

Isle of Wight Council

Schools Forum

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Pupil Premium for looked after children: Annual Update 2024-25 (financial year)

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1. Summary

- This report provides an annual overview of the looked after child pupil premium, also referred to as pupil premium plus. It outlines the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) in relation to this grant, and the way that the centrally held portion of the grant is being used to improve educational progress and outcomes of the Isle of Wight's children in care.
- The report is informed by scrutiny of personal education plans which record how pupil premium plus funding is used, additionality funding agreements and by 'Corporate Parent' visits to schools undertaken by the Virtual School when effective use of this funding is discussed.
- Reporting in relation to pupil premium plus is not a statutory requirement. However, it was agreed in 2017 that an annual update would be introduced, for the purposes of transparency and to support collegiate working going forward.

2. Background and context

- As of March 2025, there were 261 children recorded as being in the care of the Isle of Wight, with 189 of statutory school age, 29 in pre-school and 43 post-16. A proportion (25%) of these children and young people are placed on the mainland in other Local Authorities.
- The Isle of Wight Virtual School team comprises of
 - Virtual School Head (FT) Rosie Lister
 - Education Adviser (CWSW/PLAC/Kinship care 30% PPPG Funded) (FT) Matthew Bell
 - Education Officer (term time only) (PPPG Funded) Prue Paddon
 - Casework Officer (Post-16/UASC) (30% PPPG Funded) (FT) Rebecca Walker
 - Casework Assistant (Administrative) (0.8) (40% PPPG funded) Hazel Pither

The remit of virtual school staff is to support the improvement of educational engagement and outcomes for the Isle of Wight's children in care, those previously in care or living in kinship arrangements and those who have had a social worker in the last six years. This remit is delivered in partnership with education settings and the wider network of involved professionals.

- The Virtual School approach is to work with children in care as if they were in a single school, tracking the progress they make and supporting them to achieve as well as possible. One of the key statutory duties of the Virtual School Head is to directly manage the arrangements for the

distribution of the pupil premium plus grant for children in care. This should be used without delay to meet the individual needs of children as outlined in their personal education plan.

- Children who were previously looked after but ceased to be so as a result of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order are also eligible for pupil premium plus. The Virtual School Head has no direct responsibility for the use or distribution of this grant beyond providing advice and guidance and promoting best practice. Matthew Bell oversees this area of work for the Isle of Wight on behalf of the Virtual School.

3. Pupil premium plus arrangements on the Isle of Wight

- The statutory guidance published in February 2018 requires the Virtual School Head to directly manage the arrangements for distributing the pupil premium plus to schools on behalf of the children in care to their local authority. This must be undertaken in accordance with the conditions of grant published annually by the Department for Education and outlined in a written and published policy.
- The purpose of the grant is to close the attainment gap for this cohort of children and improve their educational outcomes. It is allocated to the Virtual School on behalf of each child who is in care for at least one day as recorded in the March 2024 children looked after return (SSDA903) aged 4-15 at 31 August 2023. Pupils from Year R to Year 11 are eligible for the pupil premium plus.
- During the financial year 2023-24, the government allocation for each looked after child is £2,570 per child looked after. The Virtual School allocated £1,600 pupil premium plus per child to schools (equating to £302,400 in total) paid in three termly instalments for each child. £970 per child was retained to fund central services and interventions. This arrangement was in line with Virtual School's Nationally following guidance from National Association of Virtual School Heads ([Welcome to NAVSH](#))
- A full term's pupil premium plus is provided, regardless of when a child was taken into care. Unlike many other local authorities, there is currently no bidding or application process required to access this standard funding other than receipt of a termly personal education plan.
- It should be noted that the Virtual School Head is responsible and accountable for the effective use of pupil premium plus in its entirety and not just for the portion that is centrally held. Given this, they must be assured that, whatever arrangements are in place, all the money is used for the benefit of individual looked after children's educational needs. Where it is not possible to identify how pupil premium plus is being spent (due, for example, to a missing, poor quality or incomplete PEP), the Virtual School can withhold the allocation of pupil premium plus.
- Arrangements for allocating pupil premium plus are reviewed annually based on the analysis of the educational progress and outcomes for the children in care cohort and their presenting needs.
- For the financial year 2025-26, we are reviewing the existing arrangements and envisage a change. Pupil premium plus will continue to be allocated in termly instalments for Autumn and Spring Terms at the current level of £500 per term. We are proposing, following information consultation, that Summer Term 2026 Pupil premium plus grant funds are accessed via agreement following a request process. If this is successful, this process will be implemented across all three terms for 2026-2027.

