



MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL

Community Services Children's Services

APPENDIX III

LACES (Looked After Children Education Support) Plan 2014 - 2016

*'Putting children first..... helping
schools improve'*

Gosod

*plant yn Gyntaf..... yn helpu i
wella ysgolion*

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1.0 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 1.1 LACES (Looked after Children Education Support Service) are a team who offer support to looked after children, social workers, schools and foster carers to ensure that all children and young people in care have access to a good quality, appropriate education and the necessary support to fulfil their potential. The roles and responsibilities of the team, in line with the 'Towards a brighter life and stable future' (WAG, 2007) document and the Children Act (2004) also encompass a duty, in conjunction with leaving care services to ensure that Merthyr Tydfil care leavers are fully supported to maximise their life chances.
- 1.2 Arranged in a cluster model, there is an allocated LACES officer for each Merthyr Tydfil school and each out of county school that has a Merthyr Tydfil looked after pupil on roll. The service consists of a part time LAC Education Coordinator, 3 term time only Learning Support Officers and a part time Personal Education Plan Coordinator. It is managed by the LAC Education Coordinator who in turn is line managed by the Principal Manager for Services that Support Permanence.
- 1.3 The LACES service works closely in conjunction with fellow cluster services including the Educational Psychology Service, The Pupil Inclusion Team and the Additional Learning Needs Team.

2.0 KEY OBJECTIVES

- To promote the education of all looked after children placed within and out of area, monitoring attendance, exclusion, progress and achievement data.
- To work towards the Welsh Government objectives on the education of looked after children.
- To ensure that all children and young people in care have access to an appropriate full time education that meets their social, emotional and academic needs
- To ensure, in line with Welsh Government guidelines, that every looked after child and young person has a high quality personal education plan in place within 20 school days of entering care or changing school. To provide guidance to relevant groups on their implementation.
- To recognise and celebrate all achievements in children and young people in local authority care, however small. To celebrate these achievements in line with the children/young peoples wishes.
- To help create opportunities for children and young people in care to succeed in their chosen field.
- To offer support (pastoral, academic and/or transitional) to all looked after children and young people who require it.
- To work closely with all relevant agencies to improve the educational opportunities for children and young people in care.
- To develop working relationships with other authorities in relation to out of area placements and protocols.
- To offer transition support to all relevant looked after children and care leavers.
- To liaise with Careers Wales and Youth Services to ensure appropriate and timely support and access to universal entitlements
- To disseminate good practice, including training for elected members, foster carers, social workers, school governors and designated teachers;
- To track children and young people from other local authorities and liaise with the relevant lead person from the corporate parent authority on educational provision, progress and transitional arrangements.
- To work closely with all relevant agencies to ensure that exclusions for children and young people in public care are reduced through early intervention and the use of appropriate strategies. To provide challenge in the case of exclusion.

3.0 NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 5,755 children were looked after by Welsh local authorities at 31st March 2014.
- 3.2 At a national level, despite improvements in recent years, the achievements of looked after children remains low in comparison to their peers. 17% of looked after pupils at the 31st March 2014 gained the level 2 inclusive threshold (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including English or Welsh and Mathematics) in the 2012-2013 academic year. This figure compares with 55% for all pupils in Wales.
- 3.2 Merthyr Tydfil experiences significant socio-economic challenges. We know as an LEA that there is a higher proportion of looked after children (LAC) than the average in communities with similar levels of deprivation.
- 3.3 A large number of our looked after children have additional learning needs. In July 2014, LACES research showed that over 59% of all statutory school aged Merthyr Tydfil looked after children/young people had additional learning needs sufficient for intervention at school action, school action plus or statementing level. Of this cohort, 17% had a statement of special educational need maintained by the LEA. In light of this fact, it is important that consideration is given to achievement in looked after children as well as attainment.
- 3.4 The educational settings of all Merthyr Tydfil Looked after Children and Young People of statutory school age.

