgan	89	103	13.59%
Cardiff	112	120	6.67%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	135	135	0.00%
Merthyr Tydfil	122	155	21.29%
Caerphilly	100	114	12.28%
Blaenau Gwent	172	163	-5.52%
Torfaen	191	216	11.57%
Monmouthshire	79	98	19.39%
Newport	94	106	11.32%

5.5 As highlighted in Graph 2 below the number of CLA pupils in RCT per 10,000 population aged under 18 in 2019 was the same as that reported in 2018.



**Graph 2: Rate of CLA as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 per 10,000 population aged under 18 by LA**



5.6 Table 3 highlights the numbers of children in each type of care placement. The majority of children and young people (79%) in RCT are placed in foster placements. The CLA Education Team has continued to work closely with foster carers to support CLA engagement with school with a key focus upon ELSA training. Work is ongoing in RCT residential homes to implement a trauma recovery model to support children’s needs and provide a better understanding of the young person.

**Table 3: Children Looked After on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 by Placement Type**

	Looked after Children at 31st March 2019 by Placement Type						Total Looked after children
	Placed for Adoption	Foster placement	Placements in residential Settings	Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	Living Independently	Absent or other	
<b>All Welsh Local Authorities</b>	255	4,870	470	1065	125	95	6,845
<b>Isle of Anglesey</b>	*	90	10	35	*	*	145
<b>Gwynedd</b>	5	165	15	55	10	*	225
<b>Conwy</b>	5	145	15	30	10	*	210
<b>Denbighshire</b>	5	120	10	25	*	*	165

Flintshire	*	155	30	50	*	*	240
Wrexham	*	185	15	65	*	5	280
Powys	15	170	30	15	*	5	240
Ceredigion	*	50	*	10	*	*	65
Pembrokeshire	10	105	10	30	*	*	155
Carmarthenshire	10	145	5	15	5	*	185
Swansea	15	430	35	55	*	10	555
Neath Port Talbot	*	255	10	30	*	10	310
Bridgend	20	280	25	55	*	*	380
Vale of Glamorgan	10	190	15	60	*	10	285
Cardiff	35	590	80	140	40	15	900
Rhondda Cynon Taf	25	535	45	60	10	*	675
Merthyr Tydfil	*	145	15	25	5	*	200
Caerphilly	15	300	30	80	5	*	435
Blaenau Gwent	20	135	15	45	10	*	220
Torfaen	10	300	10	90	*	*	415
Monmouthshire	*	115	15	40	*	*	175
Newport	10	270	35	35	10	10	370

## 5.7 Key data sets used for monitoring progress of CLA pupils

The progress of CLA pupils is monitored and reviewed using three key sets of data:-

- Attainment levels
- Rate of exclusion
- Attendance levels

The following data relates to RCT CLA pupils. Due to changes in the collation of Welsh Government PLASC returns since January 2019 it has not been possible to provide comparisons with other local authorities within the Central South Consortium.

## 5.8 Attainment levels

Table 4 below reports the core subject indicator (CSI) achievements of Children who are Looked After. The data highlights that in the academic year 2018/19, 67% of children who were looked after achieved expected outcomes in the Foundation Phase, which is a slight decrease from the previous year. Outcomes decreased for pupils at Key Stage 2 and a slight increase was seen for pupils at Key Stage 3. This data should be viewed in the context of the disproportionately high numbers of pupils with severe and persistent special educational needs, including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Please note data for 16/17 and 17/18 includes all CLA pupils being educated in Rhondda Cynon Taf and not just those

looked after by RCT. Data from 2018/19 includes only those who belong to RCT educated in RCT schools due to the changes to Welsh Government data collection.

**Table 4: Children Looked After Performance Indicators: RCT**

Indicator	16/17 Academic	17/18 Academic	18/19 Academic*
FPI %	50	71.43	67.57
KS2 CSI%	68.2	71.93	46.43
KS3 CSI %	69	70	70.83

\* For 18/19 data taken as CLA on 01/05/2019 with RCT as Corporate parent

- 5.9 Outcomes disappointingly decreased for pupils at Key Stage 2. There were 28 CLA pupils in this cohort. 15 of the pupils did not achieve the expected end of Key stage 2 outcomes. Of these 15 pupils all had Special Educational Needs (SEN), 8 had statements, 3 attended special school, 6 attended specialist classes. Three CLA pupils had experienced 3 or more school changes (some out of county).
- 5.10 Table 5 reports the agreed interim measures for Key Stage 4 pupils, unfortunately the achievement of the CLA pupil cohort is below both the RCT and All Wales average in all reporting measures. However it is noted when reviewing individual results: 56% of CLA pupils achieved above both the RCT and All Wales averages in Literacy, 37% in numeracy, 41% in science and 59% in Welsh Bac/Skills Challenge.

**Table 5: Interim Measures Key Stage 4 Results**

Measure	CLA Average	RCT Average	All Wales Average
Capped 9	297	352	354.4
Literacy	31	38.1	39
Numeracy	26	35.7	37.2
Science	26	35.2	36.8
Welsh Bac/ Skills Challenge	30	37.9	36.4

\* CLA cohort taken on 01/05/2019 with RCT as Corporate parent

- 5.11 It is important to note that fluctuation in attainment data can occur due to the small cohort of pupils in each key stage group.
- 5.12 As previously reported this data should be viewed in the context of the disproportionately high numbers of pupils with severe and persistent special educational needs, including social, emotional and behavioural

5.13 On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2019, 55 (14.14%) CLA pupils were placed in county specialist provision compared with 2.77% of the total population of school aged pupils.

5.14 As at September 2019, 15.42% of all RCT CLA pupils had a statement of special education needs (SEN), compared to 3.2% of the overall cohort of pupils in RCT who had a statement of SEN.

