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# **Extended Duties Programme Achieving for Children's Virtual School**

## **Interim Evaluation**

### **December 2023**

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

From September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) was extended to include all children who have or have had a social worker including children class as In Need (CIN), and those subject to child protection (CP) plans. The new responsibilities for VSHs comprises of a strategic leadership role to champion the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker.<sup>1</sup> This Extended Duties responsibility and funding are due for review in 2025.

In December 2022, the Department for Education published a phase one evaluation of the Extended Duties programme undertaken by the Rees Centre at Oxford University.<sup>2</sup> As part of this Phase One evaluation, nine VSHs participated in two Theory of Change (TOC) workshops to agree the anticipated short, medium and long-term outcomes of the programme.

The interim evaluation, carried out by Dr Catherine Carroll from St Mary's University in collaboration with the AfC VS, aimed to better understand how the AfC VS is making progress against the aims of the Extended Duties guidance and TOC outcomes in the first two years of a four-year DfE initiative and to understand the challenges and risks that might act as a barrier to the likelihood of the outcomes being achieved.

Therefore, the evaluation objectives were to:

1. review the evidence of progress against the expected national TOC outcomes and the AfC VS 2022-23 Extended Duties action plan, as of October 2023
2. better understand the challenges and risks that might act as a barrier to achieving the long-term outcomes of the Extended Duties programme intended for 2025.

## Methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted to carry out the interim evaluation. This involved:

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<sup>1</sup> DfE. (2022). Promoting the education of children with a social worker. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1086931/Promoting\\_the\\_education\\_of\\_children\\_with\\_a\\_social\\_worker\\_-\\_virtual\\_school\\_head\\_role\\_extension\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1086931/Promoting_the_education_of_children_with_a_social_worker_-_virtual_school_head_role_extension_2022.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> DfE. (2022). Phase one evaluation of the virtual school head's extension of duties to children with a social worker and the post-16 pupil premium plus pilot. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1123287/AFC\\_VSH\\_extension\\_evaluation\\_December\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1123287/AFC_VSH_extension_evaluation_December_2022.pdf)

- in-depth semi-structured interviews with three school leaders working undertaking the Attachment Aware Schools Award (AASA) and the AfC VS Assistant Headteacher (AHT) for Extended Duties
- a Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshop with the Executive AfC VS Headteacher and Associate Director, Education Standards, Children with a Social Worker and the Assistant Headteacher (Extended Duties)
- on-line survey with social workers across AfC - in total, 16 social workers completed the online survey. The invitation to take part was sent out to social workers, via the AfC VS and through the leaders of social work teams.
- attendance data and documentary analysis including the Extended Duties Action Plan for (2022-23) written by the AfC VS.

## Findings

### 1. Evidence of progress against the theory of change outcomes

The findings show that the AfC VS has made substantial progress against all of the 2022-23 TOC outcomes and already three of the four 2023-24 TOC outcomes. Furthermore, the AfC VS can demonstrate early signs of progress against pupil outcomes (attendance) which were not anticipated by the national TOC until 2025.

Specific findings include evidence for:

- access to and improved data quality for children with a CP plan and children class as In Need to make visible the disadvantages experienced by these children and young people
- better joint working and strengthened partnership between the AfC VS, schools, social care and council agencies
- the development of a common language for progress, with a focus on attendance, across professional groups through, for example, training and social worker consultation clinics
- strategies in place for increasing schools' understanding of the needs of the children and young people with a social worker through, for example, training and the work of the Transition Hub
- more inclusive practices in schools directed by senior leadership teams through the Attachment Aware Schools Award
- the average absence (AA) and Persistent Absence (PA) rates for children classed as In Need and for those children on a CP plan, in all three local authorities, have improved between February and October 2023.

2. The analyses of the findings from the REM workshop and the interviews found two themes:
  - the complexities of implementing the Extended Duties programme as demonstrated by the 19 impact pathways
  - the system changes required of the Extended Duties programme.

### Summary and recommendations

This interim evaluation aimed to understand how the AfC VS is making progress against the aims of the Extended Duties DfE guidance and TOC outcomes in the first two years of a four-year DfE funded initiative and to understand the challenges and risks that might act as barriers to achieving the intended 2025 pupil outcomes.

