VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Annual Report

2021-2022

Written by

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Visualise your dream

Dare to try

Learn to release your potential

Introduction

Halton's Virtual School is responsible for promoting the educational achievement for looked-after children (LAC) in line with the statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children' (2018). The virtual school is overseen by the Headteacher of the Virtual School and this annual report provides a summary of our actions and achievements for the past 12 months, a self-evaluation of the standard of service and support provided, and a focussed, measurable action plan for the 2022-2023 academic year.

This report also considers the progress made and actions identified to respond to the most recent DfE (Department for Education) guidance: 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker: virtual school head role extension' (2021).

Executive Summary

There has been notable change within the Virtual School in 2021-2022.

The long standing Headteacher, Sharon Williams, retired in November 2021. Following her departure, Joanne Lloyd and Peter McPartland shared the position of Acting Headteacher for the remainder of the academic year.

Benjamin Holmes was then appointed as the substantive Headteacher from 1st August 2022.

In addition to this, following the expansion of the role of virtual school Headteacher, additional PEP co-ordinators (Rachael Williams and Alys James) joined the team to release Joanne and Peter to strategically lead upon the new responsibilities.

In other changes, Gemma Donaldson, our early year's co-ordinator, is currently on maternity leave and we bid farewell to Louisa Rees (one of our education support workers) and Kelly Franklin (our Post-16 PEP lead). These departures have inevitably had an impact upon the team's capacity and the level of support that has been possible to provide to schools, social care and directly with children and young people. This will therefore be reviewed in the next academic year to ensure stability and capacity is sustainable for all colleagues within the team.

Summary of performance against Key Priorities

ü = Good Performance
≈ = there is some improvement but there is still concern
× = an area of underperformance

Priority	Achieved	Analysis
To continue to mitigate against the risk of lost learning and to increase the percentage of children who are achieving good educational outcomes.	≈	Outcomes at KS4 were positive in comparison to previous years. PEPs (Personal Education Plan) (Personal Education Plan) and the use of School Led Tuition Grant expanded the provision of tuition to tackle areas of lost learning.
Close the progress and 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.	ü	Improvements were made across all performance criteria. Performance on the combined measure at Grade 5+ also improved. There has been an increase in the number of Children in Care in Halton achieving 5 GCSES including the combined English and maths at grade 5. This will continue to be a priority focus for the next academic year.
Continue to 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.	≈	The percentage of PEPs graded good or better has increased, particularly within the early years. The quality of targets within Post 16 and a NEET PEP are now required.
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	×	This has not been actioned in 2021-22 but is identified as a priority for Spring 2023.
Develop a Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus model to provide additional support and improve retention.	≈	Progress has been made but impacted upon by the departure of the Post 16 PEP lead, which is currently a vacant

		position. Following appointment, this will be completed during 2023.
To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%	×	Although progress has been made with individual students, the overall attendance was 85% for secondary age young people. However, as a whole cohort, the attendance remains above 90%
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	×	Within the Primary cohort the number of exclusions remained low throughout the year. There has been an increase in exclusions from the previous year but remain broadly in line with exclusions in previous years.
Continue to monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school judged as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.	≈	Support and challenge visits to schools were completed on a termly basis. The information collated during these visits were then fed back to the termly Cross Service Monitoring group, attended by all sectors of the Inclusion division.
Develop a SEND dashboard to monitor the outcomes, support, and quality of provision more effectively.	×	Due to the retirement of the previous VHT and redeployment of existing team members, this has not been completed during 2021-22
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 22-year-olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	≈	A high percentage of 16–18-year-olds are engaging with EET, but this is not sustained at 19+. Initial plans are in place for the development of a traineeship model in 2022-23. The arrival of additional UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) has also impacted upon these figures.
To develop a proactive and bespoke package of support for UASC.	≈	Support is provided, but this now needs to be strengthened and developed following the appointment of a Post 16 PEP co-ordinator under the direction of the Post 16 team leader.

At Risk Register

Children in care overall performance against key education outcomes
Halton Virtual School operate an 'At Risk Register' so that we can track and prioritise those children and young people in care who are at risk of not achieving good educational outcomes. On the At Risk Register satisfactory performance is when a child in care:

- Is making at least expected progress across all key subject areas in their phase of education.
- Is currently or likely to achieve age related expectations in all key subject areas
- Has attendance that is above 95%
- Has had no fixed term exclusions
- Is accessing their full educational entitlement
- Has not had any time off school roll

A child will be flagged in the following way against these criteria:

■	Has no flags against any of the key performance indicators
■	1 flag - Is not making at least expected progress/not going to achieve age related expectations OR is not achieving 1 other performance indicator
■	2 flags - Is not making at least expected progress/not going to achieve age related expectations AND is not achieving 1 other performance indicator
■	3 or more flags - Is not making at least expected progress/not going to achieve age related expectations AND is not achieving 2 or more other performance indicator

Positive performance is a reduction in the percentage of children who are flagged as red and an increase in the percentage of those flagged as green.

The chart below shows the percentage of children in each of the risk categories across the academic year. As can be seen, the number of young people being flagged as green across the academic year has remained stable. This is because of the collaborative work lead by the Virtual School and including schools and Children's Social Care. This collaboration has helped to mitigate the risks of children and young people not achieving good educational outcomes in challenging circumstances.

Percentage of children in care within each category of risk in 2022-22
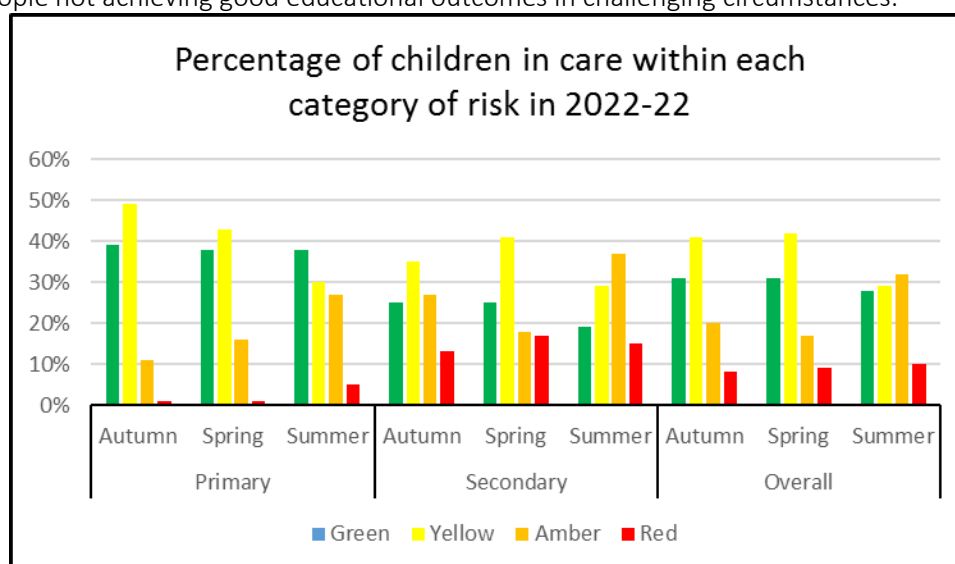
Priority Areas for 2022-2023

This is a summary of the areas of focus. The full action plan can be found at the end of this report.

Priority	Rationale
To reduce the number of LAC becoming NEET whilst in care or as a care leaver. (This includes the launch of a NEET PEP)	Too many young care leavers are becoming NEET.
Develop a high quality, multi-agency moderation process of PEPs, to continue to build upon the progress and attainment within all Key Stages	Following the expansion of the virtual school team and several changes within Halton, the development of high-quality moderation of PEPs and PEP QA judgements will be established. The development of pupil progress meetings alongside the reestablishment of Pupil Causing Concern meetings will ensure greater strategic oversight for the cohort.

Embed a high-quality strategic model for the implementation of the expansion of duties to encompass all children with a social worker.	Due to the expansion of the role of the virtual Headteacher to cover all children with a social worker, it is essential that we have a clear plan, based upon a baseline assessment and identification of areas of need.
Develop a more rigorous and robust performance and quality assurance model, including the implementation of a PEP deadline, greater analysis of standards (including the completion rate for initial PEPs within 10 days) and reintegration within the corporate parenting board.	Following the expansion of the virtual school, it is important to increase the presence of the VS with partners, including social care and across education, and report upon performance through the governance of the corporate parenting board.

Context

Halton is a small borough which consists of two towns, Runcorn and Widnes. The population is 128,200 of which around 25,954 are children and young people between the ages of 0-15 and 4310 ages 16-18.

At the time of writing, the Index of Deprivation Measure (IDM) places Halton as the 23rd most deprived area nationally, a deterioration from previous IDMs (Index of Deprivation Measure). Alongside this we have the 8th highest national Free School Meal population for Nursery and Primary and 4th highest for Secondary. Over half the wards in the borough have a third or more children living in poverty. The local economy is amongst the fastest growing in the Liverpool City region and has a good proportion of high value industries.

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. Due to the expansion of the role of the virtual Headteacher, they also take a strategic lead on the educational outcomes for Post Looked-After Children (PLAC) and those with a social worker.

Halton Virtual School Team from September 2022

Role	Name	Funding	Contract type
Headteacher of the Virtual School	Benjamin Holmes	Core funded	Permanent
Primary and Early Years PEP and Progress Team Leader	Joanne Lloyd	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Secondary and Post 16 PEP and Progress Team Leader	Peter McPartland	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Early Years Education Support Worker	Gemma Donaldson	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant until March 2023
School Age Education Support Worker	Min Ling Lee-Tai	Core funded	Permanent

Post Looked After and Placed with Families Education Support Worker	David Bradshaw	Sec 31 Grant – PLAC / SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
Primary PEP Co-ordinator	Rachael Williams	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant until Jan 2024
Secondary PEP Co-ordinator	Alys James	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant until Jan 2024
Post 16 PEP Coordinator	Vacancy	Youth Service grant	Fixed term 2 years until March 2023
KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer	Ian Wilson	Troubled Families grant	Fixed term 2 years until March 2023

We have worked hard to expand the Virtual School in response to the feedback provided in Halton's ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) inspection which stated that more capacity was needed to further improve the excellent work of the Virtual School. We have ensured that our key priority areas of Early Years and Post 16 have benefited from this increase. However, we have also recognised that as Halton has a high number of children and young people placed within their families and that additional support was also required for this cohort.

