

Annual Report

2019-20

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the work of the Virtual School within the academic year 2019-20.

Where we were in 2018-19

Summary of performance against Key Priorities

-  = Good Performance
-  = there is some improvement but there is still concern
-  = an area of underperformance

Priority	Achieved	Analysis
Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on those in Key Stage 4.		This remained an area of focus as there was under performance in GLD and Maths across the Key Stages.
Improve the quality of Personal Education Plans, with a particular focus on target setting and impact measures for Pupil Premium Plus.		Whilst the quality of the PEPs completed had improved, target setting and Pupil Premium Plus impact were still not consistent. In addition completion at Early Years and Post 16 was variable.
Improve the focus on Post 16 outcomes by supporting social care colleagues to complete the Post 16 Personal Education Plans and develop more robust tracking systems for engagement in Education, Employment and Training (EET).		Post 16 PEP completion remained variable due to capacity issues within social care. 16-19 year olds engagement in EET remained good, but 19 – 22 year olds were more likely to be Not to be engaged in EET (NEET).
Reduce the length and frequency of fixed term exclusions for Halton children in care by challenging exclusions given, to ensure they are appropriate and proportionate, ensuring support is in place to reduce the likelihood of repeat occurrences and further embed an understanding of trauma related behaviour within our schools.		Training from the Virtual School was tailored specifically around developing strategies to meet the social, emotional and behaviour needs of children in care. Whilst this will take time to embed there were positive signs of impact on duration and frequency of exclusions.
Appoint two highly qualified senior leaders from Primary and Secondary phases as PEP and Progress Coordinators.		PEP and Progress Coordinators came into post Nov 2018 and January 2019. There was positive impact on PEP completion and overall quality.
Review our support for Care Leavers with a particular focus on sustaining engagement to education and apprenticeships.		A review was undertaken which resulted in a realignment of the roles and responsibilities within the Virtual School and a dedicated member of the team was allocated a direct case load of care leavers at risk of becoming NEET. A review of other LA approaches

		was also undertaken and recommendations for an improved model of support was presented to Chief Officer's Management Team for consideration.
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What we did this year in 2019-20

Summary of performance against the Key Priorities identified for the current academic year

The academic year 2019-20 was severely interrupted by the COVID 19 pandemic which resulted in schools closing on 23rd March 2020 and not fully re-opening for the remainder of the school year. This has obviously impacted upon progress towards the key priorities that had been identified. Where possible, a summary of the outcomes has been provided but due to the unprecedented circumstances it is not possible to compare this academic year with the previous year.

Below are the overarching key priorities identified for 2019-20.

-  = Good Performance
-  = there is some improvement but there is still concern
-  = an area of underperformance

Priority	Achieved	Analysis
Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care peers, with a particular focus on those in Key Stage 4.		Due to COVID 19 restrictions only GCSE results were awarded and these were based on teacher assessments. Performance improved in all areas with the exception of the higher grades. This remains a focus for the Virtual School.
Improve the quality of Personal Education Plans, including Early Years and Post 16, with a particular focus on target setting, impact measures for Pupil Premium Plus and tracking the curriculum accessed.		Due to COVID 19 formal education was suspended from March 2020, therefore, the PEPs were amended to reflect the new circumstances so a year on year comparison is not possible. Pupil Premium Plus was also not able to be utilised in the same way as no formal teaching was undertaken for the Spring and Summer terms.
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.		Due to COVID 19 restrictions it was not possible to complete this.
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.		Due to COVID 19 restrictions formal education was suspended from March 2020. However, for the time pupils were in school there was a reduction in exclusions for the Autumn and Spring

		terms in comparison with the previous year.
Monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school rated as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.	~	Due to COVID 19 restrictions formal education was suspended from March 2020 therefore progress measures cannot be compared across the years. However, challenge and support visits were undertaken in the academic year up to the suspension of formal education.
Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	×	Due to the suspension of formal education as a result of COVID 19 restrictions progress and attendance outcomes for SEND pupils could not be formally monitored from March 2020.
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 19 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	×	COVID 19 restrictions and the loss of capacity within the Virtual School have impacted on progress in this area.

Within this academic year Ofsted conducted Halton’s Inspection of Children’s Services (ILACS) which encompassed the education of children and young people in care and care leavers. Whilst no individual judgement is provided in this area, inspectors stated during feedback that:

- The overall work of the Virtual School is good.
- The Virtual School has established a strong and positive team, with good communication links to Children Social Care.
- The Virtual School is held in very high regards by schools and that this was unanimous, including those out of borough.
- The Virtual School has an accurate picture of its strengths and areas of improvement.

They outlined 3 areas that the Virtual School needs to focus on – which have always been reflected in our key priorities:

- Improving outcomes at Key Stage 4
- Improving outcomes in Maths, which is also a borough wide priority.
- Improving apprenticeship opportunities.

The final report stated that (March 2020):

‘The virtual school has a positive presence and is held in high regard by schools. It has an accurate picture of strengths and areas for improvement, and a number of new initiatives have been implemented to improve educational outcomes for children in care. However, the impact of these initiatives is not yet evident, for example from the work to improve children’s attainment at key stage 4. Children’s personal education plans at key stage 1 and key stage 2

are completed thoroughly and well. However, children's personal educational plans at other key stages are too variable, and some lack clear targets for improvement and do not support educational planning effectively.

They (Care Leavers) have access to a broad range of services, and are supported well with education, employment or training needs, as well as emotional and physical health issues.... The local authority has plans to further improve the choice available for 16 to 18-year-old care leavers. There has been a reduction of care leavers in employment, education or training (EET). The local authority is seeking to improve the range of opportunities available.'

Other key performance during 2019-20:

The numbers of children having either a school and/or a placement move during the academic year has remained low. This is as a result of good joint working between the Virtual School and social workers.

Monitoring of all other key indicators did continue throughout the academic year but this has been complicated by the COVID restrictions. Nonetheless these outcomes remained positive for our children and young people in care.

The Virtual School had planned a full training and activity programme and some events did take place up to February half term. Since March 2020 it has not been possible to provide any face to face training or activity support due to COVID 19 restrictions. However, virtual support has been provided to professionals and young people alike.

Further details of how the Virtual School has responded to the COVID pandemic is covered in the sections within the report.

What we will focus on in 2020-21

Priority	Rationale
To ensure that all Halton children in care continue to access their educational entitlement throughout the COVID 19 pandemic.	Due to the COVID 19 pandemic children in care did not receive formal education from March 2020. This will have impacted upon their progress and overall engagement. We need to ensure that all children in care return to school and are provided with all appropriate support to enable them to catch up on lost learning and continue making progress.
Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on achieving the higher grades in Key stage 4.	It will be important to focus on all end of key stage results due to the loss of learning in 2019-20. Analysis at Key Stage 4 shows that improvements need to be made particularly in the number of young people achieving areas of English and Maths at the higher grades.
Improve the quality of Personal Education Plans, including Early Years and Post 16, with a particular focus on target setting,	Ofsted highlighted the need to improve the quality of PEPs in Early Years and Post 16 and in the consistency of target setting at Key Stage 4.

impact measures for Pupil Premium Plus and tracking the curriculum accessed.	
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	It was not possible to achieve this in 2019-20 but it remains an important tool to understand how our use of Pupil Premium Plus can have greater impact on improving the outcomes for all children in care.
To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%	Whilst there has been improvement this year, it has been a different year for attendance. We need to keep the focus on ensuring that our secondary age pupils are in school and learning.
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	It will be important to monitor the impact of returning to education on the social, emotional and behavioural needs of children in care and to ensure that exclusions and lost learning is minimised.
Monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school rated as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.	Ofsted inspections were suspended during COVID 19 restrictions so our schools remain at the previous academic year judgements. Once formal education has resumed it will be important to track the progress of those children in school that are judged below Good to ensure that they are being supported and making progress.
Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	This was not completed during the previous academic year but will be a focus so we can more robustly monitor our SEND pupils as a discreet cohort.
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 19 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	This was identified as an area of focus within our Ofsted inspection. We need to both increase the capacity of the Virtual School and develop more robust strategies in terms of engagement in EET and particularly opportunities to take part in an apprenticeship.
Improve capacity within the Virtual School to extend the direct approach to include 19-22 year old care leavers.	As above this was identified as an area of improvement within our Ofsted.

CONTEXT

Halton is a small borough which consists of two towns, Runcorn and Widnes. The population is 129,410 of which around 30,200 are children and young people.

At the time of writing, the Index of Deprivation Measure (IDM) places Halton as 19th most deprived area nationally, a deterioration from previous IDMs. Alongside this we have the 2nd highest national Free School Meal population for Primary and 10th highest for Secondary. The local economy is amongst the fastest growing in the Liverpool City region, and has a good proportion of high value industries. However, the educational profile of the borough is not at a level to take advantage of some of the job opportunities.

The purpose of the Virtual School is to enable all children and young people in care to Halton to become resilient and effective independent learners, so that they can achieve their full potential and become full and active participants in society.

Halton Virtual School Team

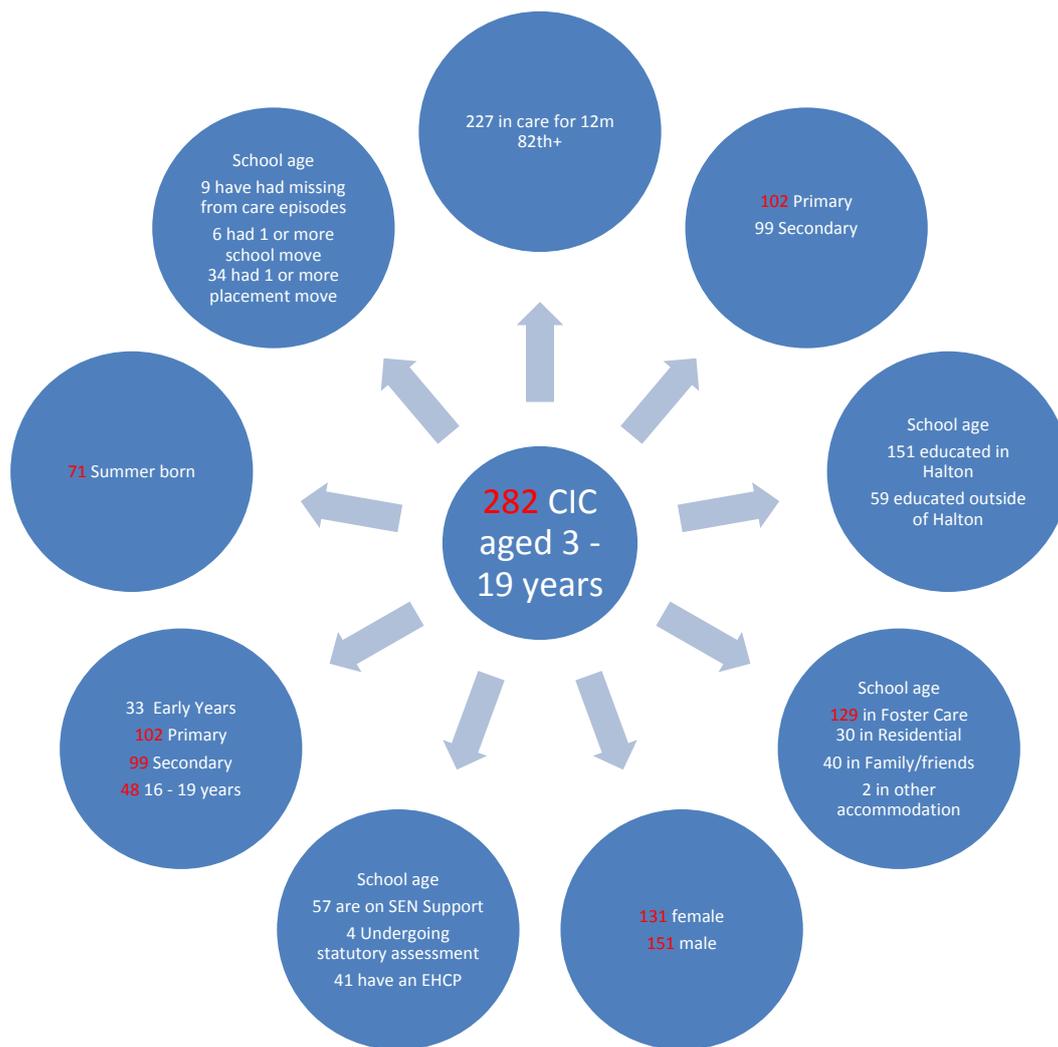
Headteacher of the Virtual School	Sharon Williams	Core funded	Education, Inclusion and Provision Directorate
PEP Coordinators Primary Secondary	Joanne Lloyd Peter McPartland	Pupil Premium Plus	Co-located with Children in Care and Care Leavers Team, Children and Families Directorate
Education Support Worker	Min Ling Lee-Tai	Core funded	Co-located with Children in Care and Care Leavers Team, Children and Families Directorate
Post 16 Education Support Worker	Vacant	Core funded	Co-located with Children in Care and Care Leavers Team, Children and Families Directorate

The position of Post 16 Education Support Worker became vacant in March 2020 shortly before the COVID 19 pandemic measures were put in place. As a result we have not been able to recruit to the post as yet. However, it is a priority for the next academic year.

We have additional capacity provided via other education services:

- Named SEN Case Worker – provides support with EHCPs and finding appropriate specialist provision
- Named Education Welfare Officer – provides attendance alerts and advice
- Education Psychology – commissioned to provide training and advice for schools

We support and promote the education of all children in care (CIC) to Halton regardless of where they are living or being educated, from the age of 3 until they have completed their formal education. For the purposes of national performance reporting the cohort of children and young people consists of those that have been in care to Halton for at least 12 months from 31st March 2020. However, we do support, monitor and evaluate the educational outcomes of all children from the first day they enter care. The following information is accurate at the end of the academic year 2019-20:



Governance of the Virtual School is undertaken by the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership Board which has multi-disciplinary membership, including Headteacher representation and the Director of Children and Adults Services, and is chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People. In addition further scrutiny and oversight is provided by Elected Members through the Children and Young People’s Policy and Performance Board.