The findings show that the AfC VS is making substantial progress against all of the 2022-23 TOC outcomes and three of the four 2023-24 TOC outcomes. Furthermore, the AfC VS can demonstrate early signs of progress against pupil outcomes (attendance) which were not anticipated by the TOC until 2025. This progress is being achieved through implementing a thoughtfully considered strategic and extensive programme of activities that combine universal and targeted activities and interventions.

Based on the findings the following recommendations are suggested for the next phase of Extended Duties programme implementation (2023-24), work towards which is already being undertaken by the AfC VS:

- continue to embed the current activities and partnerships into the routine structures and practices of all the professional groups, in order to withstand the challenges of such as complex programme
- consider how to increase capacity and capacity of parents to engage with education (2023-24 outcome)
- extend the strategic focus to capture, in-depth as well as cross cohort evidence, on the impact of the programme against two/three other pupil outcomes. For example, the Transition Hub has a focus on *children and young people having more voice and agency and feeling valued and understood* and the AfC VS may decide to focus on suspension and exclusion trends across the CWSW cohort.

## 1. Introduction

From September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) was extended to include all children who have or have had a social worker including children class as In Need (CIN), and those subject to child protection (CP) plans. The new responsibilities for VSHs comprises of a strategic leadership role to champion the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker.<sup>3</sup> This Extended Duties responsibility and funding are due for review in 2025.

In December 2022, the Department for Education published a phase one evaluation of the Extended Duties programme undertaken by the Rees Centre at Oxford University.<sup>4</sup> As part of this Phase One evaluation, nine VSHs participated in two Theory of Change (TOC) workshops to agree the anticipated short, medium and long-term outcomes of the programme. The TOC model will be reviewed over the period of the initiative, but Table 1 summarises the current expected outcomes for each year.

Table 1: Extended Duties Programme - Theory of Change model

<b>Interim outcomes by 22 - 23</b>	<b>Interim outcomes by 23 - 24</b>	<b>Long term outcomes by 24 - 25</b>
Access to and improved data quality for CIN and CP pupils (as a minimum - attendance, achievement, attainment, engagement with education, exclusion and suspensions)	Strategies in place for increasing schools' understanding of the needs of the cohort	Improved attainment Improved achievement Improved attendance Improved punctuality
Early signs of increased understanding of the needs of the cohort	More inclusive practice in schools (directed by senior leader teams)	Improved engagement with education Improved behaviour
Better joint working between social care, the AfC VS, schools and council agencies	A strengthened partnership between social care, the AfC VS, schools and council agencies	Improved resilience Improved wellbeing

<sup>3</sup> DfE. (2022). Promoting the education of children with a social worker. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1086931/Promoting\\_the\\_education\\_of\\_children\\_with\\_a\\_social\\_worker\\_-\\_virtual\\_school\\_head\\_role\\_extension\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1086931/Promoting_the_education_of_children_with_a_social_worker_-_virtual_school_head_role_extension_2022.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> DfE. (2022). Phase one evaluation of the virtual school head's extension of duties to children with a social worker and the post-16 pupil premium plus pilot. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1123287/AFC\\_VSH\\_extension\\_evaluation\\_December\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1123287/AFC_VSH_extension_evaluation_December_2022.pdf)

Development of a common language between social care, the AfC VS, schools and council agencies	Increasing the capacity of parents to engage with education	Improved transitions Reduced in-year transitions Reduction in young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) Reduction in exclusions Children and young people feel valued and understood Children and young people have more voice and agency in the process
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One of the recommendations of the Phase One evaluation was for VSHs to document evidence on local progress made towards achieving the short-term, medium and long-term outcomes identified in the Theory of Change for the programme. In December 2022, Dr Catherine Carroll from St Mary’s University, was awarded a research grant to investigate the impact of the Extended Duties programme to date in two local authorities (LAs). One of those LAs was the AfC VS and the collaboration continues the long-term partnership between AfC and St Mary’s since 2016. The partnership includes two successful Youth Endowment Foundation research projects (2019-2022) which were awarded £1.5 million in total and collaborations and publications as a result of the Promoting the Achievement of Looked after Children (PALAC) programme (2013-2018). The AfC VS was awarded £8000 by St Mary’s University to participate in an interim evaluation of the Extended Duties programme and to contribute their experiences to a wider research project that is investigating university and community research and practice collaborations. The interim evaluation took place between January and October 2023.