Due to the nature of LA (Local Authorities) funding, many these posts are grant funded and on short term fixed contracts or rolling contracts with the confirmation of the continuation of the grant. In fact, there are only 3 permanent posts within the Virtual School as a whole. This presents a risk to the work of the Virtual School and the LA in fulfilling its statutory duty to promote the education of children in care and post looked after children. These vital roles will cease if the grants end or further funding is not found.

We work closely with several other services within the LA and have additional capacity because of corporate parenting responsibilities:

- Named SEN Case Worker – provides support with EHCPs (Education and Health Care Plan) and finding appropriate specialist provision
- Named Education Welfare Officer – provides attendance alerts and advice
- Education Psychology – commissioned to provide training and advice for schools
- Named YOS officer – provides support with YOS risk assessments and securing appropriate education provision
- Named 14-19 Case Worker – ensures priority is given to tracking our post 16 young people accessing education within Halton

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 by 1st April 2022. 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 2021-22.

Children in Care Cohort Summary

This data covers the academic year 2021-22, up to 31st August 2022. Over the course of the 12 months there were…

362 LAC Aged 3-19

- 251 in care for 12mth+
- 77 early years
- 116 Primary (R-Y6)
- 126 Secondary (Y7-Y11)
- 88 16 - 18 years (Y12-Y13)
- 77 19-22 years

Our School Aged Cohort

- 115 Girls & 127 Boys
- 59 EHCPs, 49 SEN Support
- 165 Education in Halton, 67 Out of Borough (2 Out of country & 8 Not on roll)
- 118 Foster, 36 Residential, 80 Friends & Family, 8 Secure / Other
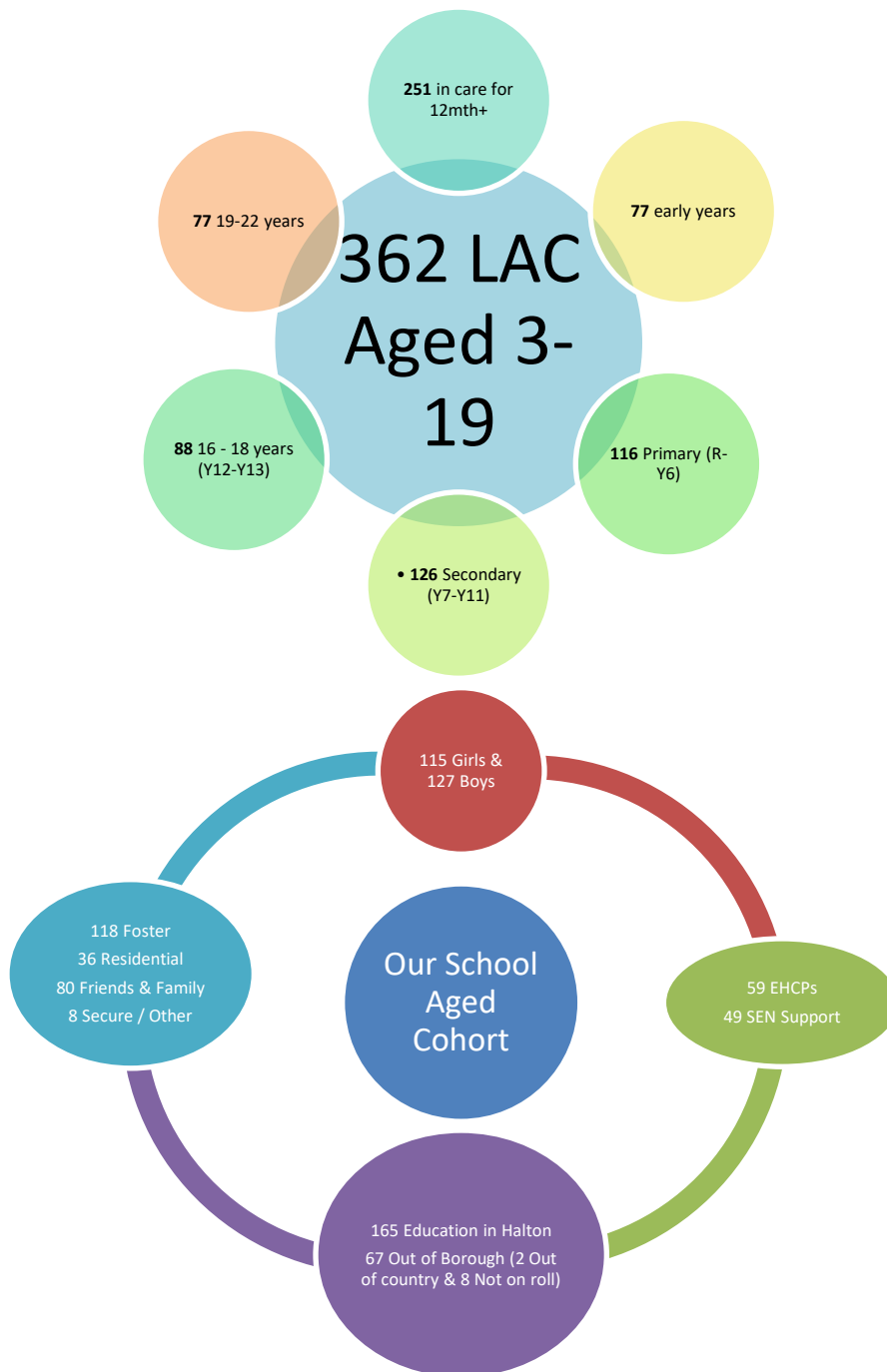
Governance of the Virtual School is undertaken by the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership Board which has multi-disciplinary membership, including Headteacher representation and the Director of Children and Adults Services, and is chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People. In addition, further scrutiny and oversight is provided by Elected Members through the Children and Young People's Policy and Performance Board and the Corporate Parenting 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 on the Halton Children and Young People Safeguarding Partnership's Executive Group and Chair of the Education Subgroup.
- 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 of the Northwest Virtual Heads network group focusing on sharing good practice, developing strategies to overcome shared challenges and to plan effectively on a regional footing.
- Membership of Halton's associations of Primary and Secondary Headteacher's and a key member of the Halton Learning Alliance.

Profile of Cohort

Placement moves

During 2021/22 there was an increase in the number of CYP (Children and Young People) who experienced a placement move. 57 children and young people who had 1 or more placement move during the academic year 2020-21 (up from 31 in 20/21). Of these:
- 36 had 1 placement move which in most cases was related to moving to a long-term placement (up from 25)
- 14 had 2 placement moves (up from 6)
- 7 had 3 placement moves (up from 3)

School moves

There were 33 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year, 31 had 1 move, whilst 1 had 2 moves and 1 had 3 moves.

There were 19 young people who have had periods of time not on a school roll.

There has been several UASC in this cohort and it has been difficult to source an appropriate education provision because of delays in the age assessment confirming they are of statutory school age and due to their extremely low levels of English. There were also 3 young people who had been discharged from secure accommodation and due to the impact of the pandemic care placements and specialist education provision have been hard to acquire at the same time. For all young people awaiting a school place the Virtual School provides tuition and sources an appropriate provision as soon as possible.

The average wait for a school place across the whole academic year was 34 days which is above the required 20 days. This figure was particularly impacted by UASC awaiting age assessments to be

completed. There were also 2 young people who were school refusers, and it was not possible to obtain a school place due to non-attendance following a placement move.

Reason for school moves for children in care in 2021-22
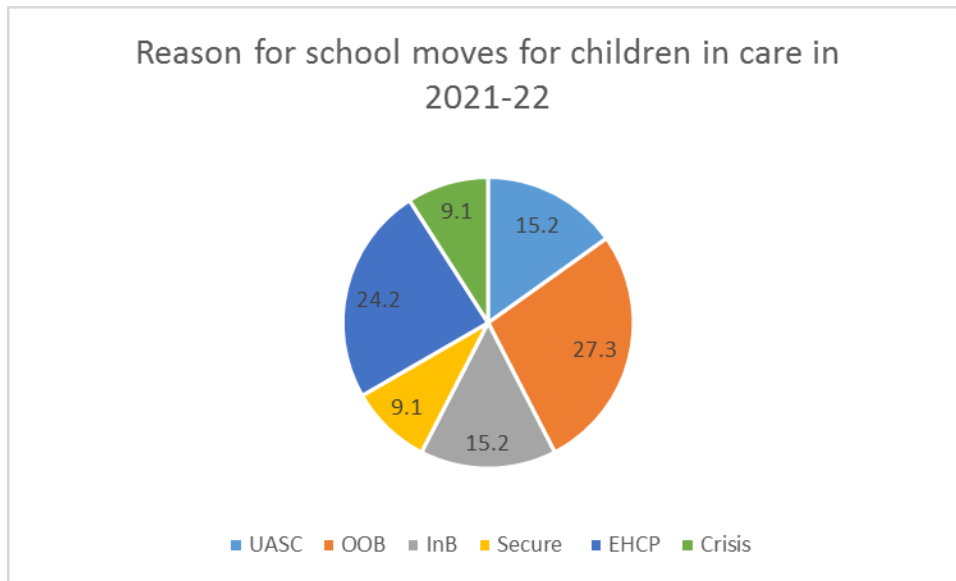
School Phase

The chart below shows a breakdown of children in care by each national curriculum year group for 2022/23. There are clear growth areas in pre-school aged children and within secondary.
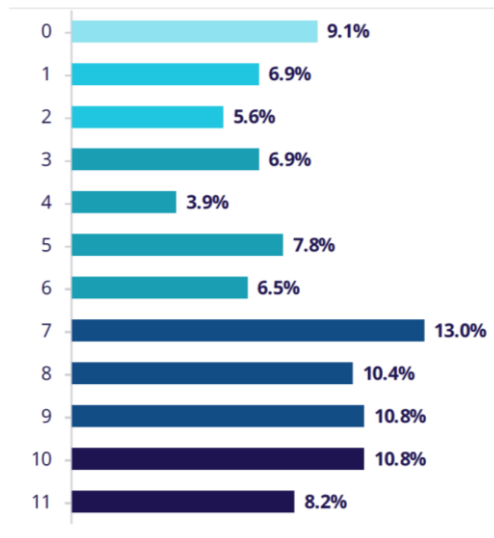
School Ofsted ratings

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 considers 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 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.