A key area for the Virtual School is to ensure that there is collaborative working with all services that help to support and promote the education of children in care and care leavers. This includes professionals from Children’s Social Care, other services across the Local Authority, Schools, carers, key partners and most importantly the children and young people. The Virtual School team achieves this by the following:

- Being fully active support members to the Children in Care and Care Leavers Council attending each session and regularly consulting with the members on educational issues.
- Membership of the Fostering Panel to ensure that providing support for education is a key part of carer’s assessments and when placing and matching children to carers.
- Membership of the Foster Carers Forum to ensure that any education related issues for foster carers can be addressed as they arise, including provision of training.

- Membership of the Placement Resource Panel and the Out of Borough Resource Panel to ensure that education provision is not disrupted without the agreement of the Headteacher of the Virtual School and only in exceptional circumstances.
- Membership of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel to ensure that support is provided both in school and at home.
- Membership and Chair of the North West Virtual Heads network groups focusing on sharing good practice, developing strategies to overcome shared challenges and plan effectively on a regional footing.
- Membership of Halton's associations of Primary and Secondary Headteachers.

NOTE

Unless stated the data within this report covers ALL children in care in 2019-20 and not only those in care for 12 months or more. The Attainment and Progress section focuses on the 12 month cohort only.

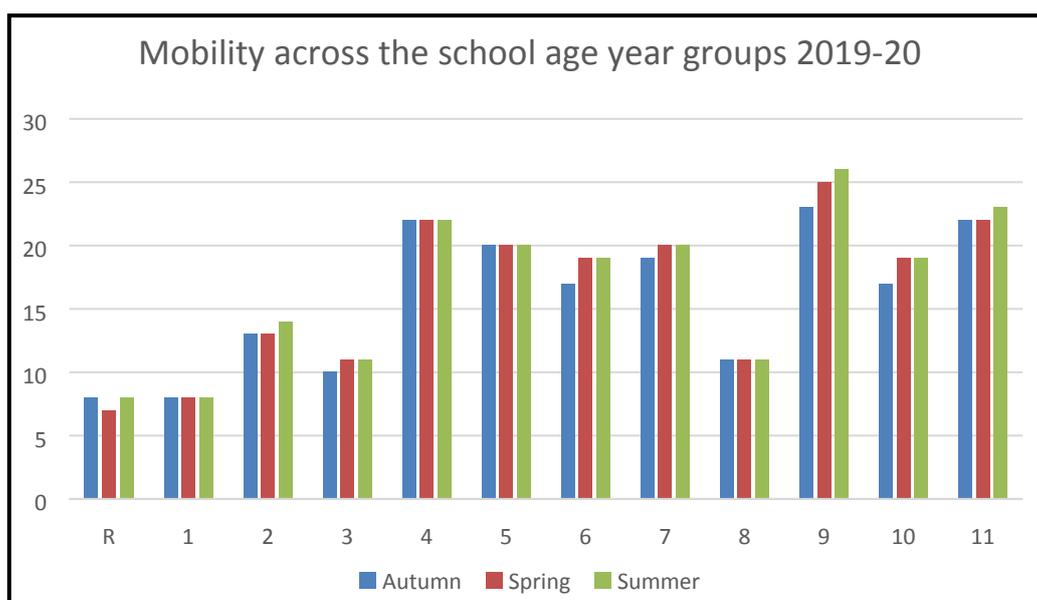
Profile and Demographics

Joiners and Leavers

The total number of children in care continues to increase and at the end of the academic year 2019 – 20 the total number was 282, 3 – 19 year olds; this is an 12.8% increase on the end of the previous academic year, 2018-19, which also had an 11.6% increase from 2017-18.

For the school age cohort in August 2019- July 2020 there were 5 Primary aged children who came into care with only 1 leaving care. There were 10 young people who came into care in the Secondary phase and 3 who returned home. Years 9 and 10 had the most additions to their cohort. This is significant as they are late entries into care who have had significant disruption due to the COVID 19 restrictions along with their previous issues, which may impact negatively on their end of key stage outcomes.

Yr	Joiners	Leavers	Net
R	1	1	0
1	0	0	0
2	1	0	1
3	1	0	1
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	2	0	2
7	2	1	1
8	2	0	2
9	3	0	3
10	2	0	2
11	1	2	1



Placement and School Moves

The national research 'Education Matters in Care' suggests that any placement move will have a detrimental impact on a child's educational attainment unless it is carefully planned, timed and supported:

'Being able to stay at the same school and avoid disruption to their education has a strong association with educational attainment for looked after children.'

In addition, Sonia Jackson's research suggests that every school move sets a child back by at least 6 months educationally.

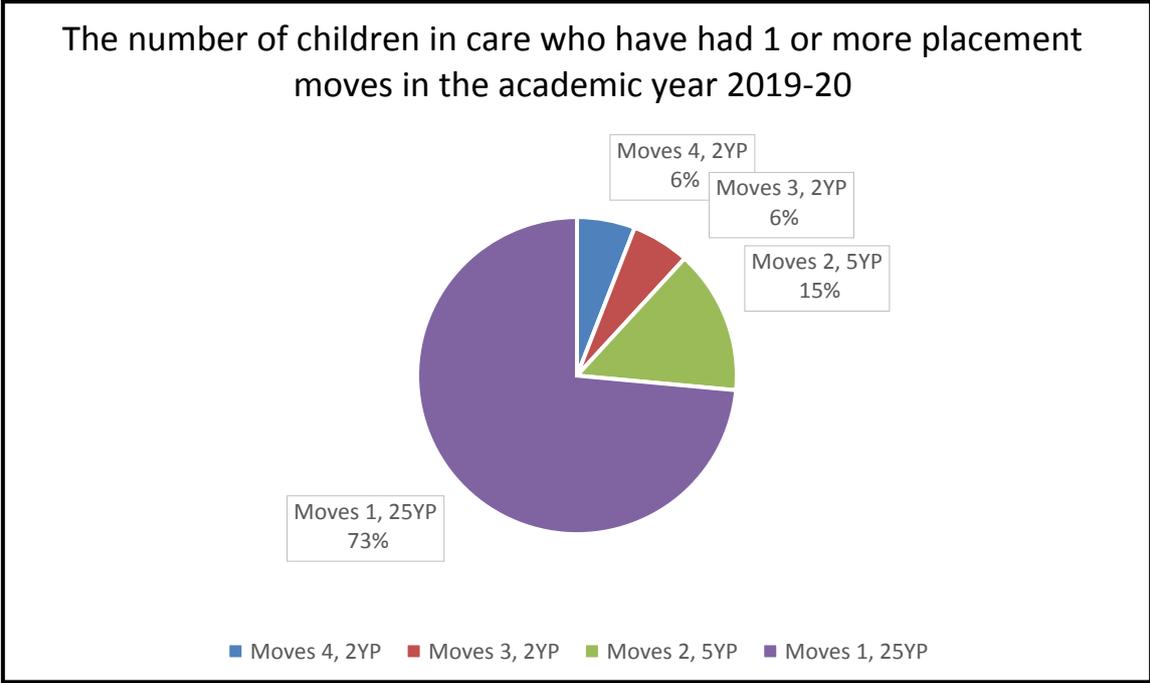
Care Planning Regulations and the statutory duty on local authorities 'Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children' clearly state that:

- The views of the Headteacher of the Virtual School should be given appropriate weighting as part of any decisions on placement moves.
- When a child comes into care everything should be done to maintain the child's existing school.
- Where this is not possible and there is a planned entry to care or placement move, then the school should be arranged at the same time as the care placement.
- If a child needs to move in an emergency and the existing school cannot be maintained, then a school should be sourced within 20 school days at the latest.
- A school with an Ofsted rating of Good or better should be prioritised when sourcing a new school for a child in care.

Placement moves

There were 34 children and young people who had 1 or more placement move during the academic year 2019-20. This number is a reduction of 25 on the previous year, due in part to the impact of COVID 19 restrictions. Of these:

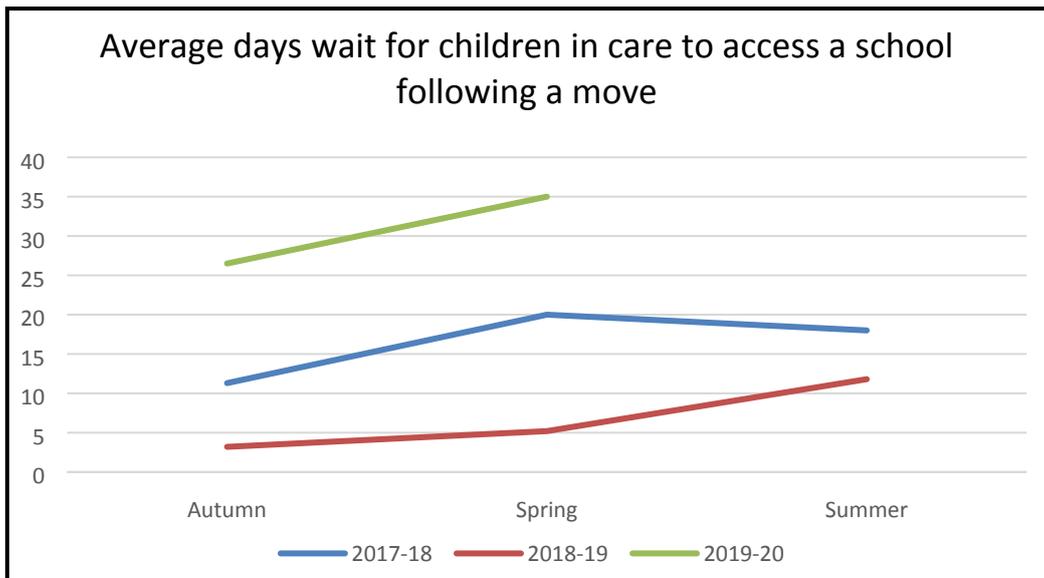
- 25 had 1 placement move which in the majority of cases was related to moving to a long term placement.
- 5 had 2 placement moves
- 2 had 3 placement moves
- 2 had 4 placement moves.



School moves

There were 7 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year, all only had 1 move in total. In addition to this there were 2 young people who had prolonged periods of not being on roll at an education provision – for 1 young person this was as a result of a number of placement changes, whilst the other was an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker who has very little English and therefore could not manage in mainstream provision.

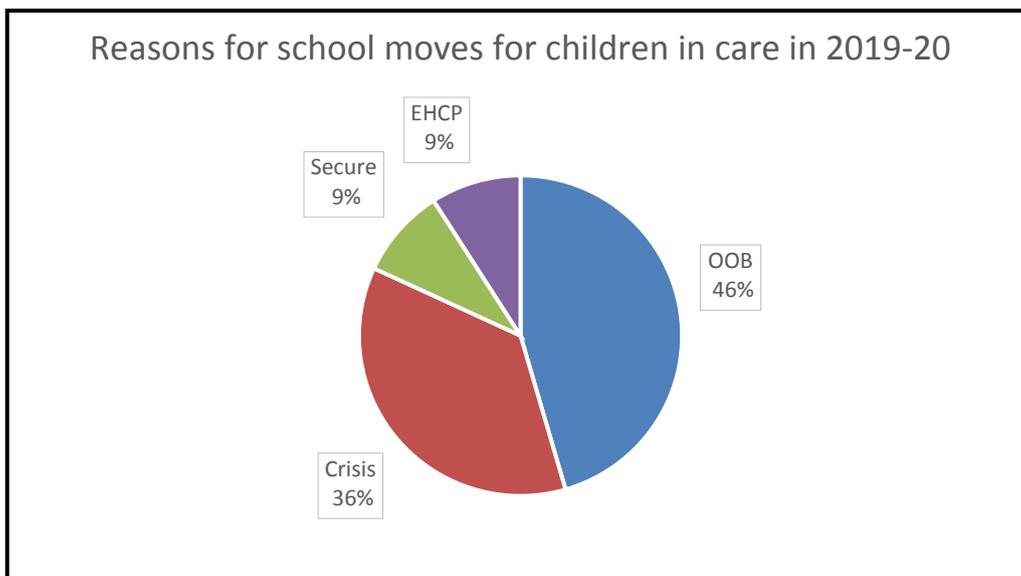
The calculation of the average days wait for a new school across the whole academic year has been complicated by the COVID 19 restrictions and the difficulties in accessing a new school placement. The average wait for a school place across the whole academic year was 31 days which is above the required 20 days, and impacted by the 2 young people not on roll. The chart below shows the average wait across the terms for the last 3 academic years, but with no data recorded for Summer 2020 due to COVID restrictions.



