Evaluation of the extension of virtual school heads' duties to children with a social worker

Phase Two: Interim report

April 2024

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Glossary

ACES Adverse Childhood Experiences

AD Assistant Director

AP Alternative Provision

AVSH Assistant Virtual School Head

CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

CIN Children in Need [used here just for those children on CIN plans]

CLA Children Looked After

CP Child Protection

CPP Child Protection Plan

CSC Children's Social Care

CWSW Children with a Social Worker

DCS Director Children's Services

DMHL Designated Mental Health Lead

DSL Designated Safeguarding Lead

DT Designated Teacher

DVSH Deputy Virtual School Head

EBSA Emotion Based School Avoidance

EHCNA Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment

EHCP Education, Health and Care Plan

EHE Elective Home Education

EIO Education Inclusion Officer

Ever 6 CWSW Children with a Social Worker in the last 6 years

EWO Education Welfare Officer

FAP Fair Access Panel

FASD Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

FSM Free School Meals

IRO Independent Reviewing Officer

ITS Interrupted Time Series

LA Local Authority

KPI Key Performance Indicator

PA Persistently Absent

PLAC Previously Looked After Children

RAG Red Amber Green rating system

SEMH Social Emotional Mental Health

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SENDCo Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SLT Senior Leadership Team

SW Social Worker

SWIS Social Workers in Schools project

TIP trauma Informed Practice

ToC Theory of Change

VS Virtual School (collectively the professionals working within the Virtual School)

VSH Virtual School Head (referring to the professional in the leadership role of the Virtual School)

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Executive Summary

Rationale

England introduced Virtual School Heads (VSHs) as a pilot in 2007 to support the education of Children Looked After and, following an evaluation[1], the role became statutory. In 2017, the role was extended beyond children for whom the Local Authority was the corporate parent to supporting the education of Previously Looked After Children and those subject to a Special Guardianship Order[2].

The Children in Need review (2019)[3] identified 1 in 10 children overall, or an average of 3 children in every classroom, that have (or had) intervention from Children's Services in the previous 6 years. Joint research by the Universities of Bristol and Oxford[4] identified 1 in 7 children in school who had a social worker at some time between Year 1 and Year 11 (a longer time frame than the 2019 Children in Need (CIN) review). These children had lower attainment and progress at each Key Stage of schooling than children who had never needed a Social Worker.

Through the analysis of national datasets and in-depth interviews with Key stakeholders (e.g. foster carers, teachers, social workers), the Bristol/Oxford study identified some of the factors contributing to these poorer outcomes (e.g. Key Stage 1 attainment, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and special educational needs and disabilities). This suggested that these broader forms of disadvantage, which were more prevalent in these groups than in other children, had an enduring effect on children's educational attainment and progress throughout their schooling.

The study recommended raising the profile of the cohort of children who have (or had) received intervention from Children's Services (i.e. those subject to a CIN or Child Protection Plan (CPP)) within schools and extending the role of Virtual School Heads to include them. In response, the role of the Virtual School Head was further extended, from September 2021, to include strategic responsibility in promoting the educational outcomes of the cohort of Children With a Social Worker (CWSW) and those who have previously had a social worker in the last 6 years (Ever 6 CWSW) who are aged from 0 up to 18. Non-statutory guidance was first published by the DfE in June 2022[5].

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[1] Berridge, D. (2009) *Looked after and learning: Evaluation of the Virtual School Head pilot*. London: DfE
[2] Children and Social Work Act 2017, s.4, amending Children Act 1989, s. 23. Children and Social Work Act 2017 (legislation.gov.uk)
[3] Review of children in need - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[4] Berridge, D., Luke, N., Sebba, J., Strand, S., Cartwright, M., Staples, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Ward, J., & O'Higgins, A. (2020). *Children in need and children in care: educational attainment and progress*. Final Report to the Nuffield Foundation
[5] Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford was commissioned to evaluate this extension of duties. Findings on the first 6 months of the extension of duties (Phase One) were published in December 2022[6]. That report found encouraging signs of progress but recognised the need for further development and evaluation over a longer period of time.

In March 2022, the extension of duties was further extended until March 2025 (Phase Two) and The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford was commissioned to extend that initial evaluation into Phase Two. This interim report describes findings for the first 20 months of the Phase Two evaluation (April 2022 – November 2023).

Methods

The Phase One evaluation used mixed-methods including national surveys and case studies to provide formative insight to support improved implementation and impact. Phase One also included engaging VSHs in a process of establishing a Theory of Change (ToC)[7] to identify realistic outcomes. Mixed-methods, including the ToC, continued to be used in Phase Two, to evaluate progress made by Virtual School Heads in their extended duties.

The evaluation of Phase Two follows a broadly cyclical pattern of data collection and analysis, alongside ongoing analysis of secondary national datasets (Table 1). For this interim report, we undertook two further national online surveys of Virtual School Heads, and case studies in six Local Authority sites. These included interviews with a wide range of stakeholders to gather varied perspectives, insights and experiences about how best to support Children with a Social Worker in their education. We assumed that there would not be only one way of providing effective support and that the aim at this stage was to support shared learning about potentially effective practice, rather than to conduct an effectiveness trial.

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[6] Evaluation of the virtual school heads extension and the pupil premium plus post-16 pilot - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[7] The Theory of Change developed in the Phase One workshops, explains how the activities undertaken by VSHs in discharging their extended duties to CWSW might contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts.

Table 1: Phase Two pattern of data collection

Data collection method	Oct 2022	March 2023	Oct/ Nov 2023	March 2024	Sept/ Oct 2024
VSH Survey	Survey 3		Survey 4		Survey 5
Case Studies		Case studies 2		Case studies 3	
Secondary dataset analysis			Access to national datasets	Analysis of national datasets	Analysis of national datasets

The final report for this evaluation will include additional online surveys, case studies and an analysis of national datasets, linking information on children's social care and education. The dataset analysis will test whether there are any early signs of progress at aggregate level in attendance, persistent absence, suspension and permanent exclusion, all of which were longer-term outcomes hypothesised in the Theory of Change.

Interim findings related to Theory of Change outcomes

The Theory of Change developed in the Phase One workshops (see Figure 1) laid out a logical series of steps through which the activities undertaken by VSHs in discharging their extended duties to CWSW might contribute to improved longer-term outcomes for children and young people. Overall, the findings show that progress has been made towards all the 2022-23 and 2023-24 interim outcomes in the ToC model, although some have seen more progress than others.

Improved data quality

At the time of Survey 3 (October 2022), over two-thirds (70.0%) of VSHs reported they were at least 'somewhat' on the way to achieving this outcome for *current* CWSW. A substantial majority of VSHs now have access to data on the attendance, persistent absence, and suspension or permanent exclusion of *current* CWSW. A substantial minority are also confident in the quality of those data. Where these data are not yet available, most VSHs report systems and processes to achieve this are in development.

In the case of attainment there has been less progress in both availability and quality of data and many fewer VSHs report developing systems that would make these data available.

It is equally clear that the challenge of accessing data on Ever 6 CWSW that was reported in Phase One, remains.

Increased schools' understanding of CWSW needs

At Survey 3, 21.2% of VSHs indicated their progress towards this outcome had 'barely' or 'not started'. By the time of Survey 4 (October/ November 2023), this had substantially reduced to 7.0%. Training remains the principal means adopted by VSHs to address this outcome. Almost every VSH continues to offer a wide range of training, mainly focussed on relational practices, improving joint working through Designated Teacher (DT) and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) networks, and addressing the need to drive up attendance.

An increasing number of VSHs are providing training aimed at addressing challenging behaviour, in large part through their focus on relational approaches and in supporting children's emotional health and well-being.

There is some qualitative evidence of a change in school policy and practice arising from this training. Some interviewees linked changes in school practice with cross-Local Authority (LA) strategies to drive change.

Finally, there is no evidence to suggest that the training need of schools is reducing. The level of refresher training matches very closely that offered to staff new to the LA. This is unlikely to change given that staff joining the LA as newly qualified teachers cannot be assumed to arrive with sufficient understanding of CWSW.

More inclusive practice in schools (directed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT))

The vast majority (80.2%) of VSHs at Survey 4 reported they were at least 'somewhat' on the way to achieving this outcome. Greater inclusion of CWSW would be indicated by Increased attendance, or reduced suspension or permanent exclusion. Nearly two-thirds of VSHs (63.5%) perceived an increase in attendance, and approximately a third reported decreases in suspensions (35.7%) and permanent exclusions (30.0%).

Those VSHs with access to high quality data on attendance, suspension and permanent exclusion are in a much stronger position to validate their judgements on whether the extension of duties is having a positive effect on these indicators of school inclusiveness.

Where VSH are positing a positive change in attendance, suspension or inclusion they cite the following as substantially supporting that change:

- Greater school awareness of, and expertise in, Trauma Informed practice and/or Attachment Awareness, particularly where it is supported by a broader LA-wide relational practice strategy.

- Efforts to build positive links with senior leaders best placed to influence school practice to be more inclusive.

- More effective joint working, supported by better identification of the CWSW cohort and more child-level data identifying the particular CWSW who are at risk of becoming persistently absent, suspended, or permanently excluded.

Increasing Children's Social Care's (CSC) understanding of education

Progress towards this outcome increased from Survey 3 to Survey 4 (73.1% at least 'somewhat' at Survey 3 to 85.2% at least 'somewhat' at Survey 4). As in the case of raising schools' understanding, VSHs see training as the principal route to increasing the understanding of education by Social Workers (SWs). Over the period of the evaluation covered by this interim report the nature of that training had changed. By the time of Survey 4 the majority of VSHs were offering training on attendance, exclusions. A substantial minority were offering training on inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) and raising awareness of relevant school networks (e.g. DSL).

There is no observable difference between the training offer to established SWs and to those new to the LA; it is clear that VSHs see the turnover of SWs as a barrier to achieving this outcome.

Strengthened partnership between schools, social care, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Virtual School (VS)

Responses from VSHs in surveys 3 and 4 indicate that they and their colleagues across the LA, and beyond, are making progress in more general partnership working – in Survey 3 a quarter (25.0%) rated their progress as 'mostly' or 'fully' achieved, whereas in Survey 4, this had risen to 40.6%. Progress towards this outcome was characterised by VSHs acting as a central hub to facilitate cross-agency working, by providing drop-in advice clinics, for example. This progress also reflects a successful effort by VSHs to influence more CSC decision makers to take greater account of the educational context of CWSW, and more non-CSC decision makers to take account of those children's safeguarding context.

Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education

Progress towards this outcome is an emerging area of work for the majority of VSHs among whom 39.2% reported making barely any progress in this area, and 21.7 % had not started (Survey 4). Some suggested this outcome could be achievable through direct work with parents but that such direct work falls outside the remit of the extended duties. Others see the possibility of addressing this outcome indirectly through strategic influence on the work of CSC, or by devising online resources to support parents and families.

An alternative route to reaching parents is reported to be through work with schools to help them better understand the needs of the families of CWSW and encouraging them to provide a channel through which information is cascaded to parents.

Next steps

This interim report identifies several areas which will be further explored in the next wave of both case studies and surveys. These include seeking to better understand:

- why less progress has been made in accessing reliable child-level *attainment* data for current CWSW compared to data on attendance or suspension/permanent exclusion.

- why less progress has been made in accessing 'safeguarding' data/information relating to CWSW and whether this is a real finding or due to the lack of a shared understanding of what the survey question sought to discover.

- why, despite the provision of training for both schools and social workers, there is less progress towards the increased understanding of social workers than there is progress towards increased school understanding of the cohort, their needs, or the importance of their educational context.

- whether there are particular barriers to more effective working with CAMHS given reports of progress in building more effective relationships with a range of other services.

- what insights the relative lack of progress towards building parental capability and capacity to engage with schools may offer as the extension of duties develops.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

From September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) was extended to include the strategic oversight of children subject to a Child in Need (CIN) plan or Child Protection (CP) plan or *having been* subject to such plans over the previous 6 years. The duty is not statutory. Non-statutory guidance was first published by the DfE in June 2022[8] which uses the terms Children With a Social Worker (CWSW) and Ever 6 CWSW, respectively. Funding was allocated to VSHs in every local authority (LA) until 31 March 2022. This initial six-month period comprised Phase One of the programme and was evaluated by the Rees Centre, though a formative, realist mixed methods evaluation, reflecting the early stage of development of the programme.

The findings from the Phase One evaluation[9] suggested that the additional resources were used by VSHs strategically to influence practice through, for example, better use of data, training of SWs and DSLs, supporting SWs to work more closely with schools and creating a culture of high aspirations. Barriers to implementing the extended duties included the short lead in time and duration of the funding, lack of access to accurate data, SW turnover and issues related to SEND among the cohort. Recommendations included longer-term funding commitments, making the CWSW duties of VSHs statutory, providing statutory guidance related to CWSW for schools, improving the systems for data-sharing and extending Pupil Premium to all CWSW.

In March 2022, it was announced by DfE that VSHs' responsibilities for promoting the educational outcomes of the CWSW cohorts would be extended until March 2025 and would comprise Phase Two of the programme. The Rees Centre was commissioned to undertake the evaluation of Phase Two. As with Phase One, this will deliver mixed methods formative support for the programme by sharing findings on how the funding is being used, difficulties and barriers for VSHs in implementation and solutions identified in practice. In addition, the evaluation will, in time, include analysis of national datasets seeking to identify benchmarks for impact.

This interim report covers the first 20 months of the Phase Two evaluation (April 2022 – November 2023), drawing on evidence from two national surveys of VSHs (Survey 3 in October 2022 and Survey 4 in October 2023) and a second round of case studies (March 2023). Table 2 outlines the timeline for data collection across the two phases to date.

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[8] [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk)
[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-virtual-school-heads-extension-and-the-pupil-premium-plus-post-16-pilot

Table 2: Data collection timeline to date– Phase One and Phase Two

Data collection method	Phase 1: Oct 2021	Phase 1: Feb 2022	Phase 1: March 2022	Phase 2: Oct 2022	Phase 2: March 2023	Phase 2: Oct/ Nov 2023
VSH Survey	Survey 1		Survey 2	Survey 3		Survey 4
Case Studies		Case Studies 1			Case studies 2	

The structure of this interim report is as follows: the methodology for each type of data collection is detailed before the most salient points from surveys 3 and 4, alongside evidence from the Phase Two case studies, are drawn together as key findings related to progress on ToC outcomes, commensurate to the time of reporting. A discussion of the key findings concludes the main body of the report. The case studies are presented in full in Appendix 1, and full results from surveys 3 and 4 are provided in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation approach taken continues that of Phase One and aims provide formative insight to support improved implementation and impact. Mixed methods are used to achieve this. The Phase One evaluation included stakeholder workshops to develop a ToC. The ToC contains two broad components leading to long-term outcomes, one relating to data (Figure 1) and the other relating to awareness raising (Figure 2). The Phase One evaluation also included a national survey of VSHs, and case studies in 7 LAs that included interviews with a wide range of stakeholders including VSHs, Directors of Children's Services (DCSs), DSLs and DTs, SWs and LA data managers.

In Phase Two, the established ToC is being used to evaluate progress made by VSHs in the extended duties towards the outcomes in the ToC. For this interim report, we undertook national online surveys of VSHs, and case studies in six LA sites from Phase One. These included interviews with a wide range of stakeholders to gather varied perspectives, insights and experiences from VSHs about how best to support CWSW in their education. We assumed that there would be a wide range of approaches and not only one way of providing effective support and that the aim at this stage was to support shared learning about potentially effective practice, rather than to conduct an effectiveness trial.

Figure 1: Theory of Change for the CWSW Extension of Duties: Data Component

Inputs	Activities	Short-term outcomes (by end of 21/22)	Interim outcomes (by end of 22/23)	Interim outcomes (by end of 23/24)	Longer-term outcomes (by end of 24/25)
Virtual School Designated Teachers Extension of Duties – work to be done on clarifying the link between strategic and operational Implementation Grant Learning from existing local practice	Work with schools and CSC around data access and quality New/increased analyst capacity	Ongoing activity	Improved data quality	Strategies in place for: Increasing schools' understanding of the needs of this cohort More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT) Increasing CSC's understanding of education and vice versa A strengthened partnership between school, social care, CAMHS and VS Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education	Improved attainment Improved achievement Improved attendance Improved punctuality Improved engagement with education Reduction in NEET Sustained outcomes Improved behaviour Reduced exclusions Improved well-being Improved resilience Improved transitions Reduced in-year transitions Yong people feel valued and understood Children have more voice and agency in the process CIN and CP plans include education objectives

Figure 2: Theory of Change for the CWSW Extension of Duties: Awareness-raising Component

Inputs	Activities	Short-term outcomes (by end of 21/22)	Interim outcomes (by end of 22/23)	Interim outcomes (by end of 23/24)	Longer-term outcomes (by end of 24/25)
Virtual School Designated Teachers Extension of Duties – work to be done on clarifying the link between strategic and operational Implementation Grant Learning from existing local practice	Training and awareness-raising for social workers, schools, other council agencies	Early signs of: Increased understanding of CWSW Development of a common language Better joint working	Ongoing activity	Strategies in place for: Increasing schools' understanding of the needs of this cohort More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT) Increasing CSC's understanding of education and vice versa A strengthened partnership between school, social care, CAMHS and VS Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education	Improved attainment Improved achievement Improved attendance Improved punctuality Improved engagement with education Reduction in NEET Sustained outcomes Improved behaviour Reduced exclusions Improved well-being Improved resilience Improved transitions Reduced in-year transitions Yong people feel valued and understood Children have more voice and agency in the process CIN and CP plans include education objectives

1.2.1 National Surveys of VSHs

In Phase Two, online surveys using the Qualtrics platform were devised to further reduce the burden on VSHs when responding, and to enable efficient distribution and data analysis. Survey items were developed to reflect the stage of programme implementation at data collection, and in response to feedback from previous surveys. For ease of completion, multiple choice items were used where possible, but opportunities for open-ended responses were provided where additional context would facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the data. A link to the survey and an information sheet outlining the evaluation was emailed to each VSH. In Survey 4, VSHs were able to download and save a printable version of their responses before submitting. Each survey to date has received a very high overall response rate as highlighted in Table 3:

Table 3: Overall response rate for each VSH survey

	Survey 1 n (%)	Survey 2 n (%)	Survey 3 n (%)	Survey 4 n (%)
Overall response rate (%)	115 (77.7)	120 (81.1)	122 (82.4)	125 (84.5)

To establish the representativeness of the survey data in Phase Two, response rates per region were calculated (Table 4). With one exception (South West; Survey 4), response rates were consistent across surveys.

Table 4: Responses to VSH surveys 3 and 4 by region

LA Region	Survey 3: Number of responses (% of LAs in region)	Survey 3: Responses from region as % of total responses	Survey 4: Number of responses (% of LAs in region)	Survey 4: Responses from region as % of total responses
London	25 (83.3)	20.5	26 (83.9)	20.8
South East	17 (100.0)	13.9	18 (100.0)	14.4
North West	17 (73.9)	13.9	20 (83.3)	16.0
Yorkshire	13 (86.7)	10.7	13 (86.7)	10.4
South West	12 (85.7)	9.8	8 (57.1)	6.4
West Midlands	11 (78.6)	9.0	13 (92.9)	10.4
North East	10 (83.3)	8.2	9 (75.0)	7.2
East of England	10 (90.9)	8.2	10 (90.9)	8.0
East Midlands	7 (77.8)	5.7	8 (88.9)	6.4
Total	122 (82.4)	100.0	125 (84.5)	100.0

Significance testing using paired t-tests was used for the comparison between responses on Surveys 3 and 4 where this was appropriate (e.g. section 2.3 Theory of Change outcome: Increased schools' understanding of CWSW needs). Where there was not repetition of both question wording and response options across the surveys, we did not conduct significance testing because the difference is not directly informative (e.g. section 2.4 Theory of Change outcome: More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT)).

1.2.2 Case studies

This interim report develops case studies of the six LAs from Phase One that focussed on the CWSW extension of duties. In total, 28 people were interviewed online including VSHs, DCS, Assistant Directors (ADs), DSLs, DTs, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENDCos) and SWs. The interviews took place between March and May 2023. To provide continuity we attempted to interview the same participants from the

Phase One evaluation; where this was not possible (due to availability or change of role) a suitable substitute was identified. Responses from the third VSH Survey (October 2022) were also available and have been included in the case studies to provide context where appropriate.