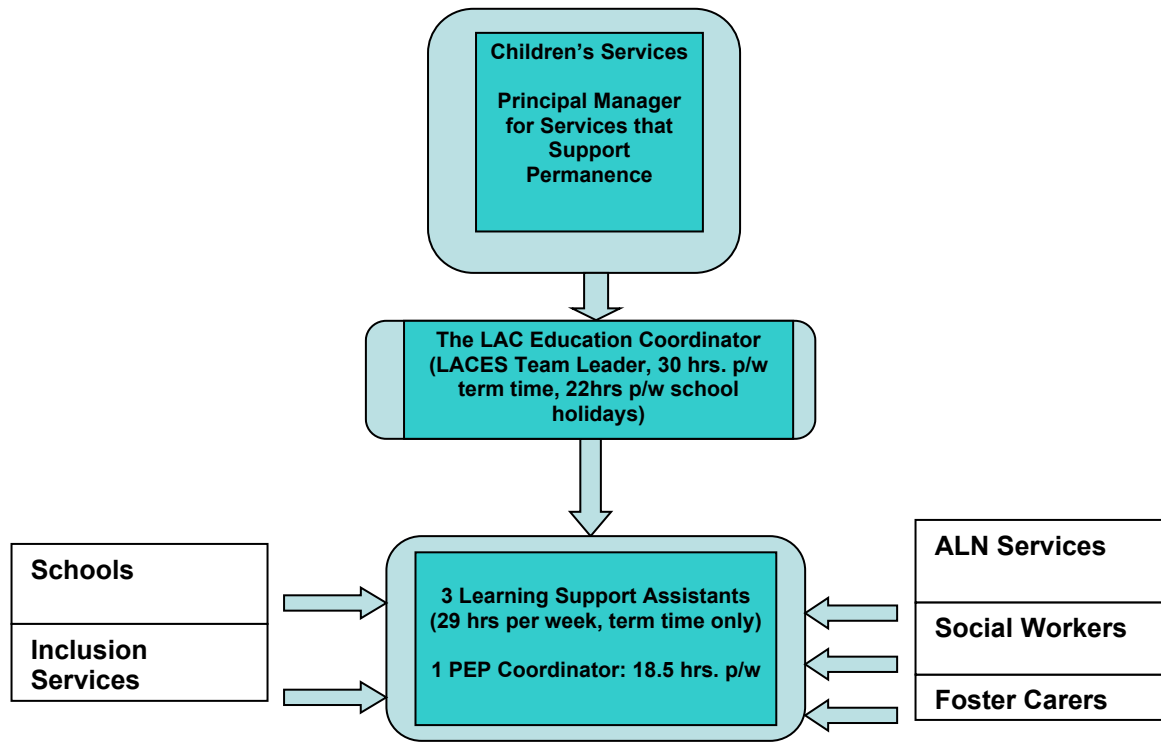
Education Setting	Number of LAC	% of LAC
Mainstream	77	66.4% (3.4% rise on 2012 figure)
Mainstream with Support	8	6.9% (1.9% rise of 2012 figure)
LRB (Learning Resource Base Class) or Special Needs Class	12	10.3% (1.7% drop on 2012 figure)
Special Tuition	1	0.9% (0.9% increase on 2012 figure)
PRU (Pupil Referral Unit)	2	1.7% (4.3% drop on 2012 figure)
Special School	12	10.3% (0.3% increase on 2012 figure)
Private Residential School/Weekly Boarding	4	3.4% (0.6% drop on 2012 figure)

*Data collected March 2014; please note mainstream with support does not include those receiving LACES support.

- 3.6 Figures obtained from the LAC Clinical Nurse Specialist suggest that of the July 2012 statutory school aged Merthyr Tydfil LAC population; just over 17% were receiving support from CAMHS, in July 2014 this figure was just 0.8%.
- 3.7 Between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014 11.2% of Merthyr Tydfil statutory school aged LAC experienced at least one or more non-transitional school move. This is a 5.5% decrease on the previous years figure. Minimised disruption to education is always considered a priority when formulating permanence plans for young people.

4.0 LACES SERVICES

4.1 Structure



4.2 LACES continuing professional development

Staff appraisals are a fundamental component of the staff development of the LACES team. They help to generate profiles that are intended to assist staff to review their competencies and to identify and articulate any staff development needs in line with the vision of the LACES. LACES meets on a fortnightly basis for full team meetings and supervision is accessed on a monthly basis by all team members.

4.3 A LACES training needs analysis is undertaken on an annual basis. The following courses have been accessed by LACES team members:

Learning Support Assistants' Annual Conference, Safeguarding Children, Dealing with Challenging Behaviour, Getting Connected Training, Parenting Children with Disordered Attachments, Catch Up Training, The Importance of Attachment in Early Childhood, CACHE Level 3 NVQ in Children's Care, Learning and Development, Behaviour Toolbox (Primary Mental Health Team), Advanced Child Protection training – Policy and Process, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Therapeutic Approaches to Challenging Behaviour, Hidden Harm Training, Caring for Children and Young People Involved in Sexually Harmful Behaviour, Safeguarding Children Involved in Sexual Exploitation, Trauma triggered behaviour in looked after and adopted children, Attachment in the classroom, Neuroscience and physiological development and the impact of trauma in children, Making a Connection: A focus on the needs of young people leaving care, Pupil Centred Approach Training, Louise Bomber Attachment in the Classroom Training. Supporting the pupil who has experienced significant relational traumas and losses, data protection and information management, attachment difficulties, level 2 safeguarding children, ELSA Training.