### 1.1 Research aims and objectives

The interim evaluation aimed to better understand how the AfC VS is making progress against the aims of the Extended Duties guidance and TOC outcomes in the first two years of a four-year DfE initiative and to understand the challenges and risks that might act as a barrier to the likelihood of the outcomes being achieved.

Therefore, the evaluation objectives were to:

3. review the evidence of progress against the expected national TOC outcomes and the AfC VS 2022-23 Extended Duties action plan, as of October 2023

4. better understand the challenges and risks that might act as a barrier to achieving the long-term outcomes of the Extended Duties programme intended for 2025.

By reporting on the progress, challenges and complexity of the changes being implemented and experienced by the AfC VS, other LAs, researchers and policy makers, including the DfE will, for example, have a more nuanced understanding of the context and what actions might be needed, in the next two to three years, to ensure the successful implementation of the policy guidance at a local and national levels.

## 1.2 Methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted to carry out the interim evaluation. This involved:

- in-depth semi-structured interviews with three school leaders working undertaking the Attachment Aware Schools Award (AASA) and the AfC VS Assistant Headteacher (AHT) for Extended Duties
- a Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshop with the Executive AfC VS Headteacher and Associate Director, Education Standards, Children with a Social Worker and the Assistant Headteacher (Extended Duties)
- on-line survey with social workers across AfC - in total, 16 social workers completed the online survey. The invitation to take part was sent out to social workers, via the AFC VS and through the leaders of social work teams.
- attendance data and documentary analysis including the Extended Duties Action Plan for (2022-23) written by the AfC VS.

The interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams and lasted 30 minutes. The REM workshop took place face to face and lasted two hours. A REM is a participatory and qualitative data collection method that requires the active input of those involved in implementing complex programmes, system changes and often across multiple settings. It produces a visual output (i.e., a map) of the programme activities and their impact, which are mapped along a timeline to better understand the chronological dimension of the system changes.



## 2. Evidence of progress against the Theory of Change outcomes

The findings show that the AfC VS has made substantial progress against all of the 2022-23 TOC outcomes and already three of the four 2023-24 TOC outcomes. Furthermore, the AfC VS can demonstrate early signs of progress against pupil outcomes (attendance) which were not anticipated by the national TOC until 2025.

This section describes the activities that have been delivered, the changes implemented and the evidence of progress gathered against the outcomes in the TOC model (Table 1).

### 2.1 Access to and improved data quality for CIN and CP cohorts

The AfC VS understood very early on that having access to the relevant data for the CIN and CP cohorts was fundamental to achieving many of the short, medium and long-term outcomes of the programme. Ultimately, it would be very difficult to track any changes in pupil outcomes by 2025 without the relevant data gathered over time. The AfC VS already had a data manager in place and building on the partnerships with Welfare Call and internal Information Technology links across AfC, the AfC VS was able to swiftly overcome many of the data sharing challenges experienced by many other VS, as described in the DfE Phase One evaluation report. Therefore, the attendance data for the CIN and CP cohorts were made available from very early.

The main benefits of this speed are threefold. Firstly, through the publication of weekly attendance data, the AfC VS is 'making visible', the disadvantages experienced by this group of children and young people and this is the first of the three main strategic responsibilities of the AfC VS as described in the Extended Duties statutory guidance. This data has then been used extensively in several activities such as, for example, raising awareness presentations for different professional groups and a monthly 'Attendance' slot at Performance Quality and Innovation Board multi-agency managers meetings. Secondly, the weekly report identifies how many students are PA per social work team and whether that team's children's PA is improving or worsening. It also identifies whether the data is better or worse than the national (through RAG rating). Finally, the AfC VS has identified and prioritised those children and young people with a 80 to 89% persistence absence rate for additional support either on a direct basis (through, for example the Transition Hub) or through supporting the schools of this group with further advice and where appropriate challenge.

## 2.2 Better joint working and strengthened partnerships between the Virtual School, schools, social care and council agencies

The AfC VS has initiated several new activities and collaborations with colleagues from different teams across AfC to strengthen partnership working. Three main approaches are being implemented to achieve this specific outcome:

- working through existing LA structures but that are new or the AfC VS
- establishing new working partnerships
- delivery of awareness raising and training opportunities.