The LA sites used in the case studies use pseudonyms for confidentiality, characteristics for each case study site are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Characteristics of case study sites

Name	Geographic footprint	Urban/ rural	Overall number of CWSW	Rate of CWSW per population
Earlham	Large	Mainly rural	4,001 – 9,000	<400
Filton Cross	Small	Urban	<4,000	401 - 800
Keldbeck	Small	Mainly urban	4,001 – 9,000	>800
Redbury	Large	Mainly rural	4,001 – 9,000	401 - 800
Alsbury	Large	Rural	4,001 – 9,000	401 - 800
Braddleton	Large	Mixed	4,001 – 9,000	401 - 800

Each case study is presented in full in Appendix 1 and begins by outlining the characteristics of the LA, the evidence base used followed by a brief summary of the findings from Phase One. Next, progress made towards the *short-term* ToC outcomes since Phase One is provided, namely:

- Increased schools' understanding of educational needs
- Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs
- Development of a common language about education
- Better joint working to address educational needs
- Improved data quality

Developments in Phase Two, commensurate with the time of the interviews, are then presented before the key points are summarised.

1.2.3 National Dataset Analysis

The final report for this project, along with the findings from the next wave of case-studies and the next survey wave, will include an analysis of national datasets, linking information on children's social care and education. The analysis will focus on identifying any change at aggregate level in three longer-term outcomes from the ToC: attainment (at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4), attendance (in terms of the amount of school time missed due to unauthorised absences), and school exclusions (both suspension and permanent). Because the programme is being delivered in all English LAs, with no control group, we will adopt a quasi-experimental approach by making comparisons with children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (Ever 6); we recognise that this is an overlapping, nevertheless markedly different population from CWSW.

Following agreed guidelines, we classify the CWSW population as those children reporting to be in need at any point within the last 6 years (Ever 6 CWSW). The pre-intervention comparison data will be drawn from 2017/18 to 2020/21. Post-intervention comparison will use data collected from 2021/22 to 2022/23. Table 6 shows the school Years (and cohorts – each colour is a separate cohort being followed through school Years) for whom we will have data. This represents a total of 16 cohorts.

We will compare average outcomes for the total population, FSM Ever 6 and CWSW Ever 6, at pre-intervention (prior to the introduction of the VSH extension, i.e. the average across the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years) and post-intervention (i.e. the average across the 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years).

Table 6: School years and cohorts for secondary data analysis

	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
2017/18											
2018/19											
2019/20											
2020/21											
NEW DUTIES											
2021/22											
2022/23											

We will also perform an Interrupted Time Series (ITS) analysis[10]. By taking observations at regular timepoints this approach allows us to account for the underlying trends in the outcome when making a pre-post comparison. It is useful where (as is the case here) there is no control group, because the intervention has been applied to all CWSW nationally. In essence, ITS uses trends in annual data for CWSW before the intervention (i.e. across the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years) to create a 'counterfactual' for what the outcomes of CIN might have been in 2021/22-2022/23, had the intervention not taken place.

As well as looking at differences between CWSW Ever 6 and other groups, we will also look at the role of other factors (including demographic information as well as characteristics and experiences of children's social care) to identify what might contribute to differences in CWSWs' outcomes.

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[10] See Bernal, J.L., Cummins, S., and Gasparrini, A. (2017) Interrupted time series regression for the evaluation of public health interventions: a tutorial, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, *46*, 1,348–55 https://academic.oup.com/ije/article/46/1/348/2622842?login=false for further details on ITS

2 Findings on Theory of Change outcomes

2.1 Overview

This section draws together evidence gathered in the initial stage of Phase Two (VSH surveys 3 and 4 and case studies) to report findings on progress towards the *interim* outcomes identified in the ToC and commensurate to the time of data collection. These are:

Survey 3 and Case Studies

- Short-term outcomes by end of 2021/2022 academic year. Early signs of:
    - Increased understanding
    - Development of a common language
    - Better joint working
- Interim outcome by end of 2022/ 2023 academic year
    - Improved data quality

Survey 4

- Interim outcomes by end of 2023/ 2024 academic year (ongoing). Strategies in place for:
    - Increased schools' understanding of CWSW needs
    - More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT)
    - Increased CSC's understanding of education
    - Strengthened partnership between school, social care, CAMHS and the VS
    - Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education

In Survey 4 we asked VSHs to rate their perception of progress towards each of the five (2023/2024) interim outcomes listed above (Figure 3). Reassuringly, the majority of VSHs (who responded to the survey) are making some progress towards each of the outcomes. Progress towards the outcome 'Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education' is an emerging area of work (37.6% rate their progress as at least 'somewhat' or 'mostly') and is discussed in more detail in section 2.7.

Figure 3: Progress made towards 2023-24 ToC outcomes
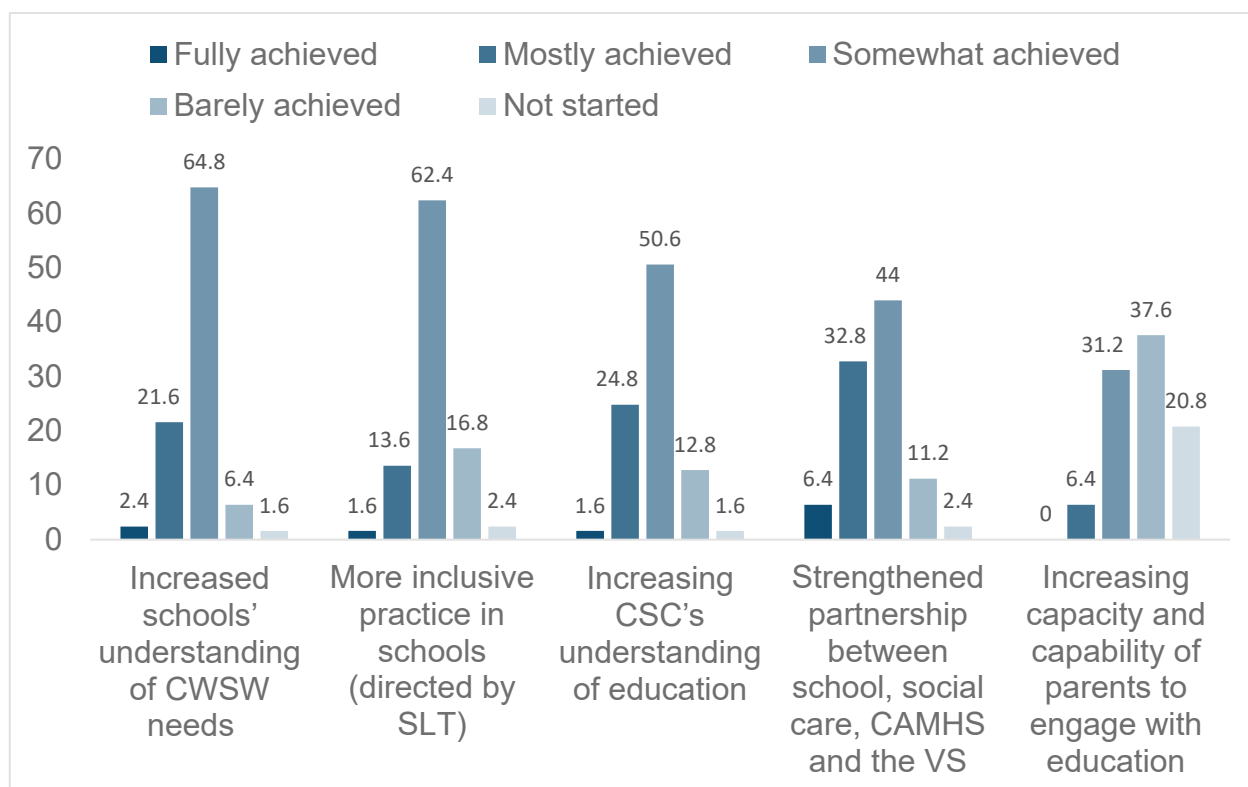
Source: VSH Survey 4; Table 51

2.2 Theory of Change outcome: Improved data quality

The Phase One evaluation report found that, among other areas, LAs invested in data collection intended to increase the understanding of the CWSW cohort and its needs. At that time, there was inconsistent availability of data on CWSW in many LAs, perhaps reflecting a previous lack of focus on their *educational* needs. Equally, the pandemic had stimulated some LAs to begin to draw together CSC and educational data, but the extension of duties galvanised more LAs to go further in seeking more robust data on the education of CWSW.

Table 7: VSH's perception of progress towards ToC outcome: Improved data quality

Improved data quality	Fully *n* (%)	Mostly *n* (%)	Somewhat *n* (%)	Barely *n* (%)	Not started *n* (%)	Total
Survey 3 (October 2022)	1 (0.8)	31 (25.0)	53 (44.2)	33 (27.5)	3 (2.5)	120

The data in Table 7 shows that in October 2022 (Survey 3) approximately a quarter (25.8%) of VSH believed they had 'fully' and 'mostly' made progress towards improving the quality of the data to which they had access. However, slightly more (30%) believed they had made 'barely' any progress and 'not started' to address the data outcome in the ToC.

This report explores whether this picture had changed by October/November 2023 (Survey 4). To do so, the relevant question in Survey 4 was adjusted to seek more detailed identification of the items of data that were available to VSHs and how confident they were in the quality of those data items. It also highlights the differences in both availability and quality between that on the *currently* CWSW cohort (Figure 4) and the Ever 6 CWSW cohort (Figure 5).

2.2.1 Cohort of children who are currently CWSW

Figure 4: Availability and quality of data on current CWSW
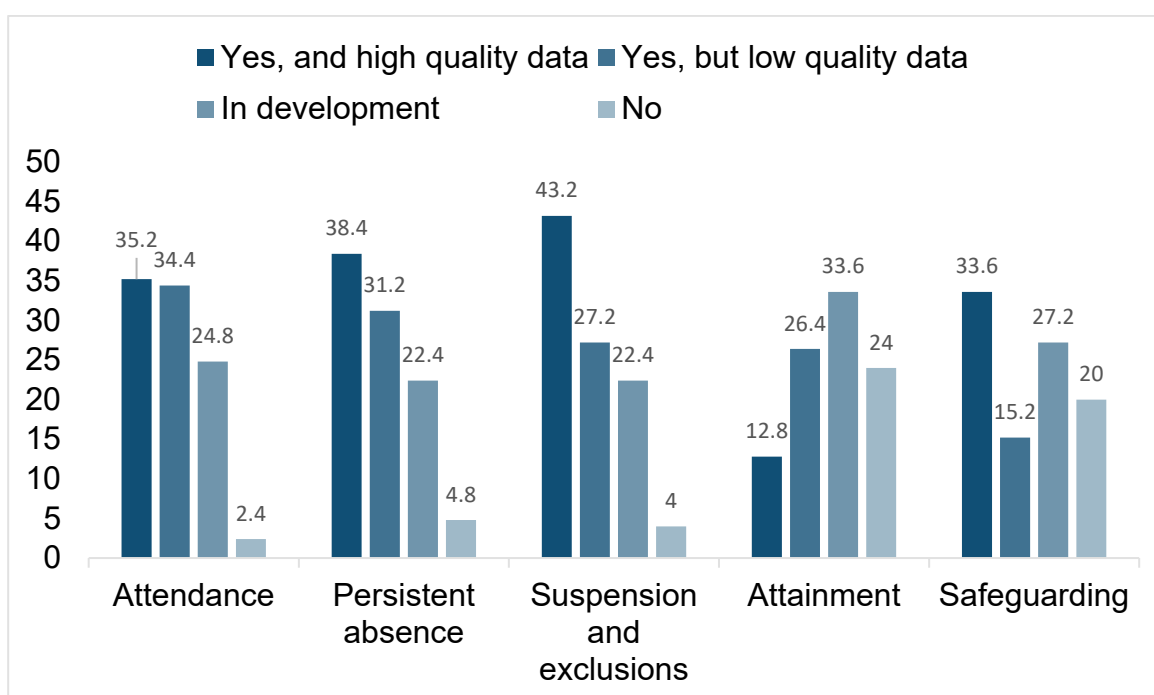
Source: VSH Survey 4; Table 52

For CWSW *currently* subject to a CIN or CP plan, attendance data were now available to 69.6% of VSHs though only just over half of those VSHs were sufficiently confident to declare their data on attendance to be of high quality. This compared to 27.2% who did not have access to attendance data, though the huge majority of those described this as 'in development'. A similar proportion had access to data on Persistent Absence (PA) for the cohort, with more than half describing the data as of high quality. As PA is derived from a child's attendance data it is not surprising to see the two measures tracking one another closely.

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Data on suspensions and permanent exclusions were the most readily available to VSH (70.4%) and it was also the measure where the highest proportion of VSH (3 in 5) reported the data to be of high quality. This may reflect the tighter statutory guidance relating to the notification of suspension and permanent exclusion data to LAs by schools, compared to locally agreed arrangements relating to attendance.

The availability of attainment data is very low in comparison to attendance or suspensions and permanent exclusions. It was only available to 39.2% of VSH and less than a third of those reported the data to be of high quality. The case study evidence suggests that attendance has been a much higher priority for LAs who often quote the impact of the pandemic on attendance across numerous pupil cohorts. This may explain the relatively low availability of attainment data to the VSHs in most LAs who are more focussed on attendance, suspension and permanent exclusion as key measures of inclusion.

However, while 33.6% of VSHs reported that they were 'developing' systems to access attainment data, a large minority of VSHs (24%) neither had access to these data, nor were they developing systems to gain access. In the next stage of the evaluation the survey and case study interviews will seek to better understanding this issue. It may be that it reflects a variation in the way in which schools collect or hold data or report attainment and progress data, variable willingness of schools to share the data they collect, or, perhaps, a view among some VSH that the annual CIN attainment data available from the DfE is sufficient to identify the needs of the cohort.

In the Braddleton case study LA (see Annex 1), improvements in matching education and CSC data have been made so that schools get regularly updated information on children open to social care, which includes CWSW.

Some VSHs suggest the absence of statutory guidance relating to the extended duties reduces the leverage necessary to obtain education data from some schools in a timely manner, if at all as this VSH points out:

> Our work needs statutory requirement as we are reliant on goodwill
> and polite persistence to access data on the CWSW cohort and a
> statutory approach will provide 'gravitas' around [the] CWSW cohort
> by all agencies *[VSH; East of England; Survey 4]*

Finally, Survey 4 asked for VSHs' views on the availability of safeguarding data. This was a much more even split between VSHs reporting it to be available to them (48.8%) and those who did not have access to it (47.2%). This was something of a surprise as the vast majority of VSHs have access to CSC data systems so they can fulfil their duties to LAC. The next stage of the evaluation will seek to clarify if there are local issues in

extending VSH access to CSC data from LAC to CWSW, or if the broad description 'safeguarding data' left some VSH uncertain what was being referred to.

2.2.2 The Ever 6 CWSW[11] cohort

The picture of data availability for the Ever 6 CWSW cohort was markedly different to that for *current* CWSW. Availability of data for attendance (20.8%), persistent absence (20.0%), suspensions and permanent exclusions (20.8%) is very low compared to the availability of current CWSW data for the same three indicators (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Availability and quality of data on Ever 6 CWSW
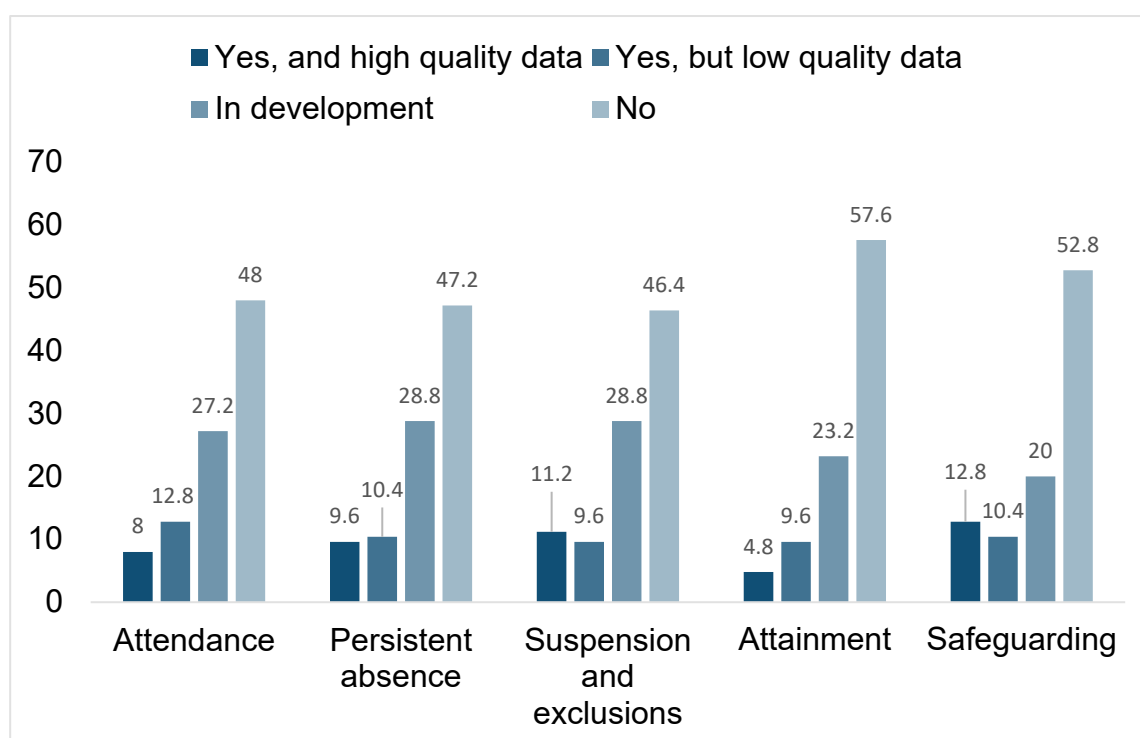
Source: VSH Survey 4; Table 53

The next wave of evaluation will consider if the consistency of access across these three measures reflects the same minority of VSH who have *any* access to the Ever 6 CWSW data and why. Attainment data (of any quality) on this cohort is available to even fewer VSHs (14.4%). Combine this with the proportion of VSH (range: 46.4% – 57.8%) who have yet to develop access to Ever 6 CWSW data, and it is clear that the challenges relating to data on the Ever 6 CWSW cohort reported in Phase One remain.

However, in the Alsbury case study (see Annex 1), the VSH reported that they can now access live data on current CWSW and, since September 2021, been able to access all

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[11] Ever 6 CWSW are children and young people who have been subject to a CIN or CP plan in the previous 6 years, but are not currently.

attendance and exclusions data for the Ever 6 CWSW group also. Their approach focusses on tracking the Ever 6 CWSW cohort forward from the introduction of the extended duties rather than investing a perhaps disproportionate amount of resource in consolidating information from a variety of sources for the previous six years.

In the surveys we asked about access to safeguarding data but the availability was similarly low. However, the VSH in the Braddleton case study LA (see Annex 1) is exploring what kind of safeguarding information is considered as part of transition planning to high school for children who have had social care involvement in their primary years. A transition project by a member of virtual school staff is underway in one locality and the outcomes will be used to inform future planning.

2.2.3 Potential benefits of accessing and sharing high quality data

Over three-quarters (76.5%) of VSHs in Survey 4 indicated that the availability of data has also contributed to improved joint working or work of partners, as exemplified in this extended quote:

> Working closely with colleagues in CSC and Education Inclusion Teams, social workers overseeing CIN and CP cases are now acutely aware of the attendance of their children. Indeed, they get weekly updates and can access/navigate live data via Liquid Logic. They have clear direction regarding what actions they need to take to overcome any barriers to school attendance and are aware of what should be in place for all children. They … have the opportunity to access consultations with the VS where they are 'stuck'. VS consultations regarding CWSW in 2022-23 resulted in the attendance of 45.5% of these learners stabilising or increasing. Many of these children had not attended school for a significant time. *[Deputy Virtual School Head (DVSH) and Lead for Extended Duties, South East; Survey 4]*

In Survey 4, VSHs outlined how data availability has improved joint working, for example by ensuring partners were kept informed of a child's legal status as CWSW, which encouraged them to consider their needs in the light of that status. Others suggested that SWs who were kept better informed of a child's educational context could then use their increased knowledge to inform discussions about, and planning for, that child and their family.

> Overall the VS's increased access to data for CWSW has increased joint working with, and the engagement of, children's services. Children's SWs value the support of the VS and the data which is available to them regarding a child's education, such as children's

attendance percentages. In turn, this allows social workers to be better able to address barriers to education themselves, alongside supporting families with schools' understanding as to a more holistic picture of the child's needs, to facilitate and support schools' removal of the barriers to attendance, attainment and progress. *[VSH, South East; Survey 4]*

Further, some VSH report that sharing data on children's context with schools has encouraged the schools to consider targeted interventions from a position of greater understanding.