Key Education Provider priority for 2022-23

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

Key Education Placement actions for 2022-23:

- Through termly tracking identify all schools' whose Ofsted judgement has changed so that the PEP and Progress Coordinator can then carry out 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 colleagues within the education division, to ensure that schools judged as Requires Improvement or below are making progress to achieve a better Ofsted outcome.
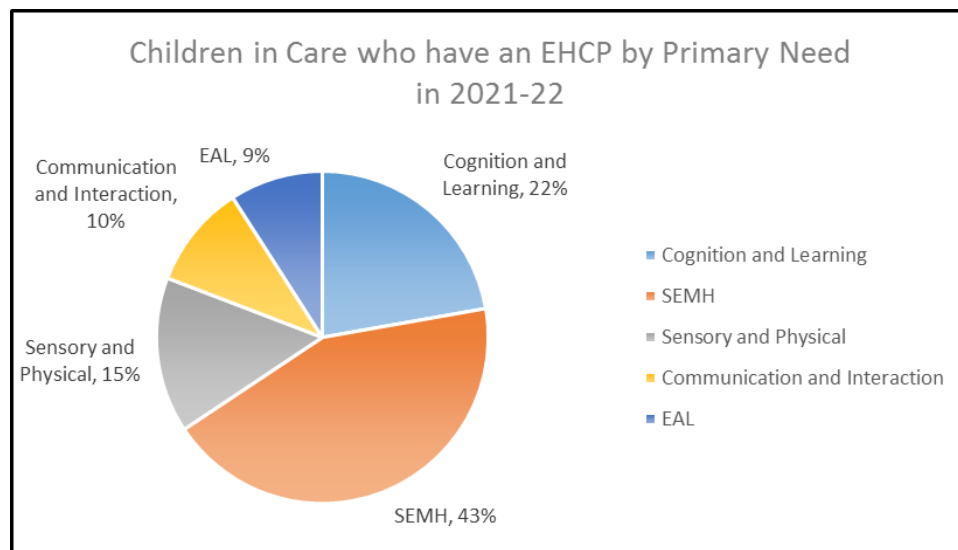
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

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 require 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.

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 education psychology time, and this is used to support our most vulnerable children who require statutory assessment but are being educated out of Halton; 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.

The following chart shows the percentage of Halton children in care who have an EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) and the primary reason. We currently have 4 children across Primary and Secondary that are undergoing statutory assessment.

Children in Care who have an EHCP by Primary Need in 2021-22

- Cognition and Learning, 22%
- SEMH, 43%
- Sensory and Physical, 15%
- Communication and Interaction, 10%
- EAL, 9%

I have included EAL as although it is not within the SEN Code of Practice is it an additional barrier that our increasing number of UASC face in accessing their educational entitlement.

Work undertaken by the Virtual School with SEN

- 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 has continued to work with our SEN Commissioning and SEN Assessment Teams to ensure that when a new specialist provision is required this is done as promptly as possible, including if the child is placed out of Halton on an emergency.
- We have supported social workers and carers to complete their elements of any assessment or annual review documentation to ensure that the EHCP is comprehensive and holistic so better meeting the child's needs.
- We have supported, through Pupil Premium Plus, any child in care who has struggled with returning to school both academically and emotionally.
- Whilst a joint 'hands on' quality assurance process for our out of borough provisions was developed with our SEND Commissioning Service it was initially impacted by COVID restrictions. However, this took place remotely and once appropriate has become face to face again.

Key SEN Priority for 2022-23

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

Key SEN Actions for 2022-23

- 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.
- Further enhance scrutiny of 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, post looked after children and those with a social worker.
- Resume implementation of a robust quality assurance process of all out of borough specialist provision attended by Halton children in care.

Academic Outcomes in 2021-2022

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.

Context

Please note that this is the first academic year that young people have completed standardised assessments since 2019. It is worth noting that those young people in Year 2, began their Primary education at the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Early Years Foundation Stage

There were 10 young people in the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more at the time of assessment – 60% of these young people achieved a 'good level of development' (GLD).
- 6 of whom were male, 4 males reached GLD and 2 females.
- 7 were educated in Halton schools.
- All schools attended by Halton young people in care were rated as Good or better by Ofsted.
- 3 children lived out of borough, and 5 were placed with parents/family.
- 2 had attendance below 95%, with 1 young person in this group having attendance below 90% as well.
- 1 young person had a school move during Reception to an out of borough school.

Year 1 Phonics

There were 6 young people in the cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more – 33% of this cohort passed the Phonics screening check with a score of 32/40 or greater (both were female):
- 1 of whom were male.
- 2 were educated in Halton schools.
- All schools attended by Halton young people in care were rated as Good or better by Ofsted.
- 3 children lived out of borough, and 2 were placed with parents/family.
- 1 young person has an EHCP, and she attends a specialist resource base provision.
- 2 had attendance below 95%, with no young people in this group had attendance below 90%.
- 0 children had periods of fixed term exclusions during Year 1.
- 1 school move took place, 1 child had an adoption breakdown and therefore moved placements twice this academic year.

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).

There were 9 young people in the cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more:

Reading	Writing	Maths	SPaG	Science	Combined
11% (1)	11% (1)	22% (2)	11% (1)	33% (3)	11% (1)

- 6 of whom were male.

- 6 were educated in Halton schools.
- 7 children attended schools rated as Good or better by Ofsted.
- 3 young people have an EHCP, with an additional child going through Statutory Assessment.
- 3 children live out of borough, 1 of those resides in a residential placement, 5 were placed with parents/family.
- 4 had attendance below 95%, with 2 young people in this group having attendance below 90% as well.
- 0 children had periods of fixed term exclusions.
- 1 young person had a school move during Year 2 due to an adoption move out of borough.

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).

There were 18 young people in the cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more:

Reading	Writing	Maths	SPaG	Science	Combined
28% (5) GD -6% (1)	33% (6)	39% (7)	33% (6)	28% (5)	28% (5)

- 10 of whom were male.
- 9 were educated in Halton schools. 2 children attended a resource base provision, 5 young people attended specialist provision.
- All young people attended schools rated as Good or better by Ofsted.
- 7 young people have an EHCP, with an additional child going through Statutory Assessment.
- 13 children live out of borough, 1 of those resides in a residential placement, 2 were placed with parents/family.
- 6 had attendance below 95%, with 2 young people in this group having attendance below 90% as well.
- 2 children had periods of fixed term exclusions.
- 3 young people had a school move during Year 6.

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.

There were 33 young people in the cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more:

- 16 of whom were male.

- 23 were educated in Halton schools.
- 13 schools attended by Halton young people in care in Y11 were rated as good or better by Ofsted.
- 30% had an EHCP, 27% were educated in non-mainstream provision.
- 36% were placed in residential provision, 36% lived out of borough, and 9% were placed with parents.
- In Year 11, 75% had attendance below 95%, 30% of students had attendance between 94% - 90% with the remaining students 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.
- 6% had periods of fixed term exclusions during Key Stage 4, however, all exclusions were below 5 days.
- 4 young people accessed alternative provision and 5 young people had periods on a reduced timetable to re-engage them in their education.
- 4 young people had a school move during KS4, 2 young people because of moving into secure, 1 young people following a move out of borough and 1 who has a provision identified following statutory assessment.

Due to the way the GCSE grades were awarded this year there cannot be a like for like comparison with previous years. However, performance does show that young people did achieve above the previous year's Teacher Assessed Grades and Centre Assessed Grades.

2021-22	E4+	E5+	M4+	M5+	EM4+	EM5+	SC4+	SC5+	5GCSEs EM4+	5GCSEs EM5+	5GCSEs 4+	5GCSEs 5+
% CIC achieving	42.4	27.3	30.3	9.1	24.2	9.1	42.4	3	24.2	6.1	30.3	12.1

KS4 Summary

Attainment	≈	Improvements were made across all performance criteria highlighted above. Performance on the combined measure at Grade 5+ also improved. There has been an increase in the number of Children in Care in Halton achieving 5 GCSES including the combined English and maths at grade 5. This is a priority focus for the next academic year.

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, we aspire for no fixed term exclusions (suspensions) and that no LAC is permanently excluded from school.

Education, Employment and Training for Post 16
- 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.

Virtual School Actions and Impact

- Scrutinised the appropriateness of the targets within each PEP and ensured that the Pupil Premium Plus funding had impact.
- PEP Leads held termly meetings with schools and hosted cluster meetings to discuss individual young people's progress and the impact of Pupil Premium Plus interventions, as well as standards across the authority. This ensured that the interventions were targeted at the areas of development identified through their outcomes. This was further supported by the inclusion of Education Psychologists to support in offering intervention suggestions to support any identified young people.
- Provided one-to-one tuition on core subjects when identified as an area of development in the PEP.
- 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.
- Worked closely with Secondary Designated Teachers to ensure that the young people had the opportunity to complete their work portfolios and assessments prior to the Teacher Assessed grades being awarded.

Progress of other children in care

Halton Virtual School monitor the progress of all children in care on a termly basis using data provided by schools through the PEP and the termly data collection.

Standardised assessments returned this summer for the first time since 2019. Children in KS1 & KS2 continued to make satisfactory progress from their starting points. 31% of Year 2 pupils reached ARE, it is worth noting that 56% of this cohort are on SEN support or have an EHCP. This cohort of pupils began their education during the COVID19 pandemic. 34% of Year 6 children reached ARE, it is worth noting that 55% of this cohort are on SEN support, have an EHCP or are undergoing statutory assessment. 39% of this cohort entered care in the last 12 months. For the Reception cohort, 60% reached expected at GLD, although more children did make progress from their starting point. The main area of concern is Communication & Language. Within the secondary cohort there has been an increase across the academic year of the number of students making satisfactory progress. This has been seen replicated in the external assessment that have returned this year for the year 11 cohort. 60 % of the key stage 3 cohort have been identified as making satisfactory progress across the academic year.