There were 5 children and young people who had both a school and placement move during 2019-20. Of these children:

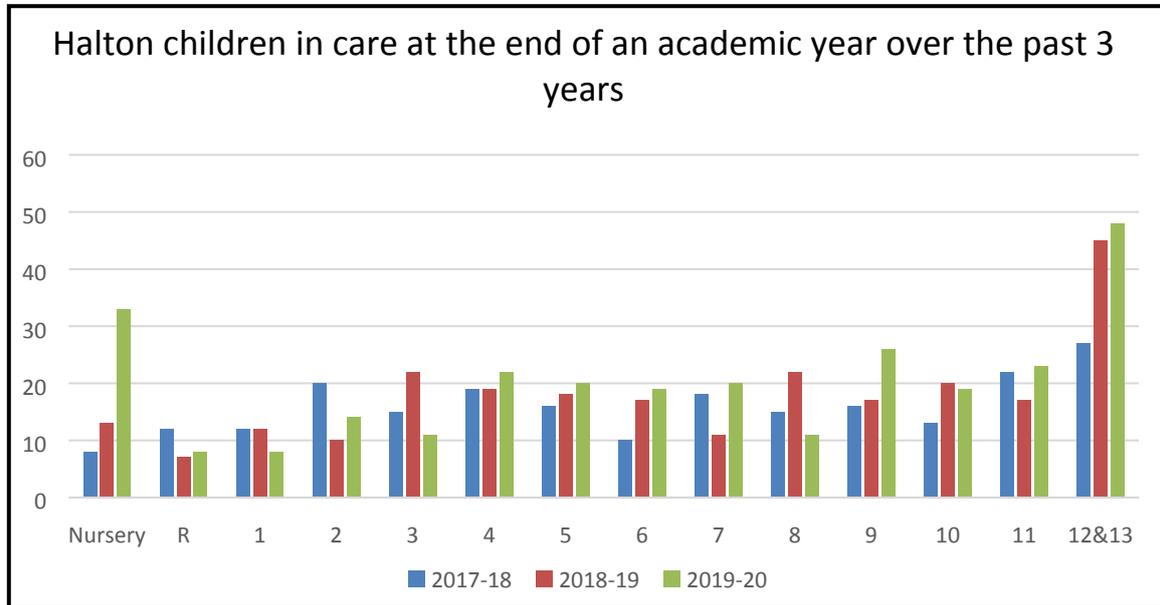
- 3 had 1 placement and 1 school move
- 1 had 2 placements and 1 school move
- 1 had 3 placement moves and 1 school move

The chart below shows the reasons for a school move taking place in 2018-19

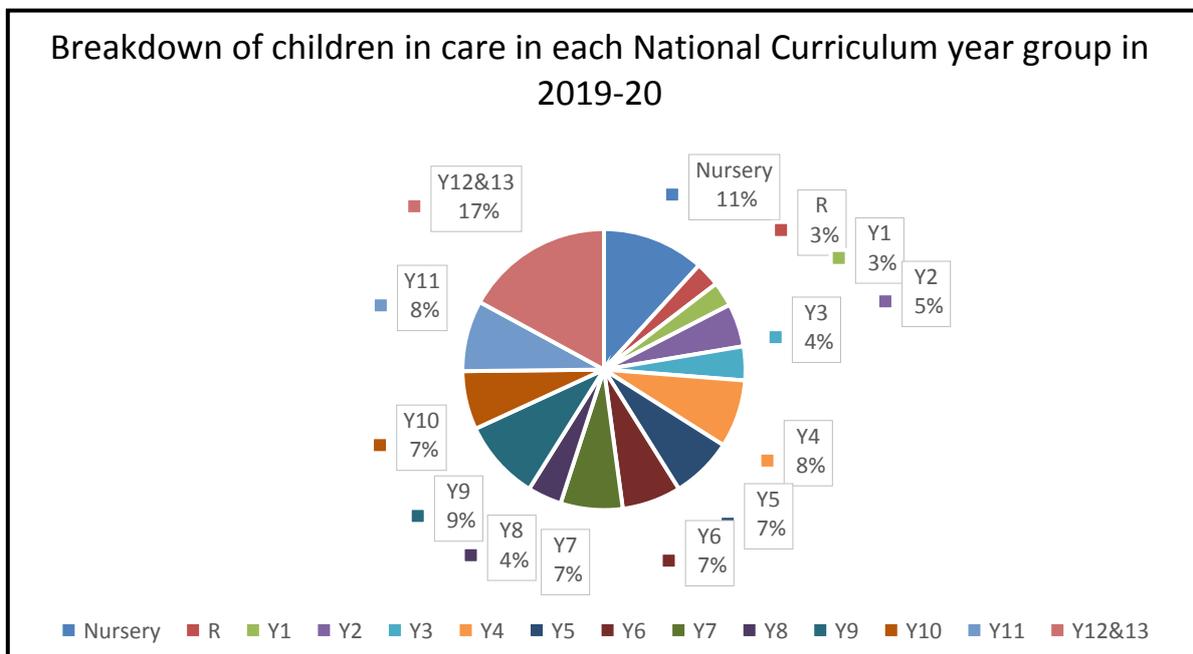


School Phase

The chart below shows a breakdown of children in care by each national curriculum year group for the 2 past academic years 2017-18, 2018-19 and this current year 2019-20. There are clear growth areas in pre-school aged children, and from Year 4 onwards, particularly in the older age groups.



The chart below shows the percentage of children in care across the national curriculum year groups for the period of August 2018-July 2019



School Ofsted ratings

When a child comes into care it is not appropriate to simply move them from their school because the school is rated as less than Good. However, Halton Virtual School does undertake a risk

assessment which takes into account knowledge of the school's overall performance, pastoral support systems, the child's progress and individual circumstances. Once this risk assessment has been completed and the view of the Virtual School is that a school move would be appropriate in the best interests of the child, then discussions take place with the child's social worker, parent/carer, and Independent Reviewing Officer and a supported transition plan is put in place.

This same process is undertaken if a school has an adverse Ofsted inspection and judgement and children in care are currently on roll.

Whenever there is a decision that a child in care remains in a school that is rated as Requires Improvement or below, rigorous monitoring of the child's progress and outcomes is undertaken, particularly through scrutiny of the Personal Education Plan.

All school moves for children in care must be agreed by the Headteacher of the Virtual School prior to the move taking place, unless in emergency and exceptional circumstances. When a request for a school move is made, the Virtual School complete an analysis of any recent Ofsted inspections of possible schools, speak to key staff including the Designated Teacher and where appropriate other local authority Virtual Schools. This is to ensure that the school chosen can meet all of the child's needs.

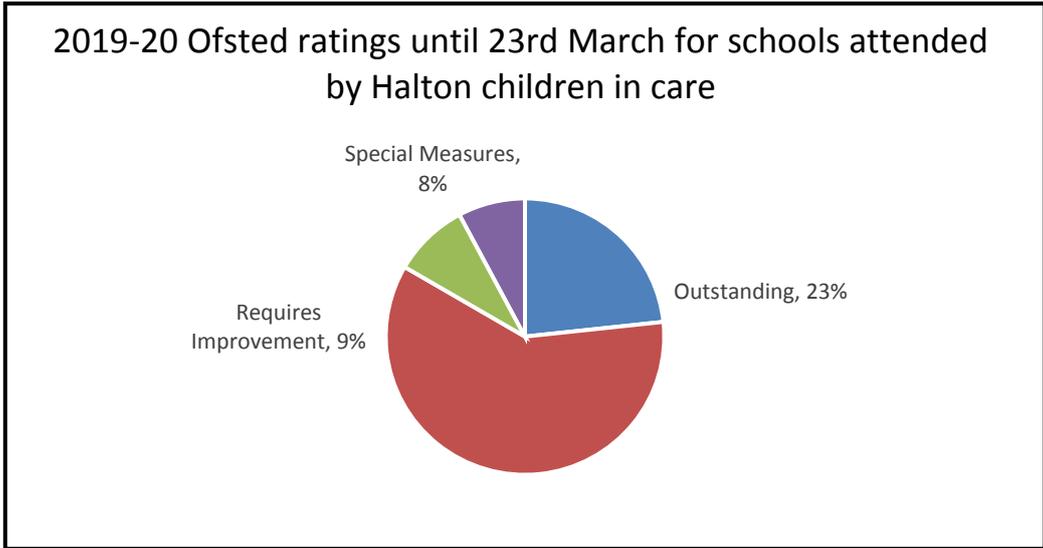
When a child is transitioning into Reception or to secondary school, the Virtual School provide advice and guidance to social workers and carers to ensure that all children are placed in suitable provision, with priority being given to schools that are judged as Good or better. The Headteacher of the Virtual School makes the final decision.

At the recent ILACS inspection the inspectors recognised that as a result of the actions taken by the Virtual School, there has been good improvement in the number of children in care attending schools judged to be good or better by Ofsted.

Outcomes pre-COVID 2019-20:

As a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, Ofsted suspended all their inspections as schools were closed to formal education but provided child care from March 23rd until the end of the summer term. Therefore, the Ofsted gradings used in this report are up to that date.

The chart below covers the Ofsted ratings of all schools attended by children in care in Halton and out of borough.



83% of children in care across both phases are attending schools that are judged to be Good or better. This is a significant increase of 14% from the previous year and also an increase of 11.5% from 2017-18. This improvement has come about because of the work that the Virtual School undertakes in sourcing the best school for our children and young people, this figure rises 94.5% for those educated outside of Halton and has also seen an increase of 5.5%. However, we do need to be mindful of the fact that this does not include the summer term as no judgements were made.

Key priority for 2020-21

- Monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school rated as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.

Key actions for 2020-21:

- Through termly tracking identify all schools’ whose Ofsted judgement has changed and PEP and Progress Coordinator will then arrange a challenge and support visit to discuss progress of the children attending that school.
- The Virtual School will continue to work closely with social workers and carers in discussions around school admissions and transitions to ensure that children in care are only placed in schools that are Requires Improvement in exceptional circumstances.
- Work closely with our ASIAs to ensure that Requires Improvement or below schools are making progress to achieve a better Ofsted judgement.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Children in care are significantly more likely to have additional needs than their non-care experienced peers, and are more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

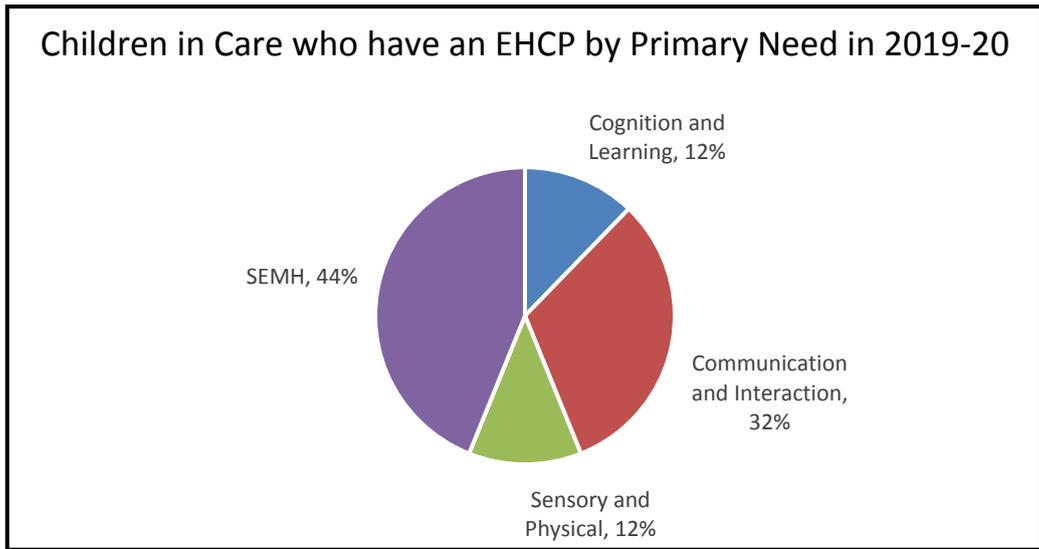
As corporate parents Halton SEND services and the Virtual School have agreed that we need to retain responsibility for our most vulnerable children in care who are living outside of Halton but not in a stable placement and are in need of a statutory assessment. In these circumstances the Virtual School commission the Education Psychology Service to undertake the assessments and an SEN Caseworker is allocated to ensure the assessment is completed at least within the statutory timeframe. This decision has been made to ensure that the assessment process is not disrupted should the placement breakdown and to minimise the number of local authorities involved in completing the assessment. For all other children placed outside of Halton in stable placements it is the resident authority that undertake the assessment as per the Belongings Regulations.

There is a named SEN Caseworker and link Education Psychologist for each school within Halton and they monitor children in care as part of their discussions with schools. In addition to this the Virtual School has a named SEN Caseworker whose focus is those placed out of borough and on an EHCP. The case worker ensures that provision and targets within the EHCP are aligned with the termly Personal Education Plan.

In order to ensure that children in care have early identification of their needs and appropriate timely support, the Virtual School have commissioned bespoke children in care psychology time and this is used to support our most vulnerable children who require statutory assessment but are being educated out of Halton, and this time is also used for joint support and challenge meetings between schools, the school EP and the PEP and Progress Coordinator. This ensures that children in care are discussed on at least a termly basis and the graduated approach is implemented in a timely manner. This creative and innovative approach was recognised as good practice during our recent ILACS inspection.

In addition to the above the Virtual School have also commissioned training from the Education Psychology Service based on needs identified by Designated Teachers. This creative approach was acknowledged as a strength in the feedback during our ILACs inspection in March 2020.

The following charts compare the percentage of Halton children in care accessing SEND support and on an EHCP with their national in-care peers, and the primary reason for those who have an EHCP.



These categories are broadly similar to the previous academic year.

Work undertaken by the Virtual School during the COVID restrictions:

- We have ensured that despite the challenging situation there has been no drift where applications for an EHCP have needed to be made or whilst the child or young person is undergoing statutory assessment. This has been facilitated by the PEP Coordinators and by our commissioned EP support.
- The Virtual School had to suspend the pilots on implementing an Adverse Childhood Experiences approach in 2 schools and also the Pivotal approach within 4 schools due to the COVID restrictions.
- Whilst a joint approach with our SEND Commissioning Service to quality assurance our out of borough provision was developed, this was also impacted by COVID restrictions.

Key Priority for 2020-21

- Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.

Key Actions 2020-21

- Continue with the joint school, EPS and Virtual School SEND support and challenge meetings with targeted Halton Primary and all Secondary schools to address early identification of need. This will ensure that schools are assessing needs and under performance early, providing appropriate and timely support and requesting statutory assessment without delay as determined by evidence.
- Resume implementation of an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) approach within two schools to develop whole school understanding and strategies to meet the SEMH needs of children in care.
- Resume implementation of a PIVOTAL approach to behaviour management support within 4 schools so that SEMH needs of children are more effectively identified and managed without escalation to exclusion.

- More robustly monitor SEND provision and related under performance through the termly Personal Education Plans, including challenging schools to request statutory assessment in a timely manner.
- Continue to provide training to develop understanding and awareness of the additional needs and impact of trauma on the learning of children in care.
- Resume implementation of a robust quality assurance process of all out of borough specialist provision attended by Halton children in care.

How academically successful have our children in care been in 2019-20?

Attainment and Progress

Whilst the Virtual School scrutinises and monitors the performance of all children in care to Halton, there is only a statutory requirement to nationally report on educational outcomes for those who have been in care for 12 months or more. The data within this section refers only to those children and young people who meet this statutory requirement.

Due to very small cohorts caution is needed in interpreting the educational outcomes for Halton children in care. Although the data may indicate differences between previous years the low numbers make it difficult when making comparisons or looking for generalisations across the cohorts.

Total numbers of children in care for 12 months covering all key stages				
Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number	61	69	72	52

What is a good educational outcome?

Contextual:

That a child has been in care for at least 12 months, living in a stable placement, with at least 95% attendance at a Good or better school, with no fixed term exclusions, and making at least the expected progress in comparison to their peers.