In the Braddleton case study LA, considerable investment has standardised the Power BI dashboards used across children's services (e.g., SEND, education, CSC) so that children in need, children subject to a CP plan and those looked after can be viewed as separate cohorts.

Braddleton has also used its improved data to develop a 'vulnerability matrix' which highlights individual children across several risk factors (e.g., no school place, attendance, exclusions) so the services (SEND, education, CSC) can prioritise team planning and resource allocation (including addressing local training needs), according to locality.

In the Keldbeck case study LA, the use of data collation procedures and systems means that CWSW are now part of a report on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that is sent to governing bodies of every school.

While identification and effective monitoring of the Ever 6 CWSW cohort remains a challenge for most VSHs, others have reported it had proved beneficial to them, prompting targeted interventions to support this group of children.

> Sharing school data for CWSW Ever 6 on attendance and suspensions has further raised professionals' concerns about this cohort and there is greater join-up around delivery of continuing professional development on attendance, engagement and strategies to overcome barriers. In particular, headteachers have been shocked to see the numbers of CWSW Ever 6 [sic]in their school and to reflect on the disproportionate representation of CWSW Ever 6 [sic] in their absence and suspension figures. This has led to positive engagement in projects and reflective practice. It is also encouraging headteachers and DSLs to monitor the group more closely. Across a range of professionals, the data is beginning to help focus strategy on this cohort because getting improved attendance and

engagement by CWSW Ever 6 [sic] would make a considerable difference to overall outcomes. *[DVSH and Lead for CWSW and Previously Looked After Children (PLAC), South East; Survey 4]*

2.3 Theory of Change outcome: Increased schools' understanding of CWSW needs

This ToC outcome and the non-statutory guidance both recognise the importance of increasing the understanding of CWSW needs by school staff if the gap between the educational (and life) outcomes of CWSW and the general school population is to close.

Table 8: VSH's perception of progress towards ToC outcome: Schools' increased understanding of CWSW needs

Increased schools' understanding of CWSW needs	Fully *n* (%)	Mostly *n* (%)	Some-what *n* (%)	Barely *n* (%)	Not started *n* (%)	Total
Survey 3 (October 2022)	1 (0.8)	19 (16.0)	75 (63.0)	20 (16.8)	4 (3.4)	119
Survey 4 (October/ November 2023	3 (2.5)	27 (22.3)	81 (66.9)	8 (6.4)	2 (1.6)	121

Table 8 demonstrates VSHs' perception of progress from Survey 3 to Survey 4 towards meeting this outcome. Those reporting that they had 'fully' or 'mostly' made progress towards this ToC outcome increasing from 16.8% to 24.8%. There was a concurrent reduction in those feeling they had made 'barely' any progress or 'not started' from 20.2% in Survey 3 to only 8.0% in Survey 4. Focusing on those VSs who responded to both Survey 3 and Survey 4, a paired t-test showed that there was a significant increase in scores over time (Survey 3: 2.90, Survey 4: 3.19), indicating greater perceived progress towards this outcome ($t(103) = 3.75$, $p < .001$).

2.3.1 Training, support and guidance for schools

Table 9 sets out VSHs' responses to the question on training content for school staff in Survey 3 (Q3, October 2022) and Survey 4 (Q7, October/November 2023). It is important to note that the Survey 4 question deliberately sought additional detail on the training topics. For example, in Survey 3 an option for training topic was 'Trauma Informed Practice'/ 'Attachment'/ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)' whereas in Survey 4 each was offered as a separate option (i.e. 'Trauma informed practice', 'Attachment' and

'Understanding ACES'. Though direct comparison between the two surveys becomes more challenging, we were keen to explore if VSHs focussed their training in specific areas. Indeed, at the time of Survey 4, more training was given on Trauma Informed Practice (82.4% for new staff) and Attachment (76% for new staff) than understanding ACES (47.2% for new staff). For clarity, in Table 9 the subjects of training from Survey 4 have been mapped to relevant subjects in Survey 3.

Survey 4 also sought to discover if VSH identified different priorities for training among new staff compared to refresher training for existing staff. Across the 12 named topics (i.e. excluding 'other' and 'none'), the majority of VSs offering training on this topic to new school staff also offered the training as a refresher to existing staff (range: 79.2% to 90.5%, M = 84.2%). This suggests that VSHs continue to see a need for a rich training offer to any and all school staff irrespective of their duration of service.

Table 9: Training content/subjects for school staff provided by the VS

Training subject: Survey 3[a] (Oct 2022)	All staff n (%)	Training subject: Survey 4[b] (Oct/Nov 2023)	For new staff n (%)	As a refresher n (%)
Trauma informed practice/attachment/ACES	84 (87.5)	Trauma informed practice	103 (82.4)	95 (76.0)
n/a	n/a	Attachment	95 (76.0)	90 (72.0)
n/a	n/a	Understanding ACEs	59 (47.2)	60 (48.0)
Raising awareness of networks (e.g. DSL/DT)	76 (80.0)	Raising awareness of networks (e.g. DSL/DT)	93 (74.4)	87 (69.6)
Attendance/inclusion/ exclusions	56 (58.9)	Attendance	68 (54.4)	57 (45.6)
n/a	n/a	suspension & permanent exclusion	56 (44.8)	48 (38.4)
n/a	n/a	Inclusion of children with SEND	46 (36.8)	39 (31.2)
Strategies to address common barriers and outcomes	46 (48.4)	Strategies to address common barriers and outcomes	68 (54.4)	60 (48.0)
Mental health/anxiety/emotional literacy/ well-being	33 (34.7)	Mental Health/ anxiety	48 (38.4)	41 (32.8)
n/a	n/a	Well-being	38 (30.4)	33 (26.4)
n/a	n/a	Emotional literacy	37 (29.6)	33 (26.4)
Behaviour	27 (28.4)	Addressing challenging behaviour	59 (47.2)	53 (42.4)
Other	23 (24.2)	Other	32 (25.6)	28 (22.4)

Note: [a]*n*=95 (77.9%) of VSHs selected at least one subject; [b]*n*=122 (97.6%) of VSHs selected at least one subject

'Strategies to address common barriers' and 'Other' subjects of training in Table 9 included topics related to school improvement (e.g. raising awareness of CWSW needs, attainment gaps), specific therapeutic approaches (e.g. Emotion Based School Avoidance (EBSA), emotion coaching, Theraplay), Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) awareness, safeguarding, the voice of the child, and sharing information about other related professional contexts (e.g. SW, Youth Justice).

In the same table, it is striking that in Survey 4, 97.6% of VSH offered training to schools. It is clear, therefore, that they continue to see training as the principal route to raising awareness of CWSW needs and changing school practice to take account of them. A continued offer of training in trauma informed practice, responding to unmet attachment needs (87.5% of VSH in Survey 3 and 82.5%, 76.0% and 47.2%, respectively in Survey 4). Together these reflect a continued focus by VSH on increasing the adoption of more relational approaches to managing challenging behaviour. They, and schools, may be responding to the findings from the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness in School Programme[12] and the increased reference to more proactive, more relational, approaches to managing behaviour, attendance and emotional health and well-being outlined in the most recent government guidance on these topics.

One VS in the London region provides an example of how cultural change can be supported by a cross-LA scaffold that encourages schools to implement change in the wake of training:

> A 9 month 'Attachment Aware Schools Award' to schools, 62 schools
> signed up for 2023. The offer includes whole school training,
> coaching with an EP, DT Forum input, weekly tasks, attachment audit
> and a whole school improvement project. The programme is
> evaluated for impact annually by EPs *[VSH, London; Survey 4]*

Almost three-quarters of VSHs (74.4% in Survey 4) continue to see raising awareness of DT and DSL networks through training as important drivers for change in schools (76.0% in Survey 3). Training on attendance, inclusion and exclusions also remain high priorities (58.9% in Survey 3, and 54.4%, 36.8% and 44.8%, respectively, in Survey 4). This may reflect the national focus on post-pandemic attendance, and the particularly poor attendance of CWSW.

The most marked change in the training offered to schools is the increase in that relating to 'behaviour'. This increased from 28.4% in Survey 3 to 47.2% a year later. This may reflect increased demand from schools given the reported post-pandemic difficulties many pupils, whether CWSW or not, have experienced. It may also be that VSH are

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[12] https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/the-alex-timpson-attachment-and-trauma-programme-in-schools/

double counting training on relational approaches which are, fundamentally, offering schools an alternative way to manage 'challenging' behaviour.

2.3.2 Training, support and guidance for schools

It is important to note that the findings presented in section 2.3.1 relate to measures of process, not impact. Table 9 provides an insight into the view of VSH on the needs of the cohort, and of schools in the context of CWSW, and their effort to meet those needs. While it is much more difficult to be certain that the lessons being offered through training are driving a greater understanding of the needs of CWSW, and impacting on school policy or practice, there are encouraging signs that it is:

> Due to the [very large] size of the Local Authority … [training] is an ongoing priority. [A] school survey carried out at the end of December 2022 found that 86% of respondents were aware of the new guidance and Ever 6 CWSW cohort, with 62% claiming that they have disseminated this information throughout the school to some degree. *[VSH, South East; Survey 4]*

> Multi-agency workshops were attended by nearly 25% of all schools, with 70% of those attending having more than 5 current CWSW or PLAC in their school. Post-training ratings increased positively in terms of understanding the cohort, protective factors, trauma informed practice and their confidence in developing effective behaviour policies to support this cohort of young people. *[VSH, South East; Survey 4]*

There is also some evidence emerging from the case studies of a growing understanding of the educational needs of CWSW. In Keldbeck that understanding runs from the AD, through the VSH, and on to the schools where stimulating more trauma informed and relational practice is central to the LAs approach:

> It's making sure that the school, therefore the teachers and all the support staff, understand what it's like, the lived experience of the child… so when we look at it like that, our schools who are particularly more trauma informed, they are much, much better at managing behaviour. Fewer exclusions, better attendance...we keep doing it, we keep getting the good results *[AD; Keldbeck; Case Study]*

A Keldbeck DSL interviewed outlined how this focus on relationships is pervasive throughout the school and is supported by the VSH.

Our philosophy has always been about relationships, building those trusting relationships so that students feel as though they've got somebody, that trusted adult that they can go to when they need support…everything that we do is based on relationships, even staff to staff relationships…that will link into the work that we've done with our virtual school head. *[DSL; Keldbeck; Case Study]*

Early evidence reported by the CWSW Lead in Redbury suggested some cultural changes were taking place among the schools with the largest number of CWSW. The VS had facilitated training in TIP for these schools and fifty-four of their practitioners had achieved a Level 5 accreditation. It is interesting to see an approach ostensibly designed to address the needs of CWSW is leading to a shift in school culture to benefit other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups of children.

…those schools that are doing it best are not necessarily focussing on a child in care, a child with a social worker, they're looking at systemic change across their setting because actually, one of the things that we advocate all of the time is, "let's not put a label on this child" *[VSH; Redbury; Case Study]*

Evidence from a safeguarding audit by the VSH of Braddleton's schools showed aspirational planning, collaborating with CSC and including the voice of the child in relation to CWSW. The VS funded whole-school training on emotion coaching and in becoming attachment aware and trauma informed. The DSL interviewed exemplified the authority-wide promotion of relational approaches and restorative practice:

[we are] trained up to work with students on their emotional literacy and their understanding of themselves. And all of our staff are emotion coach trained, so we're working towards the trauma informed school mark, and so we're all trained in attachment and trauma…it's very much about restorative practice. *[DSL; Braddleton; Case Study]*

These examples suggest that the most effective support for change goes beyond 'training sessions' to provide a longer-term, more embedded, framework within which the training sits. The evidence presented above shows that this can involve whole LA approaches to stimulate schools to re-think their culture and practice or opportunities for continued support for schools after the initial training, either by the strategic initiative of the VS or from other practitioners.

Despite these encouraging signs of change the Filton Cross case study LA identified that

> … some academies were not contacting the Virtual School for support where they had CWSW with low attendance. *[Assistant Virtual School Head (AVSH); Filton Cross; Case Study]*.

Why this would be is unclear given the desire of the VS to support schools to improves children's attendance, but may, again, relate to the absence of a statutory framework requiring schools to share data on children the LA deems vulnerable.

2.4 Theory of Change outcome: More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT)

The ToC outcome recognises that the prevalence of more inclusive practice is unlikely to increase without the positive engagement, support, and drive, of a school's senior leaders. Ensuring they have a better understanding of the needs of the CWSW cohort, and of how those needs can be met, is an essential component to improving the inclusivity of schools. This section, therefore, builds on the findings relating to increased understanding of those needs described in section 2.3 and VSHs perception of progress towards this outcome is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: VSH perception of progress towards ToC outcome: More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT)

More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT)	Fully *n* (%)	Mostly *n* (%)	Somewhat *n* (%)	Barely *n* (%)	Not started *n* (%)	Total
Survey 4 (October / November 2023	2 (1.7)	17 (14.0)	78 (64.5)	21 (17.4)	3 (2.5)	121

In attempting to judge the impact of the extension of duties on the inclusivity of schools, this report identifies three proxy measures of inclusivity: attendance, suspensions and permanent exclusions, of CWSW. For instance, we have assumed that increased attendance, or reduced suspension or permanent exclusion, of CWSW would indicate greater inclusion of this group of children and young people.

2.4.1 Influencing and challenging school SLT

VSHs are seeking to influence SLTs in schools in a variety of ways, including using some senior staff as opinion formers to lead more general change:

This year we launched our Attachment and Trauma Awareness in Schools Programme and we have been working with two leaders from each of seven schools who are working towards a post-graduate qualification and have been accessing half termly supervision with a Clinical Psychologist to support them to enact culture change in their schools. This is a rolling two-year programme and the schools will all be accessing whole school training in year 2. In the autumn term we will be developing a model Relational Behaviour Policy and we will be recruiting schools to become the second cohort. We hope that a Post-16 and Early Years provider will join us this year, too. Attachment and Trauma Awareness will be the theme of our 2023/24 Conference where participating schools will be presenting their learning. *[VSH; North West; Survey 4]*

In Keldbeck, the AD reported how the VSH was influencing schools at all levels:

It's making sure that the school, therefore the teachers and all the support staff, understand what it's like, the lived experience of the child… so when we look at it like that, our schools who are particularly more trauma informed, they are much, much better at managing behaviour. Fewer exclusions, better attendance...we keep doing it, we keep getting the good results *[AD; Keldbeck; Case Study]*

Other VSHs are building relationships with senior leaders by providing them with the information and understanding they need to better meet CWSW needs:

[We are] … developing partnerships with SLT within a range of schools ensuring that key information about the needs and vulnerabilities for CWSW is highlighted so that this information can be disseminated to the wider staff team. *[VSH; West Midlands; Survey 4]*

VSH responses suggest they are taking experience gained in supporting Children Looked After (CLA) and PLAC and adapting it to the CWSW cohort. As well as seeking to influence SLT as described above VSHs are supporting CSC and parents to challenge schools more effectively (e.g. Braddleton case study, Annex 1).

2.4.2 Attendance

In Survey 3, the question about attendance asked how much of an *increase* VSHs have seen. The survey items relating to attendance were adjusted in Survey 4 (Table 12) to

further explore differential effects on the current and Ever 6 CWSW cohorts, and to offer a *decrease* option for attendance:

Table 11 Effect of LA approach on attendance of CWSW (current and Ever 6) – Survey 3

Outcome	None n (%)	Minor n (%)	Moderate n (%)	Major n (%)	Total n (%)
Effect on attendance	47 (45.2)	46 (44.2)	8 (7.7)	3 (2.9)	104 (100)

Table 12: Perceived impact of the LA approach on CWSW attendance – Survey 4

CWSW cohort	Decrease n (%)	None n (%)	Increase n (%)	Total n (%)
Current	6 (5.77)	32 (30.8)	66 (63.5)	104 (100)
Ever 6	2 (2.06)	65 (67.0)	30 (30.9)	97 (100)

Note that in Survey 4, more VSHs reported no effect for the Ever 6 CWSW cohort (67.0%) compared to the current CWSW cohort (30.8%). Open-ended responses suggest the likely explanation is the current state of data availability, collection and monitoring for the Ever 6 CWSW cohort. For many VSHs it has been challenging to accurately identify Ever 6 CWSW retrospectively back to 2015 at the point the duty was extended in 2021 (see 2.2.2).

This report therefore focusses on the impact of the extension of duties on the attendance of *current* CWSW.

In Survey 3, 45.2% of VSHs reported no effect on attendance of CWSW and 54.8% an increase. Despite the early stages of implementation of the extended duties at the time (October 2022), and that data collection strategies were in the process of being set up, the majority of VSHs reported an increase in attendance as a result of their approach. Joint working and targeted action at school level were offered as specific examples by 19 VSHs to illustrate the action they believed had driven an increase in attendance.

By the time of Survey 4 (October/November 2023), 63.5% were reporting increased attendance of current CWSW. For those that reported an increase in attendance, links to joint working remained key to achieving positive change while the availability of data to identify and monitor the cohort was also cited as important:

> Joint work between VS and Attendance services around part time timetables and risk assessments. We co-wrote the new borough [LA]

wide policy together. *[AVSH with responsibility for extended duties; London; Survey 4]*

Regular (termly) multi-agency partnership meeting focussing on [LA-wide] attendance which includes CWSW discussion. Visibility of VS and Inclusion Team staff to support social workers and schools with overcoming barriers to attendance. Termly discussions with schools *[VSH; Yorkshire; Survey 4]*

VSHs that reported no change or a decrease in attendance mostly ascribed this to issues with data availability. For example, a VSH in the West Midlands reported:

Our main barrier to [improving attendance] is lack of access to timely, reliable data so we have a picture across the LA. We usually become involved when a child had been out of school for a long time. *[VSH; West Midlands; Survey 4]*

However, a developed data strategy in the same VS enabled sharing of the data across services:

We have been sharing termly attendance data for CIN, CP and Children in Care widely… at social care workforce conference, head teachers monthly meeting with LA, locality meetings, variety of networks including SEND, DSL, DT *[VSH, West Midlands; Survey 4]*

Where the VSH had access to timely attendance data they could offer a more targeted approach, though this example might blur the boundary between strategic and operational approaches:

We offered primary schools who had children on CP plans with <90% attendance access to funding to support and increase attendance. Schools came up with a variety of ways to use the money…such as Monday morning Lego club and a walking bus *[VSH; South West; Survey 4]*

However, it is important to note that the extension of VSHs' duties is taking place at a time when there are a range of stimuli being applied to increase attendance across the school population back to pre-pandemic levels. The largely qualitative evidence currently available from this evaluation cannot easily separate the impact of the VSH from the more general drive to improve inclusivity. This is something VSHs are also conscious of:

There was no decrease from 2021-22 but some slow recovery of attendance, but it has still not reached pre-pandemic levels. *[VSH; North West; Survey 3]*

Another VSH pointed out that:

Attendance levels are improving; however, this is against a backdrop of unprecedented levels of persistent absence during the pandemic. Determining whether the current improvements to attendance and the lower levels of persistent absence are as a result of coming out of the pandemic or as a result of our approach is not yet possible *[VSH; East of England; Survey 3]*

2.4.3 Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

As with attendance, in Survey 3 the question about suspensions and permanent exclusions asked how much of a *decrease* VSHs have seen. The survey items relating to suspensions and permanent exclusions were adjusted in Survey 4 to further explore differential effects on the current and Ever 6 CWSW cohorts, and to offer an *increase* option for suspensions and permanent exclusions.

In response to Survey 3, the majority of the VSHs (54.8%) responding to this question about *suspensions* reported that the approach being adopted in their LA had 'no effect' (Table 13). A further 43.2% reported 'minor' or 'moderate' decreases in suspensions. A similar proportion (51.9%) reported 'no effect' on the *exclusion* of CWSW, with 44.2% reporting 'minor' or 'moderate' decreases in permanent exclusions (Table 14).

Table 13: Perceived impact of the LA approach on CWSW (current and Ever 6) suspensions – Survey 3

Outcome	None *n* (%)	Minor *n* (%)	Moderate *n* (%)	Major *n* (%)	Total *n* (%)
Effect on suspensions	57 (54.8)	38 (36.5)	7 (6.7)	2 (1.9)	104 (100)

Table 14: Perceived impact of the LA approach on CWSW (current and Ever 6) permanent exclusions – Survey 3

Outcome	None *n* (%)	Minor *n* (%)	Moderate *n* (%)	Major *n* (%)	Total *n* (%)
Effect on permanent exclusions	54 (51.9)	36 (34.6)	10 (9.6)	4 (3.8)	104 (%)

Looking at responses relating to *Current* CWSW, Survey 4 shows that the proportion of VSHs reporting 'no effect' on suspensions (47.0%; Table 15) and permanent exclusions (53.0%; Table 16) remained fairly consistent with the proportions reported in Survey 3 for all CWSW; this is in line with the expected longer-term timing of changes in these outcomes in the ToC. Some VSHs made use of the introduction of 'increase' response options for these questions in Survey 4 (18.0% for suspensions and 14.9% for exclusions); though the majority of these were reporting only 'minor' increases, this is a finding worth following up in the next stage of the study.