Term:	Reception			Primary			Secondary			Total		
Autumn	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC
	8	66%	12	63	89%	71	43	38%	112	114	56%	204
Term:	Reception			Primary			Secondary			Total		
Spring	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC
	7	64%	11	67	92%	73	66	54%	123	140	68%	207
Term:	Reception			Primary			Secondary			Total		
Summer	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC	#	%	Total CIC
	11	61%	18	76	85%	89	72	54%	133	159	66%	240

Key Educational Outcomes Priorities for 2022-23

- Ensure that all Halton children in care continue to access their educational entitlement
- Close the progress and attainment gap between Halton Children in Care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on Key Stage 4.
- Expand the tracking of cohort progress and attainment to include Post-LAC and Children with a social worker.

Key Education Outcomes Actions for 2022-23

- Develop the use of pupil progress meetings within the virtual school to gain a greater understanding of where progress is sustained or where action is required to narrow the attainment gap.
- Analysis of PEP assessments and their accuracy in predicting end of year outcomes through moderation to ensure support is successfully targeted.
- 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.

Progress	≈	Data shows that children in care have continued to make progress despite the disruption to learning. However, this is not consistent.

Attendance and Exclusions

NOTE: The data presented in this section covers <u>all</u> children in care through the academic year of 2021-22.

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 attend 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 absence 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 called '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, with the latter aspiration target being the benchmark for analysis.

Attendance 2021-22

Given the lifting of COVID restrictions at the beginning of the Autumn term, it has been a difficult year for school attendance, due to medical and sickness related absences. However, the Virtual School has ensured that each child in care received support whilst studying at home if an absence was related to COVID.

The Virtual School maintained Welfare Call monitoring attendance processes throughout the year, ensuring that any COVID related absences were monitored closely to ensure educational support was provided whilst at home. This approach was developed because of the high transmission rates within Halton as an additional measure of safeguarding our children and young people in care. The Virtual School team would contact both carers and young people to ensure they had everything they needed to complete their remote learning and to address any issues of non-engagement.

Attendance of all children in care 2021-22

Average % attendance	Primary	Secondary	Overall
Autumn	95%	84%	89%
Spring	94%	85%	90%
Summer	97%	85%	91%

Attendance of all children in care over the past 6 years

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21 COVID	2021-22
Primary	96.0%	97.1%	96.2%	87.5%	93.3%	95.3%
Secondary	86.9%	88.7%	88.6%	77.9%	90%	84.6
Overall	91.4%	92.9%	92.4%	81.9%	90.5%	90%

Percentage attendance of Halton CIC from 2016-17 to 2021-22
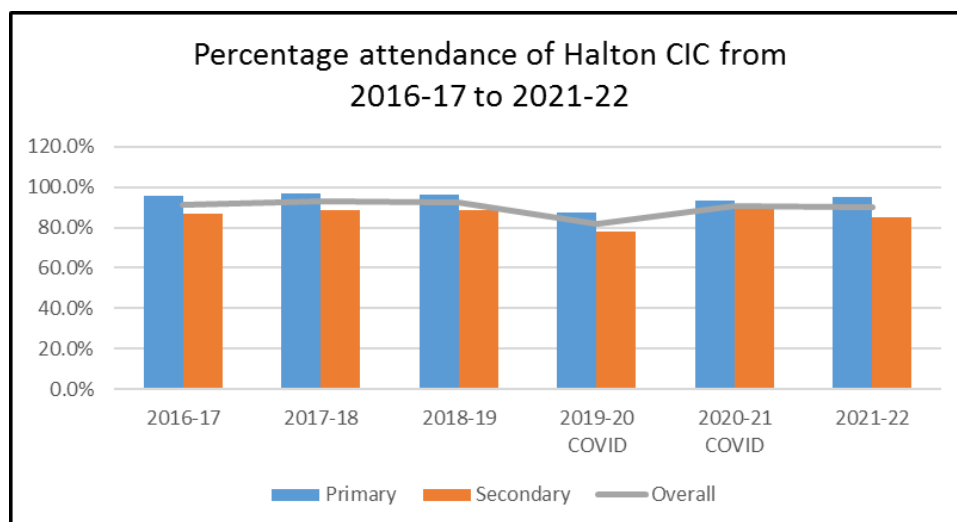
As can be seen, despite the pandemic the attendance of Halton children in care has remained positive with only a relatively low drop overall.

Attendance - Influencing Factors

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

- 14 children live with parents/family members
- 5 came into care during the academic year
- The main reasons for absence were illness
- 1 child had unauthorised absences (1 day lost learning).
- 1 child had a school move due to SEMH (Social Emotional and Mental Health) needs; 5 days were lost due to a staggered start to the Spring term.
- I child also received fixed term exclusions (7.5 days lost learning)
- 2 children had emergency placement moves out of borough
- 2 children went through the adoption process, unfortunately, 1 of these broke down and therefore an emergency placement move needed to take place (9 days lost learning collectively)
- 4 children have profound health issues.

Individual Primary children in care's attendance in 2021-22
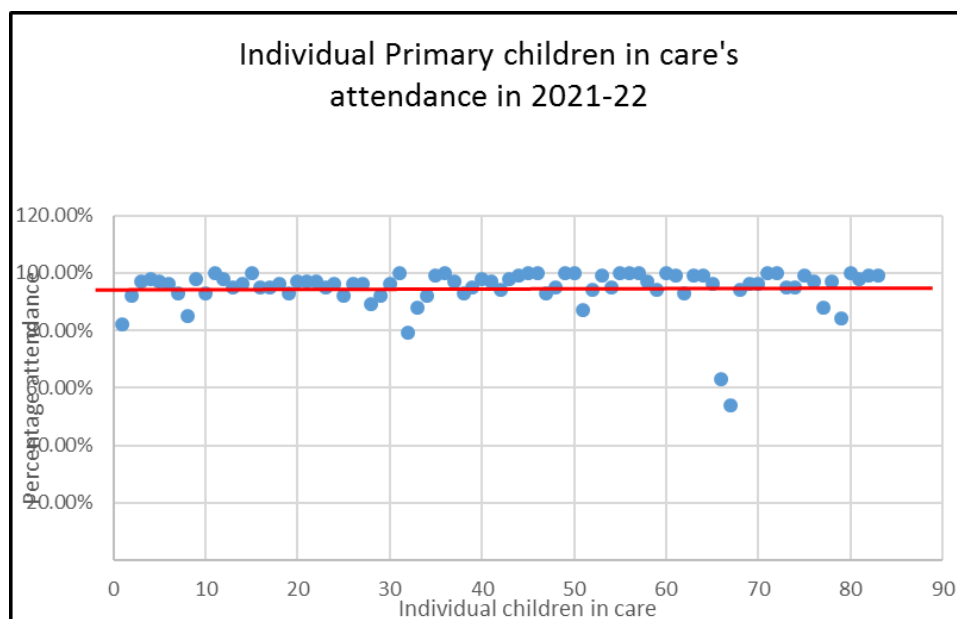
71 secondary pupils had attendance below 95% - of this cohort:

- 20 young people live with parents/family and 26 are placed in residential settings
- 23 young people came into care during the academic year.
- 5 are UASC – all these young people had a delay in their age assessments and extremely low levels of English so making it challenging to find education provision.
- The main reasons for absence were unauthorised (861.5 days lost learning), illness (178 days lost learning) and authorised absences (2410 days lost learning). Authorised absence has increased due to number of UASC waiting age assessments and not having school place identified.
- 63 young people had unauthorised absences. 24 of these live in residential accommodation, 6 are with family and 13 were new into care.
- 117 young people had authorised absences. 22 were new into care, 9 live in residential accommodation and 4 are living with family.
- 12 young people had periods of not being on roll, of these 2 had multiple times within secure accommodation, 2 had emergency placement moves and required specialist education provision once they had moved, 3 had emergency placement moves out of borough, and 5 were UASC.
- 14 young people had periods of reduced timetables, 1 young person required this to stabilise their education placements due to elevated risk of exclusion, 1 due to mental health issues, 8 to support reengagement with school studies, and 2 following discharges from secure accommodation.
- 21 young people had exclusions (56 days lost learning)
- 4 young people had periods of time in secure accommodation

Individual Secondary young people in care's attendance in 2021-22
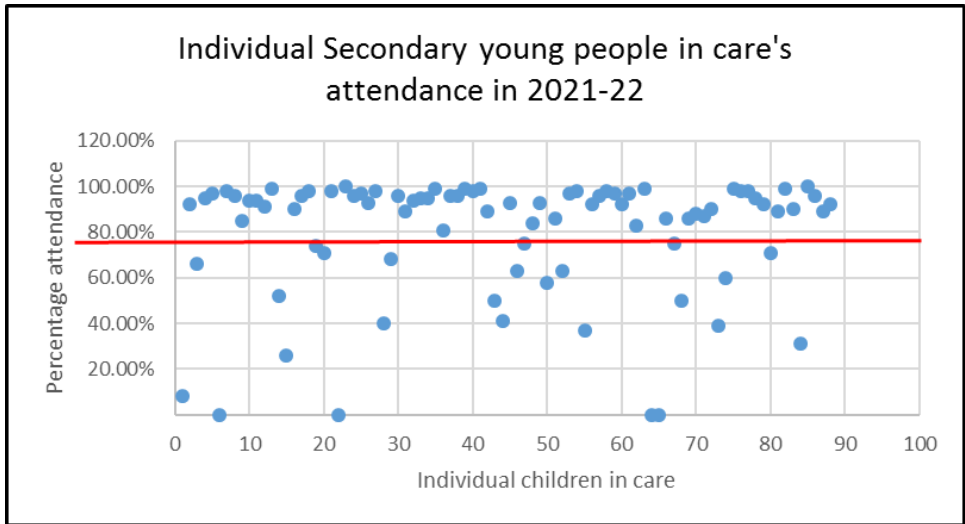
Attendance	ü	Data shows that attendance for both phases has stayed above the persistent absence rate of 90% despite the challenges of the pandemic and has broadly stayed in line with pre-pandemic rates.

Exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions of a child in care since the role of the Headteacher of the Virtual School was established.

Work was done with all schools attended by our children and young people in care to remind them of the additional anxieties and challenges that our cohort often face. These issues could be exacerbated due to the anxiety of returning to a more open society and a relaxing of rules within schools.

Percentage of children in care receiving 1 or more fixed term exclusions in 2021-22:

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	1	0	0.8
Secondary	8.1	9	10
Overall	4.9	4.8	5.8

As can be seen from the graph below this has resulted in a in 23 young people receiving one or more periods of exclusion throughout the academic year. There we 2 Primary pupils who had received periods of suspension from education and 21 Secondary age pupils. Of this number there were 8 pupils who received 1 period of suspension throughout the academic year.

Learning days lost for children in care who received suspensions during 2021-22
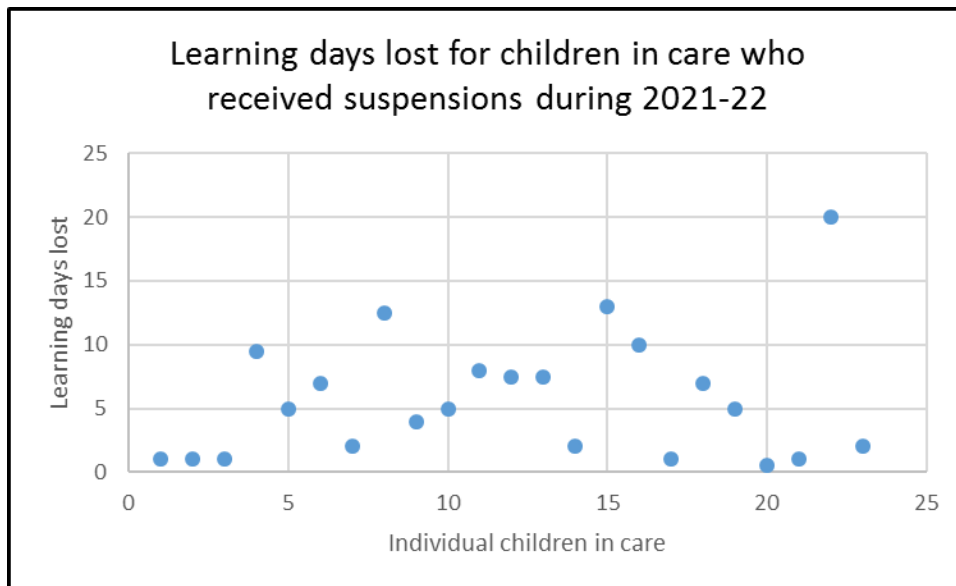
Exclusion Analysis 2021-22

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

- 2 were educated out of borough
- 1 was in residential provision and 1 placed with foster carers
- 1 had an EHCP, was in specialist SEMH provision out of borough
- Total days lost learning for Primary children was 17 days

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

- 11 young people attend out of borough schools and 10 attend Halton schools.
- 9 have an EHCP
- 8 attend specialist provision or a PRU
- 10 live in residential provision and 3 are placed with family
- There are 12 girls, 8 of whom were in Y9 and Y10
- 7 young people had 3 periods of exclusion
- Total days lost learning for Secondary young people was 115 days

The chart below shows that the primary cohort have continued to have low rates of suspension throughout the academic year. Within the secondary cohort there has been an increase on the previous two years suspension rates, but this remains in line with previous years suspension rates.

Percentage of Children in Care who have received 1 or more suspensions in 2021-22

Exclusions	X	Within the Primary cohort the number of exclusions remained low throughout the year. There has been an increase in exclusions from the previous year but remain broadly in line with exclusions in previous years.

Virtual School Actions and Impact on Exclusions

- 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.
- Supported schools in applying for and securing an EHCP when appropriate.
- Provided ongoing advice to increase awareness and improve practice in meeting the needs of children with attachment difficulties
- Worked with SEND colleagues to support identification of appropriate education placements

Key Attendance and Exclusion Priorities for 2022-23

- Continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%
- Continue to reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and frequency
- To enable our UASC to access education as soon as possible.

Key Attendance and Exclusion Actions 2022-23

- 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 liaise with a school link EWO to ensure that issues related to school are addressed.
- Resume our work on developing '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.
- Develop a bespoke and proactive support package for UASC so enabling them to access full time education provision in a timelier manner.

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.

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 in 2021-22

During the academic year 8 young people accessed alternative provision at some point, with 3 young people accessing across all 3 terms, the remaining young people only accessed alternative provision for 1 term. 3 of the young people were accessing their alternative provision to enhance their skills and for post 16 progression, with the final young person having access as a result of a permanent exclusion prior to coming into care.

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 provide advice and guidance for their social workers or PAs as appropriate.

Halton's ILACS inspection in March 2020 highlighted that the Virtual School required more capacity to further develop its excellent work, in particular around support for our Post 16 cohort. As a result of this we have created 2 new roles, a Post 16 PEP Coordinator and a KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer. The purpose of these 2 roles is to improve the engagement of Post 16 young people in care and care leavers in EET and to also ensure that they have access to direct support to explore a range of EET options and achieve good post 16 outcomes.

The Post 16 PEP Coordinator focuses on those in FE and moving to HE, ensuring that PEPs are high quality, and the young people have all the support they require to achieve their educational outcomes. The KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer focuses on those who may require more bespoke guidance on choosing a Post 16 career path, including developing and improving our apprenticeship support or moving into employment when age appropriate. The KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer also undertakes direct work with young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment and Training) and this has been extended from previous years to now include young people up to the age of 22 years (which was an area for improvement from the last inspection).

Planned transition meetings during the Spring and Summer terms take place between the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator and both the Post 16 officers for early identification of those leaving school who may become NEET, or who are unclear about their chosen career path.
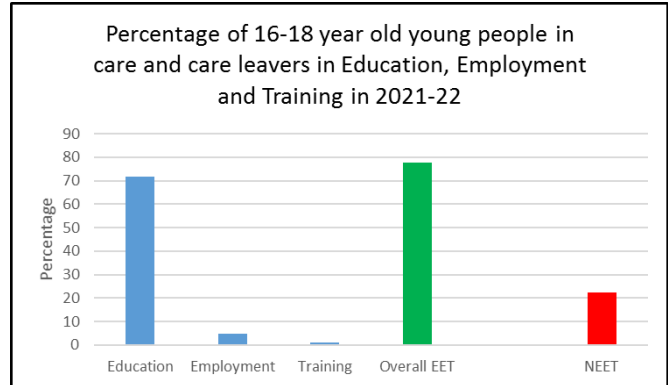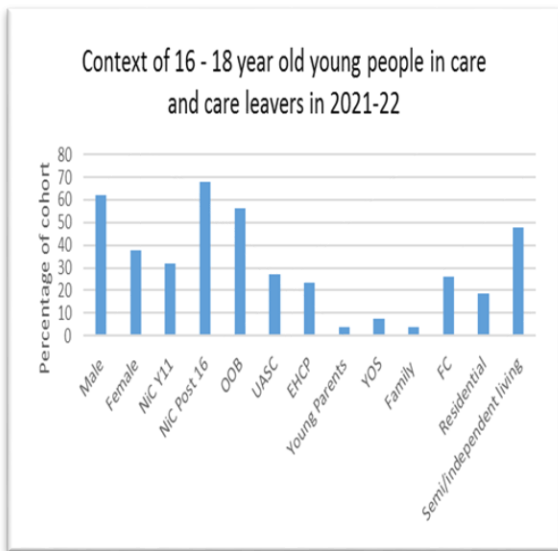
Monthly tracking is undertaken by the Post 16 PEP Coordinator to ensure that there are early alerts for young people who are at risk of becoming NEET as well as those currently NEET. The direct work to re-engage this group, undertaken by the KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer, is to ensure that the views of the young person are heard and that any barriers are addressed when formulating a plan for re-engagement. Both Post 16 Officers work with young people regardless of where they live or are educated, and they also liaise with the 14-19 team if the young person is resident in Halton and their equivalents out of area, other agencies, providers, social workers, and PAs. During the 2021/22 academic year, the Post 16 PEP lead position became vacant. This work has therefore been continued by the wider VS team, until the post can be filled.

Creating the right apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities and support remain a struggle for us in the current financial and political climate. However, the KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer is working closely with the Apprenticeship Hub to ensure that children in care and care leavers have access to high quality information regarding apprenticeships and support to enable them to apply if they want to. In addition to this we are working with other parts of the Council to develop a Care Leaver Apprenticeship Strategy to broaden the support our young people can access but also increase their range of opportunities.
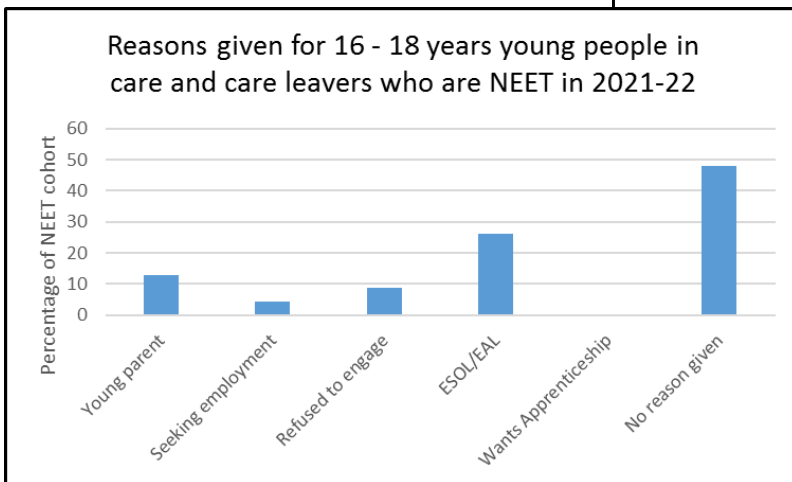
As a result of COVID restrictions, Post 16 learners have experienced a lot of disruption not only to their college courses, but also to apprenticeship and traineeships opportunities. Employment opportunities have also been impacted due to the uncertain economic climate.