4.4 SWOT Analysis

4.4.1 Strengths of the LACES Service

The LACES Service:

- has experienced, qualified and committed staff at all levels;
- has valuable links with the Educational and Child Psychology Service and other cluster model teams within the LEA.
- has a robust policy in relation to informal support and supervision;
- contributes to school improvement;
- has good relationships with all schools in Merthyr Tydfil and out of county.
- has positive relationships with foster carers;
- has good relationships with specialist services such as Careers Wales and Barnardos;
- has good inter-LEA working arrangements with other LEAs, enhanced by the Central South Consortium;
- provides an easily accessible service;
- provides relevant training, to schools, carers and relevant professionals;
- has a flexible approach to additional learning needs;
- has a well motivated staff base with a positive attitude to work;
- has the ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines;
- has good within team working relationships; and
- has a dedicated part time administration support/Personal Education Plan Coordinator.

4.4.2 Weaknesses of the LACES Service

The LACES Service:

- is stretched in regards to its workforce (currently 3 LSA's cover 4 Merthyr Tydfil secondary schools, one special school and all primary school feeders). The LAC Education Coordinator maintains case responsibility for all out of county cases.
- is stretched by increases in the Merthyr Tydfil LAC population.
- is stretched by the logistical constraints of a high number of Merthyr Tydfil LAC placed out of county, some at a significant distance away; and
- lacks a dedicated Educational Psychologist for LAC.

4.4.3 Threats to the LACES Service include:

- The difficulty in meeting increasing demand, particularly for those who are placed at significant distance from their home authority.
- A need to cut local authority budgets.
- A high demand for specialist educational placements that are equipped to meet the needs of our highly complex looked after children.

5.0 NATIONAL PLANS AND GUIDANCE

5.1 The service is influenced and shaped by the following national plans, strategies and priorities.

5.1.1 National Plans

a) **Towards a Stable Life and Brighter Future (2007)**

Welsh Assembly Government guidance and regulations that strengthen the placement, education and wellbeing of looked after children and young people. The arrangements are intended to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the child and that placements are made close to home wherever possible. They are also intended to improve the coordination between agencies and the regulations use powers, provided under the Children Act 2004, to ensure that all agencies co-operate fully in delivering their corporate parenting responsibilities.

b) **The Education (Admission of Looked After Children) (Wales) Regulations 2009**

Regulations on the admission arrangements under which LAC pupils are to be admitted to maintained schools in Wales in the school year 2010/2011 and any subsequent school year.

c) **The Children Act (2004)**

The Children Act 2004 placed a duty on services to ensure that every child, whatever their background or circumstances, has the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve through learning, make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic wellbeing.

d) **The Belonging Regulations (1996) and Amendments to the Belonging Regulations (2009)**

The Belonging Regulations make provision for determining the local education authority to whose area a young person belongs. These regulations apply for the purposes of recoupment and mandatory awards.

e) **If This Were My Child – A councillor’s guide to being a good corporate - 2009**

Published by the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association, this document is intended to remind elected members of their responsibility to act as good corporate parents to children who are looked after and care leavers.

6.0 MAKING IT HAPPEN

6.1 Strategies, in addition to the LACES cluster model support system, currently being employed to help achieve the key objectives:

- **Personalised Education Plans (PEPS) for each Merthyr Tydfil looked after child/young person -**
These plans are designed to establish clear targets and actions to respond effectively to each child's needs and provide a continuous record of their achievements. They are also an opportunity to listen to child/young person, record their hopes and worries and clearly show their stated aspirations. A PEP meeting is set up within 20 school days for each looked after child who becomes accommodated by the Local Authority or changes school. LACES, social worker, foster carers, school, young person and parents (if appropriate) are invited to this meeting to share relevant background information and update the plan accordingly. These plans are reviewed on a regular basis in line with the LAC review process.
- **Pupil Deprivation Grant LAC Funding (PDG LAC) –** The LAC element of the PDG in 2014-2015 was allocated to schools on the basis of £918 per statutory school aged looked after child on their roll, and £450 per relevant looked after child in 2013-2014. From 2015-2016 PDG LAC will be managed and administered by the regional education consortia to deliver interventions and support on a strategic level. The focus remains increasing literacy and numeracy levels and closing the gap. Looked after pupil numbers eligible for this grant are calculated on Social Services SSDA data from the previous year.
- **School Effectiveness Grant LAC Funding (SEGLAC) –** This funding stream was managed centrally by the LAC Education Coordinator. This funding was currently used to address the following needs:
 - 1) To offer bespoke school support packages to key stage 1 and 2 out of county looked after children who are at risk of not achieving the CSI at the end of key stage 2.
 - 2) To offer focused English and Mathematics tuition to looked after children with the intention of raising the percentage of pupils achieving the Level 2 inclusive threshold and the CSI at the end of key stage 3.
 - 3) As detailed within Higher Education Bursary Regulations, to provide a £2,000 payment to each relevant care leavers who moves on to access a HE course.
 - 4) To offer bespoke packages of support to Merthyr Tydfil looked after pupils who are at risk of exclusion and not achieving a level 1 or level 2 inclusive threshold.