For suspensions and exclusions for Ever 6 CWSW, a greater majority of VSHs identified no change in the outcomes for this cohort; however, this might be interpreted as reflecting the lack of an accurate dataset relating to that cohort, rather than the LA's approach being less effective for these children.

Table 15: Perceived impact of the LA approach on CWSW suspensions – Survey 4

CWSW cohort	Decrease n (%)	None n (%)	Increase n (%)	Total n (%)
Current	35 (35.0)	47 (47.0)	18 (18.0)	100 (100)
Ever 6	9 (9.6)	71 (75.5)	14 (14.9)	94 (100)

Table 16: Perceived impact of the LA approach on CWSW permanent exclusions – Survey 4

CWSW cohort	Decrease n (%)	None n (%)	Increase n (%)	Total n (%)
Current	30 (30.0)	53 (53.0)	17 (17.0)	100 (100)
Ever 6	9 (9.7)	74 (79.6)	10 (10.8)	93 (100)

The large majority of the activity aimed at decreasing suspensions and permanent exclusions was described in the surveys and case studies as being underpinned by greater efforts to stimulate joint working. One VSH described a very coherent approach to address the risk of suspension which operated at the level of individual team around a child, at the level of the relevant LA service, and at the level of trusts:

We have been providing consultations to schools and social workers around holding more effective reintegration meetings and stressing the importance of multi-agency approaches and [Social Emotional Mental Health] SEMH assessments/SEND planning much earlier.

We have also supported the service that is responsible for AP [Alternative Provision] and exclusions in extending their capacity, so that they can focus more on supporting CWSW and ensuring schools and their service are putting in provision that meets their needs. We are discussing cases with SEND much more too.

Where we have concerns about levels of suspensions within trusts, we are working collaboratively with the trust and other services to provide challenge and a joined-up approach *[Strategic Lead for CWSW; East of England; Survey 4]*

In relation to impacting permanent exclusions one VSH described influencing the relevant LA service to focus on this at-risk cohort:

The PRU, Inclusion, Attendance Service (PIAS) has also prioritised this cohort which has positively impacted on withdrawn and reinstated permanent exclusions. Last year, PIAS reported that 51 permanent exclusions across the county that were either withdrawn or reinstated (31% of these are classed as Ever 6 CWSW) *[VSH; South East; Survey 4]*

Another VSH described the secondment of a social worker to the virtual school to work alongside teams such as Behaviour Outreach teams and Exclusion and Reintegration teams in an effort to improve the joint working of those teams with CSC.

In the surveys and case studies, many VSHs reported they had impacted suspension or permanent exclusion rates through their support for relational approaches, including support for trauma informed practice and greater attachment awareness, which helped keep CWSW in school and reflects the training focus across the sector (Section 2.3).

Many VSHs that identified a decrease in permanent exclusions offered some form of relational practice as an activity that drove the reduction in CWSW being excluded, such as schools adopting TIP, training by the VS to use trauma-informed strategies as preventative measure so that behaviour does not escalate to warrant permanent exclusion and supporting schools to change from 'behaviour' policies to 'relational' policies.

There was also some evidence of concrete changes in school practice in response to training in relational approaches to managing behaviour:

> One secondary setting that we have worked closely with has now scrapped detentions in place of restorative conversations. They are one of 12 settings participating in our [training programme on relational approaches] that is working to achieve the goal of creating sustainable trauma-informed, relational and restorative communities. *[DVSH with responsibility for extended duties; South East; Survey 4]*

2.4.4 The value of data in tracking impact

As described in section 2.2 there is wide variation among virtual schools in the availability of data related to attendance, suspensions and permanent exclusions. As described in section 2.2, not all VSH have access to data on attendance, suspensions and permanent exclusions they consider of high quality. Where data *are* both available and of high quality, in terms of both accuracy and detail, then it is possible for the VSH to provide precise tracking of these indicators of inclusion and demonstrate impact on the CWSW cohort:

> Days lost to suspension decreased term on term for both CIN and CP cohorts in 2022/23. Days lost to suspensions for CP has dropped in 2022/23 from 513 in 2021/22 to 147 in 2022/23. For CIN, this has dropped from 492 in 2021/22 to 336.5 in 2022/23. *[DVSH with responsibility for CWSW; South East; Survey 4]*

> The percentage of those receiving suspensions last year [2022-2023 academic year] who were open to social services at the time of the suspension, fell by 5% compared to the previous year (although overall suspensions survey increased by 48%) *[VSH; South East; Survey 4]*

2.5 Theory of Change outcome: Increasing CSC's understanding of education

The ToC reflects the non-statutory guidance in relation to the extension of VSH duties. They both recognize the importance of increasing the understanding of social workers as much as that of schools, though the nature of the gap in understanding may be different.

As with other evidence from the surveys it is important note that these are subjective judgements by VSHs, not objective measures. However, they provide a growing sense of momentum for change among VSHs.

Table 17: VSH perception of progress towards ToC outcome: Increasing CSC's understanding of education

Increasing CSC's understanding of education	Fully n (%)	Mostly n (%)	Some-what n (%)	Barely n (%)	Not started n (%)	Total n (%)
Survey 3 (October 2022)	0	14 (11.8)	73 (61.3)	25 (21.0)	7 (5.9)	119 (100)
Survey 4 (October/ November 2023)	2 (1.7)	31 (25.6)	70 (57.9)	16 (13.2)	2 (1.7)	121 (100)

Compared to Survey 3, Table 17 demonstrates greater confidence among VSH a year later, when they completed Survey 4, that they are making progress towards this ToC outcome. Those reporting that they had 'fully' or 'mostly' made progress towards this outcome increased from 11.8% to 27.3%. There was a concurrent reduction in those feeling they had made 'barely' any progress or 'not started' from 26.9% in Survey 3 to only 14.9% in Survey 4. Those percentages are greater than the equivalent figures in Table 6, relating to progress in school's understanding of CWSW (20.2% and 9.0%, respectively). Focusing on those VSs who responded to both Survey 3 and Survey 4, a paired t-test showed that there was a significant increase in scores over time (Survey 3: 2.78, Survey 4: 3.11), indicating greater perceived progress towards this outcome, (t(103) = 4.34, p < .001).

This does not seem to be due to a lack of training offered to CSC, as Table 18 shows 96% of VSH have offered training to SW, a similar proportion that offered training to schools (97.6%). It will require further exploration in the next wave of data collection to identify whether the *volume* of training provided for SW was less than to schools or whether VSH feel that CSC continues to require more additional support.

Table 18 Training subjects for social workers provided by the VS (*n* (%))

Training subject: Survey 3[a] (Oct 2022)	All SW staff	Training subject: Survey 4[b] (Oct/Nov 2023)	For new staff	As a refresher
New duties and responsibilities explained	72 (83.7)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Understand language, systems and processes connected with education	53 (61.6)	n/a	n/a	n/a
SEND/ understanding EHCP process	43 (50.0)	Inclusion of children with SEND	51 (40.8)	46 (36.8)
Attendance/inclusion/ exclusion	61 (70.9)	Attendance	80 (64.0)	78 (62.4)
n/a	n/a	Suspension and Permanent Exclusion	70 (56.0)	69 (55.2)
Trauma informed practice/attachment/ACES	37 (43.0)	Trauma informed practice	51 (41.8)	50 (40.0)
n/a	n/a	Attachment	41 (32.8)	39 (31.2)
n/a	n/a	Understanding ACEs	20 (16.0)	20 (16.0)
Behaviour	21 (24.4)	Addressing challenging behaviour	27 (21.6)	29 (23.2)
Other	14 (16.3)	Other	20 (16.0)	18 (14.4)
n/a	n/a	Mental Health/ anxiety	17 (13.6)	19 (15.2)
n/a	n/a	Well-being	17 (13.6)	17 (13.6)
n/a	n/a	Emotional literacy	12 (9.6)	11 (8.8)
n/a	n/a	Raising awareness of networks (e.g. DSL/DT)	61 (48.8)	57 (45.6)
n/a	n/a	Strategies to address common barriers and outcomes	50 (40.0)	55 (44.4)

Note: [a]86 (70.5%) of VSHs selected at least one subject; [b]116 (92.8%) of VSHs selected at least one subject

2.5.1 Training, support and guidance for SWs

Progress towards this ToC outcome by VSHs was driven by activities such as:

- training to meet needs identified from internal surveys and audits of knowledge or understanding of education,

- provision by the VSH of regular drop-in sessions or clinics for SWs (and often open to other professionals) to seek advice, guidance and clarification on education related issues,

- a programme devised by a VS in the East of England that supported DT and SW to swap for a day to experience the responsibilities and demands of each other's role, and,

- attendance at CSC team meetings to promote the education perspective on issues facing CWSW (including the protective factor of school attendance).

Over time there has been an increase in training provided to social workers, from 70.5% in Survey 3 (Table 25) and rising to 96.0% in Survey 4 (Table 18).

In Survey 4, across the 12 named topics (i.e. excluding 'other' and 'none'), the majority of VSs offering training on this topic to new social workers also offered the training as a refresher to existing staff (range: 75.0% to 90.0%, M = 85.5%). This suggests the VSH's strategy has recognised the need for ongoing training by providing sessions for new SWs as they enter the profession or the local authority, and to update existing SWs on new developments.

Some VSHs also provided regular training for new starters in CSC to mitigate the impact of high SW turnover. Over half (56.6%) of VSHs in Survey 3 highlighted SW turnover as a barrier to implementing the extended duties as it interrupts consistent support for CWSW. In addition, high SW turnover requires ongoing training on raising of awareness of the VS role and challenges faced by CWSW as this strategic lead for CWSW in the East of England points out:

> We have multi-agency training, regular consultations, social care and school-specific training and sit on a range of forums and panels. The issue is that we are a large LA and turnover does mean that we constantly need to work to promote the VS, the new duties and raise awareness of barriers *[CWSW Lead; East of England; Survey 4]*

In Survey 4, education awareness sessions delivered by the VSH were beginning to be integrated into initial SW qualification training. Table 18 sets out VSH responses to the question on training content for social workers in Survey 3 and Survey 4.

It is important to note that the Survey 4 question deliberately sought additional detail on the training topics, which makes direct comparison between the two surveys difficult. However, the subjects of training from Survey 4 have been grouped in an effort to address this difficulty.

In Survey 3 the principal focus of training was introducing the new duties to SW (83.7% of VSH responding). However, beyond that the subjects of training delivered to SWs reported in surveys 3 and 4 are comparable, addressing school related topics, such as attendance (64%, Survey 4), exclusions (56%, Survey 4), raising awareness of networks (48.8%, Survey 4) and SEND (40.8%, Survey 4). Training content reported as 'other' for SWs included, raising aspirations, roles and responsibilities of the VSH and CIN/ CP planning.

A manager from CSC, interviewed in the Alsbury case study, was clear about the need to develop a common language across services and the value of the VS in acting as a bridge:

> Sometimes education and social work don't speak the same language and we are often not the best of friends. But the virtual schools are a bit more on the same page as education, they speak the same language, they understand them and they have a bit more respect funnily enough than social workers do with schools. *[CSC manager; Alsbury; Case Study]*

The Earlham case study (see Annex 1) is an example of an LA aiming to keep the issues raised in training and other awareness raising alive in the work of schools and social workers. It is also an interesting example in that it is the same newsletter going to both schools and social workers, reinforcing a sense of shared language, responsibility and partnership:

> … with a monthly newsletter that is sent to SWs and schools to share updates (e.g., on trauma informed approaches), prompts to facilitate reflection on current practice and ways to support pupils. *[VSH; Earlham; Case Study]*

2.5.2 Impact of training, support and guidance for social workers

Through training and advice on casework in drop-in sessions (in-person and online), VSHs in Survey 3 felt that SWs were increasingly empowered to challenge schools around exclusions and other related practices, e.g. part-time timetables, off rolling:

> Training provided to SWs around attendance and part time timetables. Heads of service illustrate in discussions they have a

more detailed understanding of education needs and the SEND process. A disability team education worker has started to support social workers in understanding the needs and processes associated with SEND. A growing understanding of the Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) process and how schools can meet needs has been seen in discussion with social workers and when social workers present at panels. *[VSH; Yorkshire; Survey 3]*

The Earlham case study (see annex 1) provides an example of the impact of training, support and guidance on social workers becoming more informed about the needs of CWSW:

Evidence from targeted weekly contact by the VS about pupil status (e.g., [Elective Home Education (EHE), suspensions, exclusions, pupils on part-time timetables, CWSW needs and barriers to learning) suggests SWs are better informed about the educational needs of CWSW *[VSH; Earlham; Case Study]*.

While VSHs have long stressed the importance of education as a protective factor for care experienced children, the extension of duties has offered opportunities to broaden that conversation to social workers working with children subject to CIN or CP plans. For instance, the AD in the Braddleton case study noted that the extension of duties had led to the wider influence of VSH influence over CSC planning for CWSW so the promotion of education as a protective factor was more widely understood, and extending that to services supporting the maintenance of education for that cohort:

Our virtual school tries to have a significant influence… applying those same principles to youngsters with a social worker, the same principles as we would apply to the youngsters in care…then we need to be thinking about how we sustain and maintain the effective education provision *[AD; Braddleton; Case Study]*

VS are increasingly perceived as acting to bring together LA services into one conversation. This example from the Filton Cross case study:

I think the virtual school has been able to act as a critical friend and as an impartial party in the work between social care and schools and, indeed, in its own work because its own expertise from working with children who are already vulnerable around reducing the risk of exclusion, etc., that work has transferred over into all children known to social care. *[AD; Filton Cross; Case Study]*

As CIN and CP plans are compiled, reviewed and monitored by SWs, improved clarity and focus of education elements may suggest an increase in understanding of education aspects for the CWSW cohort by CSC (Table 19). In Survey 3, 38.3% of VSHs agreed with the statement that the clarity and focus of education in CIN and CP plans has improved but just over one-quarter (27.5%) were unsure. By Survey 4, over two-thirds (68.5%) of VSHs agreed with the same statement and fewer were unsure (7.2%). Focusing on those VSs who responded to both Survey 3 and Survey 4, a paired t-test showed that there was a significant increase in scores over time (Survey 3: 3.47, Survey 4: 3.81), indicating greater perceived improvements in this outcome (t(69) = 2.60, p = .006).

Table 19: VSH perception of education clarity and focus in CIN/ CP plans

Clarity of CIN/ CP plan improved	Agree n (%)	Neither n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Not sure n (%)	Total n (%)
Survey 3 (October 2022)	46 (38.3)	32 (26.7)	9 (7.5)	33 (27.5)	120 (100)
Survey 4 October/ November 2023)	76 (68.5)	19 (17.1)	8 (7.2)	8 (7.2)	111 (100)

In the early stages of Phase Two (Survey 3), focus on CIN and CP plans was an emerging area of work with variance in level of involvement by VSHs in the planning process. Some agreements were made in principle between VSHs and CSC to include key questions about education in the planning process but this was not embedded in practice at the time of Survey 3. Some systemic changes to the construction of plans included, in one VS, mandatory inclusion of attendance targets where attendance falls below 95% and, in another VS, an EWO) is invited to review meetings where attendance falls below 90%.

Some VSHs commented in the case study interviews that the profile of CWSW had been raised by inclusion of education elements in CIN/ CP plans and were now developing strategies to improve quality through various QA audits and sampling of plans. Where VSHs had begun to quality assure CIN/ CP plans, initial findings suggested little direct reference to the work of schools in existing plans. The VSHs looked to improve this through further SW training and new guidance around assessment and planning.

VSHs reflected on the potential benefits of attending CIN/ CP review meetings but many highlighted the impracticalities due to the high numbers of CWSW in their VS and the

resource allocated to the extended duties. One such example was highlighted in Survey 3:

> As a Virtual school we would really be very keen to be able to attend CP/CIN review meetings but this project is the strategic overview of CWSW and was clearly set out that way. More resource for attending meetings to be more involved with schools, families children and social care in the model used for CIC would be amazing and would have impact but with current funds this is not possible as in [LA] we have large numbers of children with 2 staff assigned. *[VSH; South West; Survey 3]*

2.6 Theory of Change outcome: Strengthened partnership between school, social care, CAMHS and the VS

Progress towards this outcome was characterised by VSs acting as a central hub to facilitate cross-agency working. This may reflect a raised awareness in other agencies of the roles and responsibilities of the VSs, as well as the sustained efforts by VS staff to advocate for the CWSW cohorts in inter-agency meetings and panels. Overall, VSHs perceive the partnership between agencies as strengthened, as indicated by the shift in ratings for this ToC outcome from Survey 3 to 4 (Table 20).

Table 20: VSH perception of progress towards ToC outcome: Strengthened partnership between school, CSC, CAMHS and the VS

Strengthened partnership between school, CSC, CAMHS and the VS	Fully *n* (%)	Mostly *n* (%)	Some-what *n* (%)	Barely *n* (%)	Not started *n* (%)	Total *n* (%)
Survey 3 (October 2022)	1 (0.8)	29 (24.2)	67 (55.8)	20 (16.7)	3 (2.5)	120 (100)
Survey 4 (October/ November 2023)	8 (6.6)	41 (33.9)	55 (45.5)	14 (11.6)	3 (2.5)	121 (100)

References to joint working were prominent throughout survey responses as the main vehicle for raising awareness of CWSW needs across both schools and CSC, and how education plays a key role in supporting CWSW and their families. The VSH in a case study LA neatly summarised some of the benefits of joint working in ensuring school

attendance was recognised as a protective factor and ultimately improved outcomes for CWSW:

> And we wanted to work…clearly and collaboratively with our social care colleagues…we framed it in the way of a wider care team is more people to share the risk, to share the load. And if a child is in education, you've got all of the supervision and all of the safeguarding that comes with schools…and I think that was what's been really well received, is a recognition that multi-agency working has better outcomes. *[VSH; Keldbeck; Case Study]*

A case study DCS described the VS role in relation to CWSW as helping to promote education within multi-agency support for children and families:

> And I think [the VS role] does ensure when we put forward our support packages, we don't forget the education element of it and also the added value that schools can provide. […] And so it's really important that [schools'] input is part of that and the virtual school can help to facilitate that. *[DCS; Filton Cross; Case Study]*

VSs seem to be well placed to act as a central point to effectively coordinate joint working between children's services. A VSH in the South West was one of a minority to explicitly identify improved partnership working with CAMHS and other services, including Early Help that may provide effective prevention of the escalation of cases to statutory social work intervention:

> As the bridge between school, [C]SC, CAMHS and ourselves, we have become an integral and stable part of multi-agency panels to advise, support and guide colleagues in ways to support the education of vulnerable YP. We open our training programme to all multi-agencies and at our last face to face training event, we had representatives from Early Help, Fostering, CSC, Post-16 and School Improvement, matching the numbers from education settings *[VSH; South West; Survey 4]*

Most VSHs suggest the partnership between education and CAMHS is less well established. Challenges with CAMHS reported by VSHs include long waiting times for consultations from referrals, thresholds for intervention and over-stretched resources. Further exploration of the barriers to effective working with CAMHS is required to provide holistic support for CWSW. An education advisor from the East of England illustrates the work in progress:

Currently no direct involvement with CAMHS and not the lead for this partnership however we will continue to explore opportunities to contribute. There are strong and reciprocal partnerships across some aspects of these groups but not between all 4 together from a VS perspective. Visibility of the VS and queries about our offer have increased *[Education advisor; responsibility for PLAC and CWSW; East of England; Survey 4]*

The specific inclusion of CAMHS in this ToC outcome reflects the view expressed by VSHs in the original ToC workshops that emotional health and well-being were key to making progress for this at-risk group of children and young people. It is likely the same view that has driven many VSHs to focus their training for schools in trauma informed and attachment aware practice, and to encourage schools to adopt more relational approaches to the management of learning. However, very few VSHs volunteered specific observations with respect to CAMHS.

Another example of this strategic level work across services comes from the Earlham case study where:

A 'Team Around the School' concept was established to work with schools and the wider professional team. The VS developed a 'relational lens review' of a school's approach to supporting CWSW. A [Red, Amber, Green] RAG rating system was used to identify CWSW most vulnerable to poor attendance and interventions targeted accordingly. *[VSH; Earlham; Case Study]*

2.6.1 Influencing decisions

A large majority of VSHs (79.0%) in Survey 4 indicated that they now attend decision making panels. These multi-agency panels are mostly connected with CSC, attendance and safeguarding. The main contributions to the panels, as reported by VSHs, are raising awareness of CWSW needs, ensuring 'education' has a voice, general education related advice and guidance and opportunities to share information and examples of good practice.