Outcomes for our 16–18-year-old young people in care

The overall cohort is 103 young people of which 78% are EET.

Context of 16 - 18 year old young people in care and care leavers in 2021-22

Percentage of 16-18 year old young people in care and care leavers in Education, Employment and Training in 2021-22

There are 23 young people who are NEET within this cohort.
Of those who refused to engage in EET activities, 12 lived outside of Halton. There has been

Context of 16-18 year old young people in care and care leavers who are NEET in 2021-22

Reasons given for 16 - 18 years young people in care and care leavers who are NEET in 2021-22
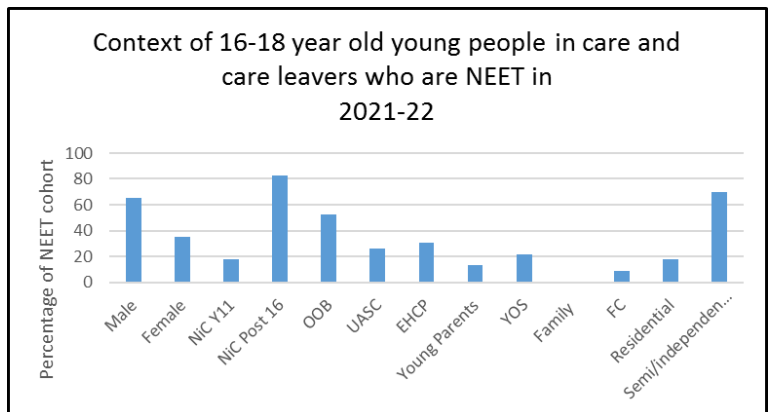
an increase in the number of UASC who have extremely limited English and would therefore struggle to access mainstream FE. For each of these young people, they have an ESOL support package in place with a view to then enrolling them at college once their career aspirations are more fully understood.

Outcomes for our 19 - 22-year-old care leavers:
Of these 55 young people, 69% are currently accessing EET.

Context of 19 - 22 year old care leavers in 2021-22

Percentage of 19 - 22 year old care leavers in Education, Employment and Training in 2021-22
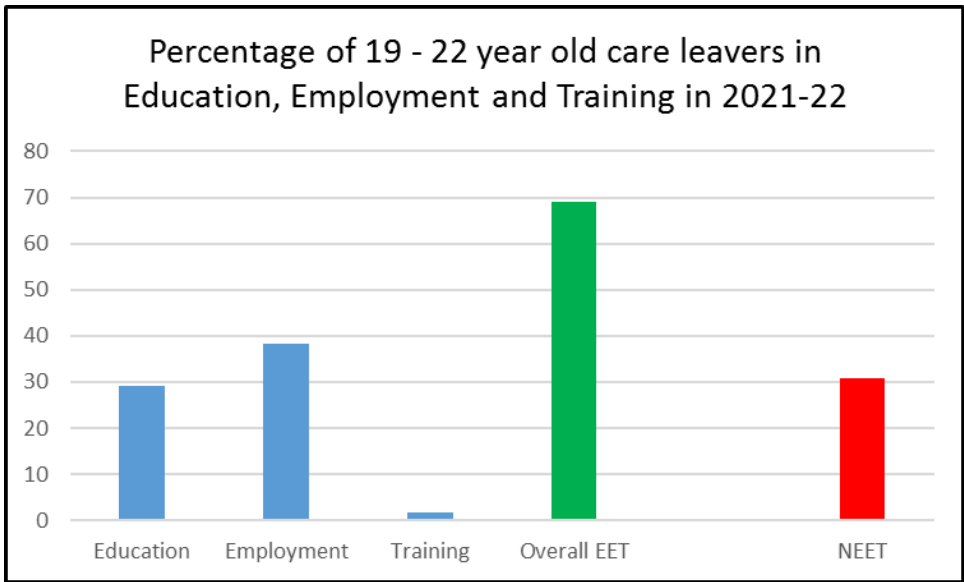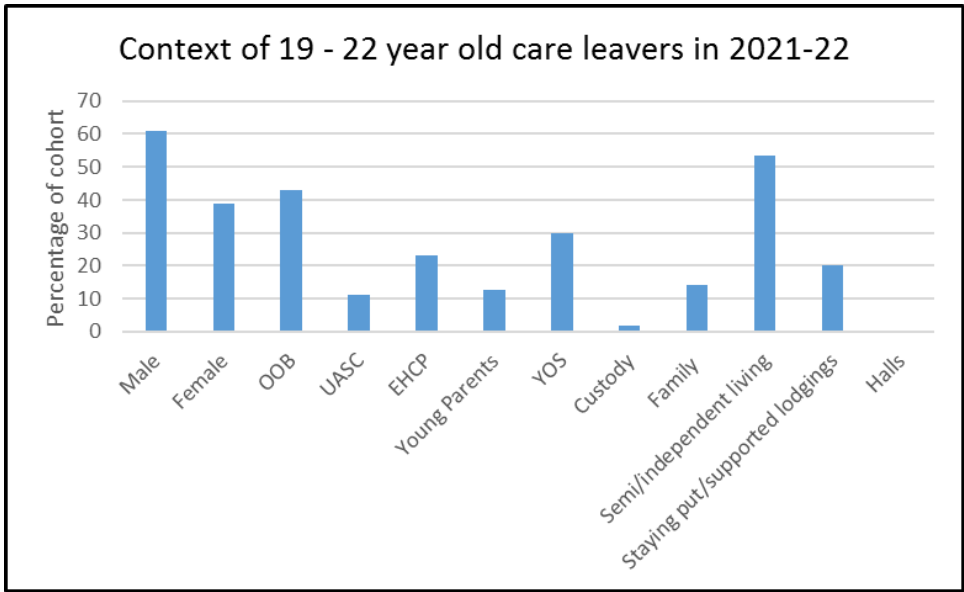
There are 17 young people in this cohort who are NEET:

Context of 19 - 22 year old care leavers who are NEET in 2021-22

Percentage of NEET cohort

Categories (x-axis): Male, Female, OOB, UASC, EHCP, Young Parents, YOS, Custody, Family, Semi/independent living, Staying put/supported...

Approximate values: Male ~35, Female ~64, OOB ~23, EHCP ~23, Young Parents ~35, YOS ~35, Semi/independent living ~100

Reasons given for 19 - 22 year care leavers who are NEET in 2021-22

Percentage of NEET cohort

Categories (x-axis): Young parent ~35, Custody ~6, Unfit to work ~17.5, Missing from care 0, Looking for work ~23.5, Mental Health ~11.5, Refused to engage ~6, No reason ~11.5

This chart identifies that of the 17, a high percentage are not able to be able to access EET. However, as a virtual school we plan to establish a NEET PEP during 2022/23, which we consistently offer support and guidance throughout the year on a plan of re-engagement.

Virtual School Actions and Impact on EET

- Created 2 new roles 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.
- 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 are working towards implementing an improved model of support for care leavers, with a particular focus on increasing access to apprenticeships or traineeships.

Key EET Priorities for 2022-23

- To improve the percentage of Post 16 young people in care and care leavers 16 – 22 years who are in EET through the introduction of a NEET PEP.
- Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 22-year-olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on ensuring that they are accessing their chosen career pathway.
- Improve support for those young people who wish to undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship.

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 (aspirational goal of within 10) 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 senior Children's Social Care managers.
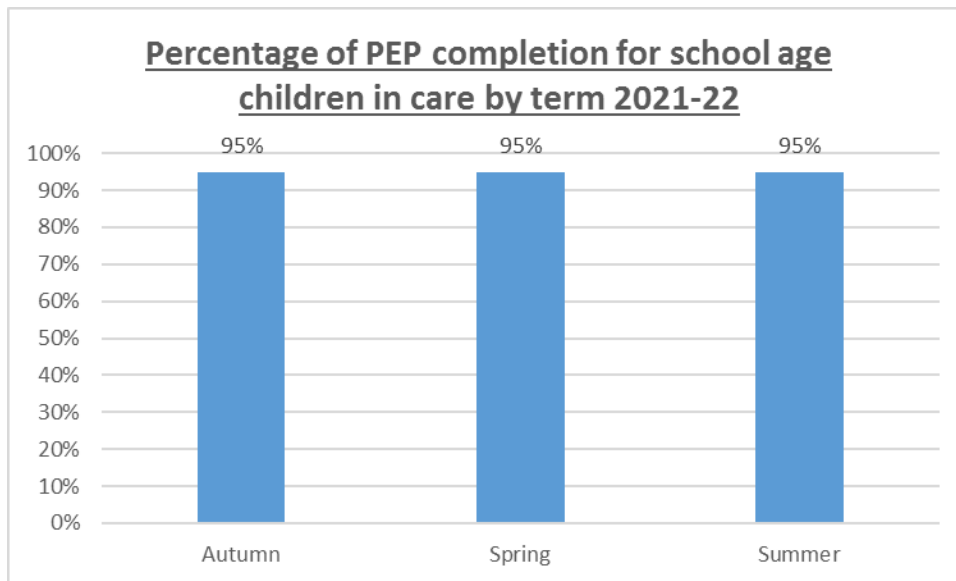
PEP Completion

During 2021/22, the PEP system was migrated from Eclipse over on to Welfare Call. Training and guidance were provided for all professionals involved in the PEP process, which resulted in a successful launch.

Statutory Compliance and Quality Assurance

For 2021-22, overall PEP completion for the Autumn term was up from 85% last year to 92%, this improved in the Spring term to 93% and this rate was sustained in the summer term remaining at 91%. This is taking into consideration the capacity issues within the Early Years and Post-16 areas of the Virtual School. The Virtual School also saw a much higher number of children in care compared to previous years. As can be seen by the chart below Primary PEP completion was 100% across all two terms, dropping to 99% in the Summer. The rates in the other phases were impacted by issues with capacity in the team. Within Secondary and Post 16 there are a higher number of out of borough provisions.