Regular reviews of progression and attainment data allowed us to ensure that we were targeting need appropriately. From 2015-2016, SEGLAC funding ceased and alternative funding arrangements are being arranged via PDG LAC.

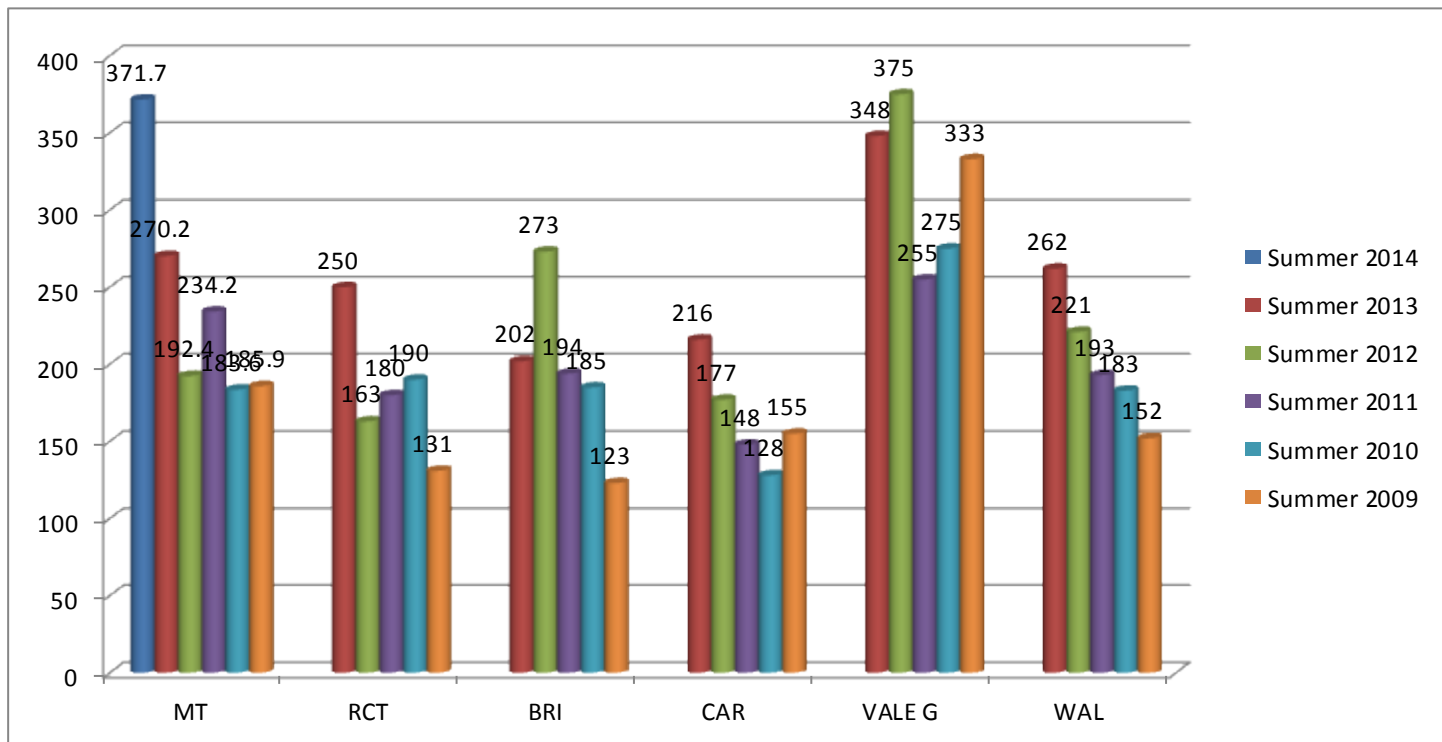
- **Additional after School Tuition** – additional focused tuition is available to all looked after children/young people and this is readily taken up. Prior to tuition commencing, a meeting takes place between the tutor, the school, young person and carer to agree priorities, actions and anticipated outcomes. A learning plan is drawn up for each individual pupil and reviewed on a regular basis.
- **Foster carer training, supervision and development** – Foster carers have a pivotal role to play in promoting education and championing good outcomes for the young people in their care. It is essential that foster carers are aspirational for our looked after children, recognise their strengths and talents and support to nurture and develop these skills. Training is offered to carers on promoting a 24 hour curriculum giving them the skills and techniques they need to support in delivering better outcomes for looked after children.
- **The Letterbox Club** – This Book Trust Cymru project intends to raise literacy and numeracy levels in key stage 2 and 3 looked after children through personalised monthly parcels containing literacy and numeracy resources.
- **Transitional support** – in addition to the transitional support that is offered by dedicated LACES officers to statutory school aged pupils as they move through the key stages, we also recognise the importance of clear formalised arrangements and protocols to support the transition of looked after pupils into post 16 education and training settings. The LACES team has established a clear protocol with Merthyr Tydfil College with regards to this and is in the process of looking at how this model is rolled out with other colleges and training providers. There are clear arrangements in place to monitor the transitional arrangements for all year 11 Merthyr Tydfil looked after pupils to eliminate those pupils at risk of NEET status, and a close working relationship with the Barnardos team who deliver our leaving care service. The LAC Education Coordinator sits on the NEET Operational Group and also meets regularly with the manager of the lead working team in the authority to support efforts to reduce LAC NEETS.
- **Training** – We offer regular training to schools, foster carers and social workers on key themes to support better outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. On a regional level, it is proposed that Central South Consortium PDG LAC funding is used partly to establish a consortium wide rolling training calendar for schools, FE and HE institutions, training providers, Children’s Services and Foster Carers on the fundamental issues associated with supporting vulnerable LAC learners to achieve their academic potential. There are also plans to establish a Consortium wide professional learning forum for LAC Designated teaching staff and leads for LAC in FE and HE institutions.