The AHT for Extended Duties and the AfC VS Executive Headteacher, now regularly attend safeguarding team meetings to promote the importance of education for CWSW and how practices and systems might need to be adapted to promote practice that supports children and young people's engagement in education. The AfC VS has always attended LA headteacher forums/meetings but this is now extended to those meetings for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs). The emphasis has been awareness raising and to make visible the disadvantages experienced by CWSW, with a particular emphasis on attendance.

A second approach has been to establish new working partnerships. The first is the provision of 70 social worker Consultation Clinics, delivered by the AfC VS in collaboration with the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) since Autumn 2022. The purpose of the clinic is for individual social workers to discuss specific children or young people on their caseloads where they would like further information and/or support as to how best support their education. To date, over 45 social workers have attended one or more of the 70 clinics delivered. Another, more recent collaboration, has been with the Education and Welfare Officer (EWO) team by employing an EWO to go across the AfC VS and EWO services to enhance the focus on attendance. It is recognised that progress for these children is important, however, if they are not in school they cannot learn. The third approach has been to deliver a range of raising awareness and training opportunities for various groups across AfC. Since Spring 2022, for example, 22 raising awareness presentations have been delivered to groups of headteachers, DSLs and social care managers. In Spring 2023, training was delivered to five Child Protection Chairs which focused on what an 'exemplar' CP plan might look like and the importance of education as part of the plan.

## 2.3 Development of a common language

For the purposes of this interim evaluation, the development of a common language has been interpreted to include practices that support a common language as well as terminology to describe practices.

The inclusion of an education target on all CP and CIN plans since Autumn 2022 is an example of a common practice. At present, the emphasis of the education target has been on attendance and what approaches/strategies the social worker might advise or implement with the child, school and or family. The emphasis on attendance, and what good attendance looks like is an example of an approach by the AfC VS to foster a common strategic and practice focus across professional groups. Attendance is a priority for this group of children and young people within AfC and nationally and provides the foundation from which to begin to address other long-term outcomes, such as academic progress and attainment. In addition, an Attendance Strategies booklet was compiled for DSLs, through consultation with schools who were invited to input the strategies they used in their school. The opening introduction outlines our advice on attendance strategies that can be effective and supports a shared understanding between professionals and that common approaches are used across schools.

Analyses of the interview and survey responses show the emergence of vocabulary to describe common practices across all professional groups. The most common examples of terminology include:

- attachment aware and trauma informed practice
- relational practices
- restorative approaches
- emotional regulation.

## 2.4 Strategies in place for increasing schools' understanding of the needs of the cohort of children and young people

The AfC VS has put in place universal and targeted strategies to help schools to understand the needs of the cohort. Examples of the universal approach includes 'making visible' the needs of the cohort through the coordination and sharing of weekly attendance and suspension and exclusion data weekly with schools. The AASA is another example of a universal offer. An example of a third approach is through the work of the Transition Hub. Here, staff from the Transition Hub provide targeted support for individual children and young people, their school and families for a term. One aim of the programme is to work with the school to gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs of a pupil at the start of the programme through additional

assessments. In this way, specific strategies can be put in place that should ensure a greater chance of success against intended outcomes. The Social Worker Consultation Clinics is another example of a targeted approach to support schools to have a better understanding of the needs of the cohort of children and young people.

## 2.5 More inclusive practices in schools (directed by senior leadership teams)

The delivery of the AASA is the principle strategic vehicle through which the AfC VS supports school senior leadership teams to assist more inclusive practice for this cohort of pupils. The AfC VS, in collaboration with the EPS, is now in its fourth year of delivering the AASA. By the end of July 2023 118 schools have completed the bronze level and 65 the silver level and 22 are completing Gold for 2023-24. Over the course of one academic year, a AfC VS coach and a school's EP will work with the senior leadership team to support them to lead on whole school approaches that have been shown to support the education of all pupils but particularly those who are more vulnerable to and/or have experienced some of abuse and/or neglect.

As part of the evaluation, three senior leaders from secondary and primary settings were interviewed to investigate:

- their reasons for signing up for the AASA
- the activities undertaken in their settings as part of the AASA
- their perceptions of the benefits of participating in the AASA to date and how the programme had facilitated such benefits
- the challenges of taking part in the AASA.