At Early Years Foundation Stage:

- A child has achieved the measure of Good Level of Development (GLD)

At Year 1 Phonics:

- A child has achieved the threshold of 32 or more in the Phonics test

At Key Stage 1:

- A child has achieved the Expected Standard in each subject area (Reading, Writing, and Maths) and in the 3 combined areas (RWM).

At Key Stage 2:

- A child has achieved the Expected Standard in each subject area (Reading, Writing, and Maths) and in the 3 combined areas (RWM). In addition the child had made at least their expected progress in Reading, Writing and Maths, from their educational starting point at Key Stage 1 (this indicated by a positive number).

At Key Stage 4:

- A young person has achieved English and Maths at grade 5 or above and that they have achieved highly on Attainment 8 and have a positive Progress 8 score.

Attendance and Exclusions:

- A child or young person's attendance has been above 90% for the academic year (the Persistent Absence benchmark). However, Halton Virtual School have set an attendance target of above 95% for the academic year as an internal measure of success.
- In addition they have had no fixed term exclusions or been permanently excluded from school.

EET:

- A young person should be actively engaged in Education, Employment or Training (EET) from the age of leaving school until at least 19 years old.

Educational performance across the Key Stages for children in care for 12 months or more in 2019-20

In the ILACs inspection in March 2020 the inspectors commented on the following areas from the previous year's results and analysis:

- Progress in Maths is low, however, this has been recognised by the Virtual School and is also an LA wide issue
- Outcomes in KS1 and 2 are generally good, particularly compared to other LA children in care and children in care nationally.
- KS4 outcomes are weaker and lower than national for children in care. However, the Virtual School has also recognised this as an area for improvement.
- Although no pupils achieved the combined English and Maths at grade 5, this was in line with expectations for the cohort.

Strategies to address the feedback above were in already in place, however, due to the COVID 19 pandemic formal education was suspended from 23rd March 2020 and schools provided child care support only. As a result the Government decided not to hold the end of Key Stages tests in Primary schools and not to award any teacher assessments either. Therefore, there has been no requirement for schools to provide data for Early Years Foundation Stage Good Level of Development, Y1 or Y2 Phonics, end of Key Stage 1 or end of Key Stage 2.

The Government did decide that results would be provided for those pupils who should have taken GCSEs at the end of Year 11. This was done using teacher assessments and then via an Ofqual algorithm to enable the results to be standardised nationally.

The Virtual School liaised closely with all secondary schools to ensure that the teacher assessments provided took into account, where possible and appropriate, the extenuating circumstances that some of our young people had been facing throughout the academic year.

Key Stage 4

There were 16 young people in the cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more:

- 10 of whom were female.
- 13 were educated in Halton schools.
- 12 schools attended by Halton young people in care in Y11 were rated as Good or better by Ofsted.
- 12.5% had an EHCP, 12.5% were educated in non-mainstream provision.
- 12.5% were placed in residential provision, 1 was out of borough, and 6.25% were placed with parents.
- In Year 11, 37.5% had attendance below 95%, with 31.25% of this group being below 90%.
- Across Key Stage 4, 5 young people had attendance below 95% both years and of this group, 4 young people had attendance below 90% for both years.
- 1 young person was unable to access full time provision based on a psychology assessment, 1 young person was pregnant and was due to give birth at the point of her exams, the remaining young people had unauthorised absences.
- 37.5% had periods of fixed term exclusions during Key Stage 4, with 1 young person having 18 days of lost learning through exclusion.
- 2 young people were placed on alternative provision and 3 young people had periods on a reduced timetable to stabilise their education as they were at high risk of permanent exclusion.
- 3 young people had a school move during KS4, 2 in Y10 as a result of moving out of borough and 1 young person in Y11 following a move back to live with parents.

Due to the way the GCSE grades were awarded this year there cannot be a like for like comparison with previous years. However, performance did show that young people did achieve in line with their PEP predictions.

2019-20	E4+	E5+	M4+	M5+	EM4+	EM5+	SC4+	SC5+	5GCSEs EM4+	5GCSEs EM4+	5GCSEs 4+	5GCSEs 5+
% CIC achieving	29	6	18	6	18	0	18	6	18	0	18	0

Summary

≈ Attainment	Improvements were made in all areas with the exception of Maths at grade 4. However, there are still no young people in care in Halton achieving the combined English and maths at grade 5. This is a priority focus for the next academic year.
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What the Virtual School has done and its impact:

- Scrutinised the appropriateness of the targets within each PEP and ensured that the Pupil Premium Plus funding had impact.
- The Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator held termly challenge visits with schools to discuss individual young people's progress and the impact of Pupil Premium Plus interventions.

This ensured that the interventions were targeted at the areas of development identified through their outcomes.

- Progress Improvement Clinics were chaired by the Director of Children's and Adults Services with the aim of removing any barriers to Key Stage 4 young people making the maximum progress they can.
- Provided one-to-one tuition on core subjects when identified as an area of development in the PEP.
- Ensured that young people attended high quality alternative provision that meets their long term aspirations.
- Maintained contact with the young people and their carers to ensure that all resources and support were made available as required.
- Provided appropriate IT equipment to enable the young people to continue to access learning remotely.

Other work undertaken by the Virtual School to promote continued engagement with learning during the COVID restrictions:

- Virtual School have been working with carers and schools to ensure that children and young people in care have been able to access learning online during the COVID restrictions.
- The Virtual School worked to ensure that as many children and young people in care as possible were provided with a DfE laptop and router as required. Along with the IT equipment that the Virtual School have already provided this now means that only a very small number of children who have complex needs do not have IT access – the Virtual School are looking into purchasing the correct equipment for these children so that they do not miss out.

Key Priorities 2020-21:

- Ensure that all Halton children in care continue to access their educational entitlement throughout the COVID 19 pandemic
- Close the attainment gap between Halton Children in Care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on Key Stage 4.

Key actions for 2020-21:

- Provide support for those young people who will need to re-sit their English and Maths GCSEs
- Strengthen transition support from the end of the secondary phase to post 16 to ensure that all appropriate support is put in place to maintain post 16 engagement.
- Further develop our training offer for foster carers to support learning at home – this is via an online learning platform which provides bespoke learning linked to the individual child in placement. This will enable the foster carer and child to focus on all the core subjects.
- Strengthen our Key Stage 3 and 4 Activity Programme and look to develop a remote learning approach to support the current situation.
- Undertake question level analysis with our Primary and Secondary schools to ensure that our children and young people are ready and prepared for the examinations.
- Work with our Secondary schools to conduct 'deep dives' to gain a greater understanding of why our KS4 pupils are not achieving the higher grades.

Attendance and Exclusions

NOTE: The data presented in this section covers all children in care through the academic year of 2019-20 up until 23rd March when formal education was suspended due to COVID regulations. Attendance was still monitored after this point but was subject to individual risk assessments.

Regular school attendance is a key part of giving any child the best possible start in life. However, it is highly likely that a child who comes into care has already missed some time in school, and for some this is a considerable amount. Therefore, it is vital that children in care are supported to achieve regularly to mitigate against the impact of previously lost learning. Government research has shown that:

- 14 days absence across Years 3 – 6 (Key Stage 2) makes it less likely for a child to achieve the expected standards in their subjects. (This equates to 84 lessons missed)
- 7 days across Years 10 and 11 (Key Stage 4) reduces the prospects of the young person achieving 5 GCSEs at Level 5 or above. (This equates to 42 lessons missed)

Attendance during one school year	Equivalent days	Equivalent sessions	Equivalent weeks	Equivalent lessons missed
95%	9 days	18 sessions	2 weeks	54 lessons
90%	19 days	38 sessions	4 weeks	114 lessons
85%	29 days	58 sessions	6 weeks	174 lessons
80%	38 days	72 sessions	8 weeks	228 lessons
75%	48 days	96 sessions	10 weeks	288 lessons
70%	57 days	114 sessions	11.5 weeks	342 lessons
65%	67 days	134 sessions	13.5 weeks	402 lessons

Halton Virtual School commission a company 'Welfare Call' to monitor the attendance and exclusions of all Halton children in care regardless of where they are educated. This is done by daily contact with all schools and alternative providers to ensure that attendance is tracked and recorded appropriately and to comply with safeguarding procedures.

Whilst the DfE have determined below 90% attendance to constitute persistent absence, Halton Virtual School monitor both below 90% and 95% attendance.

Attendance 2019-20:

Given the COVID restrictions and the suspension of formal education from 23rd March 2020 it is not possible to undertake a comparison with previous years.

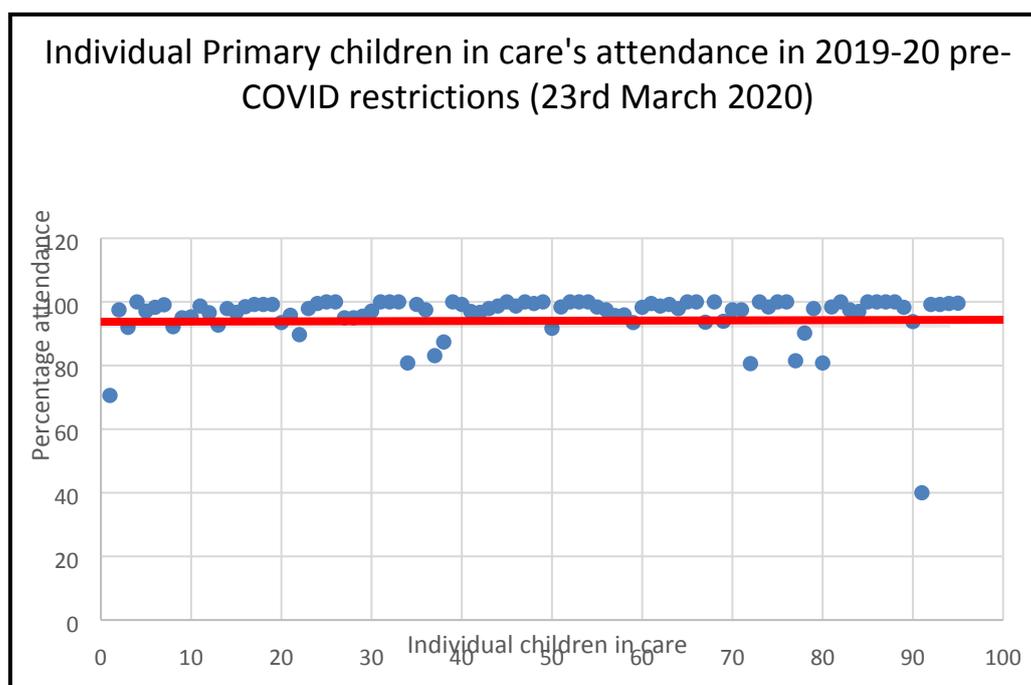
The Virtual School maintained Welfare Call monitoring attendance processes pre-COVID, but developed a more bespoke approach during the lockdown period until the end of the summer term. The data in this section covers all children in care during that time. For the COVID data the average percentage attendance is based on the number of children in care whose risk assessment allowed them to attend school during the restrictions.

2019-20 Pre-COVID attendance analysis shows:

Average 5 attendance	Primary	Secondary	Overall
Autumn 2019	95.7	88.3	92
Spring 2020 – Pre-COVID	94.9	82.2	91.1

20 Primary children had attendance below 95% - of this cohort;

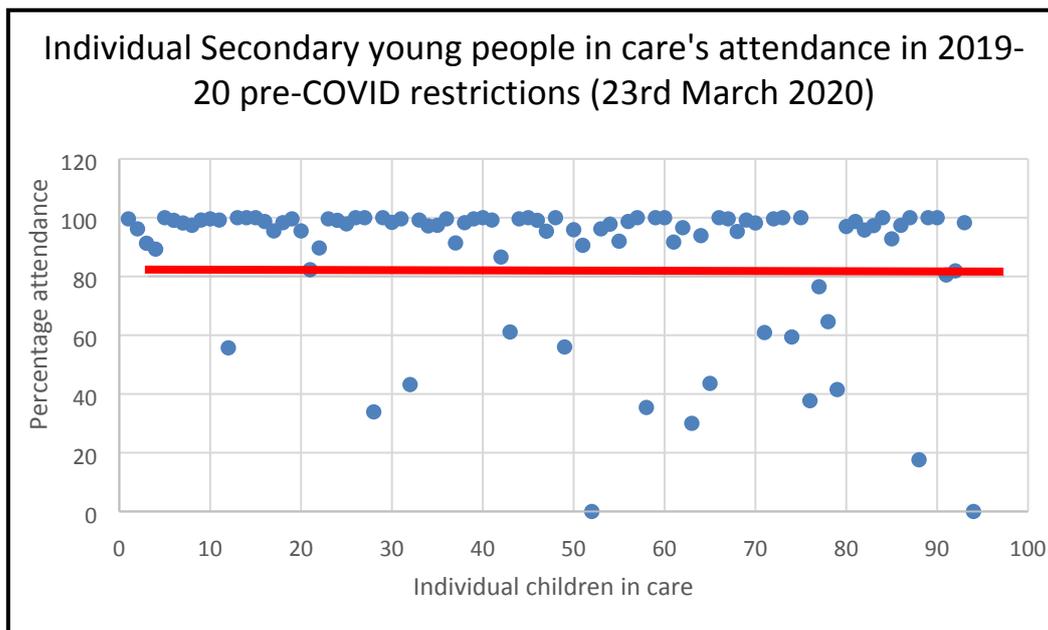
- 12 children live with parents/family members
- 2 came into care during the academic year
- The main reasons for absence were illness (187 days lost learning) and unauthorised absences (57.5 days lost learning)
- 11 children had authorised absences (51 days lost learning).
- 1 child had 7 days not on roll due the family moving out of borough and not securing a school place at the same time.
- 3 children had a holiday in term time (19 days lost learning)
- 1 child also received fixed term exclusions (6.5 days lost learning)



30 secondary pupils had attendance below 95% - of this cohort:

- 6 young people live with parents/family and 14 are placed in residential settings
- 2 young people came into care during the academic year.
- The main reasons for absence were unauthorised (506 days lost), illness (78 days lost) and authorised absences (65.5 days lost)
- 23 young people had unauthorised absences. 12 of these live in residential accommodation, 6 are with family and 2 were new into care.