7.0 MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

7.1

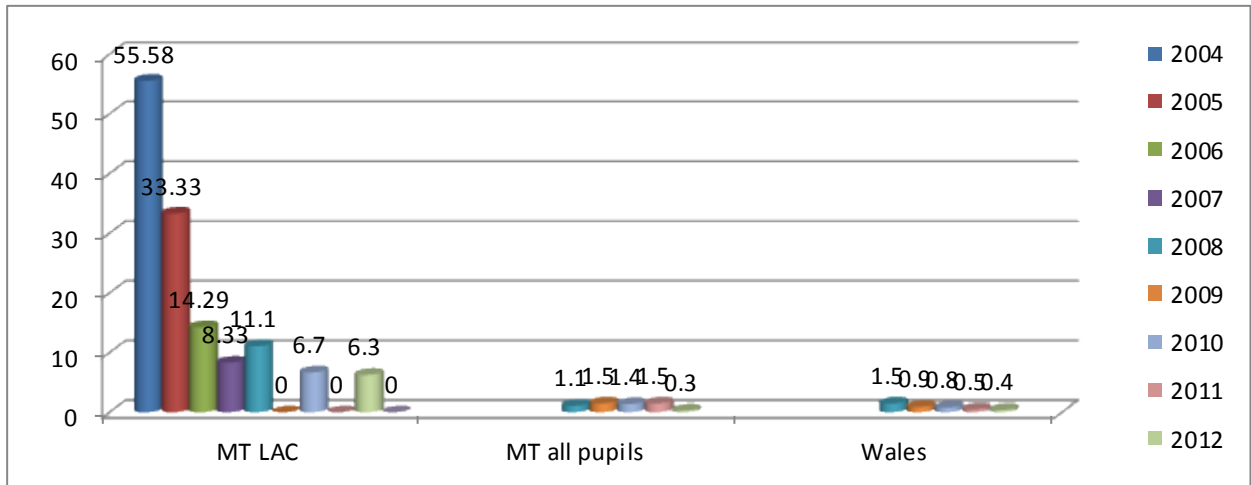
The LACES service recognises the need to carefully monitor, evaluate and review its own practice. The LAC Education Coordinator carries out regular reviews of key aspects of the service. The LACES service consults service recipients on a variety of aspects of the service they have received. Budget reviews are conducted regularly.

A comparison of the average external qualification point score of 16 year old LAC across the Central South Consortium



Aside from a slight dip in in 2011-2012, Merthyr Tydfil’s average LAC external point score performance at key stage 4 has remained above the Welsh LAC average since 2008-2009. During these periods, Merthyr Tydfil is placed in the middle quartile across Wales with regards to performance. In 2011-2012 Merthyr Tydfil’s did fall below the Welsh average, placing us between the lower and median quartile. It should be noted however that this year’s figure was influenced by the fact that 25% of the cohort attended a specialist residential provision for SEBD or a special school setting for moderate to severe learning difficulties. Although it is recognised that excuses should not be made for under performance in looked after children, it is also important that significant social, emotional factors are considered when analysing the data.