There were three main reasons given by participants for signing up for the AASA. The first, is the increase in number of CWSW on roll. Secondly, is that more pupils (CWSW and other pupils) are exhibiting the need for more support relating to one or more of the following: attendance; social and emotional needs and mental health concerns. Thirdly, participants reported that they were looking to review their behaviour policy and they wanted it to reflect changes in whole school approaches that had already happened or were being planned that recognised, for example, the importance of relational and restorative approaches:

Our behaviour policy was also coming up for renewal and we wanted it to more accurately reflect what was happening in the school now. It was very behaviourist. (Interviewee 2)

Senior leaders described a variety of practices introduced into their settings because of taking part in the AASA. The adoption of emotion coaching techniques and language, after training from

the EPS, was a very common activity. A second approach was the introduction of safe spaces in a variety of forms. One school had set up a nurture room which had led to a further development offering a 'lunch time chat' provision. Here, the trained nurture room staff are available in a classroom, at lunchtime, for any child to come and speak with them if they are 'worried' or 'upset' about anything. Colleagues in schools can refer any pupil who they consider might benefit from this type of support. This development had been particularly well received by parents who feel reassured that there is somewhere and someone for their child to go during the day if required:

We found that it's been really good for parents, to feel really reassured by the fact that we can say there's a space they [pupil] can go to and we shared that in our newsletter as well. It's also it's been really valuable that sometimes things have come up that can be fed back to the class teacher.  
(Interviewee 1)

The analyses of the interview data showed four benefits for staff, pupils and parents or those schools who have participated in the AASA. as described by the senior leaders. Firstly, senior leaders observed staff having an increased knowledge and understanding of the needs of this cohort of pupils and how to expand their practice to be more inclusive:

We have spotlights on certain students— those at risk of permanent exclusion and because of our increased understanding of attachment aware practices we have gone above and beyond to provide personalised programmes of support. (Interviewee 3)

Secondly, two participants reported a reduction in suspensions and the use of sanctions. One of these senior leaders reported that a nurture room had played a very important contribution to a reduction in suspensions. One participant reported that they felt that the emotion coaching approaches adopted throughout the school had contributed to the improvement in attendance data which was now above the national average. Finally, as previously described, one participant reported that parents were appreciative of the new initiatives.

Participants were clear about how the programme had facilitated changes in inclusive practices in their settings. They described how the programme structure, with for example, the input of training for all staff at the start of the programme, worked well in terms of launching the AASA and supporting a common approach by staff. It was important to interview participants that the AASA allowed them to focus on priorities and ways of working that were particular to their settings. The coaching sessions offered to the members of the SLT throughout the year helped to inform them of evidence informed practice as well as keep them 'on track' against their action

plans. In addition, interview participants appreciated the time and space to reflect on practice, with knowledgeable professionals, which is not always possible bearing in mind the demands on SLT time. Finally, one participant described the importance of receiving external validation and recognition for the decisions taken and activities being implemented in their settings.

There are some challenges to taking part in the AASA reported by the participants. The first, was finding the time, especially at the beginning of the academic year to read and complete the required activities:

...initially it [AASA] did feel like another task, another demand. It's not always easy finding the time....now they [leadership team] know it was a good use of time, but you're often starting the programme with perhaps not knowing that. (Interviewee 1)

It could feel somewhat overwhelming. However, all three participants agreed that the benefits of completing the AASA had outweighed these initial reservations and would recommend that other schools complete the AASA. A second challenge was gaining the 'buy in' of all staff in a setting to new ways of working. Participants described how it took time to convince some colleagues that attachment aware practices were not, for example, about accepting a reduction in 'acceptable' standards of behaviour. Or, for example, that a change in the profile of many of their pupils necessitated additional ways of working with potentially vulnerable pupils.

## 2.6 Early signs of increased understanding of the needs of children with a social worker

In addition to the interviews, the interim evaluation included an e-survey of social workers to assess the impact of the various activities undertaken by the AfC VS for social workers. including the SW Consultation Clinics, and the regular attendance data sharing. Sixteen social workers responded to the survey and as shown in Figure 1, nine had attended a Consultation Clinic, eight a raising awareness/training event and three responded that they had received regular email updates on attendance.