Percentage PEP completion by school phase and the overall total in 2021-22
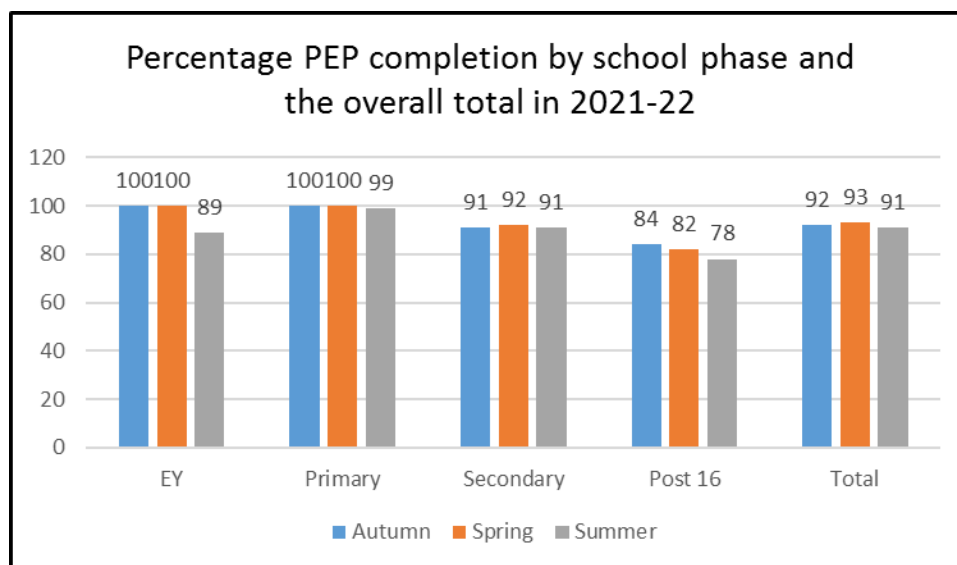
The chart below shows the completion rate for school age children across the full academic year, and this demonstrates that the PEP completion rate has remained consistently high despite the challenging circumstances.

Percentage of PEP completion for school age children in care by term 2021-22

Autumn: 95%
Spring: 95%
Summer: 95%

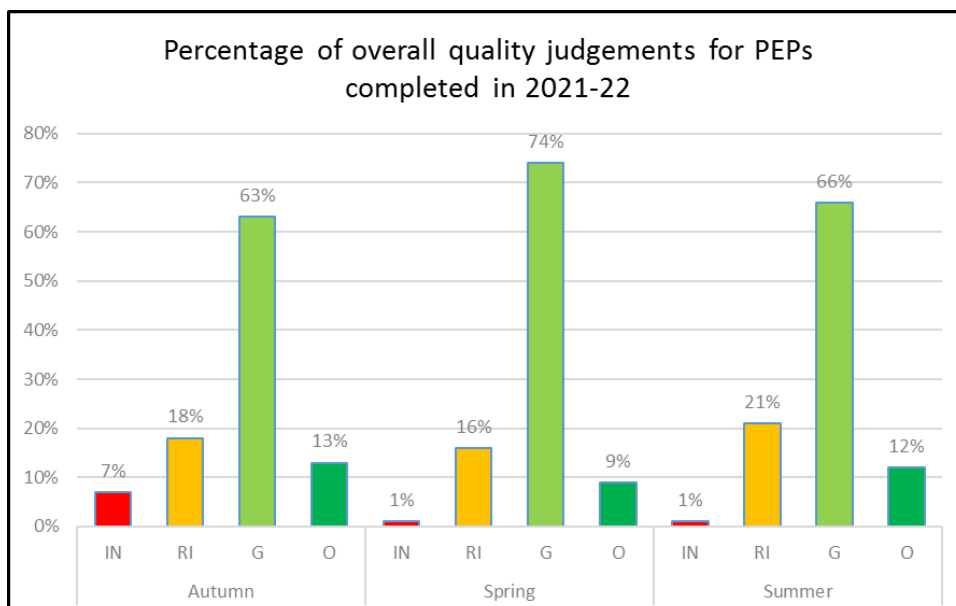The chart below shows the PEP completion rate by CSC teams. There have been capacity issues within all teams as a result some PEP meetings did not take place. In these cases, PEP Coordinators continued with a prominent level of communication with settings to ensure support was offered for our young people. For new social workers, PEP and Progress Coordinators have ensured that new members of staff were fully aware of their roles and responsibilities around PEPs and so the completion rates have remained relatively high.

Percentage PEP completion by Children's Social Care Team in 2021-22

Team	Autumn	Spring	Summer
CIN W	97%	97%	91%
CIN R	95%	90%	84%
CICCL	97%	94%	94%
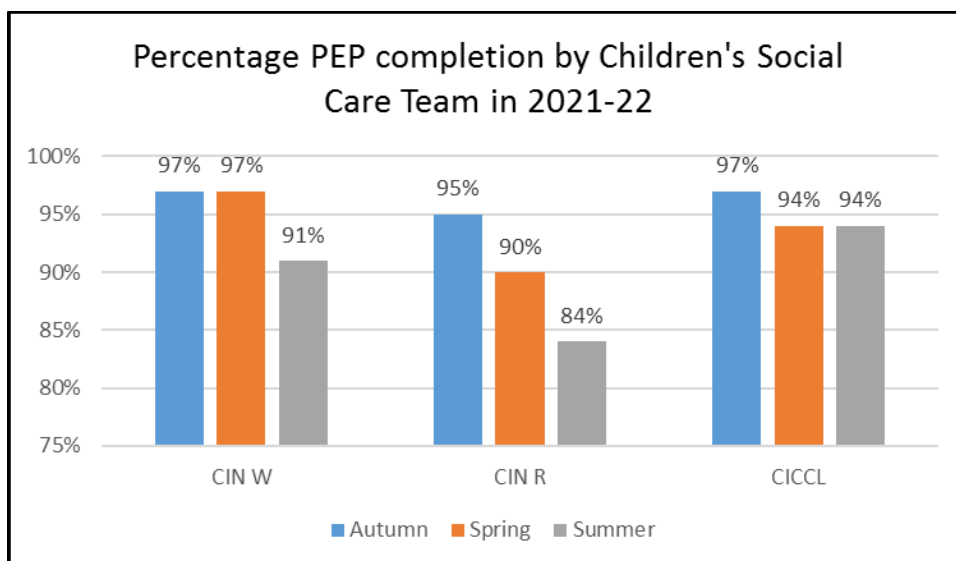
Quality Assurance

The Virtual School quality assure every PEP that is completed each term and provide feedback to schools around areas of improvement. Analysis has shown that in Post 16 and Secondary PEPs it is the SMART targets and impact of Pupil Premium Plus sections that continue to need improvement. However, the overall percentage of PEPs that are rated as Good or better is increasing each year.

Percentage of PEPs completed that are rated as Good+ across each phase for 2021-22

Percentage of overall quality judgements for PEPs completed in 2021-22
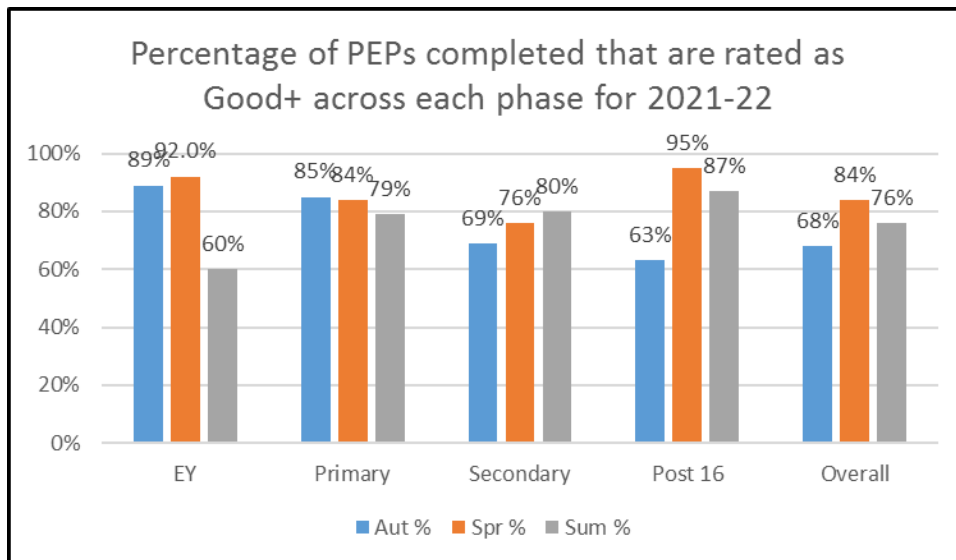
Key PEP Priorities for 2022-23

- 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.
- Increase the number of initial PEPs completed within timescale
- Provide greater performance related data to managers, schools, and those to whom the virtual school is accountable throughout the academic year.

Key PEP Actions for 2022-23

- 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.
- Embed a new rigorous multi-agency moderation process across Halton, including managers, social care, designated teachers, and other key agencies to improve the quality of PEPs.
- 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 through the development of the use of Welfare Call.
- Deliver additional training and support for schools whose PEPs are judged as Requiring Improvement or below.
- To establish a network of Post 16 providers to offer support, training, and target improving PEP quality.

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 within the census data. (Children Looked After Data Return (SSDA903) for those aged 4 to 15 on 31 August the previous year.) The funding runs in line with the fiscal 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 must 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 discharge more effectively 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 considered, and the allocation of funding is managed carefully and robustly through the completion of effective, timely and high-quality PEPs.

PP+ Expenditure 2021-22

The PP+ grant is awarded on a financial year basis and for 2021-22, the total grant allocated for Halton was £515,900. The chart below demonstrates that through PEP allocation and other Virtual School support 56% was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes.