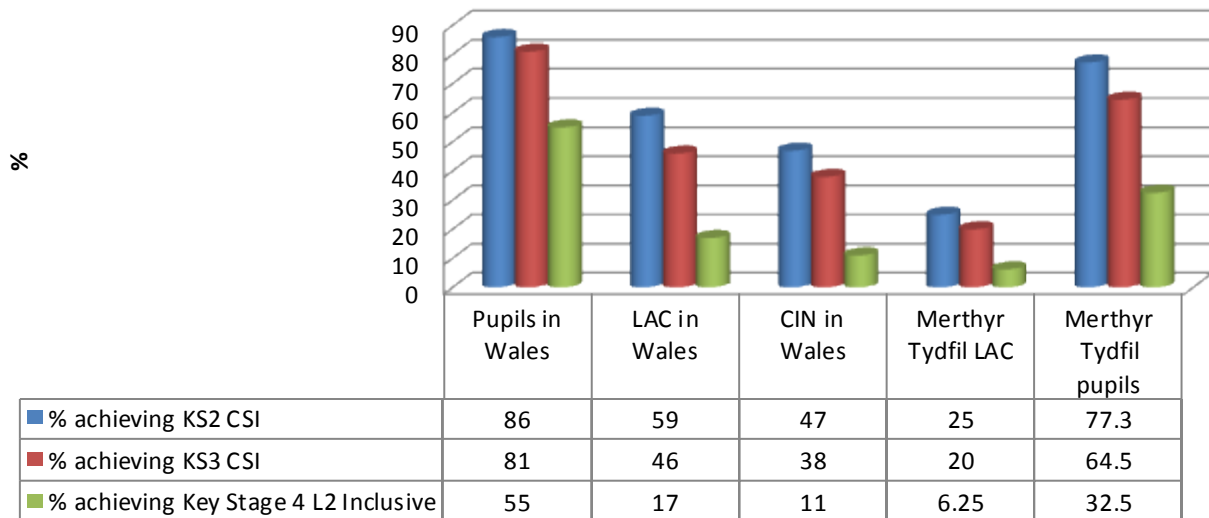
A graph to illustrate the % of 16 year old pupils who leave education without an accredited qualification



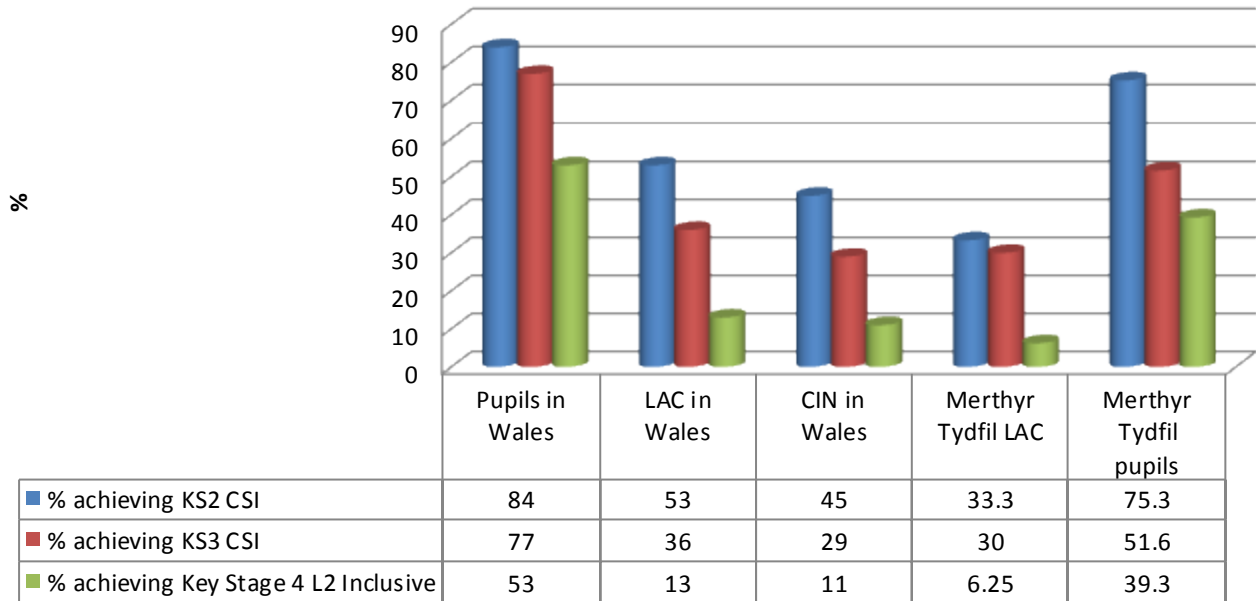
It should be noted that the performance of Merthyr Tydfil looked after children and young people across the key stages remains significantly poorer than the performance of all pupils across Merthyr Tydfil, and that of all pupils across Wales. As a Local Authority, and regionally within the Central South Consortium, with the support of the Welsh Government we are committed to working with key partners to support children who are looked after to achieve better educational outcomes and fulfil their potential. Closing the gap is a 'Corporate Parent' responsibility and to achieve success it is essential that all partners work collectively towards agreed objectives.