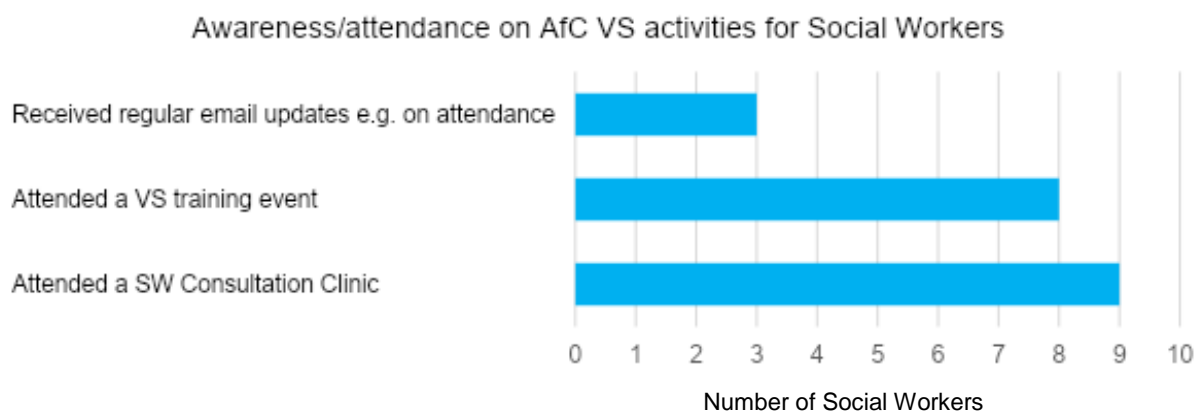


Figure 1: Social Worker awareness of and/or attendance on AfC VS activities

Table 2 shows that the social workers who answered the survey were positive about their experiences. The majority reported that the activities had resulted in a greater awareness and understanding of the education needs of CWSW, that they felt more confident about this element of their practice and had seen developments in their practice as a result of their involvement with the AfC VS activities.

Table 2: Social Worker (N=16) views on the impact of the Extended Duties programme to date

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
The activity/ies and/or information shared were relevant for my practice.	5	9	2	-	-
I have greater awareness and understanding of the educational needs of CWSW	4	10	2	-	-
I feel more confident in supporting the education of a CWSW	8	8	2	-	-
There has been some development in my practice because of my involvement in any aspect of the Virtual School programme	4	8	4	-	-

The survey included open questions where social workers were asked to explain and/or provide examples for their responses to the closed questions. As a result of the Consultation Clinics, for example, respondents had a greater understanding of special educational needs /and/or disability (SEND) processes and what questions to ask of schools such as the training offered to staff:

I questioned the school about SEND needs of the child in the Child in Need Review and this led to greater information sharing between school and social care on the child's educational needs.

The consultations are useful to gain specific information regarding what training the school staff has had and by observations, whether the school is implementing the training.

Examples, provided for increased confidence included how to advise schools on strategies to support CWSW:

It gave me specific tools to ask the school to try with the young person and also the reassurance that my concerns were valid and I was raising them in the correct way.

Finally, the comment below from a social worker indicates that the importance of holding high expectations for and of children and young people is being understood:

Education is a vital piece of the puzzle for the children we work with and we need to value that for their future success and it also contributes to their safety as higher attainment presents more possibilities for them in their later years.

## 2.7 Evidence of progress with pupil attendance

The average absence (AA) and PA rates for children classed as In Need and those children on a CP plan, in all three LAs that come under AfC, have improved between February and October 2023. In February 2023, the AA and PA rate for children class as In Need and on a CP plan, for all three LA, was above the national average for these groups, as shown in Tables 3 and 4. By October 2023, all three LAs were reporting a reduction in AA rates by 5 to 8% for children on a CP plan and a reduction in PA rates by 12 to 30% (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of Average Absence and Persistent Absence Rates for children on a CP plan from February and October 2023

	<b>AA Feb 2023 (19.5% national average)</b>	<b>AA Oct 23</b>		<b>PA Feb 2023 (56.2% national average)</b>	<b>PA Feb 2023</b>
<b>Richmond</b>	23.6%	16.8%		53.6%	42.0%
<b>Kingston</b>	22.0%	15.9%		66.3%	35.6%
<b>Royal Borough of Windsor &amp; Maidenhead</b>	23.4%	18.4%		53.6%	36.7%