Some VSHs also attend panels connected with Youth Justice, funding, Fair Access and exclusions. Many VSHs report they (or their staff) attend multiple panels – many in the range of 3-6 different panels, with some regularly attending 10 or more.

Sitting on a range of decision-making panels reflects work by VSHs to raise the profile of CWSW and inform associated services at all levels regarding CWSW needs and how the VS is strategically supporting this vulnerable cohort in schools, leading to a strengthened partnership.

The Keldbeck case study provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which VSHs' influence and reach has changed as a result of the extension of duties. The VSH reported in Survey 3 and the evaluation interview that:

> … the close working with CSC teams also enables a common language about education. It is [our] aim to ensure that education, as a protective factor, is a golden thread throughout all care planning. *[VSH; Keldbeck; Case Study]*.

The AD provided additional insight into the increased reach and influence of the VS saying that the extension of duties has:

> … raised the virtual school's profile and made it more accessible to all children's social workers, not just those for looked after children; mainly as the result of a big push in communication to CSC about education and the virtual school's service offer. Further, the VSH is now included more in planning, formal meetings and inspection preparation, whereas previously they were represented through their head of service. *[AD; Keldbeck; Case Study]*

While there is still progress to be made towards this ToC outcome (indicated by less than half (40.5%) of VSHs rating their progress as fully or mostly completed) the potential of the extension of duties in increasing the relevance of education to safeguarding decisions is widely recognised. The AD in the Keldbeck case study LA was emphatic that:

> developments in CSC casework are underway to include attendance as a key factor in decisions around case closure [and that] You can't close it when they've got zero attendance, for example…that isn't a safe case closure. And…in Keldbeck, we've got high re-referrals through the front door, so that is demonstrating that maybe something's not quite right when we're closing the cases. *[AD; Keldbeck; Case Study]*

2.7 Theory of Change outcome: Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education

The ToC workshops identified increasing parental engagement with education as a key step towards the longer-term outcomes identified in the Theory of Change. We asked for VSHs perception on progress towards this outcome for the first time in Survey 4, commensurate with the stage of programme development (Table 21). For the majority of

VSHs, work towards this outcome is emerging as 60.9% indicated progress had barely begun or not started.

Table 21: VSH perception of progress towards ToC outcome: Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education

Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education	Fully n (%)	Mostly n (%)	Some-what n (%)	Barely n (%)	Not started n (%)	Total n (%)
Survey 4 (October/ November 2023)	0	8 (6.7)	39 (32.5)	47 (39.2)	26 (21.7)	120 (100)

Interpretation of this ToC outcome by some VSHs suggest direct work with parents does not fall within the remit of the extended duties, whilst others suggest this may be accomplished indirectly through working closely with CSC or devising online resources to support parents and families. The latter example may reflect approaches taken under the VSHs' duty to PLAC, which has often been met through the provision of resources for parents and carers to use.

Other approaches to increasing parental engagement stem from VS training opportunities offered to schools whereby strategies and information is cascaded to parents via schools' own parental engagement approaches and projects:

> The advice, support and guidance we give in this role to schools has impacted positively on parents as schools then share strategies such as emotion coaching strategies and ways to build resilience in young people. *[VSH; South West; Survey 4]*

In the Filton Cross case study, the VSH worked closely with CSC teams. From these discussions, parenting was identified as a major issue affecting attendance for some CWSW. The VSH made the strategic decision to use a partner organisation to deliver parenting courses. At the time of the case study interview, two courses had been completed intended to prevent falling attendance and improve engagement by adolescents, particularly those going into Year 11. The courses were well received by parents, and in response to their feedback, the VS adjusted the timing of the second course, as explained by the Assistant VSH (AVSH):

> The first one that we did we did around May, and parents said this is fantastic, I just wish this had happened before they were taking their GCSEs because the difference that we're seeing, that it's made

would have been really useful. This time we ran it from November
and it kind of – it was a series of them, so it's just finishing next week,
just in time for GCSEs. *[AVSH; Filton Cross Case Study]*

As the implementation of the extended duties progresses, further exploration through case studies and VSH surveys may provide insights into how VSHs are working towards this outcome in collaboration with schools, CSC and other agencies.

3 Discussion

This section begins with a summary of the key findings relating to progress towards the ToC outcomes. Supportive evidence for the assumptions underlying the ToC model is then presented, along with ongoing challenges to further progress towards the ToC outcomes. Limitations of the study are outlined and implications for the next stage of the evaluation complete this discussion.

3.1 Key findings on progress towards Theory of Change outcomes

The Theory of Change developed in the Phase One workshops (see Figure 1 and 2) laid out a logical series of steps through which the activities undertaken by VSHs in discharging their extended duties to CWSW might contribute to improved longer-term outcomes for children and young people. Overall, the findings show that progress has been made towards all of the 2022/23 and 2023/24 interim outcomes in the ToC model, although some have seen more progress than others.

With regards to the 2022/23 interim outcome ('Improved data quality'), a substantial majority of VSH now have access to data of those children *currently* subject to a CIN or CP plan (CWSW); a notable minority of those are also confident in the quality of that data. However, the challenge of accessing data on the Ever 6 CWSW that was reported in Phase One remains.

Despite the survey taking place at the start of the 2023/24 school year, around a quarter of VSHs felt that increased understanding (of CWSW needs by schools, and of education by CSC) had already been 'fully' or 'mostly achieved'. Only very few reported no progress towards these outcomes, though CSC understanding was 'barely achieved' in twice as many LAs as schools' understanding. Almost 4 in 10 reported that they had fully or mostly achieved improvements in partnership working across agencies. Progress towards achieving more inclusive practice in schools was seen to be less advanced, perhaps suggesting that increased understanding of CWSW's needs and partnership working needed to be in place first before this would have an effect on practice. Finally, many VSHs reported the strategic support of parents and families of CWSW as an emerging and ongoing area of work.

3.2 Supportive evidence for the ToC model

The findings in this interim report provide supportive evidence for the theorised chain of steps between the activities and the interim outcomes in the ToC model; this important step strengthens the assumption that the changes seen to date should in turn produce improvements in longer-term outcomes.

The interim outcomes in the ToC model can be seen as mechanisms facilitating progress towards longer-term outcomes. The findings from the surveys and case studies suggest that the predominant mechanisms for progress in the ToC model have been improvements in joint working and data quality, and that each of these facilitates the other. Direct links between training and increased understanding were also evident.

Case studies and surveys showed that training remained the VSH's principal means for increasing both schools' understanding of CWSW needs and CSC's understanding of education practice. Relational approaches, trauma-informed practice and attendance comprised the majority of the training subject offered. Through their training programmes, VSHs said that they have empowered SWs to be more assertive on attendance and school placements by improving their knowledge, understanding and confidence when dealing with schools. In turn, greater understanding of trauma informed practice and/or attachment awareness (particularly where it is supported by senior leaders in schools and a broader LA-wide relational practice strategy) alongside more effective joint working, was identified by VSHs as substantially contributing to positive change in attendance, suspension and inclusion.

Awareness of, and involvement in, networks may be seen as one of the activities where better joint working has the opportunity to flourish. VSHs are well placed to act as a central point to effectively coordinate joint working between children's services. Sitting on a range of decision-making panels reflects advocacy work by VSHs to raise the profile of CWSW and inform associated services, at all levels, regarding CWSW needs and how the VS is strategically supporting this vulnerable cohort in schools, leading to strengthened partnerships. Better joint working is facilitated also by whole LA approaches, and 'buy-in' by senior leaders (both in the LA and schools) due to the raised profile and the impact from information shared.

Other references to a more coordinated approach (likely from better joint working) included empowering educational, and other, professionals who work directly with families, to advocate for the importance of education when planning and delivering support for CWSW. The improved aspects of joint working have raised awareness of the CWSW cohort through increased conversation and visibility.

Where better joint working was taking place, several factors were seen as having most influence when they are present collectively. Raising both the profile of the CWSW cohort, and awareness of the demands and responsibilities related to other professionals' roles, through multi-agency training has facilitated better joint working. Further, sharing of data between agencies provides opportunities for discussion to take place, particularly when the space for conversations is provided through drop-in clinics/surgeries hosted by the VSHs or through participation in decision making panels or in establishing networks (e.g. DSL/DT networks).

Indeed, the majority of VSHs felt that the availability of data on CWSW had improved joint working, by informing discussions and planning. VSs reported on how data sharing had helped partners to better understand risk factors and strategies for improvement, and to take shared ownership of priorities. Monitoring of individual children's attendance and special educational needs had been used to inform the agendas of both operational and strategic multi-agency boards, groups and meetings, as well as prompting targeted interventions. Access to data on CWSW in education had also enabled VSs to identify individual schools that had particularly good outcomes for CWSW, enabling shared learning around good practice. Those VSHs with access to high quality data on attendance, suspension and exclusion could also be confident in their judgements on whether the extension of duties is having a positive effect on these indicators of school inclusiveness.

3.3 Ongoing challenges

The ToC model is underpinned by a set of assumptions about what needs to be in place to make the model 'work'. Despite self-reported evidence of progress through the theorised steps in the model so far, it is important to identify ongoing challenges that might threaten further progress towards the long-term outcomes in the ToC. Where these challenges are major (high risk) or extensive (broad spread), this might require further input in terms of guidance or resources to improve the chances of the model working as planned.

3.3.1 Defining the scope of the extended duties

A key assumption underlying the ToC is that VSHs have a shared understanding of the scope of the extended duties. However, the findings suggest that this assumption is under threat in two key ways. First, a tension between the strategic nature of the duty and casework was evident to a certain degree in both the VSH surveys and the case studies. Some VSHs were able to resolve this and still meet the strategic element. In those cases, VSs were often working with, or signposting to, partner services or settings to deliver the strategic nature of the extended duties (e.g., removing barriers to attendance, training, school level intervention). This partnership included other services within the LA (e.g., health), but also private entities that provide training (for schools and CSC) and enrichment activities.

Some of the demand for more direct work is coming from SWs, less often from schools but also some from VSHs' moral purpose. An interview with a DSL suggested an assumption that the VS could provide support to individuals, particularly in respect of non-attendance:

It would be helpful if [the VS] could be a bit more hands on in picking up some of the students who are falling through the gaps. And we're not talking about a huge number, but we're talking about three or four, and if only one could be rescued, that would be fantastic, because we've got three or four kids who, for a variety of different reasons, are not in education. *[DSL; Filton Cross; Case Study]*

At the same time, the Filton Cross AVSH described multiple requests for individual tuition for CWSW and how the VS was working closely with partners to try to accommodate requests, using a triage system to respond appropriately to those seeking support.

It may be possible to relieve some of the tension between strategic and operational support by highlighting the difference between them. Operational involvement in an individual case can sometimes help build relationships and encourage dialogue in a way that a set of strategic guidelines to schools and SW are less likely to achieve. Operational engagement can teach by demonstration, modelling or by working alongside to build sustainable understanding and practice.

In this case, operational signposting with regard to particular individuals is intended to breed a strategic relationship between SW and the signposted service, and therefore justified as a strategic activity. In contrast, a VS organising and staffing parenting classes may be considered 'direct work'. As Phase Two develops there may be value in distinguishing activities as 'strategic guidance and training'; 'operational support for the partners around the family' (e.g., placing a VS worker *alongside* schools and SW professionals), and 'intervention in the case by a VS worker who does direct work with the child or family'.

Some VSH feel that the non-statutory nature of the guidance relating to the extension creates an important challenge. This was voiced as a challenge for data collection, but other examples include:

The absence of a statutory duty upon schools to report attendance to LAs is a real barrier. *[VSH; East Midlands; Survey 4]*

Priority and focus needs to be maintained on this role in order to effect long term systemic change to continue to support this vulnerable learner's group. This would be further progressed with the guidance of a nationally agreed model or process for the expectation of the role, with evidence of effective practice being shared with all LAs. *[DVSH and Lead for CWSW; West Midlands; Survey 4]*

Our work needs statutory requirement as we are reliant on goodwill and polite persistence to access data on the CWSW cohort and a

statutory approach will provide 'gravitas' around CWSW cohort by all agencies *[VSH; East of England; Survey 4]*

The struggle to maintain a strategic perspective that VSHs report may be particularly valid at this stage in the development of the initiative. For instance, it might be helpful for a VSH to agree to more operational, case based, work in pursuit of longer-term strategic change. This might include supplementing training by involving themselves, or their colleagues, with the 'team around a child or family', to model how partners could work together differently.

The following extended quote, from an education advisor with responsibility for the extended duties in a South West VS, epitomises the dilemma faced by many VSHs:

> One of the main challenges with the extended role duties is the balance between the strategic overview and individual case input.
>
> We have sought to run interventions, share advice, signpost services, monitor data for the CP and CIN cohort, lead training sessions, commission external training sessions, lead a South West Virtual School regional group to share best practice, create tools and regular communication such as our newsletter which we send out to colleagues across the county regularly. These actions are really important in raising the profile of the cohort and supporting a relational and restorative approach within education and social care.
>
> However, we do not want to spend all our time and energy on these activities at the expense of direct support and involvement with individual young people for whom there are very real and significant issues right now, which we can relieve in some way. We want to be able to say 'yes' to social care colleagues who have tried a number of avenues and who then reach out to us in the VS Extended Role and say "please can you help, we're really stuck!". We do run a 'surgery' each week when any education or social care colleague can contact us and seek advice/ signposting/ direct support.
>
> We still go into schools, meet with young people face to face and sometimes parents. This is vital in moving things forwards for individual young people and in keeping us informed about the very specific and unique complexities, challenges and barriers facing many of our young people. Our actions, priorities and planning must be informed by the data as we seek to use our time and resources wisely, however we must still be available to support individual young

people who may be in crisis and we may be the professional who is best placed to make a difference. *[Education advisor; South West; Survey 4]*

A second area of possible uncertainty about scope relates to children receiving 'lower-level' interventions, such as from Early Help services. In the case studies, there is some evidence that VSHs are making use of the extension to raise awareness of the importance of education by involving Early Help and other services in training principally aimed at SWs (see Section 2.6). While this could provide effective prevention of the escalation of cases to statutory social work intervention, it may reflect mission creep in terms of the VSHs' role.

Some LAs were trying to improve the effectiveness of Early Help in particular, by raising the awareness of DSLs of their role and that the duty could therefore also focus on pro-active preventative support to becoming CWSW (including from Early Help). Some DCSs/ ADs talked about the positive way that the initiative is helping schools and services think more broadly about the children that might need more support and that, having done work with the VSH in relation to CWSW, were continuing to adopt sound practice when a family was stepped-down to Early Help. Some VSH are already doing work with Early Help as some CWSW and their families may be stepped down to an Early Help worker when the case open to a social worker is closed. Despite the positive nature of these reports, caution is needed to ensure that extending the focus of VSs to include work with Early Help does not dilute their attention to CWSW.

3.3.2 Funding

A further key assumption underlying the ToC is that funding for the extension of duties would be ongoing. Uncertainty and timing of funding for the extended duties that might undermine progress through the model remains an issue for many VSHs. However, others welcomed the commitment to further funding:

> The move to a 2-year commitment has enabled us to recruit permanently which will help to drive forward the work. *[VSH; London; Survey 4]*

Any plans to taper the funding once the duty was embedded may be considered naïve given SW turn-over and changes in the DSL cohort and the resulting need to continue offering training and support for sustainability of the practice in the long term. Reflecting the VSH duty to CWSW in the statutory duties of DSLs and DTs would alleviate some of the uncertainty around longer-term funding of and commitment to support for this cohort of children, as well as some of the challenges relating to timely sharing of school-held CWSW data.

3.4 Limitations of study

This report includes findings from two annual surveys (October 2022 and October/November 2023) and a set of case study interviews (from March 2023). We have summarised the findings across these data collection methods in Chapter 2, noting where any changes were seen between the time of the two surveys. However, the case study interviews took place roughly halfway between the two surveys and we must acknowledge the possibility that interview responses might have changed had these been conducted concurrently with the survey.

While a group of VSH and representatives of the DfE were consulted on each item in both Survey 3 and Survey 4, it is still possible that different VSH will have interpreted the questions differently, and responded accordingly. Where there was a change in VSH between Survey 3 and Survey 4, or where the VSH delegated the completion of the survey to a colleague, then further potential changes in interpretation may have been introduced.

It is also possible that when questioned about the 'CWSW cohort', not all VSH were responding with the same cohort in mind. For instance, the VSH in the Redbury case study LA appears to interpret the scope of the extension of duties and the children to whom those duties apply in a particular way, seeking data on children outside the non-statutory guidance definition of 'CWSW':

> [We] rely on local data [on children] to inform our priorities as children who are in the process of being assessed and do not yet have a CIN plan are not included in the national data so this information is collected locally since [children being assessed] constitute 26% of the cohort. *[VSH; Redbury; Case Study].*

While Redbury and the other case study LAs were identified to provide a range of different LA contexts their inclusion in the evaluation relied on their willingness to provide interviewees. While not, therefore, self-selecting, they are not randomly selected from among LAs with similar characteristics.

The same is true of the individual interviewees that informed the case study evidence base. The evaluators relied on individuals within the LA being identified by the VSH in that LA and prompted to agree to be interviewed. In the case of some categories of interviewee this proved very difficult to achieve despite considerable efforts of the evaluation team and VSHs; the views of front-line SWs were not included in this interim report for this reason.

The response rate to surveys 3 and 4 was largely consistent across the regions, however the response rate from VSHs in the South West region for Survey 4 was noticeably lower

than Survey 3 (and lower than other regions in Survey 4) despite a marginal increase in overall response rate. Finally, approximately 20 VSH did not respond to Survey 4. We cannot know why or whether their responses could have substantially modified the findings detailed in the report. Further work to identify this group and determine if they have been consistent non-responders might identify whether this is a relevant concern.

Finally, changes that have been reported by VSHs have taken place in the context of other local and national initiatives, this makes attributing causality to the extension of duties difficult.

3.5 Conclusion and next steps

Evidence from the two national surveys of VSHs and the case studies presented in this report demonstrates that the funding for the extension of duties has been well-received by Virtual Schools and has been used to ensure that progress through the ToC continues to gather momentum. Thus far, VSs have been innovative and creative in discharging their strategic responsibilities under the extension of duties to those currently CWSW in particular.

A particular improvement appears to be in attendance (though at this stage those are subjective, qualitative, measures capturing in most cases VSH perceptions). This and other less frequently reported progress are attributed by the VSHs to the extensive training being provided. Training for SWs, in particular on relational approaches and navigating the education system, is seen as having made a substantial contribution to this progress. Joint working, both through cross-service training and representation of the VS on a wider range of interdisciplinary panels, is also reported to have assisted improvements. All of this has been best supported where VSH have been able to ensure that those well-placed to use it, have access to accurate and regularly updated data on those educational indicators that best reflect the needs of the CWSW cohort; though progress with the Ever 6 cohort continues be challenging in many areas.

This interim report identifies a number of areas which will be further explored in the next wave of both case studies and surveys. These include seeking to better understand:

- why less progress has been made in accessing reliable child-level attainment data for current CWSW compared to data on attendance or suspension/exclusion.

- why less progress has been made in accessing 'safeguarding' data/information relating to CWSW and whether this is a real finding or due to the lack of a shared understanding of what the survey question sought to discover.

- why, despite the provision of training for both schools and social workers, there is less progress towards the increased understanding of social workers than there is progress towards increased school understanding of the cohort, their needs or the importance of their educational context.

- whether there are particular barriers to more effective working with CAMHS given reports of progress in building more effective relationships with a range of other services.

- what insights the relative lack of progress towards building parental capability and capacity to engage with schools may offer as the extension of duties develops.

Perhaps the broadest area for further investigation relates to the barriers that appear to exist to matching the growing knowledge and understanding of the current CWSW cohort to that of the Ever 6 CWSW cohort. Insights into the relative rarity of progress relating to the Ever 6 cohort being reported by VSH may be particularly important in shaping any recommendations presented in the final evaluation report.

Finally, the next stage of the evaluation will seek to better understand whether there is a small but consistent core of VSH who have not responded to the previous rounds of surveys and how, if at all, the evaluation can capture their views.