The gap between the educational outcomes of all pupils, LAC in Wales, Children in need in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil LAC and all Merthyr Tydfil pupils at 31st March 2014

(based on academic year 2012-2013)

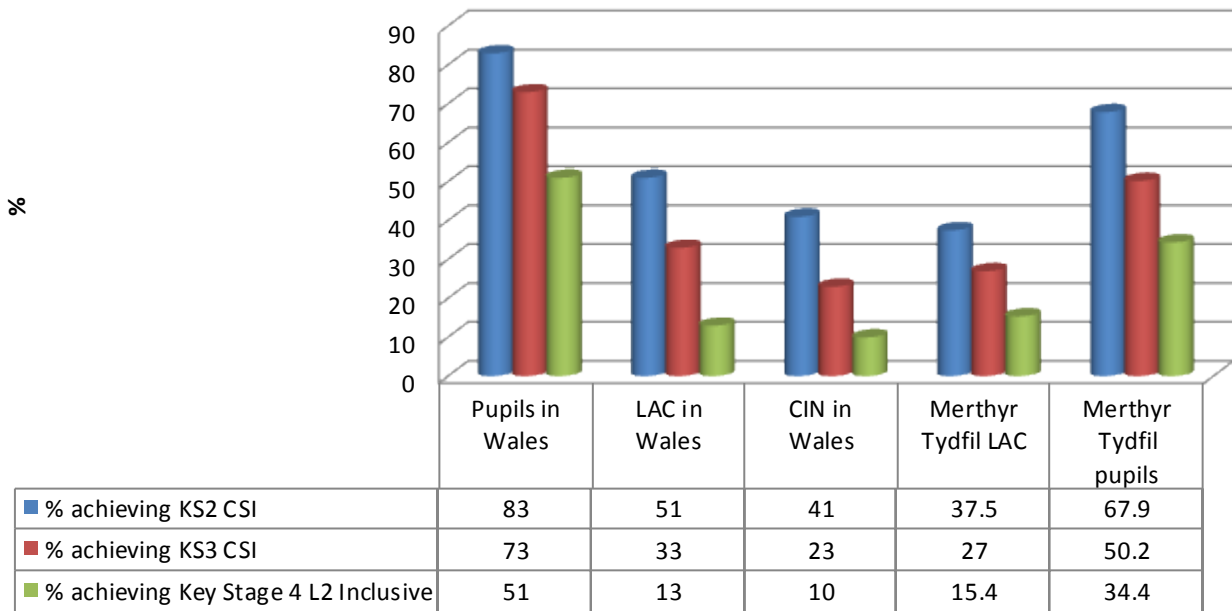


The gap between the educational outcomes of all pupils, LAC in Wales, Children in need in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil LAC and all Merthyr Tydfil pupils at 31st March 2013 (based on academic year 2011-2012)



The gap between the educational outcomes of all pupils, LAC in Wales, Children in need in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil LAC and all Merthyr Tydfil pupils at 31st March 2012

(based on academic year 2010-2011)



7.2 Personal Education Plans

Under Welsh Government guidance on the education of looked after children, a good quality PEP (Personal Education Plan) should be agreed and initiated within 20 school days of a looked after child entering care or joining a new school. Merthyr Tydfil is working hard to meet this target; the data below demonstrates our capability in this area. The LACES team's dedicated PEP Coordinator is currently responsible for initiating PEPs ready for completion at a PEP meeting within the required timescale and updating them fully following this meeting.