- 15 young people had authorised absences. 2 were new into care and 7 live in residential accommodation.
- 5 young people had periods of not being on roll, 2 of these were due to extended missing from care episodes, 1 was released from secure provision, 1 was an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker who has very little English and could not manage in mainstream school at this time and the other young person has complex needs and has had a number of placement changes.
- 5 young people had periods of reduced timetables to stabilise their education placements due to high risk of exclusion
- 10 young people had exclusions (60 days lost learning)



For the academic year 2019-20 attendance during COVID restrictions (23rd March – 17th July 2020):

During the COVID restrictions, the Virtual School worked with Children’s Social Care and schools to ensure that there was an individual risk assessment around the appropriateness of the children to attend school. This was regularly reviewed throughout the Spring and Summer Terms.

Work to support attendance undertaken by the Virtual School during the COVID restrictions:

- The Virtual School was proactive in encouraging all our children and young people in care to access school throughout this period in line with DfE guidance. The PEP Coordinators in particular provided a bridge of communication and facilitation between schools, carers and social workers and they coordinated bespoke planned returns to school. This is regardless of where the child was placed or being educated.
- For children in care with an EHCP the Virtual School was involved in their risk assessment alongside the SEN Assessment Team, and when appropriate in planning the child’s return to school.

- The PEP Coordinators had daily attendance and keeping in touch phone calls with our out of borough schools in particular to ensure that both attendance was happening and also to 'nip in the bud' any developing issues.

Both Halton and out of borough schools have provided very positive feedback about the level of proactive support from the Virtual School both to the child/young person and also to the school itself. Feedback from out of borough schools has also shown that Halton Virtual School have ensured that our children accessed their educational entitlement in line with DfE COVID 19 guidance, which was not always replicated by others.

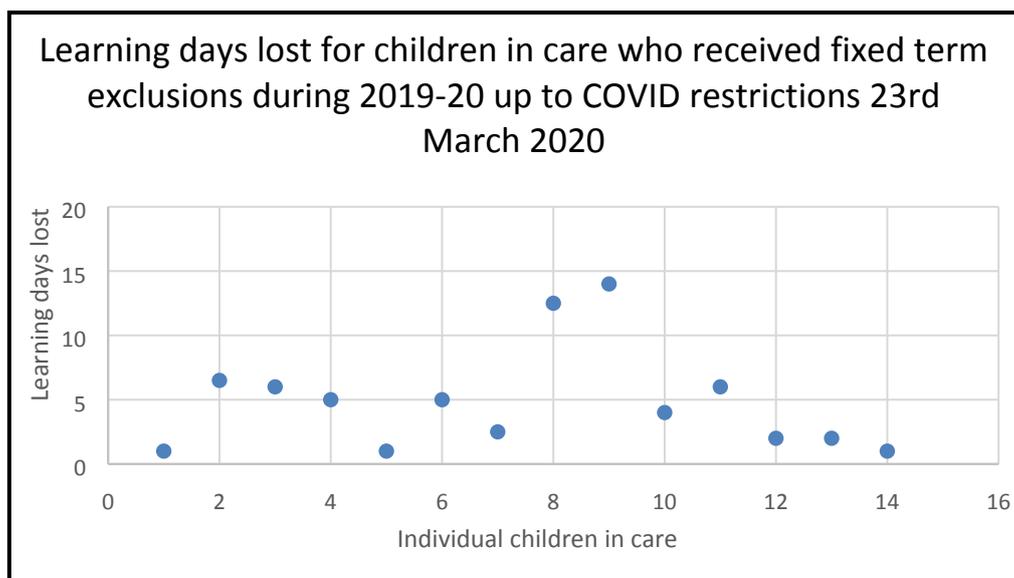
Attendance of CIC during COVID restrictions	Primary		Secondary		Overall	
	Spring	Summer	Spring	Summer	Spring	Summer
Total in cohort	98	101	96	98	194	199
RA – Not to attend	78	26	82	55	160	81
RA – Should Attend	20	75	14	43	34	118
Average % Attendance	75%	77.2%	71.9%	64.3%	73.5%	71%
# = 0% attendance	4	3	3	4	7	7
# = 100% attendance	13	28	8	13	21	41

Attendance		Prior to the COVID restrictions overall attendance has remained above 90% which is the DfE benchmark for persistent absence. During the COVID restrictions overall attendance was above 70%.
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Exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions of a child in care since the Headteacher of the Virtual School has been in post and this was highlighted as a positive in the ILACS inspection in March 2020.

Due to the COVID restrictions introduced on 23rd March 2020 the DfE suspended the use of exclusions from that point onwards until the end of the academic year. This means that a year on year comparison is not possible. However, the chart below shows the days learning lost as a result of fixed term exclusions received by children in care up to that point



Exclusions	n	There has been a decrease in the number of Primary children receiving fixed term exclusions. However, in the secondary phase, there is an increase in the proportion of girls receiving fixed term exclusions. Analysis has shown that the behaviours are predominantly related to emotional and anxiety needs.
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Analysis for all children in care in 2019-20 up to 23rd March 2020 shows:

2 Primary children had 1 or more periods of fixed term exclusions

- Both were educated out of borough.
- 1 had an EHCP for SEMH needs (Number 2 on the chart above).
- 1 was living with family (Number 2 on the chart above)
- The total number of days learning lost was 7.5.
- There has been a decrease in the number of Primary children compared to the same period last academic year.

12 Secondary pupils had 1 or more periods of fixed term exclusions:

- 5 young people attended Halton schools and 7 were educated out of borough.
- 1 was new into care during the academic year (numbers 13 on the chart above)
- 3 have an EHCP for SEMH (numbers 9 and 14 on the chart above)
- 5 were living in residential care and 4 was placed with family (numbers 3, 4, 9, 11 and 6, 12, 13 and 14 respectively on the chart above)
- 8 were girls, 4 of whom were in Y10 and 11 (numbers 8, 9, 10 and 11 in the chart above)
- 4 were boys, 2 in Y9 and 2 in Y10 (numbers 4, 6, 7 and 14 in the chart above)
- The total number of learning days lost was 61 days, 45 of these are for Key Stage 4 pupils.

What the Virtual School has done and its impact:

- Provided support and advice to schools who were experiencing difficulties managing challenging behaviour.
- Provided tailored packages of support to high risk pupils
- Provided attendance support through Pupil Premium Plus
- Commissioned specialist assessments to support schools to meet the needs of complex children
- Supported schools to undertake the graduated approach in relation to SEMH needs.
- Provided ongoing training to increase awareness and improve practice in meeting the needs of children with attachment difficulties

6 pupils received fixed term exclusions of under 3 day's duration and a further 3 receiving exclusions below 5 days. This means that whilst pupils did receive exclusions on average the lost learning time across the cohort was low.

Key Priorities 2020-21:

- To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%
- Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and frequency

Key actions 2020-21:

- Continue to work with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to provide early alerts of any child who has had more than 3 days absence and those whose attendance is falling below 95%. The EWO will provide advice and guidance to carers around proactive support for attendance and also liaise with a school link EWO to ensure that issues related to school are addressed.
- Resume our work on developing 2 Adverse Childhood Experiences Aware (ACEs) schools which will focus on increasing awareness of the impact of ACEs and toxic stress and the impact they have on a child's resilience and ability to learn.
- Resume our work with the Behaviour Support Service to implement the PIVOTAL Approach to managing behaviour within 4 pilot schools.
- Work with our secondary schools to develop more bespoke and proactive support for children in care who are presenting with behaviour issues, particularly girls who are experiencing emotional and anxiety related issues.

Accessing Alternative provision

The Bridge School (Halton's PRU) provide an Engagement Programme for Y10 and Y11 young people who require access to alternative provision. This alternative provision is quality assured by The Bridge School.

If a school purchases alternative provision placements for young people with providers who are not part of The Bridge School Engagement Programme, then it is the school's responsibility to quality assure the provision.

Agreement must be gained from the Headteacher of the Virtual School prior to a young person in care being placed on alternative provision. This is to ensure that the provision will meet the educational needs of the young person and their long term aspirations. Scrutiny of the outcomes of these young people is undertaken through the termly Personal Education Plan.

Any alternative provision that is not through the Engagement Programme is quality assured by the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator. If the provision is via the Engagement Programme the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator liaises with The Bridge School to ascertain quality assurance outcomes.

Access to alternative provision 2019-20:

Due to COVID restrictions and the suspension of formal education, access to alternative provision ceased from 23rd March 2020. However, up to that date, there were 7 young people who accessed alternative provision at some point during 2019-20, with 6 of those accessing during both terms. 6 of the young people were accessing the alternative provision to enhance their skills and for post 16 progression, with the final young person having access as part of a re-integration programme to mainstream school.

Post 16 Access to Education, Employment and Training

The Virtual School provide support and guidance for all young people in care or care leavers up to the age of 25 around access to Education, Employment and Training (EET), and their social workers or PAs as appropriate. However, in terms of more intensive support this has been focused on 16 – 19 years olds due to capacity within the Virtual School.

Planned transition meetings during the Spring and Summer terms take place between the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator and the Post 16 Education Support Worker (ESW) for early identification of those leaving school who may become Not engaged in Education, Employment and Training (NEET).

Monthly tracking is undertaken by the Post 16 ESW to ensure that there are early alerts for young people who are at risk of becoming NEET as well as those currently NEET. Within the 16 – 19 year old cohort the Post 16 ESW provides direct support by gathering the views of the young person as to any barriers to engagement and ensuring that their views are heard when formulating a plan for re-engagement. The Post 16 ESW also liaises with the 14-19 team if the young person is resident in Halton and their equivalents out of area, other agencies, providers and social workers and PAs.

Creating the right apprenticeship opportunities and support structure remains a struggle for us in the current financial and political climate.

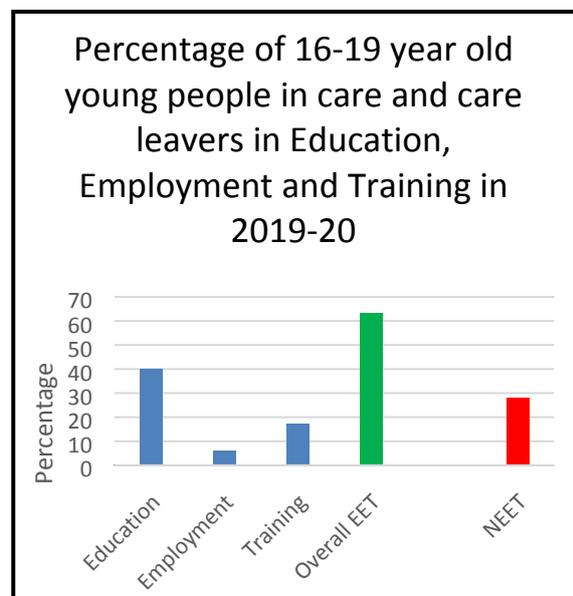
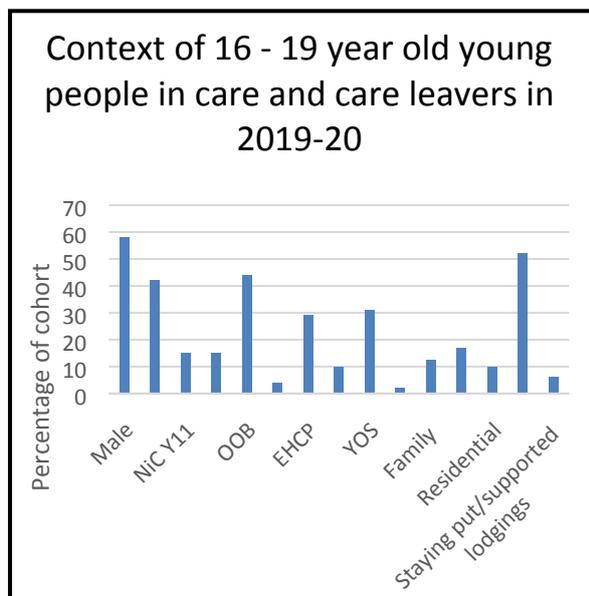
Our ILACS inspection in March 2020 highlighted Post 16 outcomes as an area of development for the Council. At that time the inspectors reported the following:

- The Virtual School focus on 16 – 19 year olds is having a positive impact.
- However NEET figures for 19 – 22 year olds is low in comparison. There are capacity issues within the Virtual School which make it challenging to support a broader strategy to improve the outcomes of this group
- Uptake on apprenticeships is at early stages of improvement.
- A comparative review of the performance of pupils remaining in care and leaving care would be useful for future learning.

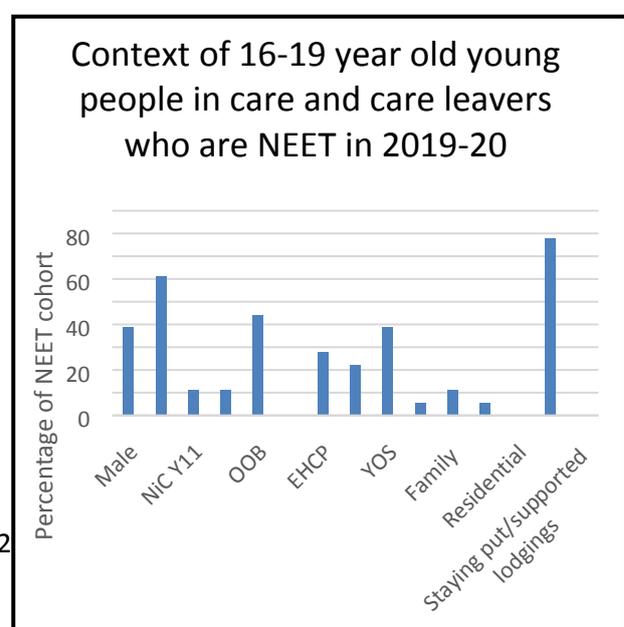
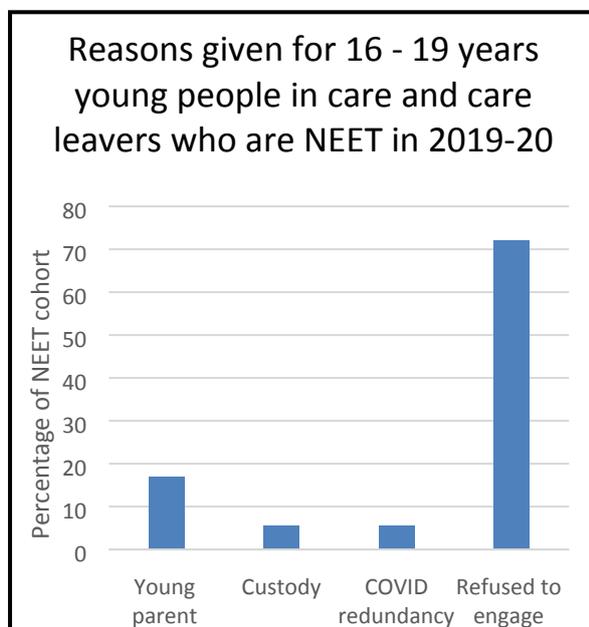
As a result of COVID restrictions, college courses, apprenticeship and traineeships were suspended alongside formal education from 23rd March. In addition to this the member of staff whose role was focused on Post 16 and EET left the LA. All of this has impacted upon our monitoring of our post 16 young people and on their outcomes.