For children classed as In Need, two LAs reported a reduction in AA rates by 1 to 5% and a reduction in PA rates by 9 to 14% (Table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of Average Absence and Persistent Absence Rates for children classed as In Need from February and October 2023



	<b>AA Feb 2023 (16.4% national average)</b>	<b>AA Oct 23</b>		<b>PA Feb 2023 (48.5% national average)</b>	<b>PA Oct 2023</b>
Richmond	18.2%	16.1%		49.1%	39.5%
Kingston	17.7%	18.4%		43.9%	45.9%
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	19.1%	13.8%		49.1%	35.4%

### 3. Understanding of the challenges of the long-term outcomes of the Extended Duties programme are to be achieved (Research objective 2)

The second research objective of the interim evaluation was to gain a better understanding of the challenges and risks that might act as a barrier to achieving the long-term outcomes of the Extended Duties programme intended for 2025. The analyses of the findings from the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshop and the interviews found two themes:

- the complexities of implementing the Extended Duties programme
- the system changes required of the Extended Duties programme.

#### 3.1 Complexities of implementing the Extended Duties programme

Complexity can describe a problem, an intervention and/or the context of a problem and intervention.<sup>5</sup> Implementing the Extended Duties programme fits the definition of a complex challenge as all three elements describe the programme.

Firstly, the disadvantages experienced by CWSW are many and interrelated. Although common trends might be identified, how they are experienced by a CWSW will be unique to them and their own particular context. As of March 2023, in England over 403,000 children were classed as in need and just under 51,000 children were on protection plans.<sup>6</sup> AfC has 803 children and young people classed as in need or on protection plans. Table 5 shows the level of disadvantage (nationally) in terms of academic attainment, free school meals and persistent absence experienced by pupils classed as in need compared with the overall pupil population as of March 2022.<sup>7</sup>

Table 5: Outcomes for pupils classed as in need compared with overall pupil population

	<b>Children class as In Need</b>	<b>Overall pupil population</b>
Average Attainment 8 score	20.2%	48.8%
Persistent Absence	43.8%	23%
Free School Meals	58%	23%

<sup>5</sup> Nobles, James, et al. "Ripple effects mapping: capturing the wider impacts of systems change efforts in public health." *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 22.1 (2022): 1-14.

<sup>6</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need/2023>

<sup>7</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england>

Secondly, as the REM output in Appendix 1 shows, there are several ‘interventions’ being undertaken by the AfC VS. The analyses from the REM output shows 19 different impact pathways resulting from the core activities of: establishing the data collection system with Welfare Call; overcoming the GDPR challenges and the lack of Unique Pupils Numbers for over half of the pupils to facilitate attendance data sharing; partnership meetings; training sessions, the AASA Transition Hub and Social Worker Consultation Clinics. A pathway is defined here as a chain of activities, challenges and impacts which contribute to one or more of the three main planned outcomes of the Extended Duties programme. The 19 pathways highlight just how much is involved that needs ‘to work’ to achieve the final outcomes.

The third element of complexity - context – is illustrated in the REM output (Appendix 1), by, for example, the eight different professional groups directly and indirectly involved in the lives of the young people and their families: teachers/school leaders; social workers; EPs; EWOs, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and IT teams; the AFC VS staff and social care managers. In turn, these professionals work in six different settings, within the LA: social care, schools, the AfC VS, EPS, EWO service and LA operational support.

### **3.2 System changes required of the Extended Duties programme**

The REM output highlights the extent of the system changes required if the Extended Duties programme is to achieve its long-term outcomes. Specifically, change is required:

- of multiple numbers and types of professionals in their professional beliefs, knowledge, understanding, skills and ultimately practices within and between professional groups and settings
- of structures and processes across AfC to facilitate changing practice.

For professionals’ practices to change, so too, do their beliefs, knowledge, understanding and skills. The Extended Duties guidance, for example, prioritises the importance of learning as a protective factor. For most social workers, explicitly supporting the education of CWSW is a new area. Taking attendance as an example, this entails: understanding what ‘good’ attendance looks like; knowing how to advise families and schools as to the multiple possible causes of persistent absence, strategies to use to support CWSW back into school and joining up with the existing agencies in the LA who are already supporting aspects of the Extended Duties offer holistically to schools or families e.g. work around inclusion, health and emotionally related school avoidance.