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

Table 6 reports the number of CLA pupils that were subject to fixed term exclusions over the last 5 years. It is evident that the rate of exclusion per 1000 pupils has fluctuated during this period primarily due to the small cohort of excluded CLA pupils each academic year. The percentage of CLA pupils being excluded per 1000 pupils has increased from 35.23 per 1000 in 2017/18 to 35.78 per 1000 in 2018/19. This is an increase of 0.55 (1.56%) per 1000 pupils.

**Table 6: Exclusion Rate of Children who are Looked After**

CLA Exclusions	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Number of RCT pupils excluded	895	815	944	1022	1118
Number of CLA pupils excluded	41	32	42	36	40
Excluded CLA cohort per 1000 pupils	45.81	39.26	44.49	35.23	35.78

5.16 In 2018/19, RCT schools permanently excluded 23 pupils of which 2 were CLA pupils both attended secondary provision. This equates to 13 per 1000 of the CLA cohort being permanently excluded compared with 1.46 per 1000 of the overall population of secondary aged pupils. However the number identified is extremely small for the CLA population and any single incident would be a significant increase.

**5.17 Attendance Figures for Children who are Looked After (CLA)**

Table 7 highlights that the attendance levels of children and young people who are looked after are comparable to the general population of children in schools. Attendance levels have continued to improve over the last academic year in the primary cohort although it must be noted that there has been a dip in performance within the secondary cohort.

**Table 7: Attendance Levels of Children who are Looked After**

School	Total percentage of attendance for CLA pupils			Total percentage of attendance of whole school population		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Primary	96.40	96.30	96.53	94.64	94.22	94.31
Secondary	93.90	94.21	92.46	93.54	92.93	92.75

**6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

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

**7. CONSULTATION**

7.1 No consultation exercises have been undertaken.

**8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

**9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

9.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

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

10.1 Supporting children who are looked after to achieve the best possible educational outcomes through the effective use of person centred and collaborative early intervention approaches supports the Council's Corporate Priorities to build a strong economy and to promote independence and positive lives for everyone and ensures that the Sustainable Development principle and the Wellbeing Goals of the Wellbeing for Future Generations Act (Wales) underpin the vision and working practices of the service.

## 11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 National data indicates that RCT has a large number of children looked after when compared to other local authorities. Contextual information relating to attainment data highlights the risk factors which can adversely impact the educational outcomes of CLA pupils and are often a significant and long term barrier to achievement. Despite improvements in the end of key stage outcomes for children looked after between 2016/17 and 2017/18, data for 2018/19 indicates a lack of further progress in all reported indicators. This indicates that further work needs to be done to develop a model of understanding that supports a different response to the complex and specific needs that children who may have experienced developmental trauma present with. There will continue to be a focus on the roll out of our CLA friendly school process focusing on 44 key indicators that will support pupils to engage with education. The related training provides a whole school approach that will support the understanding of the needs of children who are looked after and help shape interventions that promote their engagement.

There has been a recently published report (May 2020) commissioned by Welsh government 'An integrated approach to improving educational outcomes for looked after children in Wales', written by Sir Alasdair Macdonald, that describes the benefits of developing a virtual school approach with a virtual school head across LA in Wales. These recommendations are to be discussed further in RCT by senior managers in Children's services and Education.

- 11.2 The outcome data for this vulnerable group of learners suggests that we need to do things differently. All children need access to a stable placement at home and school, a structure and routine that creates a sense of safety, a key adult and opportunity to build positive relationships in and out of school and access to support for learning often through helping to develop better emotional and social skills. Children who have experienced developmental trauma have not had access to this through their families and schools are in a good place to help them.
- 11.3 The CLA Education Team continues to work collaboratively with schools, children's services and carers. The CLA Education Team continues to develop a strategic approach and support for schools to develop a CLA friendly environment through training and guidance. Support and advice is provided to schools on developing the use of the PEP document and the utilisation of this document will be a priority going forward.
- 11.4 Data for children who are looked after will continue to be evaluated in order to inform key areas for further strategic development and improvement. In collaboration with Children's Services, Access & Inclusion have developed a virtual school data set that can run reports on targeted populations at any point in time to assist in identifying concerns trends and to inform service provision. There is an enhanced focus upon

effective transition support and interventions for pupils at year 10 and 11 who struggle to engage with a Key Stage 4 curriculum and the impact of the transition pilot project will be evaluated and will inform future service priorities. Further work will be completed on encouraging schools to consider relationship based policies as part of their approach to managing behaviour.

- 11.5 There is a need for continued focus on ensuring all CLA pupils succeed despite their past and current circumstances and recognising protective factors such as:
- having one or more stable, caring child-adult relationship,
  - feeling involved and connected.
  - getting support to manage your behaviour and emotions
  - helping children and young people feel they overcome hardship and shape their future
- 11.6 This is not possible through one intervention or one specific programme. It takes time and a team around the child approach, collaboration, a shared understanding of the needs of the child and informed approaches to intervention and support. Ensuring that specialist central services have an in-depth understanding of the specific attachment needs of CLA pupils and the impact of developmental trauma has been a key development priority for the Access & Inclusion Service.
- 11.7 The CLA Education Team will continue to work collaboratively with schools and empower them to recognise the important role they play in providing the protective factors that support a child. Support through the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark will continue with the upskilling of all teaching staff through training, support and guidance.
- 11.8 Effective partnership and multi-agency partnership has resulted in a continuing increase in request for involvement of the CLA Education Team benefiting a larger groups of children and young people.
- 11.9 Support and challenge for schools will continue to be provided where there are concerns relating to outcomes and continued opportunities for sharing good practice will be provided so that schools, carers and external agencies feel they are making a difference.