Pre-COVID 2019 – 20, 16-19 year old cohort:

There overall cohort is 48 young people of which 63% are EET



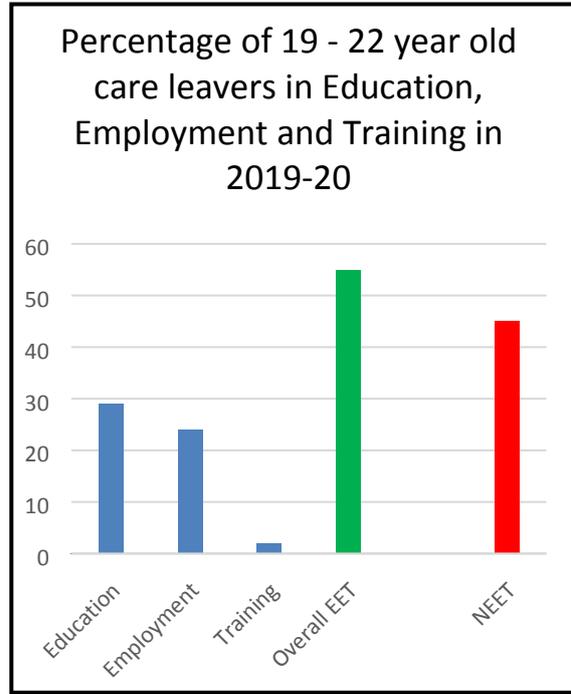
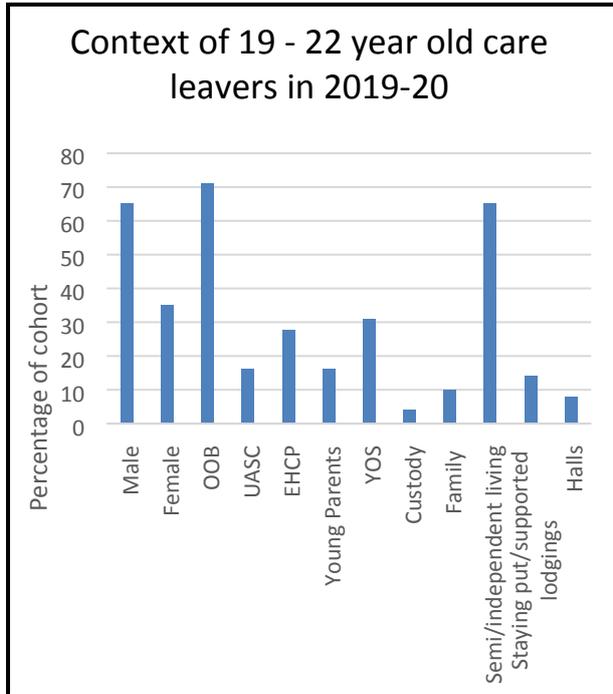
There are 18 young people who are NEET



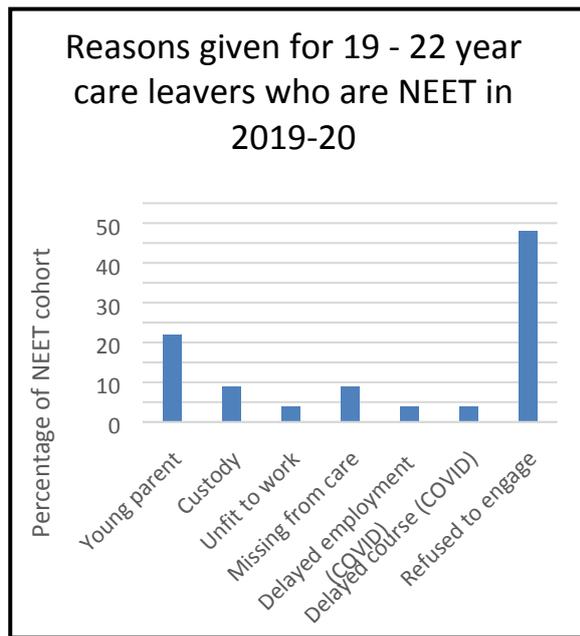
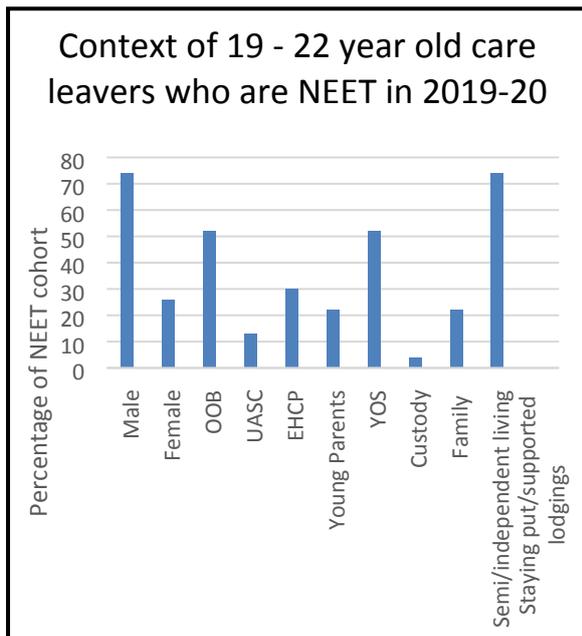
The chart above gives the main reasons for being NEET. Of those who refused to engage in EET activities, 7 lived outside of Halton

Pre-COVID 2019-20, 19 - 22 year old cohort:

The overall cohort is 51 young people of which 55% are EET



There are 21 young people in this cohort who are NEET:



Of our overall Post 16 cohort 4 young people are accessing higher education courses. Unfortunately we currently do not have any young people on an apprenticeship, as the COVID restrictions have impacted upon this area of opportunity.

What the Virtual School has done and its impact:

- Realigned roles and responsibilities within the Virtual School to have a greater focus on post 16.
- A dedicated member of the team now has a direct work case load of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and an additional case load of young people who have expressed an interest in an apprenticeship. This will be resumed once recruitment has taken place to the vacant position.
- Strengthened transition support from the end of the secondary phase to post 16 to ensure that all appropriate support is put in place to maintain post 16 engagement.
- Reviewed approaches used by other local authorities and is working towards implementing an improved model of support for care leavers, with a particular focus on increasing access to apprenticeships.

Key Priorities for 2020-21:

- Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 19 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.
- Improve capacity within the Virtual School to extend the direct approach to include 19-22 year old care leavers.

Key actions for 2020-21:

- Expand the capacity within the Virtual School to proactively support our post 16 young people.
- Ensure all young people in care and care leavers receive an appropriate offer of learning and progress onto a suitable and sustained learning programme of employment.
- Improve the number of apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers
- Conduct a comparative review of outcomes for post 16 young people remaining in care and those who leave care.
- Establish a Care Leaver Apprenticeship Strategic Group led by the Director of Children's and Adults Services whose focus will be to remove barriers to care leavers accessing support and employment opportunities both within the Council and the broader community.
- Work with colleagues in Adult Social Care to establish a graduated programme from work experience to possible apprenticeships within the local care home sector.
- Develop closer links with the Chamber of Commerce and Halton Employment Partnership, with a view to increasing apprenticeship possibilities.
- Work with colleagues who are looking at Supported Internships to ensure that appropriate care leavers are prioritised for opportunities within the programme.

Personal Education Plans

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children' (February 2018) places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain a Personal Education Plan (PEP) for every child in care in an educational setting up to the end of the school year that s/he turns 18 (Year 13). On coming into care a PEP must be initiated and completed no later than 20 working days so that it can inform the first statutory review (28 days) and then be reviewed termly from that point on.

For a PEP to be high quality and effective, the guidance states that it should be:

A 'living', evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's experience, progress and achievement (academic and otherwise), and inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child's wider care plan' (Para 23 pg 15)

It is a process that should enable each child or young person to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. It should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the identified educational needs of the child, raises aspirations and builds life chances.

As the PEP is an integral part of the care plan it is the responsibility of the child's social worker to initiate the first PEP and ensure each PEP is completed from that point onwards. However, the guidance is clear that the quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the Local Authority and the school.

The role of the school, via the Designated Teacher, is to ensure that all appropriate educational information is shared, that SMART targets are set to accelerate the progress of the child in their education, that all appropriate support is in place for the child to be successful within their provision, and to demonstrate the impact of any Pupil Premium Plus funding. The Designated Teacher leads on how the PEP is developed and used in school to make sure the child's progress towards education targets is monitored.

The role of the Virtual School is to ensure that there are effective systems in place to ensure social workers, Designated Teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's PEP and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP; ensure that PEPs are up-to-date, effective and high quality and focus on educational outcomes; ensure that all children in care (aged 3 – 18), wherever they are placed, have such a PEP; undertake regular quality assurance of all PEPs.

The Virtual School track on a termly basis the number and quality of PEPs completed. This is then reported to schools and also senior Children's Social Care managers.

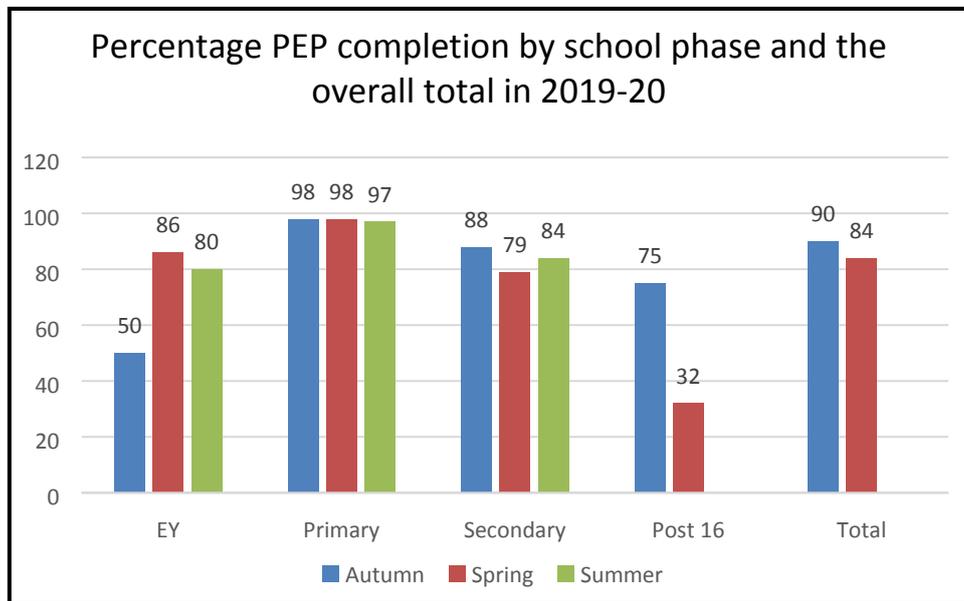
PEP Completion

Due to COVID restrictions introduced on 23rd March schools closed for education from that date until the end of the summer term. Consequently, it was not possible to complete PEPs in their usual format as no formal learning was taking place. However, the statutory requirement for all children in care to have a completed PEP remained.

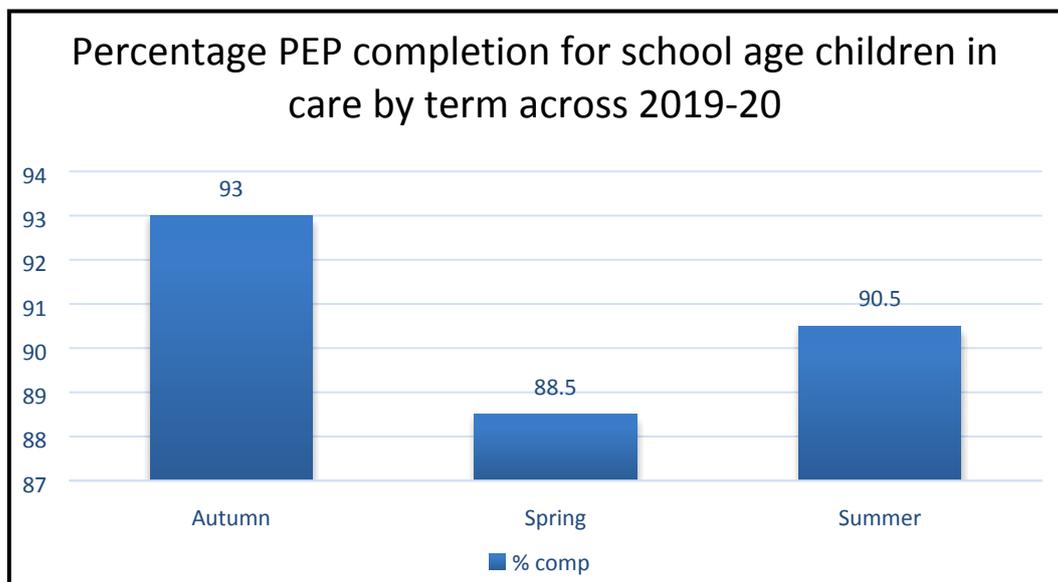
Work undertaken by the Virtual School to ensure statutory compliance with PEP completion and quality assurance:

- A new PEP document was devised to reflect the current situation and to proactively provide support for our children and young people during this difficult time. This was achieved through fast response collaboration between the Virtual School, Designated Teachers and Social Workers so that the new document was ready for the beginning of the Summer term.
- PEPs have successfully moved to a virtual format with all key professionals, and where appropriate children and young people, taking part in conference calls and so the PEPs have continued to be completed in a timely manner.
- PEPs have provided a clear mechanism to address any concerns foster carers have had in supporting children and young people with their education at home and in reducing anxieties around children and young people returning to school.
- PEPs have focused on identifying interventions to support transition of young people back into education settings and have allowed schools to plan ahead including providing any extra support required to facilitate reintegration. This has included virtual tours of school prior to a child or young person's return and arranging bespoke visits for our Y6 pupils who are moving to Secondary schools.