Annex 1: Phase Two case studies

Overview of case studies

This section summarises and highlights key themes from across the case studies. In total, 28 people were interviewed online across the 6 case study sites[13] including VSHs, DCSs, ADs, DSLs, DTs and SENDCos. The interviews took place between March and May 2023. To provide continuity we attempted to interview the same participants from the Phase One evaluation; where this was not possible (due to availability or change of role) a suitable substitute was identified. Evidence from the third VSH Survey (October 2022) has also been included, to provide context where appropriate.

Evidence from these sources was drawn together to present a narrative case study for each of the LA sites that highlighted progress and developments from Phase One and against the ToC outcomes. Each case study begins by outlining the characteristics of the LA, the evidence base used followed by a brief summary of the findings from Phase One. Next, progress made towards the *short-term* ToC outcomes since Phase One is provided, namely:

- Increased schools' understanding of educational needs

- Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs

- Development of a common language about education

- Better joint working to address educational needs

- Improved data quality

Developments in Phase Two, commensurate with the time of the interviews, are then presented before the key points are summarised.

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[13] Pseudonyms are used for confidentiality.

Earlham

Characteristics of the LA and evidence base

Earlham is a large, mainly rural LA with a medium overall number and low rate per population of CWSW. Survey 3 was completed by the VSH and five interviews were completed (CWSW lead in VS, 2 DSLs and 2 SWs). The DCS had recently left post and was unable to be interviewed. The VSH described the progress made as steady for the first three months (Survey 2) but rapid since then (Survey 3). **This case study foregrounds Earlham's work on the use of data and addressing attendance issues.**

Summary from Phase One

The virtual school in Earlham employed two educational advisers to lead on the extension of duties, one covering primary schools, and the other, secondary schools. The evidence suggests Earlham had made progress in implementing the extension duties, particularly in the use of data and the Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) project, though the VS feels there could be better collaboration between some of the SWIS SWs and themselves. The VSH stated that suspensions and SW shortages were immediate priorities. The interviews suggested that the VS would need to continue to raise their profile with all DSLs.

Progress in Phase One activities

The VSH reported rapid progress on the extended duties in the six months prior to Survey 3 and anticipated similar in the following six months.

Progress on Phase One Theory of Change Outcomes

Increased schools' understanding of educational needs

The CWSW lead interviewed outlined a comprehensive programme provided for school staff and social workers. The focus of the training was on understanding the impact of trauma and ACEs on learning. In addition, student voice interviews have been completed to better inform school leaders of pupil needs.

Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs

Evidence from targeted weekly contact by the VS about pupil status (e.g., EHE, suspensions, exclusions, pupils on part-time timetables, CWSW needs and barriers to learning) suggests SWs are better informed about the educational needs of CWSW. This is supported by a weekly 'drop-in' session for SWs and schools, hosted by VS CWSW leads to discuss needs.

Development of a common language about education

The VS compile a monthly newsletter that is sent to SWs and schools to share updates (e.g., on trauma informed approaches), prompts to facilitate reflection on current practice and ways to support pupils.

Better joint working to address educational needs

A 'Team Around the School' concept was established to work with schools and the wider professional team. The VS developed a 'relational lens review' of a school's approach to supporting CWSW. A RAG rating system was used to identify CWSW most vulnerable to poor attendance and interventions targeted accordingly.

Improved data quality

Survey 3 response indicates that data are used to identify CWSW at key transition points (EY to FS; KS2-3 and KS4-5).

Developments in initial stage of Phase Two

Building on the Phase One work regarding data, the lead for CWSW in the VS reports good progress in identifying the current cohort and using the data to provide targeted support to schools to improve attendance. For example, because Earlham is a mainly rural LA, the VS utilised resources to provide outdoor education as a lever to improve attendance. Challenges remain, however, with accurate identification of the Ever 6 CWSW cohort, largely due to fluidity of the cohort's social care status.

Earlham has addressed issues to do with attendance through their use of data, increased multi-agency working, ongoing training and parental engagement projects (e.g., art-based activity day, shared-reading and story-telling workshops). Effective communication and sharing of data between agencies have been vital to addressing issues of attendance and raising awareness of this cohort's needs, as this social worker outlines:

> Every week in Earlham [the VS] go through all of the children, all of the school reports on attendance, spot those children that are open to statutory social work services who have got low attendance and flag them to the social worker…so they're re-advocating. [CWSW] absolutely need education, someone who is advocating for that and noticing, creating those connections and getting into the schools which have got lots of [CWSW], and making sure we're thinking together collaboratively about how do we bring our resources together, and do better. *SW*

The collaborative approach to improving attendance for CWSW was echoed by school staff:

> Some of our children who have a SW have quite low attendance, so that's something that we work on as a school but also with the SWs, or the family practitioners, to help us improve attendance. Sometimes that might be the SW bringing them to school, or it's also making sure that in regular group-call meetings attendance is always raised as an issue to be checked in on and discussed. *[DSL]*

Further work on attendance included the creation of an attendance monitoring tool for all CWSW. The attendance tool is a school level survey that was created in collaboration with an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), social workers and DSLs with the aim of building an informed picture of school experience for individual pupils including patterns of attendance and levels of engagement. A RAG rating system, allowed tailored, school level interventions to support the most vulnerable groups of CWSW. The attendance tool has been shared with CSC with a view to inform CIN and CP planning meetings. The findings from the attendance tool informed the decision to commission a link EWO for the VS team to develop strategies for different groups of low-attending pupils.

Parental engagement projects were organised to promote attendance, especially for the hardest to reach pupils in secondary schools. These projects included reading workshops and art projects that:

> have helped with attendance, well-being and getting the kids back into school *[CWSW lead]*.

In the six months prior to the interviews, Earlham VS CWSW leads have facilitated local networks for social care and DSLs, and for other VS leads of the extended role in the region, to share examples of practice.

Summary

Earlham has built on the progress made in phase one by utilising the data collected, in particular on attendance, to better inform schools and CSC about the CWSW cohort and raise awareness of their needs. The VS recognised the value of schools working with families of CWSW as a contributory factor to improving relationships, well-being and attendance. Better joint working via regular networks and ongoing training has enabled Earlham to provide targeted support for CWSW.

Filton Cross

Characteristics of the LA and evidence base

Filton Cross is an urban LA with a small geographic footprint and a small overall number but medium rate per population of CWSW. Survey 3 was completed by the VSH and four interviews were conducted (Assistant VSH (lead for CWSW), DCS and AD (Education; joint interview), one DSL and one SW). The VSH described the progress made as rapid during the first six months (Survey 2), and steady since then (Survey 3). **This case study foregrounds Filton Cross's work on developing partnerships and resources to reduce exclusions and increase attendance, and involving DTs and DSLs in supporting delivery of strategic work.**

Summary from Phase One

The VSH reported that they were well supported by managers who recognised the importance of the extension duties. The extension grant has provided an impetus for different parts of the LA to work together more effectively, and those partnerships were enabling the VSH to meet their responsibilities for CWSW strategically. Seven lead practitioners had been identified to demonstrate best practice for the education of CWSW and share their practice in a forum the VS uses to train the trainers in the aims, priorities and style of training delivered across all schools.

Progress in Phase One activities

The focus on different parts of the local authority working together in partnership has continued with acknowledgement in the interview with the DCS and AD of the important role of the Virtual School in connecting CSC and schools.

From discussions with CSC, parenting was identified as a major issue affecting attendance for some CWSW in Filton Cross. The VSH made the strategic decision to use a partner organisation to deliver parenting courses. At the time of the interview, two courses had been completed intended to prevent falling attendance and improve engagement by adolescents, particularly going into Year 11. The courses were well received by parents, and in response to their feedback, the Virtual School adjusted the timing of the second course, as explained by the AVSH:

> The first one that we did we did around May, and parents said this is fantastic, I just wish this had happened before they were taking their GCSEs because the difference that we're seeing, that it's made would have been really useful. This time we ran it from November and it kind of – it was a series of them, so it's just finishing next week, just in time for GCSEs. *[AVSH]*

Progress on Phase One Theory of change outcomes

Increased schools' understanding of educational needs:

Evidence suggested that a strong relationship exists between the VS and schools in Filton Cross, although a need for some further work raising awareness of the remit of the VS was identified in interviews. The AVSH described identifying how some academies were not contacting the Virtual School for support where they had CWSW with low attendance. A DSL also referred to uncertainty amongst some school colleagues about the VS's role.

Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs:

The DCS described the VS's role in relation to CWSW as helping to promote education within multi-agency support for children and families:

> And I think [the VS's role] does ensure when we put forward our support packages, we don't forget the education element of it and also the added value that schools can provide. […] And so it's really important that [schools'] input is part of that and the virtual school can help to facilitate that. *[DCS]*

Better joint working to address educational needs:

The AD described the VS's role with CWSW as helping to integrate children's education and social care 'into one conversation':

> I think the virtual school has been able to act as a critical friend and as an impartial party in the work between social care and schools and, indeed, in its own work because its own expertise from working with children who are already vulnerable around reducing the risk of exclusion, etc., that work has transferred over into all children known to social care. *[AD]*

Evidence suggested that although the Virtual School had a strategic duty towards CWSW, in practice their role and the distinction between strategic and operational was more nuanced. An interview with a DSL suggested an assumption that the Virtual School could provide support to individuals, particularly in respect of non-attendance:

> It would be helpful if [the Virtual School] could be a bit more hands on in picking up some of the students who are falling through the gaps. And we're not talking about a huge number, but we're talking about three or four, and if only one could be rescued, that would be

fantastic, because we've got three or four kids who, for a variety of
different reasons, are not in education. *[DSL]*

At the same time, the AVSH described multiple requests for individual tuition for CWSW
and how the Virtual School was working closely with partners to try to accommodate
requests, and using a triage system to respond appropriately to those seeking support.

Developments in initial stage of Phase Two

The Virtual School is creating an inclusion pathway, initially aimed at preventing
exclusions of CWSW, but also acknowledged as being potentially relevant to exclusions
of any child. The AVSH described the substantial amount of work involved in building a
network of partners to support the pathway and creating a directory of additional support
available to schools (e.g., listing programmes, such as boxing, run by external agencies).
The AVSH acknowledged the challenge of maintaining an up-to-date directory of support
as the funding and priorities of voluntary sector partners changed over time. The AVSH
also described being in the process of developing an inclusion toolkit for schools, with a
particular focus on supporting CWSW.

The Virtual School has established 'Achievement Champions' to support delivery of its
strategic work relating to CWSW. Champions are DTs or DSLs in schools who undertake
tasks such as delivering training developed by the Virtual School. An Achievement
Champion's forum provides peer support and also enables the Virtual School to seek
feedback from the group on relevant issues (e.g., feedback on a draft letter going out to
SWs).

The Virtual School has developed an online form to capture education information about
young people involved with youth justice. The form incorporates information obtained
from social workers and is kept up to date through termly meetings with the Youth Justice
Team, as a way of tracking and getting to know this group of young people.

Survey 3 referred to the Virtual School exploring how to obtain attendance data on
CWSW from current providers of education, but noted that collection of these data had
not been implemented due to cost.

Going forward, the Virtual School plans to re-write the education element of the CIN/CP
plans.

Summary

Filton Cross has continued to focus on strengthening partnerships with organisations
best placed to provide additional support to children and families and developing
resources to help schools identify that support. The evidence also suggests that the
Virtual School has a recognised and valued role in supporting the relationship between
CSC and schools. The Virtual School, CSC and schools in Filton Cross are described as

working together to support children and families in the round, rather than operating in silos.

Survey 3 describes a minor increase in attendance and minor decrease in exclusions of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW since April 2022. The development of an inclusion pathway, a directory of additional support, and establishing Achievement Champions are intended to further improve outcomes for CWSW. However, at the time of data collection, the extension of the AVSH role was uncertain pending decisions on further funding.

Keldbeck

Characteristics of the LA and evidence base

Keldbeck is a mainly urban LA with a small geographic footprint and a medium overall number and high rate per population of CWSW. Survey 3 was completed by the VSH, and three interviews were conducted (VSH, AD and one DSL). **This case study foregrounds Keldbeck's work on attendance of CWSW and multi-agency working.**

Summary from Phase One

Keldbeck pre-empted the extension duties with their attendance programme in response to concerns about CWSW that had increased during the pandemic. Better integration of services and joint working across the LA have been a key lever for addressing the barriers to attendance and thereby contributing more generally to support for CWSW. It was too early to see impact on attendance data in Phase One, but the interviews confirmed that DSLs and SWs understood the new duties and felt supported by the VS.

Progress in Phase One activities

The attendance programme implemented prior to the extension of duties, continues to address barriers to attendance for CWSW and supports schools and CSC in doing this. The VS has been actively working with schools to better understand the barriers from the school's perspective. The VS has used this work to inform their strategic planning around parenting programmes, SEMH support and a rise in emotional-based school avoidance (EBSA) stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic. The EP and inclusion teams have collaborated with the VS to develop EBSA programmes that can be rolled out to schools.

Part of the CWSW funding has recently been used to recruit an EWO who will support CWSW who are between 20% and 50% attendance. Utilising the comprehensive data collection process established in Phase One to identify schools with high numbers of CWSW on roll, the EWO will be working with these schools to *'help them strategically to put support in…to up that attendance for those young people.'* [VSH]

The VSH uses the data to monitor the effectiveness of the programme but is aware of challenges presented by the constantly changing cohort. In particular, children that were stepped down from a CIN or CP plan after only a short time are unlikely to be captured in the existing data collection process. However, the VSH tracks the overall attendance for CWSW on a monthly basis and reports '*an increase in attendance, not of absenteeism.*' This rise in attendance is attributed by the VSH to raising awareness of CWSW needs in schools and maintaining open lines of communication and support with the VS. The VSH implied that those spending longer than 6 months on CIN & CP plans, and therefore having greater exposure to the attendance support programme were a decreasing component of the 'less than 20% attendance' group.

Progress on Phase One Theory of Change outcomes

Increased schools' understanding of educational needs

There is a clear commonality of understanding the educational needs of CWSW in Keldbeck that runs from the AD, through the VSH and on to the schools. Trauma informed and relational practice is central to this approach:

> It's making sure that the school, therefore the teachers and all the support staff, understand what it's like, the lived experience of the child… so when we look at it like that, our schools who are particularly more trauma informed, they are much, much better at managing behaviour. Fewer exclusions, better attendance...we keep doing it, we keep getting the good results *[AD]*

The DSL interviewed outlined how the focus on relationships is pervasive throughout the school and supported by the VSH.

> Our philosophy has always been about relationships, building those trusting relationships so that students feel as though they've got somebody, that trusted adult that they can go to when they need support…everything that we do is based on relationships, even staff to staff relationships…that will link into the work that we've done with our virtual school head. *[DSL]*

Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs

Following the extension of duties, social workers in the CIN and CP teams were invited by the VS to take part in weekly drop-in sessions and clinics. The drop-in sessions were open to professionals from schools and social care and not only discuss individual cases but also legislation, guidance, SENDCo practice, behaviour policies and building a network of contacts. After initial reluctance, the sessions were well-received as the CSC teams developed a better understanding of CWSW educational needs and how they are supported in schools.

Development of a common language about education

The VSH reported in Survey 3 and the evaluation interview that the close working with CSC teams also enables a common language about education. It is the aim of the VSH to ensure that:

> … the close working with CSC teams also enables a common language about education. It is [our] aim to ensure that education, as

a protective factor, is a golden thread throughout all care planning

[VSH]

Better joint working to address educational needs

The AD stated that the extension of duties has raised the virtual school's profile and made it more accessible to all children's social workers, not just those for looked after children; mainly as the result of a big push in communication to CSC about education and the virtual school's service offer. Further, the VSH is now included more in planning, formal meetings and inspection preparation, whereas previously they were represented through their head of service.

The VSH described how attendance can be a protective factor through better joint working and ultimately improving outcomes for CWSW:

> And we wanted to work…clearly and collaboratively with our social care colleagues…we framed it in the way of a wider care team is more people to share the risk, to share the load. And if a child is in education, you've got all of the supervision and all of the safeguarding that comes with schools…and I think that was what's been really well received, is a recognition that multi-agency working has better outcomes. *[VSH]*

The DSL felt the key impact in the last year was the VS liaising with other services on behalf of the school to move things forward:

> [the VS] tend to be able to get access, and their geographical location and sharing workspaces…does help them to be able to go into other rooms and speak to people. But we absolutely tap into that all of the time. They will go and find the information that we haven't been able to. *[DSL]*

The DSL felt this was especially helpful as some other services might misread the school's intentions about plans for particular children, and might not understand the volume of support strategies that had been offered ahead of these plans.

Improved data quality

The use of data collation procedures and systems established in the attendance project prior to the extension of duties continues to underpin the strategic support for CWSW in schools. The AD noted that CWSW are now part of a report on KPIs that is sent to every governing body.

Developments in initial stage of Phase Two

The VS continues to develop close working with colleagues in CSC. For example, the VSH has explored the processes involved in casework from Early Help, through assessments and on to provision of support. This partnership has led the VSH to identify ten educational risk factors that are being promoted across social care and education with a view to targeting specific support through a number of different triage panels.

Better integrated working between CSC and education was also noted by the AD where developments in CSC casework are underway to include attendance as a key factor in decisions around case closure:

> education [must be] an essential requirement of a case closure. You can't close it when they've got zero attendance, for example…that isn't a safe case closure. And…in Keldbeck, we've got high re-referrals through the front door, so that is demonstrating that maybe something's not quite right when we're closing the cases. *[AD]*

The virtual school has widened the scope of its DT training to include any professionals who work with CWSW. The VSH acknowledges the importance of stability of staff teams both in school and in CSC, but the transient nature of school staffing presents challenges in maintaining a constant, knowledgeable and informed presence in schools; challenges highlighted by over two-thirds of the DTs in Keldbeck changing in the last year.

Lack of stability, arising from SW turn-over which creates difficulties in maintaining and developing relationships with social workers was also noted as a potential barrier to supporting CWSW by the DSL and AD (in terms of the fluid nature of CWSW social care status). However, the extension of duties has raised awareness of the CWSW cohort through VSHs advocating for their educational needs.

Summary

The VS in Keldbeck has continued to build on the successful attendance programme established as a response to circumstances on the ground during the Covid-19 pandemic. Evidence suggests that a relational and trauma-informed approach permeates through the LA and underpins the provision of support for CWSW by enhanced multi-agency working with clear systems in place to identify needs and target appropriate support.

Redbury

Characteristics of the LA and evidence base

Redbury is a mainly rural LA with a large geographic footprint and a medium overall number and medium rate per population of CWSW. Survey 3 was completed by the VSH, and three interviews were completed (DCS with VSH in attendance, VSH and CWSW lead and one DSL). The progress made was described as steady in the first three months, rapid in the second three months (Survey 2) and steady since (Survey 3). **This case study foregrounds Redbury's work on use of data and training in trauma-informed practice (TIP) in relation to CWSW.**

Summary from Phase One

Redbury had been very active on implementing the extension duties, particularly on attendance and joint training for education and CSC staff. The DCS interviewed reported that this had been overcoming the previous 'silo' mentality structurally and by encouraging the focus to be on all children – not just those with a SW, in order to prevent the need for a SW. The VSH had suggested that there was work yet to be done in making better connections with their colleagues in the Youth Offending Team and Health, but they were confident that they will be able to deliver strategically to CWSW based on the evidence of work completed in the first two terms.

Progress in Phase One activities

The VS had offered weekly surgeries for SWs focusing on school attendance with the VSH reporting a good take up. These were reported by the CWSW Lead to enable the discussion of case issues and signposting the SWs to other services as appropriate. While this implied a more operational approach, it was seen as a necessary step in building SW capacity to intervene without the VS support.

The VS reported in Survey 3 that they have continued to provide extensive training jointly for school and social care staff to encourage the sharing of knowledge and expertise and building peer-to-peer networks. Resources have been prioritised for this with 25% of the extended duties grant reported to have been spent on training in schools and 15% on training for social care staff, family support practitioners in particular.

Progress on Phase One Theory of Change Outcomes

Schools' increased understanding of educational needs:

Early evidence reported by the CWSW Lead suggested some cultural changes in schools targeted by the Virtual School as having the most CWSW. Fifty-four school practitioners from these schools have trained in TIP and received a Level 5 accreditation. The VSH commented:

> …those schools that are doing it best are not necessarily focussing on a child in care, a child with a social worker, they're looking at systemic change across their setting because actually, one of the things that we advocate all of the time is, "let's not put a label on this child" *[VSH]*

Some schools have told the VSH about changing their models of working so in one, they removed their inclusion room as they no longer need it since behaviour had improved. Another school reported a reduction in suspensions.

Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs:

The VSH noted that a social care colleague, when adding a note to a child's file, was using trauma informed language and asking questions about the young person's struggle with school.