	% of Merthyr Tydfil PEP's initiated in line with statutory guidelines.	All Wales Average
2007-2008	94.74%	52.13%
2008-2009	93.02%	65.51%
2009-2010	98.3%	61.4%
2010 – 2011	88.7%	60.3%
2011-2012	92.6%	63.5%
2012-2013	95.7%	65%
2013-2014	93.9%	Figure not yet available

It is proposed that Individual Development Plans (IDP's) replace statements of SEN, post 16 assessments (under section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000) and non-statutory Individual Education Plans (IEPs). It was proposed that IDPs would be able to either replace or serve the function of the PEP currently required in respect of all LAC learners. The Welsh Government will consider responses to the White Paper as it develops the detail of the provisions to be included in a draft bill, to be introduced into the National Assembly for Wales in 2015.

For further information on Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's current PEP process please refer to the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council PEP Guidance and accompanying flow chart (July 2012).

7.3 Attendance

We are committed to ensuring that all looked after children and young people have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. Regular attendance at school is a significant factor in achieving this.

	MT LAC Primary Attendance	MT LAC Secondary Attendance
2009 - 2010	95.6%	91.3%
2010 - 2011	95.1%	94.6%
2011-2012	96.8%	95.6%
2012-2013	97.4%	97.3%
2013-2014	97.9%	96.5%

7.4 LAC Exclusions

	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of LAC who received a fixed term exclusion	Average number of days fixed exclusion
2008 – 2009	0 (0%)	9	9.8
2009 – 2010	1 (0.9%)	13	6.5
2010 - 2011	1 (1%)	14	7.6
2011 - 2012	1 (0.9%)	14	8
2012 - 2013	1 (0.9%)	7	4.4
2013 – 2014	0 (0%)	7	7.4

The lives of looked after children are often characterised by emotional stress and their continuum of learning is frequently disrupted as a result of these difficulties. As a team we work closely in conjunction with behaviour support services, Educational Psychology Service, schools and relevant private sectors organisations to monitor and address the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion. All LACES learning support officers are fully ELSA trained, equipping them with the skills required to best support our vulnerable LAC in Merthyr Tydfil schools.

7.6 LACES Recipient Consultation

Of 131 authorities who participated in the 2007 Audit Commission Survey of school's views of their LEA, Merthyr Tydfil was ranked 9th in regards to the 'quality of advice, support and training' offered to teachers with a designated responsibility for LAC.

In the summer term 2012 the LACES Service undertook their annual survey with Merthyr Tydfil schools looking at their views of the service offered.

75% felt the usefulness of LACES was highly valued in/significantly improves educational outcomes for looked after children, the remaining 25% of schools felt that the service was useful in their work to improve outcomes for looked after children.

* Survey conducted with 86% of schools with Merthyr Tydfil looked after children on roll

Some of the comments given by schools, pupils and foster carers over the past three years demonstrate the value of the service.

"It raises the pupils self esteem as they have a special contact within the school who is not part of the teaching team" – Ysgol Y Graig Primary School.

"LACES 1:1 support has given our looked after children the opportunity to share feelings they would not do in a class room setting" – Gellifaelog Primary School.

"I feel less upset because I've got someone to talk to" – year 7 Pen-y-dre pupil

"... has clearly gained in confidence as a result of LACES intervention, she is now willing to have a go at things she previously wouldn't have tried. I have noticed a definite improvement in her literacy levels since LACES started working with her." – Foster Carer

'I now write better and listen better' – Year 4 Coed-y-Dderwen Primary School Pupil

'Pen y dre High School is appreciative of its continued good links with LACES. This is a vital provision for vulnerable learners.' – Mr. Jones (LAC Designated Teacher, Pen y dre High School)

'I'm not so worried now about going to Afon Taf in September' – Year 6 Gellifaelog Pupil who has been receiving transition support via LACES.

Annual larger scale LACES training events are organised for designated teaching staff, foster carers and social workers. The focus of these events is determined by individual training needs. Previous events have focused on attachment, behaviour and learning, neuroscience and physiological development and the impact of trauma in children. The LAC Education Coordinator continues to present regularly to groups such as SENCO forum and offers training to LSA's and school governors. LACES learning support officers continue to meet with LAC designated teachers on a regular basis to address individual training needs.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The LACES service has clear strategies to assist it to fulfil its own key objectives and strategic priorities. These strategies are translated into clearly defined activities for the service to perform. Each strategy continues to be monitored and evaluated by the LAC Education Coordinator to ensure it is fit for purpose and is meeting the needs of the recipient group.
- 8.2 This plan will help focus the efforts the LACES team in achieving its key objectives for the forthcoming years.
- 8.3 The LACES service continues to grow and develop in line with the educational needs of Merthyr Tydfil's LAC population. Through careful management it will continue to ensure that a high quality, efficient, effective and economic service is provided to all Merthyr Tydfil looked after children and those who work directly or indirectly with them.