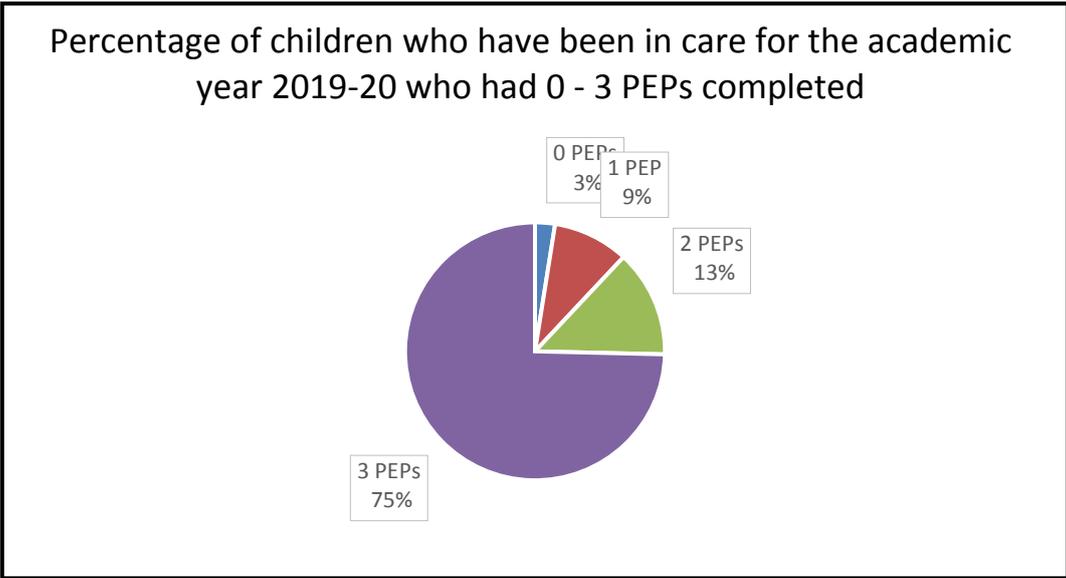
For 2019-20, overall PEP completion for the Autumn term was 90%, this dropped in the Spring term to 84% which was largely due to the impact of the COVID restrictions on our Post 16 cohort and also Early Years as some settings had to close. During the summer term our Early Years cohort were not able to access provision consistently and Post 16 cohort were not able to access provision at all, therefore, this impacted on PEP completion in the summer term so an overall completion rate cannot be provided.



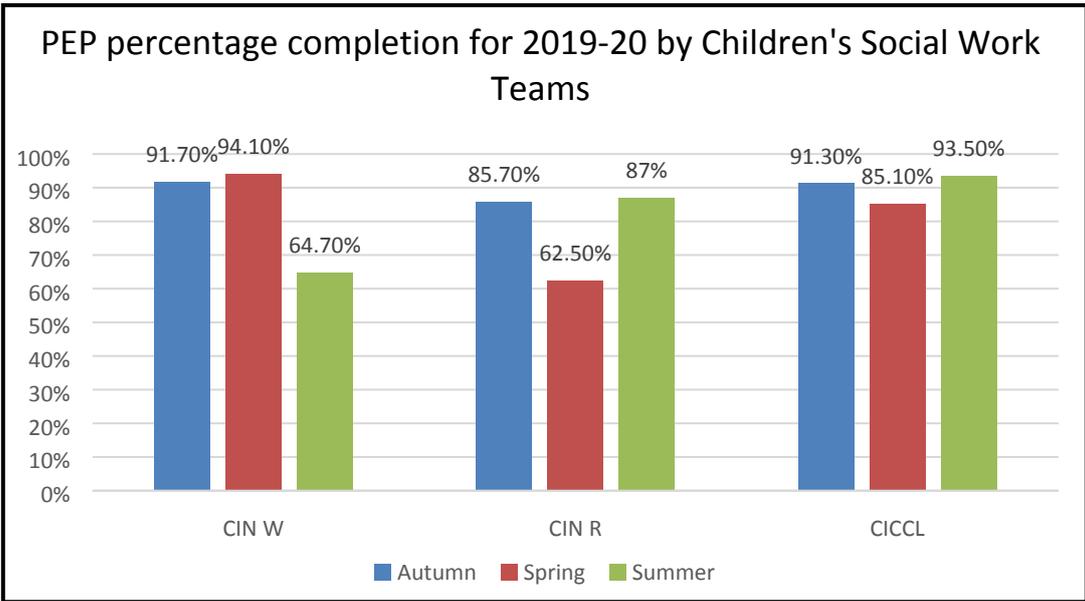
However, the chart below shows the completion rate for school age children across the full academic year and this demonstrates that despite a slight dip in the spring term the PEP completion rate has remained consistently high in spite of the challenging circumstances.



The chart below shows the number of PEPs completed for those children and young people in care for the whole of the academic year 2019-20, but exclude our post 16 young people



The COVID restrictions have required a change to normal working practices for everyone and this has included how PEP are completed. The meetings are now being held remotely rather than face to face and also social workers have had to adapt to working within bubbles and not being in the office at all times. There were also capacity issues within the social work teams which has impacted on some PEP completion.



Quality Assurance

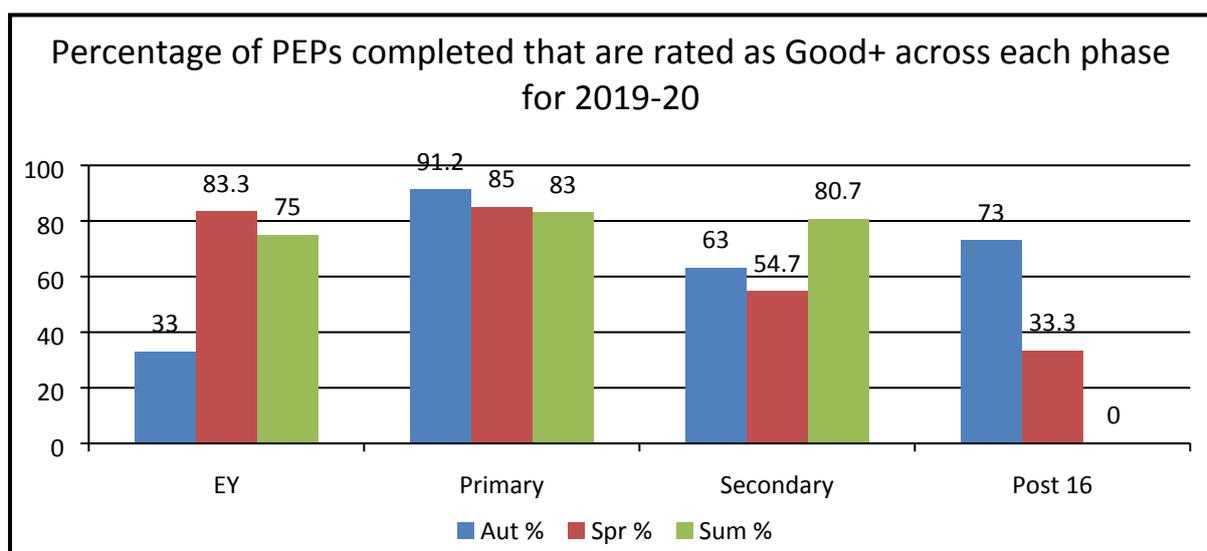
The Virtual School quality assure every PEP that is completed each term and provide feedback to schools around areas of improvement. Previous analysis showed that it is the SMART targets and impact of Pupil Premium Plus sections that continue to need improvement. However, the percentage of PEPs that are rated as Good or better is increasing.

This was verified during our ILACs inspection with feedback from the inspector stating:

- KS1 and 2 PEPs are completed thoroughly, however, there is some variability across other key stages.
- The views of children are captured well, especially when the 1-page profile is undertaken by school. However, these need to be completed more consistently to capture emotional wellbeing.
- The quality of Post 16 PEP is known as an area of improvement.
- Schools said they receive quality assurance feedback in 5 days – this is a real positive and strength.

Due to COVID restrictions and the changes that were made to the PEP document to reflect the situation, there cannot be year on year comparison of the quality of the PEPs. No formal teaching took place from 23rd March and therefore, no academic targets could be set, no progress measures captured and use of Pupil Premium Plus was limited. In addition to this, as stated above, Post 16 PEPs were not able to be completed during the summer term and so there is no quality assurance data for that term.

The Virtual School has continued to undertake its quality assurance role and as can be seen improvements continue to be maintained in spite of the challenging circumstances.



Key Priority for 2020-21:

- Improve the quality of Personal Education Plans, including Early Years and Post 16, with a particular focus on target setting, impact measures for Pupil Premium Plus and tracking the curriculum accessed.

Key Actions for 2020-21:

- To continue to support social workers to improve the completion across all phases. This will be done in collaboration with team and divisional managers through their performance clinics.
- To continue to provide support and challenge to schools to improve the quality of all PEPs. This will be done through the termly support and challenge meetings and also through Designated Teacher network meetings.

- Build on the positive feedback to schools by completing quality assurance in 'real time' with targeted schools to drive improvements.
- Develop an accountability framework to address schools that have 'stuck' PEPs.
- Deliver SMART target training across all schools that have PEPs judged as RI or below.
- Develop capacity within the Virtual School to drive improvements in Early Years and Post 16 PEP completion and quality.
- To establish a network of Post 16 providers to offer support and training and also target improving PEP quality. This will be done through the work of the Post 16 ESW worker, social workers and PAs.
- To work directly with Riverside College to ensure that the completion and quality of their Post 16 PEPs improve – this will be done through the work of the Post 16 ESW.
- To review our PEPs to ensure that we are tracking the child's journey through the curriculum to ensure that it is broad and balanced, they are accessing their entitlement and that any learning 'building blocks' that are missing are addressed.

Pupil Premium Plus

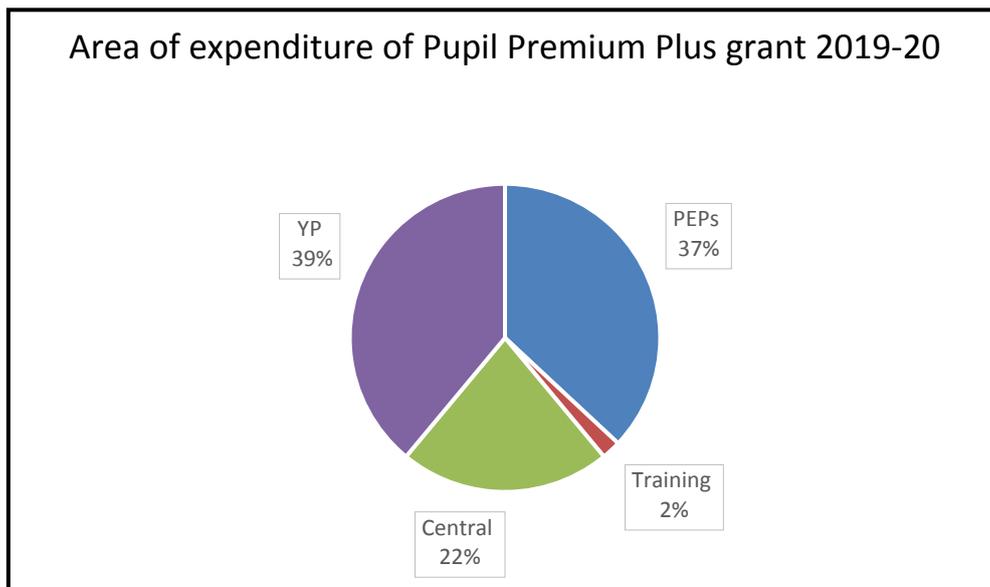
Children and young people who have been in care for 1 day or more and are of statutory school age are entitled to access Pupil Premium Plus funding (PP+). The PP+ allocation of £2300, is made per child for the number of children looked after for at least one day as recorded in the March Children Looked After Data Return (SSDA903) and aged 4 to 15 at 31 August the previous year. The funding runs in line with the financial year (1st April – 31st March) and not an academic year. The conditions of grant clearly state that the grant allocation must be managed by the Headteacher of the Virtual School and does not go directly to the school the child is attending. The total grant is the number of eligible children multiplied by £2300. This does not mean that every single child has to be allocated the full £2300. The Headteacher can manage the grant in the best interests of individuals or the full cohort. The Virtual School can top slice the PP+ grant and retain this centrally in order to undertake additional activities, projects or to more effectively discharge some of its statutory duties.

Halton have adopted an individual child needs led model for the allocation of PP+. This is in recognition that the needs of each child can vary significantly over time depending on their life experiences and the barriers to learning that they encounter. Each individual child's needs and circumstances are taken into account and the allocation of funding is managed carefully and robustly through the completion of effective, timely and high quality PEPs.