Development of a common language about education:

Survey 3 responses suggested no progress on developing a common language though examples given in the interviews suggested some teachers and social workers were using trauma-informed language.

Better joint working to address educational needs:

In Survey 3, working with health and youth offending (which were given as priorities at the end of Phase 1) were listed as services with whom the Virtual School was now working.

The DCS explained that when describing children's services as one service, this reflected the culture in which practitioners have been brought together in teams around specific groups of children (e.g., CWSW, Previously Looked-After) with education and learning at the centre, rather than in professional 'silos' of education, social care, etc. Attendance was reported in the interviews to be everyone's responsibility, so the Virtual School had contributed to the draft attendance policy.

The DSL interviewed described the marked difference created by having a 'named SW' rather than having to try and find a different SW each time they needed one.

Improved data quality:

Data on children who currently have a SW are readily available and being used. The VSH reported that they rely on local data to inform their priorities since they are more reliable than those obtained through the national system. For example, children who are in the process of being assessed and do not yet have a CIN plan are not included in the

national data so this information is collected locally since they constitute 26% of the cohort. Identifying the Ever 6 population remains a challenge.

Developments in initial stage of Phase Two

The VS has developed an online platform that holds information about training opportunities and resources and is regularly updated. This means practitioners have access to the information they need in one place. The DSL interviewed spoke highly of this resource and in addition, noted that they receive a weekly update from the LA safeguarding team of CWSW and those (not yet with a SW) receiving family support.

The TIP training has been extended to 32 family support practitioners who had just completed their training. It was reported to be making a difference:

> They have already started using the language with families…
> feedback from a parent who said: "I recognise when my child flips
> their lid." *[Lead CWSW]*

> …that trauma informed practitioner status that I managed to get
> through [the VS]…it's just life changing…I just wish everybody in
> teaching could have that qualification. *[DSL]*

Alongside this training, the Virtual School has developed supervision and reflective practice groups in schools to provide ongoing support following training. In addition, the regular Virtual School surgeries offered support to SWs and DSLs. The DSL interviewed felt very well supported and is an example of a justifiable 'operational' approach as it is part of a strategic training offer for DSLs:

> They've done loads of things. So, they've run this trauma informed
> practice, they set up a supervision group and reflective practice
> group, we've got a network as well and the surgery. And there's
> loads of training and …lots of information. I've got a named person at
> the virtual school so I can contact them and they will help me and I've
> had a meeting with them just to look at all of my children with a social
> worker. *[DSL]*

The accountability of the Virtual School for CWSW was noted by the VSH not yet to be reflected in OFSTED reports. No report of a local authority inspection seen to date had mentioned Virtual School services for children previously in care or children with a social worker. The concern is that this reflects these responsibilities being non-statutory.

Summary

Redbury has considerably extended its training activities for both schools and social care staff. It is beginning to see some early outcomes of these such as schools and SWs having a clearer focus on the education of CWSW, better joint working and use of data to target specific schools. Individual schools have provided examples of changing culture, improved behaviour (as reflected in SDQ scores and policy changes) and a reduction in suspensions. The infrastructure has been set up by the Virtual School to provide sustainability for these changes.

The DCS and CWSW lead in the VS noted that the lack of certainty about long-term funding, limits plans to embed the implementation and raised concerns that there might be an expectation that '*the money can taper out and somehow the LA can just accommodate the resource without any funding [DCS]*'.

Alsbury

Characteristics of the LA and evidence base

Alsbury is a rural LA with a large geographical footprint, a medium overall number and medium rate per population of CWSW. Survey 3 was completed by the VSH and four interviews were conducted (VSH and one assistant VSH (CWSW lead), AD, data manager and one Manager from CSC). Progress in implementing the duties was described as rapid over the first six months (Survey 2) and anticipated it being steady since (Survey 3). **The case study foregrounds Alsbury's use of data and strategic multi-agency working.**

Summary from Phase One

The extension duties had been well received in Alsbury and regarded as having been desperately needed for a long time in terms of the services taking ownership of a cohort rather than just individuals. This was reflected in their investment in data systems and use of data in multi-agency meetings. SWs noted that the extension had reframed their role in education. The VS was reported by DSLs and SWs to have been a strong mediator between education and CSC increasing their understanding of each other.

Progress in Phase One activities

The investment in data systems in Phase One continues to be of benefit, with improved data availability. Since the last survey they have finalised the development of a live data dashboard, enabling the VS to track all CWSW. The dashboard is used in multi-agency meetings, including targeted monthly meetings to identify children whose attendance is a concern. CSC team managers are now aware of attendance rates in their area.

There is a continuing focus on education in training for SWs. The VS offers a weekly drop-in service where they can offer advice and step in where necessary to address any challenges accessing support for individual CWSW. The CSC manager noted that the "*conversation about education has been much more prominent than it's ever been.*" They described this as a "*huge change over the past year*", citing the volume of meetings and conversations about education and the increased knowledge SWs had about processes and education.

The VS continues to be a strong mediator between education and CSC increasing their understanding of each other. This also continues, with the VS facilitating collaboration between schools and CSC at multi-agency meetings. The AD also praised the way that the VSH negotiates with schools around exclusions, being able to calm down the situation and get them to think about things differently. Similarly, the CSC manager noted that the VS holds "*a little bit more sway with schools than we do*", describing them as an "*ally*".

Progress on Phase One Theory of Change Outcomes

Schools' increased understanding of educational needs

Evaluations from DSL training indicate high satisfaction regarding increased knowledge of the educational needs of CWSW. The CSC manager talked about the importance of the "*triangle*" of home, school and the social worker – with the SW being able to provide the school with context about a child's home life that might enable more appropriate responses to behaviour issues.

Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs

Two whole-service learning days focused on education were well received and evidence suggests positive improvement in CSC knowing what support was needed and how to access this for education of CWSW.

Development of a common language about education

Survey 3 responses suggest there is more to be done on this. The VS is working on moving the language to align with both services around their practice model and strength based relational work. The CSC manager noted that SWs find the weekly drop-ins useful for understanding the language around education, but also how good it was that the VS would liaise with schools:

> Sometimes education and social work don't speak the same language and we are often not the best of friends. But the virtual schools are a bit more on the same page as education, they speak the same language, they understand them and they have a bit more respect funnily enough than SWs do with schools. *[CSC manager]*

Better joint working to address educational needs

Education data is now included in the CSC Performance Board. Responses in Survey 3 also describes "*good quality*" multi-agency meetings for children with all members aware of roles in education and care planning, and states that the VS is beginning to see evidence of education planning in care plans and learning spaces audits. Although they 'somewhat agree' that CIN/CP plans have improved focus and clarity of information about education, the VS rarely attends planning or review meetings, and is still rarely asked to provide education data or quality assurance for these plans. The CSC manager felt that there was now less of an "*us and them*" mentality between CSC and education: "*It's more of a working together type approach, or it feels like that. It feels like we're working more towards like a shared goal.*"

Improved data quality

In addition to the live data on current CWSW, the VS can also now access all attendance and exclusions data since September 2021 for the 'Ever 6 CWSW' group. The VS encourages DSLs to meet and agree plans and strategy to increase the attendance and engagement of this group.

Developments in initial stage of Phase Two

The bulk of the budget has been used on training for school staff (30%), network/forum meetings (25%) and social workers (30%), though the CSC manager could not corroborate the availability of SW training. Surveys 2 and 3 show continued training for school staff on trauma-informed practice but now with additional training around mental health and well-being, awareness of DT/DSL networks, and understanding of the role and support expected from social work practice. There has been continued training for social workers around the education system and SEND. In addition, new training has taken place for both school staff and social workers on the topics of attendance, inclusion, exclusion and school admissions.

Survey 3 states work has taken place to monitor attendance and intervene to improve it. The CSC manager notes a "*huge push*" around attendance of CWSW, with meetings including the VS, CSC, school and the SEND team, and making use of the data provided by the VS. Survey 3 reports a 'moderate increase' in attendance, giving figures for current CWSW of 77% in Autumn 2021, 84% in Spring 2022 and 79% in Summer 2022. They note that this could be an anomaly as data are not always accurate due to Y11 Leavers, so further analysis is required.

Suspensions and exclusions have seen a 'moderate' reduction (Survey 3), but no data are provided to support this. The CSC manager noted that compared to primary schools, high schools were (with some exceptions) "*much less tolerant of behaviour that they would see to be unmanageable. They're much more quick to exclude and say they can't meet need*".

Based on their experience supporting CWSW and their families, the VS has established an 'education community of practice' that draws in the wider professional teams including education advisers from Early Help and Youth Justice. The VSH feels that early intervention contributes to fewer permanent exclusions for children open to social care.

The VS in this local authority sits within the Children and Families service; the AD feels this arrangement is critical in enabling a holistic view of the child, and in enacting plans more quickly. The CSC manager also felt that having named people within the VS to work with SWs in specific areas helped with the development of relationships between schools, SWs and the VS.

Summary

The Virtual School in Alsbury has driven a focus on attendance through developing better multi-agency working. Progress to date in this area has been achieved by bringing together education and social care teams with a view to better understanding respective areas of practice.

Braddleton

Characteristics of the LA and evidence base

Braddleton is a mixed urban and rural LA with a large geographical footprint and a medium overall number and medium rate per population of CWSW. Survey 3 was completed by the VSH and six interviews were conducted (VSH, DCS/AD, three DSLs and one SW). In Survey 2, the VSH described the progress made as steady for the first six months and continuing so since (Survey 3). **This case study foregrounds Braddleton's work on use of data and relational and restorative practice.**

Summary from Phase One

Braddleton VSH's activities are reported to have raised awareness of the educational needs of CWSW. They have taken a strategic role to investing in SWs to increase their confidence to challenge and support schools which, particularly in the small number of schools in SWIS, had the capacity to enhance effective provision for CWSW. Support for CWSW has been integrated into the existing locality model which was intended to enable Early Help to reduce the numbers of children escalated at each threshold. The locality model was reported to be contributing to better integration of education and CSC, though further work on this was judged to be required.

Progress in Phase One activities

Evidence suggests that the integration of education and CSC has developed since Phase One. Survey 3 responses indicate SW training on attendance, admissions, introduction to new duties and VS responsibilities have been completed. The VSH estimates that 40% of the funding has been used for SW training and attendance at panels to offer sign-posting and advice. In Survey 3 the VSH rates communication and the overall working relationship with CSC as 'good', but the SW interviewed could not corroborate that judgement.

The locality model established in Phase One continues to deliver consistent provision across this large geographical authority. A key development has been the creation of a new relational and restorative practice team that sits within the VS. This team was established after consultation across the system following an authority-wide investment in relational approaches. The VSH has worked to resolve the tension between casework and strategic advice by investing in a sustainable training approach:

> [For] many of the children, it had got to that point where you need some almost advocacy and some kind of intensive but focused work. So, it's very much we'll go in, work alongside social workers, work alongside schools, put in those restorative conferences and the

solution circles. But our long-term aim is those practitioners and settings develop those practices themselves. *[VSH]*

In Survey 3, the VSH reports a 'major reduction' in suspensions and 'moderate reduction' in permanent exclusions as a result of their approach:

> We implemented some Relational and Restorative conferencing with Education Inclusion Officer (EIO) teams targeting children with a social worker, this raised profile appears to have had an impact on exclusion rates. Nexus data indicate a reduction of [suspensions] for CIN from 21.27 to 11.93 and permanent exclusions from 0.47 to 0.36. *[Survey 3]*

Progress on Phase One Theory of Change outcomes

Schools' Increased understanding of educational needs

Evidence from a safeguarding audit of schools who have identified CWSW shows aspirational planning, collaborating with CSC and including the voice of the child. The VS funded whole-school training on emotion coaching and in becoming attachment aware and trauma informed. The DSLs interviewed exemplified the authority-wide promotion of adopting a relational approach:

> [we are] trained up to work with students on their emotional literacy and their understanding of themselves. And all of our staff are emotion coach trained, so we're working towards the trauma informed school mark, and so we're all trained in attachment and trauma…it's very much about restorative practice. *[DSL]*

Increased SWs' understanding of educational needs

The AD noted the work of the VS in promoting education as a protective factor in CSC planning for the CWSW cohort, which had not previously been considered:

> our virtual school tries to have a significant influence… applying those same principles to youngsters with a social worker, the same principles as we would apply to the youngsters in care…then we need to be thinking about how we sustain and maintain the effective education provision *[AD]*

As a result of the training that raised awareness and *'improved thinking'* about the role of education, the VSH reports that SWs are more inclined to contact the VS directly when they have queries about education.

Development of a common language about education

Survey 3 responses suggested no progress on developing a common language though examples given in the interviews suggest some teachers and social workers are using trauma-informed language.

Better joint working to address educational needs

The VSH continues to make good use of the well-established professional networks in Braddleton, including networks and regular meetings for DSLs, DTs, SENDCos and Designated Mental Health Leads (DMHL) in schools. The VSH sees involvement in these networks as essential to maintaining a multi-faceted approach to supporting CWSW in schools. The VS has developed new contacts with Health and Early Help since April 2022.

Improved data quality

There has been considerable investment in the use of data since Phase One. The VS seconded a data officer from the data and intelligence team to standardise the Power BI dashboards used across children's services (e.g., SEND, education, CSC) so that children in need, children subject to a care plan and those looked after can be viewed as separate cohorts. This was achieved by '*adding filters to key panel processes such as Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment* (*EHCNA) decision making panels, AP panel.'* A vulnerability matrix was developed, based on recent research, which highlights individual children across a number of risk factors (e.g., no school place, attendance, exclusion) so the services can prioritise team planning and resource allocation (including addressing local training needs), according to locality.

Improvements in matching education and CSC data have been made so that schools get regular updated information on children open to social care, however the VSH identifies challenges in applying this to Ever 6 CWSW. A key area for development identified is to explore what safeguarding information on children who have had social care involvement in their primary years is considered as part of transition planning to high school. A transition project by the EIO is underway in one locality to expedite this process and the outcomes will be used to inform future planning.

Developments in initial stage of Phase Two

Braddleton are using funding from other sources to build on approaches established in Phase One. For example, a peer ambassador programme was initially funded by a health project around autism in schools which enables children to be advocates for solution-focussed relational approaches within schools. The programme now looks to ensure that at least 50% of the cohort comprise children identified as the most in need, including CWSW. The VSH sees the '*transformational*' benefits for schools and in particular CWSW.

A key programme in Braddleton addresses raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, which was established for children and young people in care but has recently widened its scope to include CWSW under the extension of duties. The programme aims to be proactive in identifying and removing barriers to attendance, rather than reactionary to challenging behaviour. The strategic element includes a CPD resource pack which has been sent to all schools in Braddleton and is now an expected part of social worker training.

The work of the VS both from the extension of duties and the SWIS programme has been recognised by other schools in the locality. The VSH reports an exciting new development where they are now working closely with three academy chains to implement relational and restorative practice. One large academy chain has invested heavily in supporting disadvantaged children and young people, including CWSW. The SWIS lead was recruited by the academy chain to lead the work on supporting CWSW across the chain. Although in its early stages, the VS was able to utilise existing strategies and training to enable a swift response to the academies' expressions of interest.

The VSH see the next stage of the duties as one of ensuring recent developments in systems and practice are embedded throughout the LA:

> I feel that we've got a really strong foundation…the next 12 months is embedding…what we now want to see is build[ing] that evidence bank of impact that we can be reflecting back to [bring more schools on board] *[VSH]*

Summary

Braddleton has strived to offer consistent provision across a wide geographical area through its locality model, and has utilised this structure as a vehicle in the work towards their goal of widespread relational approaches. This has been facilitated by the creation of a relational and restorative practice team that sits within the VS. A large amount of work in accessing and use of data has also contributed to improvements in the support for CWSW in schools. However, the VSH is concerned about the capacity of the school system to take up training and development when they are focusing on continuing recovery work from the COVID-19 pandemic

Annex 2: Responses to VSH Survey 3

Question 1: I have read the information sheet

Response: Yes/ No

Q2: Do you agree to take part in this survey?

R: Y/ N

Q3: Your Unique ID number is:

Q4: Definition of the CWSW cohort that is the focus of this survey

Q5: Please state your Local Authority

R: Open text

Q6: Please state the region of your local authority

R: Open text

Table 22: Survey 3 – Q6 Responses to survey by region and total

LA Region	Frequency *n*	Response by region %	Response in total %
London	25	83.3	20.5
South East	17	100	13.9
North West	17	73.9	13.9
Yorkshire	13	86.7	10.7
West Midlands	11	78.6	9.0
South West	12	85.7	9.8
North East	10	83.3	8.2
East of England	10	90.9	8.2
East Midlands	7	77.8	5.7

Total	122		100

Q7: Has any training for **school staff** been implemented, or is continuing following an earlier implementation, specifically with a focus on current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW, in the last 6 months?

R: Y/ N

Table 23: Survey 3 – Q7 Has training for school staff been implemented

Response	*n* (%)
No	27 (22.1)
Yes	95 (77.9)
Total	122 (100)

Q8: If yes to Q7: Please select the main subject(s) of the training?

Table 24: Survey 3 – Q8 Main subjects of training for school staff

Training Subject	*n* (%)
Trauma Informed Practice/ attachment/ understanding ACEs	84 (87.5)
Raising awareness of DT/ DSL networks	76 (80.0)
Attendance/ inclusion/ exclusion	56 (58.9)
Strategies to address common barriers and outcomes	46 (48.4)
Mental Health/ anxiety/ emotional literacy/ well-being	33 (34.7)
Behaviour	27 (28.4)
Other, please specify	23 (24.2)

Q9: Has any training for **social workers** been implemented, or is continuing following an earlier implementation, specifically with a focus on current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW, in the last 6 months?

R: Y/ N

Table 25: Survey 3 - Q9 Has training for social workers been implemented?

Response	*n* (%)
No	36 (29.5)
Yes	86 (70.5)
Total	122 (100)

Q10: If yes to Q9: Please select the main subject(s) of the training?

Table 26: Survey 3 – Q10 Main subjects of social worker training

Training Subject	*n* (%)
Introduction to new duties/ responsibilities explained	72 (83.7)
School admissions/ attendance/ exclusions	61 (70.9)
Understand language, systems & processes connected with education	53 (61.6)
SEND/ understanding EHCP process	43 (50.0)
Trauma Informed Practice/ attachment/ understanding ACEs	37 (43.0)
Behaviour	21 (24.4)
Other, please specify	14 (16.3)

Q11: Have any network/ forum meetings been implemented in the last 6 months?

R: Y/ N

Table 27: Survey 3 – Q11 Network/ forum meetings implemented

Network meetings	n (%)
No	31 (25.6)
Yes	90 (74.4)
Total	121 (100)

Q12: Who were the networks with, and who facilitated them

R: Open text

Q13: Have any strategic meetings been implemented in the last 6 months?

R: Y/ N

Table 28: Survey 3 – Q13 Strategic meetings implemented

Strategic meetings	n (%)
No	18 (14.8)
Yes	104 (85.2)
Total	122 (100)

If Yes to Q13:

Q14: Who were the strategic meetings with?

R: Open text

Q15: Have any other activities been implemented in the last 6 months? Select all that apply.

Table 29: Survey 3 – Q15 Other activites implemented

Other activities	n (%)
Accessing and analysing data	108 (88.5)

Increasing consultation or engagement	93 (76.2)
School visits	74 (60.7)
Monitoring attendance	69 (56.6)
Intervening to improve attendance	63 (51.6)
Panels and review meetings	64 (52.5)
Surveys, consultations to collect views of professionals	61 (50.0)
Facilitating/ referring others to additional services	58 (47.5)
Facilitating specific support for individual children	40 (32.8)
Other, please specify	37 (30.3)
Facilitating enrichment activities	27 (22.1)

Q16: Approximately, what percentage of your grant for the extension of duties to CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW has been spent on the following activities (0-100):

Table 30: Survey 3 – Q16 Grant spend by activity

Activity	*n*	Min	Max	Mean
Other	74	0	100	45.1
Training for schools	93	0	90	21.9
Data collection and analysis	92	0	70	20.4
Specific support for individual children	49	0	65	16.1
Network/ forum meetings	72	0	60	14.3
Training for social workers	82	0	50	14.2
Enrichment activities	34	0	50	9.85

Q17: What steps have been taken, if any, since April 2022 towards improving the collection, access and use of **data** on children who **currently** have a social worker? Tick all that apply.