Moreover, it is not always possible to separate changes in practices from structures and processes which can overlap across different professional groups and settings. Hence, as shown

in the REM output, there have been changes in, for example, who attends certain meetings (Impact Pathway 5), the required content of a CP plan (Impact Pathway 8) and how and what new data is collected (Impact Pathway 1). One of the challenges has been that these changes have cut across teams/services bringing additional concerns about the need to be sensitive to different systems, practices and 'boundaries'.

### 3.3 Emerging evidence of system changes taking place

Another purpose of the REM workshop was to identify where there was evidence of system change taking place and which activities might yet require more evidence of impact in 2023 - 24 to ensure progress towards the long-term pupil outcomes. In the REM output, a continuous line indicates that sufficient evidence has been collected by the AfC VS, along with the additional data collected for this evaluation, that would indicate that an activity is having a meaningful impact. Three good examples of this would be the AASA (Impact Pathway 16), the Social Worker Consultation Clinics (Impact Pathway 12) and the use of weekly attendance data by the AfC VS (Impact Pathway 5) as evidenced from the findings from the teacher and AfC VS staff interviews and social worker surveys. This is not to say that every school who takes part in the AASA would report as positively as those schools interviewed or that all social workers are taking advantage of the AfC VS offer to support their development of their knowledge and understanding. The sample numbers of the survey and interviews were small and cannot be generalised for all social workers and schools. However, the findings are indicative that the AfC VS offer of activities can and do lead to their intended outcomes, if the whole context of an Impact Pathway is favourable.

A dotted line indicates that the impact of a specific activity is not yet known with sufficient confidence which can be for a number of reasons. It may be for example, in the case of the EWO collaboration (Impact Pathway 10) and the training for Child Protection Chairs (Impact Pathway 11) that the activity has only very recently started and it has been too early to assess the impact for this interim evaluation. It may be, as in the case of the Transition Hub (Impact Pathway 19), that a revision of the programme structure and assessment measures, means that meaningful data will only be available in 2024. Finally, as in the case of who is using the weekly attendance data and how it is used beyond the AfC VS team (Impact Pathway 4) would require resources beyond those that were available for this interim evaluation. Although it should be noted that this question was asked in the social worker survey and the awareness of such data was low. Another view might be that it is not possible or feasible to try and investigate the impact of every pathway and that intended changes in pupil outcomes, such as with attendance, might be the final 'litmus' test.

## 4. Summary and recommendations

This interim evaluation aimed to understand how the AfC VS is making progress against the aims of the Extended Duties DfE guidance and TOC outcomes in the first two years of a four-year DfE funded initiative and to understand the challenges and risks that might act as barriers to achieving the intended 2025 pupil outcomes.

The findings show that the AfC VS is making substantial progress against all of the 2022-23 TOC outcomes and three of the four 2023-24 TOC outcomes. Furthermore, the AfC VS can demonstrate early signs of progress against pupil outcomes (attendance) which were not anticipated by the TOC until 2025.

This progress is being achieved through implementing a thoughtfully considered strategic and extensive programme of activities that combine universal and targeted activities and interventions. The particular strengths of the programme to date have been the: very swift collection of CIN/CP data which has then been effectively used to underpin other activities including; the focus on attendance in training; the AASA; Social Worker Consultation Clinics; the strengthening of existing partnerships and establishing of new collaborations.

The AfC Extended Duties programme is in a strong position to address and withstand the challenges and risks identified through the REM workshop, not least the complexity and degree of systems change required, if the programme is to succeed with achieving its long-term pupil outcomes. Based on the findings the following recommendations are suggested for the next phase of Extended Duties programme implementation (2023-24), work towards which is already being undertaken by the AfC VS:

- continue to embed the current activities and partnerships into the routine structures and practices of all the professional groups, in order to withstand the challenges of such as complex programme
- consider how to increase capacity and capacity of parents to engage with education (2023-24 outcome)
- extend the strategic focus to capture, in-depth as well as cross cohort evidence, on the impact of the programme against two/three other pupil outcomes. For example, the Transition Hub has a focus on *children and young people having more voice and agency and feeling valued and understood* and the AfC VS may decide to focus on suspension and exclusion trends across the CWSW cohort.

# Appendix 1: Ripple Effect Mapping Output