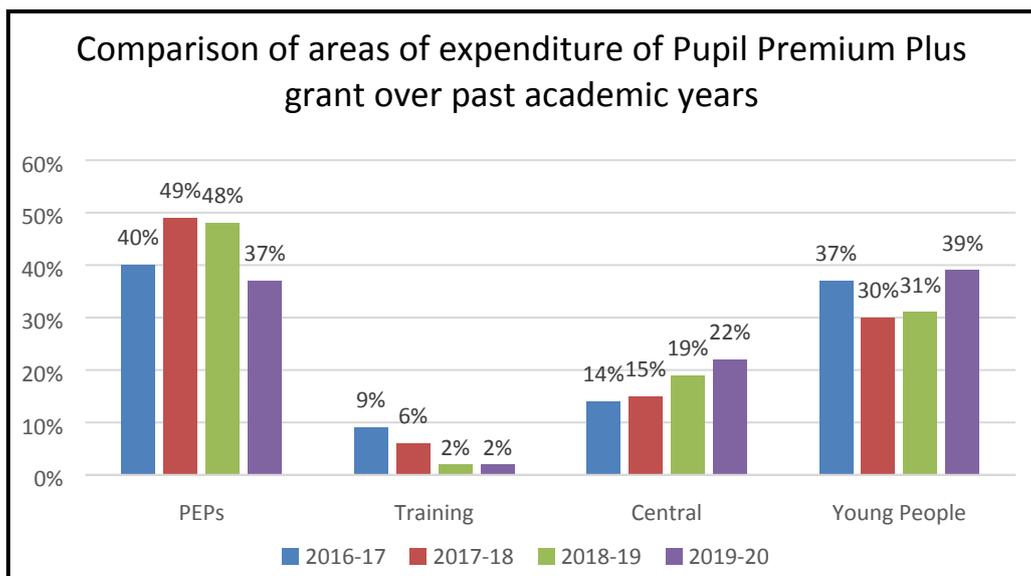
PP+ expenditure 2019-20:

One of our priorities for this academic year was to undertake a review of the impact of our PP+ expenditure, which was acknowledged in our recent Ofsted ILACs inspections as a good step towards identifying key areas of impact. However, given the COVID restrictions this was put on hold.

The PP+ grant is awarded on a financial year basis and for 2019-20 the total grant allocated for Halton was £475,700. The chart below demonstrates that through PEP allocation and other Virtual School support 76% was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes. The funding also includes an allocation to one of our secondary schools to develop bespoke support and engagement for learning for the high number of our young people in care they have on roll. Whilst PP+ has continued to be made available to schools, the PEP allocation of funding has been impacted due to the suspension of formal learning as a result of COVID restrictions.



Training delivered was for Designated Teachers, Governors and other key professionals through conferences and termly network meetings. The centrally retained portion was for the attendance service the Virtual School commission, for dedicated Education Psychology time, purchasing of Boxall Profile licences, PEP admin support and for 2 PEP Coordinators.



As formal learning was suspended from 23rd March it is not possible to analyse the link between the use of Pupil Premium Plus funding and progress this academic year. However, the Virtual School will be focusing on this next academic year when schools fully reopen.

Key Priority for 2020-21:

- To undertake a Pupil Premium Plus review to look more closely at the best evidence based impact approaches.

Key Actions for 2020-21

- To continue to scrutinise the use and impact of PP+ funding through the PEPs and the termly support and challenge progress meetings.
- To develop and share a good practice guide with our local schools and across the region through the Designated Teachers network meetings and the regional meetings.
- To review and disseminate the EEF Toolkit for PP+ to all schools to ensure that they are utilising evidence based approaches.

Additional work of the Virtual School

In our ILACS inspection in March 2020, it was noted that:

- The out of borough schools our children and young people attend reported that that the support provided by the Virtual School stands up well in comparison with that provided by their home and other LAs.
- All schools welcomed the strong link and visibility of the Virtual School in dealing with the education of children in care.
- The Virtual School has a strong presence and that communication is a strength.

Training and Development

The Virtual School offers a comprehensive training programme that is based on feedback from schools and analysis of the educational experiences of our children in care. Any costs incurred are covered through the Pupil Premium Plus grant.

There are termly Designated Teacher network meetings for both Primary and Secondary phases. These are focused on information and good practice sharing.

We actively promote the Regional Designated Teachers conference and have high numbers of schools attending. These conferences focus on national issues with speakers from Ofsted, DfE and other national groups attending. This year's focus was the implications of the new Ofsted School Inspection Framework and the Exclusions Review.

We also run at least one conference or training event per term. This year we have focused on meeting the emotional and mental health needs of our children and young people as this was identified as a priority by our schools:

Training pre-COVID 2019-20

The training below all took place prior to the COVID restrictions, but unfortunately others had to be cancelled.

Training event	Focus
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Children in Care can – Aspire and Achieve	Training for Designated Teachers and Designated Governors. The focus was on raising aspirations around our children in care and challenging underachievement. Updates were provided on children and young people’s outcomes. Two workshops were designed to challenge practice around ‘labelling’ and managing moments of crisis.
Flipping your lid – managing moments of crisis	Training for foster carers. The session explored the brain and the body in response to stress/crisis, the crisis curve and the 3 C’s in responding to crisis: Calming (de-escalation techniques), Connecting (emotional validation) and Controlling (planning for crisis).
Mental Health First Aid Training	Training for Designated Teachers. Specifically designed for DTs to provide them with tools to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of our children in care.
The WHY behind the WHAT	Multi-agency training. Delivered by a drama based organisation, the training focused on delivering dynamic and thought provoking scenarios so that greater understanding could be gained around the reasons for challenging behaviour and exploring ideas in managing challenges to be able to support children in care in achieving their full potential. Delegates were given time to step back, reflect and share ideas.
NW Regional Conference – Champions for Change	Training for Designated Teachers. Presentation from key partner including Ofsted, DfE, NAVSH and the Rees Centre, Oxford University.

Additional learning and literacy support

Halton Virtual provides a high level of ‘outside the classroom’ educational support for our children and young people in care. We have worked hard to find different and creative ways to continue this support despite the COVID restrictions being in place.

The Virtual School coordinate additional one-to-one tuition for any Halton child in care who requests support with a subject regardless of where they are educated or living. The tutors are always qualified teachers and subject specialists and provide regular tuition reports. Whilst our original 1:1 tuition offer has been face to face, we have responded to the current situation and moved to provide online tuition. This continued throughout the lockdown period and over the summer holidays to support children and young people to remain engaged in their learning and to mitigate against falling behind.

In partnership with a local bookshop (The Curiosity Book shop) the Virtual School send an individualised book parcel to each identified child in their placement on a half termly basis. The children are identified through analysis of the PEP outcomes and also all Reception age children receive them. The parcels are tailored to the child’s interests and their reading and writing levels. The aims of the book parcels are to encourage a love of reading at home; and improve reading ages and vocabulary development. 27 children and young people received the parcels during the Autumn term but unfortunately due to COVID restrictions this had to cease from 23rd March onwards. We will be looking to re-start this when appropriate.

The Virtual School also has a yearly subscription to Storytime Magazine which is sent out each month to identified children in Key Stage 2. The magazines are brightly illustrated and have short stories. The aim of the magazines are to encourage a love of reading at home particularly for those who struggle accessing a book and to improve reading age and vocabulary development. The Virtual School and the magazine company were able to find a solution to GDPR concerns so that these magazines continued to be sent to the 37 identified children.

In addition to the above the Virtual School provided the following support for learning during the COVID restrictions:

- The Virtual School website (www.myvirtualschool.org) was enhanced and regularly updated with COVID-19 guidance from the DfE; curriculum links particularly Maths and English and other subjects; resources to support learning at home; other activities to support carers in keeping children and young people engaged in their learning such as virtual tours of museums, cross curricular activities, coding projects, arts & craft ideas, fun ideas from famous authors etc. A new section with ideas and resources to support Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing was also added.
- The Virtual School was in the process of launching a digital learning platform (Anspear/Nimbl) which was being targeted at specific children and young people and their carers. This could not happen in the planned way so our Education Support Worker contacted 20 carers and their young person individually to ensure that they were set up on the system and could access both curriculum materials for the child/young person and also education based professional development modules for the carer.

Keeping in Touch Packs:

The Virtual School were mindful that school and learning was very different during lockdown and the COVID restrictions, and that our children and young people were 'missing a lot'. Therefore, we developed 'Keeping in Touch' packs which were sent out to 203 school aged children and young people for the summer holidays with resources and activity ideas, including opportunities for them to engage in some activities virtually with the Virtual School. Packs were tailored to different age groups and specific SEN needs.

The items and activities were designed to:

- Improve reading skills,
- Develop creative writing and use of language skills,
- Encourage STEAM by giving them hands on experiments to do using household items,
- Develop number, logic and strategy skills through card games and activities,
- Improve fluency of multiplication.

The variety of items included:

- Virtual School Newsletter – giving them ideas of things to do and guiding them to the website.
- Worksheets
- Competitions
- Books

- Games
- Stuffed toys
- Wellbeing packs

Feedback from children, young people, carers and social workers has been overwhelmingly positive. Some young people who have never engaged in our activity programme have enjoyed receiving the parcels and completing the activities. Therefore, we are looking to continue with this approach even when our activity programme is up and running again.

Activity and Support Programme

During the school holidays the Virtual School provide a range of activity days to engage and support our children and young people to develop a variety of academic, personal and independence skills. Some days are fully developed and led by the Education Support Worker within the Virtual Schools and others are delivered in partnership with other guests, agencies and providers. All the activity programme is funded through the Pupil Premium Plus grant.

However, due to COVID restrictions coming in on 23rd March 2020 only the following activities were able to be run.

Target group	Number of CYP attended	Details	Aims
Creative Mind with Curtis Jobling			
Years 8, 9 & 10	10	Curtis Jobling joined us again to bring us more lively activities, hints and tips and general chit chat about writing and also future aspirations regardless of what they may be. His last visit with us brought us lots of laughter and the feedback from everyone who took part was that they'd like more of the same!	Writing Speaking and listening Decision making Self Confidence Self Esteem
Eat Fit & Move It			
All CIC	32	The CIC health team delivered a hands on, activity packed day around "healthy eating and physical exercise".	Healthy lifestyle choices Cooking Nutrition PE
Monster Mayhem			

Target group	Number of CYP attended	Details	Aims
Year 3 & Year 4	7	A monster themed day perfect for Halloween filled with lots of crafts and games. Children created a monster puppet, gave their puppet a character profile and worked as a team.	Art & Design Reading Writing – Spelling, punctuation and grammar Times tables Number patterns Interpersonal skills Communication skills Team working.
Pit Stop Challenge			
Year 9, Year 10 & Year 11	6	Delivered by Hi-Impact. CIC teamed up as “pit crew” to dismantle and reassemble a go-kart. The challenge was to do this in the quickest time possible as they raced against other teams.	Design & Technology Interpersonal skills Communication skills Team working.
Virtual Reality			
Year 7 to Year 9	14	Delivered by Hi-Impact. CIC had the chance to use tools to create and view their own VR world.	Computing Design & Technology Imagination Exploration and inquisitiveness
Now Press Play			
Year 1 to Year 4	10	Delivered by Hi-Impact. CIC become the main character of a story through an interactive audio experience. They also got to make use of different apps and technology equipment to practice skills in computer coding as well as literacy and numeracy.	Speech and Language Discussion skills Computing
Spy Academy Code Breakers			
Year 5 & Year 6	11	The day involved solving riddles and code breaking to expose enemy spies who have infiltrated the spy academy.	History Problem solving Interpersonal skills Communication skills Team working.

Some feedback from our young people:

I enjoyed the exercising and food tasting. I learnt about sugars in food today.

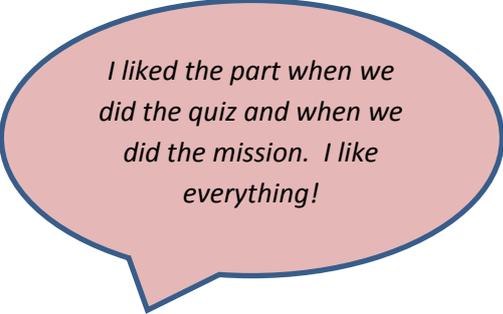
My favourite part of the day was exercising. I have different exercises to learn at my house. I would come again because it is fun.



I enjoyed the building and taking apart the go kart. I also enjoyed the team work side of it. I would definitely like to do something with hi-impact again.



I had fun and I enjoyed myself. I also found some topics interesting and cool.



I liked the part when we did the quiz and when we did the mission. I like everything!

Key actions for 2020-2021:

- To explore the use of Microsoft Teams to enable the delivery of virtual activity days.
- To develop the website to improve communication with and support for carers and children and young people in care.
- To expand on the Keeping in Touch packs to provide more resources at home for carers and children and young people to use, particularly through the school holidays and social distancing procedures resulting from the COVID restrictions.

Key Priorities for 2020-21

Priority	Rationale
To ensure that all Halton children in care continue to access their educational entitlement throughout the COVID 19 pandemic.	Due to the COVID 19 pandemic children in care did not receive formal education from March 2020. This will have impacted upon their progress and overall engagement. We need to ensure that all children in care return to school and are provided with all appropriate support to enable them to catch up on lost learning and continue making progress.
Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on achieving the higher grades in Key stage 4.	It will be important to focus on all end of key stage results due to the loss of learning in 2019-20. Analysis at Key Stage 4 shows that improvements need to be made particularly in the number of young people achieving areas of English and Maths at the higher grades.
Improve the quality of Personal Education Plans, including Early Years and Post 16, with a particular focus on target setting, impact measures for Pupil Premium Plus and tracking the curriculum accessed.	Ofsted highlighted the need to improve the quality of PEPs in Early Years and Post 16 and in the consistency of target setting at Key Stage 4.

Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	It was not possible to achieve this in 2019-20 but it remains important tool to understand how our use of Pupil Premium Plus can have greater impact on improving the outcomes for all children in care.
To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%	Whilst there has been improvement this year, it has been a different year for attendance. We need to keep the focus on ensuring that our secondary age pupils are in school and learning.
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	It will be important to monitor the impact of returning to education on the social, emotional and behavioural needs of children in care and to ensure that exclusions and resulting time out of school is minimised.
Monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school rated as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.	Ofsted inspections were suspended during COVID 19 restrictions so our schools remain at the previous academic year judgements. Once formal education has resumed it will be important to track the progress of those children in school that are judged below good to ensure that they are being supported and making progress.
Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	This was not completed during the previous academic year but will be a focus so we can more robustly monitor our SEND pupils as a discreet cohort.
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 19 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	This was identified as an area of focus within our Ofsted inspection. We need to both increase the capacity of the Virtual School and develop more robust strategies in terms of engagement in EET and particularly opportunities to take part in an apprenticeship.
Improve capacity within the Virtual School to extend the direct approach to include 19-22 year old care leavers.	As above this was identified as an area of improvement within our Ofsted.