Table 31: Survey 3 – Q17 Improving collection, access and use of data for current CWSW

Steps – current CWSW	n (%)
New ways in which data already collected (from any source) can be accessed by VS/ schools/ SW	87 (71.3)
New ways to identify current CWSW in existing data	75 (61.5)
Developments in matching CSC and education data	74 (60.7)
Developments in what is done with the data to inform targeting of resources	61 (50.0)
Collecting new items of information not previously collected	57 (46.7)
Data sharing agreements set up	29 (23.8)
Other, please specify	22 (18.0)
None	-
Total	122 (100)

If None selected in Q17:

Q18: What has prevented steps being taken?

R: Open text

Q19: Please briefly describe examples for your choices.

R: Open text

Q20: What steps have been taken, if any, since April 2022 towards improving the collection, access and use of **data** on **Ever 6 CWSW**? Tick all that apply.

Table 32: Survey 3 – Q20 Improving collection, access and use of data for Ever 6 CWSW

Steps – Ever 6 CWSW	n (%)
None	50 (40.7)
New ways in which data already collected (from any source) can be accessed by VS/ schools/	40 (32.8)
Developments in matching CSC and education data	39 (32.0)
New ways to identify Ever 6 CWSW in existing data	26 (21.3)
Developments in what is done with the data to inform targeting of resources	24 (19.7)
Collecting new items of information not previously collected	24 (19.7)
Data sharing agreements set up	14 (11.5)
Other	8 (6.6)
Total	122 (100)

If 'none' selected in Q20:

Q21: What has prevented steps being taken?

R: Open text

Q22: Please briefly describe examples for your choices.

R: Open text

Q23: Thinking about current CWSW AND Ever 6 CWSW, please rate and describe any evidence of progress towards the outcomes shown below, which are drawn from the Theory of Change developed by VSH in Stage 1 workshops. (We acknowledge that work towards meeting outcomes at this stage is ongoing)

Table 33: Survey 3 – Q23 Progress against ToC outcomes

Toc Outcome	Fully n (%)	Mostly n (%)	Some-what n (%)	Barely n (%)	Not started n (%)
Increased schools' understanding of educational needs[a]	1 (0.8)	19 (16.0)	75 (63.0)	20 (16.8)	4 (3.4)
Increased social workers' understanding of educational needs[a]	0	14 (11.8)	73 (61.3)	25 (21.0)	7 (5.9)
Development of a common language about education[a]	0	16 (13.4)	65 (54.6)	25 (21.0)	13 (10.9)
Better joint working to address educational needs[b]	1 (0.8)	29 (24.2)	67 (55.8)	20 (16.7)	3 (2.5)
Improved data quality[b]	1 (0.8)	30 (25.0)	53 (44.2)	33 (27.5)	3 (2.5)

[a]n=119; [b]n=120

Q24: Please describe any early **evidence** of progress against any of the listed outcomes drawn from the Theory of Change:

R: Open text

Q25: Since April 2022, in respect of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW, please select the option that best describes your **quality of communication** with HT/ SMT; Teachers; Social workers:

Table 34: Survey 3 – Q25 Quality of communication

Role	Very good n (%)	Good n (%)	Acceptable n (%)	Poor n (%)	Very poor n (%)	Total n (%)
HT/ SMT	15 (12.6)	61 (51.3)	36 (30.3)	5 (4.2)	2 (1.7)	119 (100)
Teachers	13 (11.1)	44 (37.6)	45 (38.5)	14 (12.0)	1 (0.9)	117 (100)

| SW | 19 (16.1) | 41 (34.7) | 48 (40.7) | 8 (6.8) | 2 (1.7) | 118 (100) |

Q26: Since April 2022, in respect of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW, please select the option that best describes your **overall working relationship** with HT/ SMT; Teachers; Social workers:

Table 35: Survey 3 – Q26 Quality of overall working relationship

Role	Very good n (%)	Good n (%)	Acceptable n (%)	Poor n (%)	Very poor n (%)	Total n (%)
HT/ SMT	30 (26.1)	60 (52.2)	23 (20.0)	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)	115 (100)
Teachers	21 (18.6)	54 (47.8)	30 (26.5)	7 (6.2)	1 (0.9)	113 (100)
SW	26 (22.8)	58 (50.9)	28 (24.6)	2 (1.8)	-	114 (100)

Q27: Since April 2022, what effect has the current approach in your Local Authority had on **attendance** of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 36: Survey 3 – Q27 Effect of LA approach on attendance of CWSW

	None n (%)	Minor n (%)	Moderate n (%)	Major n (%)	Total n (%)
Effect on attendance	47 (45.2)	46 (44.2)	8 (7.7)	3 (2.9)	104 (100)

Q28: If possible, please describe examples/ evidence to illustrate this effect on **attendance** (where appropriate, please include comments on attendance data held, and any examples of analysis about causes and impact)

R: Open text

Q29: Since April 2022, what effect has the current approach in your Local Authority had on **fixed-term exclusions**[14] of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 37: Survey 3 – Q29 Effect of LA approach on fixed-term exclusions of CWSW

	None *n* **(%)**	**Minor** *n* **(%)**	**Moderate** *n* **(%)**	**Major** *n* **(%)**	**Total** *n* **(%)**
Effect on suspensions	57 (54.8)	38 (36.5)	7 (6.7)	2 (1.9)	104 (100)

Q30: If possible, please describe examples/ evidence to illustrate this effect on **fixed-term exclusions** (where appropriate, please include comments on attendance data held, and any examples of analysis about causes and impact)

R: Open Text

Q31: Since April 2022, what effect has the current approach in your Local Authority had on **permanent exclusions**[15] of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 38: Survey 3 – Q31 Effect of LA approach on permanent exclusions of CWSW

	None *n* **(%)**	**Minor** *n* **(%)**	**Moderate** *n* **(%)**	**Major** *n* **(%)**	**Total** *n* **(%)**
Effect on permanent exclusions	54 (51.9)	36 (34.6)	10 (9.6)	4 (3.8)	104 (%)

Q32: If possible, please describe examples/ evidence to illustrate this effect on **permanent exclusions** (where appropriate, please include comments on attendance data held, and any examples of analysis about causes and impact)

R: Open text

Q33: Please rate the following statement:
Since the introduction of the new duties in September 2021, the focus and clarity of information about **education**, in CIN/ CP plans, has improved.

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[14] Phrasing used at time of survey, since replaced with 'suspensions'
[15] Phrasing used at time of survey, since replaced with 'permanent exclusions'

Table 39: Survey 3 – Q33 Education focus and clarity in CIN/ CP plans

	Agree n (%)	Neither n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Total n (%)
Clarity of CIN/ CP plan improved	46 (38.3)	32 (26.7)	9 (7.5)	33 (27.5)	121 (100)

Q34: Please also rate the following statements:

Table 40: Survey 3 – Q34 Rating of VS involvement with CIN/ CP planning process and review

CIN/ CP statement	Never n (%)	Rarely n (%)	Sometimes n (%)	Often n (%)	Always n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Total n (%)
VS attends CIN/ CP planning meetings	48 (39.3)	44 (36.1)	26 (21.3)	4 (3.3)	-	-	122 (100)
VS attends ongoing CIN/ CP review meetings	59 (48.4)	36 (29.5)	22 (18.0)	5 (4.1)	-	-	122 (100)
CIN/ CP review asks for attendance and attainment data	9 (7.4)	10 (8.3)	29 (24.0)	25 (20.7)	18 (14.9)	30 (24.8)	121 (100)
VS involved in the quality assurance of CIN/ CP plans	74 (61.2)	16 (13.2)	23 (19.0)	5 (4.1)	-	3 (2.5)	121 (100)
Education elements of CIN/ CP plans promote a culture of high expectations	5 (4.1)	14 (11.5)	46 (37.7)	13 (10.7)	4 (3.3)	40 (32.8)	122 (100)

Q35: If possible, please describe examples of **good practice** where CIN/ CP plans contain an **education** focus.

R: Open text

Q36: Please select the <u>three</u> most significant **barriers** you have encountered in implementation of the extension duties to current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 41: Survey 3 – Q36 Implementation barriers

Implementation Barriers	n (%)
You are not receiving some of the data you need	79 (64.8)
Social worker turnover and/or vacancies	69 (56.6)
Difficulties recruiting staff/enhancing existing roles	54 (44.3)
Other, please specify	50 (41.0)
Inadequate resources, please specify	27 (22.1)
Lack of support from senior managers in the LA	15 (12.3)
Difficulties in relationships with children's social care	14 (11.5)
Total	122 (100)

Q37: And now, please select the <u>three</u> most significant **facilitators** you have encountered in implementation of the extension duties to current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 42: Survey 3 – Q37 Implementation facilitators

Implementation Facilitators	n (%)
Established good relationships with CSC	73 (59.8)
New staff/enhanced existing roles	70 (57.4)
Support from senior managers in the LA	68 (55.7)

You are receiving some of the data you need	55 (45.1)
Additional resources from the extension of duties, please specify	31 (25.4)
Other, please specify	26 (21.3)
Stability of social worker	4 (3.3)
Total	122 (100)

Q38: Which of the following services are you currently working with in supporting the virtual school's extension duties to current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 43: Survey 3 – Q38a Joint working with other services

Current Associated Professionals	n (%)
Children and Families' Services	112 (91.8)
Education Entitlement	102 (83.6)
SEND/ Inclusion	102 (83.6)
Educational Psychology	98 (80.3)
School improvement	80 (65.6)
Early help	76 (62.3)
Youth Offending Team	74 (60.7)
Health	54 (44.3)
Police	29 (23.8)
Other	11 (9.0)
Total	122 (100)

Were any of these new contacts since April 2022?

Table 44: Survey 3 – Q38b New contacts for joint working

New Professional Contacts	n (%)
Early help	33 (27.0)
Youth Offending Team	27 (22.1)
Health	24 (19.7)
Police	20 (16.4)
Education Entitlement	19 (15.6)
School improvement	11 (9.0)
Educational Psychology	10 (8.2)
SEND/ Inclusion	9 (7.4)
Other	9 (7.4)
Children and Families' Services	4 (3.3)
Total	122 (100)

Q39: Which group, or body, is providing oversight of the extension of the Virtual School

Table 45: Survey 3 – Q39 Oversight of the extended duties of the VS

Governing body	n (%)
Virtual School Board of Governors	36 (30.0)
Children's Services Leadership Team	36 (30.0)
Relevant Assistant Director's Leadership Team	18 (15.0)
Corporate Parenting Board/Panel	12 (10.0)

None	9 (7.5)
Education Committee	4 (3.3)
A new group or body specifically created for current CWSW	3 (2.5)
A new group or body specifically created for Ever 6 CWSW	2 (1.7)
Education Scrutiny Commission	-
Safeguarding Board	-
Total	120 (100)

Q40: Finally, considering your responses in this survey, please think about the **overall progress** your virtual school has made on the extended duties so far, and its capacity to make progress in the future.

Please select the word that you think best describes your perception for each of the time periods.

Table 46: Survey 3 – Q40 Rating past and present overall progress on extended duties

	None *n* (%)	Limited *n* (%)	Steady *n* (%)	Rapid *n* (%)	Total *n* (%)
Last 6 months (Mar 2022 – Sept 2022)	5 (4.1)	41 (33.6)	60 (49.2)	16 (13.1)	122 (100)
Next 6 months (Oct 2022 - Mar 2023)	-	9 (7.4)	76 (62.8)	36 (29.8)	121 (100)

Q41: Do you agree to your responses being used?
R: Y/ N

Annex 3: Responses to VSH Survey 4

Question 1: I have read the information sheet

Response: Y/ N

Q2: Do you agree to take part in this survey?

R: Y/ N

Q3: If possible, please enter your unique survey ID from Survey 3:

Q4: What is your job title and role within the Virtual School (VS) in relation to the extension of duties for CWSW?

R: Open text

Q5: Please state your Local Authority

R: Open text

Q6: Please state the region of your local authority

R: Choose from list

Table 47: Survey 4 – Q6 responses by region

LA Region	Frequency	Response by region	Response in total
	n	%	%
London	26	83.9	20.8
South East	18	100	14.4
North West	20	83.3	16.0
Yorkshire	13	86.7	10.4
West Midlands	13	92.9	10.4
South West	8	57.1	6.4
North East	9	75.0	7.2

East of England	10	90.9	8.0
East Midlands	8	88.9	6.4
Total	125		100

Q7: What training have you delivered for **school staff** (for new staff or as a refresher) over the last academic year (2022-2023)? *Select all that apply*

Table 48: Survey 4 – Q7 Subjects of training for school staff

Training subject	For new staff *n* (%)	As a refresher *n* (%)
Trauma informed practice	103 (82.4)	95 (76.0)
Attachment	95 (76.0)	90 (72.0)
Raising awareness of networks (e.g. DSL/DT)	93 (74.4)	87 (69.6)
Attendance	68 (54.4)	57 (45.6)
Strategies to address common barriers and outcomes	68 (54.4)	60 (48.0)
Addressing challenging behaviour	59 (47.2)	53 (42.4)
Understanding ACEs	59 (47.2)	60 (48.0)
Permanent exclusion & suspensions	56 (44.8)	48 (38.4)
Mental Health/ anxiety	48 (38.4)	41 (32.8)
Inclusion of children with SEND	46 (36.8)	39 (31.2)
Well-being	38 (30.4)	33 (26.4)
Emotional literacy	37 (29.6)	33 (26.4)
Other	32 (25.6)	28 (22.4)
None	3 (2.4)	3 (2.4)

Q8: What training have you delivered for **Social Workers** (for new staff or as a refresher) over the last academic year (2022-2023)? *Select all that apply*

Table 49: Survey 4 – Q8 Subjects of training for social workers

Training subject – Social Workers	For new staff n (%)	As a refresher n (%)
Attendance	80 (64.0)	78 (62.4)
Permanent exclusion & suspensions	70 (56.0)	69 (55.2)
Raising awareness of networks (e.g. DSL/DT)	61 (48.8)	57 (45.6)
Inclusion of children with SEND	51 (40.8)	46 (36.8)
Trauma informed practice	51 (41.8)	50 (40.0)
Strategies to address common barriers and outcomes	50 (40.0)	55 (44.4)
Attachment	41 (32.8)	39 (31.2)
Addressing challenging behaviour	27 (21.6)	29 (23.2)
Understanding ACEs	20 (16.0)	20 (16.0)
Other	20 (16.0)	18 (14.4)
Mental Health/ anxiety	17 (13.6)	19 (15.2)
Well-being	17 (13.6)	17 (13.6)
Emotional literacy	12 (9.6)	11 (8.8)
None	5 (4.0)	4 (3.2)

Q9: Do you, or a colleague within the Virtual School, now sit on any decision-making panels or groups relating to CWSW?

R: Y/ N

Table 50: Survey 4 – Q9 Decision making panel membership

Response	n (%)
Yes	98 (79.0)
No	26 (21.0)
Total	124 (100)

If yes to Q9: Please briefly outline the functions of these panels/ groups

R: Open text

Q11: What do you consider to have been the VS contribution to these panels/ groups?

R: Open text

Q12: Please provide two good examples of how working with other professionals has changed the practice of partners (e.g. Health, Educational Psychology, Youth Offending Team, Police, Education Entitlement, SEND/Inclusion, Early help, School improvement) in relation to supporting CWSW.

R: Open Text

Q13: Please rate your progress towards each outcome and provide details of the progress your virtual school has made (including the influence of any training provided).

Table 51: Survey 4 – Q13 Progress towards ToC outcomes

Toc Outcome	Fully n (%)	Mostly n (%)	Some-what n (%)	Barely n (%)	Not started n (%)
Increased schools' understanding of educational needs	3 (2.5)	27 (22.3)	81 (66.9)	8 (6.4)	2 (1.6)
Increasing CSC's understanding of education	2 (1.7)	31 (25.6)	70 (57.9)	16 (13.2)	2 (1.7)

More inclusive practice in schools (directed by SLT)	2 (1.7)	17 (14.0)	78 (64.5)	21 (17.4)	3 (2.5)
Strengthened partnership between school, CSC, CAMHS and the VS	8 (6.6)	41 (33.9)	55 (45.5)	14 (11.6)	3 (2.5)
Increasing capacity and capability of parents to engage with education	-	8 (6.7)	39 (32.5)	47 (39.2)	26 (21.7)

Q14: The DfE guidance includes in the CWSW definition any child who has fulfilled the criteria at any time in the last 6 years, but do not currently have a social worker (known as Ever 6 CWSW).

Do you have access to the necessary data to maintain effective oversight of the progress of **current CWSW** in the following areas?

Table 52: Survey 4 – Q14 Access and quality of current CWSW data

Area	High quality n (%)	Low Quality n (%)	In development n (%)	No n (%)	Total n (%)
Attendance	44 (35.2)	43 (34.4)	31 (24.8)	3 (2.4)	121 (100)
Attainment	16 (12.8)	33 (26.4)	42 (3.6)	30 (24.0)	121 (100)
Suspension and permanent exclusions	54 (43.2)	34 (27.2)	28 (22.4)	5 (4.0)	121 (100)
Persistent absence	48 (38.4)	39 (31.2)	28 (22.4)	6 (4.8)	121 (100)
Safeguarding	42 (33.6)	19 (15.2)	34 (27.2)	25 (20.0)	120 (100)

Q13: Do you have access to the necessary data to maintain effective oversight of the progress of **Ever 6 CWSW** in the following areas?

Table 53: Survey 4 - Q15 Access and quality of Ever 6 CWSW data

Area	High quality n (%)	Low Quality n (%)	In development n (%)	No n (%)	Total n (%)
Attendance	10 (0.8)	16 (12.8)	34 (27.2)	60 (48.0)	120 (100)
Attainment	6 (4.8)	12 (9.6)	29 (23.2)	72 (57.6)	119 (100)
Suspension and permanent exclusions	14 (11.2)	12 (9.6)	36 (28.8)	58 (46.4)	120 (100)
Persistent absence	12 (96)	13 (10.4)	36 (28.8)	59 (47.2)	120 (100)
Safeguarding	16 (12.8)	13 (10.4)	25 (20.0)	66 (52.8)	120 (100)

Q16: Has the availability of these data improved joint working or the work of partners (e.g. children's social care, Youth Justice)?

R: Y/ N

Table 54: Survey 4 – Q16 Have availability of data improved joint working?

Response	n (%)
Yes	91 (76.5)
No	28 (23.5)
Total	119 (100)

Q17: Please outline how?

R: Open text

Q18: In the last academic year, what effect has the current approach in your Local Authority had on **attendance** of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 55: Survey 4 – Q18 Effect of LA approach on attendance

CWSW cohort	Decrease n (%)	None n (%)	Increase n (%)	Total n (%)
Current	6 (5.77)	32 (30.8)	66 (63.5)	104 (100)
Ever 6	2 (2.06)	65 (67.0)	30 (30.9)	97 (100)

If increase options selected in Q15

Please provide an example of activity that in your view has increased attendance

R: Open text

If None/ decrease options selected in Q15 Why do you think this is?

R: Open text

Q21: In the last academic year, what effect has the current approach in your Local Authority had on **suspensions** of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 56: Survey 4 – Q21 Effect of LA approach on suspensions

CWSW cohort	Decrease n (%)	None n (%)	Increase n (%)	Total n (%)
Current	35 (35.0)	47 (47.0)	18 (18.0)	100 (100)
Ever 6	9 (9.6)	71 (75.5)	14 (14.9)	94 (100)

If decrease options selected in Q16

Please provide an example of activity that in your view has increased attendance

R: Open text

If None/ increase options selected in Q16

Why do you think this is?

R: Open text

Q24: In the last academic year, what effect has the current approach in your Local Authority had on **permanent exclusions** of current CWSW and Ever 6 CWSW?

Table 57: Survey 4 – Q24 Effect of LA approach on permanent exclusions

CWSW cohort	Decrease n (%)	None n (%)	Increase n (%)	Total n (%)
Current	30 (30.0)	53 (53.0)	17 (17.0)	100 (100)
Ever 6	9 (9.7)	74 (79.6)	10 (10.8)	93 (100)

If decrease options selected in Q17

Please provide an example of activity that in your view has increased attendance

R: Open text

If None/ increase options selected in Q17 Why do you think this is?

R: Open text

Q27: Please rate the following statement:
'Since the introduction of the new duties in September 2021, the focus on educational needs and targets in CIN/ CP plans has improved.'

Table 58: Survey 4 – Q27 Rating of focus on educational needs and targets in CIN/ CP plans

Response	n (%)
Strongly disagree	1 (0.8)
Somewhat disagree	7 (5.6)
Neither agree nor disagree	19 (15.2)
Somewhat agree	60 (40.8)
Strongly agree	16 (12.8)
Not sure/don't know	8 (6.4)

Total	111 (100)

Q28: Finally, please add any other comments, not already covered in this survey, relating to the Virtual School's extension of duties to CWSW that you feel the evaluation team should know.

R: *Open text*.

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