4. Pupil premium plus 2024-25: overview and impact

- On the Isle of Wight, the majority of the pupil premium plus funding is provided directly to schools to meet individual children's educational needs as identified and recorded in their personal education plans. The identification and assessment of need is therefore crucial to ensuring that the use of the funding is appropriately targeted and that the impact on progress and achievement can be measurable, where possible.
- Our auditing of personal education plans indicates that a comprehensive use of the 'PEP Toolkit' developed by Hampshire Virtual School supports schools to identify and understand unmet needs and areas of difficulty. The PEP Toolkit considers children's needs across seven areas, adult or peer relationships, executive functioning, self-regulation, motivation, sense of self and language development and provides guidance on evidence-based strategies and approaches. Our settings also have access to Reach2Teach to support needs analysis.
- Given that the use of the funding is most effectively used to target specific areas of need for individual children, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of the interventions and strategies that schools have used successfully. For example, circle of friends, peer mentoring or multi-sensory work may be more appropriate than specialist subject 1:1 tutoring for some children.
- The Virtual School audits 100% of PEPs every term with a particular focus on effective needs analysis, target setting and the impact of funding and uses the outcomes to inform and improve our training programme for Designated Teachers.
- The centrally retained pupil premium funding is managed directly by the Virtual School. The management of the operational and strategic work of the Virtual School is provided by the Education, Inclusion and Access Branch led by the Assistant Director for the area. The Virtual School Head is required to produce an annual report and regular updates to the Corporate Parenting Board which includes elected members and senior leaders across the Isle of Wight.
- The following provides a broad overview of the use and impact of the pupil premium plus held centrally on the Isle of Wight. This is organised into four main areas: a) the Virtual School team, b) training and capacity building, c) partnership working and d) additionality funding. Our work in these areas makes a significant difference to the educational experiences and outcomes of the Island's children in care and the key adults in their lives.

a) Virtual School

- The Virtual School team is small relative to the size of the cohort of children in care on the Isle of Wight and so building and strengthening capacity is our predominant approach. Given this, the development of strong and credible relationships alongside ensuring that communication and key systems and processes work effectively across the wide network are important tasks for the Virtual School team. This work is driven forward by the dedicated partnership working of each member of the team with social care colleagues and schools, which provides the bedrock for the value and impact of our work.
- The Education Officer and Education Mentor lead on support for individual children and young people for the Virtual School. They work closely with social care colleagues to support timely admissions and to maintain school stability for individual children. There is a relentless focus on monitoring patterns of attendance, children at risk of fixed term exclusion and supporting children when they face difficulties in school or transitions. They work hard to reduce the amount of time any child spends out of education, particularly between homes.
- The Virtual School management, for children in care, consists of the Virtual School Head. The VSH leads on ensuring a full programme of training is delivered to support Designated Teachers

throughout the year which focuses on their vital role in promoting education. The VSH also leads on 'Corporate Parent' visits to schools, ensuring that designated teachers are supported, guided, and challenged so they can meet the individual needs of children in care. The VSH meets weekly with the officers within the team to provide specific guidance and support alongside a mechanism for escalation.

- The Early Years Advisory Team, supported by the Virtual School's casework assistant, support our Pre-school and Year R cohort. The team attend every Personal Education Plan for this group and ensure their progress is closely monitored before entering Year 1. This is funded from PPPG and feeds into our offer for supporting school readiness and improvement in outcomes at the end of reception (Good Level of Development (GLD)).

b) Training and capacity building

- As stated, in the context of the Isle of Wight, the approach is one of building capacity across the local authority, and beyond, to meet the educational needs of children we care for. As a result, there is a strong focus on providing the highest quality training for Designated Teachers (DTs). We delivered a range of training opportunities across 2024-25 including Lego Therapy, Person Centred Planning, Educating Young People seeking safety through asylum to name a few.

- The well-established Attachment and Trauma Aware Schools and Settings (ATAS) programme has now completed its final cohort of the Isle of Wight. Kate Cairns Associates (KCA) have run training for all schools who educate IOW looked after children on the Island who have completed the specialist training which is based on a 'Lead Team' model. This was build upon in 2024-25 through training and resources from ARC ([Attachment & Trauma Aware approaches in education | ARC](#)) and The Care Leaders Online ([Home](#)). We also ran a training support programme for schools who wanted to create space to focus on the development of their trauma informed practice.

- Settings have received bespoke training packages on request – these might include but are not limited to, an introduction to attachment and trauma practice for support staff, Executive Functioning in the Classroom, Emotion Coaching and developing therapeutic classroom spaces.

C) Partnership working

- The Virtual School has continued to collaborate with the Early Years Advisory Team. This team attend every early years' PEP and ensure the needs of our youngest children are met within their education settings. The aim of this work is to increase the number of children achieving a good level of development (GLD) year on year. We provided transition pack for all settings and parent/carers for children transitioning from pre-school to Year R in September 2024. This received very positive feedback and will be repeated in 2025.

- The Virtual School continues to work closely with Isle of Wight SEND to advocate for our young people to minimise drift and delay. This partnership was high priority this year due to changes within the Local Authority and the local offer for SEND. The Virtual School continue to support a number of schools, both on and off the Island, who are home to our young people with Special Educational Needs.

- The Virtual School has developed a working relationship with a new Educational Psychology service this year. The service has provided bespoke consultations, support and training to professionals supporting our young people both on the Isle of Wight and out of county. This

partnership has allowed advice and guidance to be offered in a timely way and has limited statutory delay to Education Health and Care Plan guidance.

- The Virtual School has worked in partnership with the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) to provide our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people with a language assessment and profile of needs to support their transition into mainstream school. Our separated children (UASC) were supported, via commission, by a social care team based in Hampshire until 2025. The Virtual School support of these young people returned to the Isle of Wight Team in June 2024. Both Isle of Wight based teams are now working effectively to support our separated children to access and thrive in education.
- All Isle of Wight looked after children are part of Dolly's Books - a free book gifting scheme whereby children receive a high quality, age-appropriate book in the post, free of charge every month from birth to age five. We continue to work with Wightlink and Red Funnel to provide sponsored free travel for young people in care / care leavers who wish to study on the mainland at Post-16.
- The Virtual School recognised the needs to improve identification and support for children and young people who may have Speech, Language and/or Communication Needs. We have partnered with the Local Authority specialist team to provide training for all Island settings alongside a Progression Tool. The use of the tool will become mandatory within the Personal Education Plan for all children we care for in September 2026.
- The Virtual School is part of the Island's Cultural Education Partnership run by Creative Island. We hosted a workshop alongside Artswork at the IOW Story festival for children we care for to write a submission for CORAM Voice. These collaborations will continue in 2025-26.

d) Additionality Funding 2024 – 2025:

- Primary and Secondary schools were invited to apply for Additionality Funding across the year in 2024-25. The requests needed to clearly identify need, a clear plan for the funding in response to the need and how this would be monitored, and impact evaluated. The Virtual School agreed to £104,345.53 of additionality funding in 2024/25 (Autumn and Spring terms). Each allocation was applied for, discussed and agreed based on need to ensure stability, progress and outcomes.
- Resources and access devices were supplied to children to ensure access to education provision or to enable home learning.
- Provision for our young people seeking asylum is arranged on an individual basis dependent on the child's needs, geographical location and point of entry. Many of our young people seeking safety through asylum are placed on the mainland and there can be delay to accessing mainstream school places dependent on the saturation of the area for ESOL courses.

5. Educational outcomes for children we care for

- As has been outlined, schools on the Isle of Wight and the Virtual School are committed, and determined, to further improve the engagement, participation, and achievement in education for the Isle of Wight's children we care for.
- We also recognise that it is important to focus on the educational experiences and individual journeys of children, as many have overcome significant challenges arising from complex trauma, emotional and mental health needs, and the wider impact of adverse childhood experiences.

- The effective use of pupil premium plus funding by both schools and the Virtual School is evidenced both in PEPs and in the improving picture of educational outcomes for our children and young people in care.

Outcomes Summer 2024

Assessment Point	IOW CLA 2024	IOW CLA 2023	IOW All Children	National CLA
End of EYFS	33.3%	16.7%	68%	39%
KS1 Phonics	50%	50%	78.3%	60%
KS2 RWM	45.5%	77.8%	51%	34%
KS4 5+ inc E&M	9.5%	4.8%	47.7%	15%

All data from NCER NEXUS and OC2.

- Attendance data continues to be monitored daily by Asset. The IOW attendance for looked after children of statutory school age saw a positive return in September 2024 with overall attendance at 92.4%. The Virtual School team meet weekly to address persistent or severe absence alongside changes to attendance patterns. Appropriate intervention is put in place alongside school and social care colleagues.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

- This report sets out how the effective use of the pupil premium plus supports the local authority, carers, and schools to promote the educational needs of children in care.
- We recommend that the School Forum notes the content of this report.

End.