Area of expenditure of Pupil Premium Plus grant 2021-22
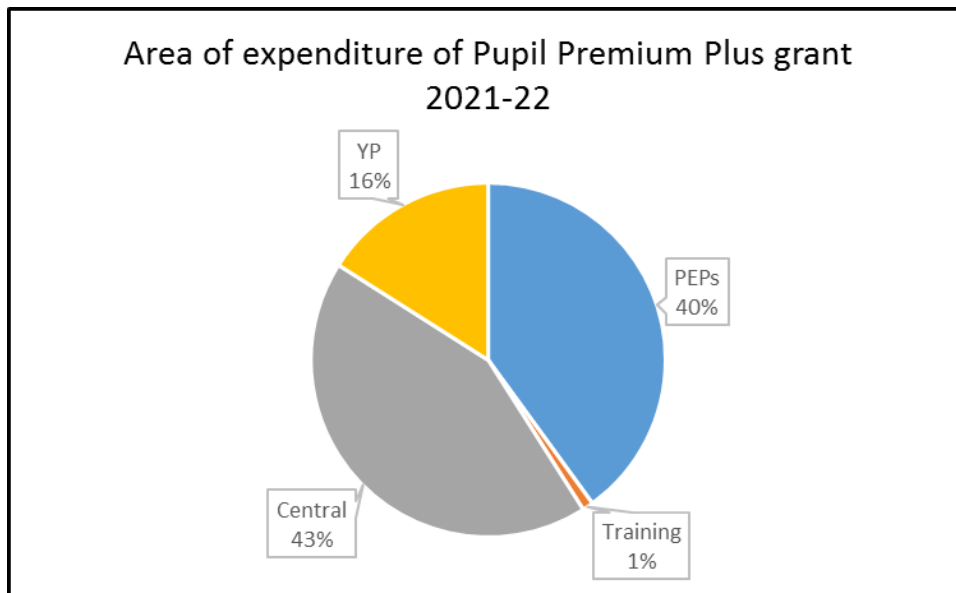
Following the easing of Covid restrictions and the development of remote delivery of training, we have been able to make significant savings on the costs associated with training, whilst still delivering all that has been required.

The centrally retained portion is for the attendance service the Virtual School commission, dedicated Education Psychology time, purchasing of Boxall Profile licences, and for staff within the Virtual School (including the Post 16 PEP Co-ordinator). It is important to note that this central allocation is vital to ensuring that we can track the educational outcomes and provide support for both schools and children in care. The 'Young People' portion is spent of subscriptions, activity days, additional emergency support (such as to avoid permanent exclusions) and 'keeping in touch' packs.

Comparison of areas of expenditure of Pupil Premium Plus grant over past academic years
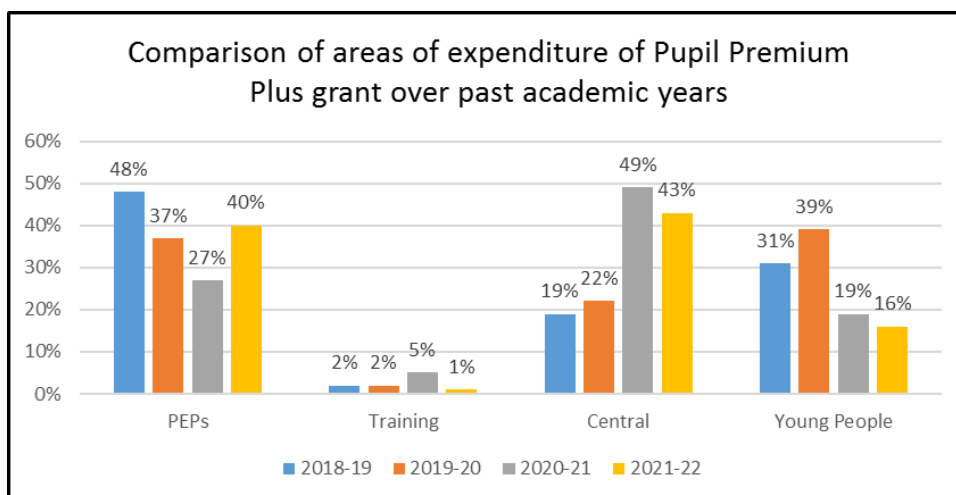
Key PP+ Priorities for 2022-23

- Benchmark the spending of PP+ in comparison to other LAs (Local Authorities) and Virtual Schools.
- Develop greater measurement of IMPACT of spending, which will feed into the longer-term planning for the virtual school.

- To develop a system of support for our Post 16 young people

Key PP+ Actions for 2022-23

- 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, as well as with social work teams.
- To review and disseminate the EEF Toolkit for PP+ to all schools to ensure that they are utilising evidence-based approaches.
- Work with our Post 16 providers to develop a Post 16 PP+ fund linked to the PEP and aimed at improving educational outcomes and retention, alongside the use of the school-led tuition grant.

Post Looked After Children

Halton's Virtual School uses the Previously Looked After Children Grant to contribute towards the funding of staffing to ensure there is capacity to provide advice and guidance in relation to Children Previously Looked After (PLAC) and provide capacity to develop resources for families and professionals.

Raising the profile of the role of the Virtual School for children previously looked after, delivering training, sharing information and signposting to professionals, parents, and schools, ensuring provision and support is in place is at the heart of this role.

The educational support worker for children previously looked after provides schools and other alternative providers of education advice on how to make the best use of pupil premium funding for children previously looked after, adopted, or placed on an SGO (Special Guardianship Order), and that Designated Teachers have positive relationships with adoptive parents and guardians.

Work in 2021/22 included:

- Support and advice to schools and adoptive parents
- Referral handling, signposting, advising, and directing for all matter PLAC related

- Updating Virtual School website on PLAC so that it can be used as a resource
- Development of a PLAC Personal Education Plan

- PLAC information for schools on our VS newsletter and bulletins

- PLAC training (Early Years and Statutory School Age)
- Termly networking meetings with Virtual School PLAC leads in the Northwest to share information and ideas

Expansion of the Role of the Virtual School

Children with a Social Worker (CWSW) or in the last 6 Years (Ever6 CWSW)

Brief context:

2019 Child in Need Review found that in 98% of state schools children with a social worker are:

- Almost 3 times more likely to be persistently absent
- 3 times as likely to have SEN,
- Almost 4 times as likely to be claiming FSM
- Nearly 6 times as likely to have both FSM and SEN
- 25-50% less likely to achieve a strong pass in English and Maths even after accounting for limiting factors
- Had an average attainment 8 scores of just 21, compared to 50 for all pupils in 2019/20.

Following the conclusion of the review:

- The DfE committed to ensuring children with a social worker are seen, safe and able to succeed so that they can achieve their potential
- The leadership and the impact that Virtual School Heads (VSH) have had for CIC and PLAC was highlighted, and pathfinder Virtual Schools were to be explored

Impact of the pandemic:

- Virtual School Pathfinders were paused
- Children with a social worker were able to attend schools, but generally only a minority took the offer up and since schools have reopened their attendance has remained below pre-pandemic levels and that of their peers
- The DfE have concluded the impact of the pandemic is likely to have disadvantaged children with a social worker further, adding to the education barriers identified in the Child in Need review

On Wednesday 16 June 2021 the Department for Education announced more than £16m to extend the role of Virtual School Heads from September 2021.
What is within the scope of the extended VSH role?

As strategic leaders who champion children with social workers, VSHs (Virtual School Head) should create a culture of high aspirations and drive improved outcomes. They will:

- Enhance partnerships between education settings and the LA so agencies can work together. Some suggested activities to achieve this could be:
    o Work with education settings to encourage anyone supporting children with a social worker to hold high aspirations for this cohort of children.
    o Convene education and LA leaders to develop shared goals and set the direction for improving outcomes, including addressing links with other strategic priorities e.g., working with Violence Reduction Units to tackle serious violence
    o Clarify the role of the VSH and communicate the offer of support to education settings and others in the LA so everyone has clear expectations of the VSH and what help is available.
- Identify the cohort's needs and intervene to overcome barriers to poor educational outcomes and ensure pupils reach their potential. Some suggested activities to achieve this could be:
    o Use data and analysis to understand and monitor local trends in accordance with strategic priorities, e.g., safeguarding trends, attendance rates
    o Promote evidence and good practice that prioritises consistency, high support, and exacting standards for children with a social worker and recognises the importance of stability and strong information sharing.
    o Share knowledge and training to strengthen how education settings and social care understand the impact of adversity on education (newsletters, webinars, and workshops)

- Support and advise key professionals to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence using evidence-based interventions. Some suggested activities to achieve this could be:
    o Engage and support key professionals and local services including social workers and school staff to promote improved outcomes for children.
    o Advise on evidence-based interventions and strengthen links with research organisations to participate in work that will build a stronger evidence base for what works for children.
    o Encourage schools and social care to be creative and thoughtful in communicating with children and families, including taking account of children's wishes and feelings.

What is not in scope of the extended VSH role?

- Work with individual children and their families - including tracking and monitoring educational progress of individual children.
- Responding to requests from parents or carers to offer advice and support in relation to individual children with a social worker
- Responsibility for children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) who do not require or need a social worker.

Ambitions for the extension of the VSH role:

- Make the disadvantage of children in need visible and strengthen relationships between education settings and the LAs to ensure all hold lofty ambitions for these children
- Promote engagement in education, including as a means of keeping children safe
- Level up outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so children reach their potential. Ensure education recovery activity reaches children in need.

Crucially - all statutory duties relating to CIC and PLAC remain the same; this means that the duties around children with a social worker are in addition to the core work of the Virtual School and the VSH.

Funding for the role extension:

- Will be via a Section 31 grant of the Education Act 2002. This is done via a funding formula based on the number of education settings within a LA. For Halton, £100,000 has been allocated.
- Funding is to be used to provide VSHs with additional resources required to take on the strategic leadership role for children with a social worker and is sufficient to recruit additional team members to support them with these responsibilities.
- Funding has been allocated up to 31st March 2022 and in recognition of the brief period between the announcement and the commencement of the role the allocation has not been reduced to a pro-rata for 21-22.
- There has been no guarantee of funding for the next academic year as the proposals are within the Government's spending review. However, feedback from Andrew Baxter, Head of the DfE CIN (Children in Need) Unit, is that there is an expectation that it will be made available for 2022-23, at the same level whilst a decision is made about the status of the guidance.
- Each LA must sign a memorandum of understanding to receive the funding which will be delivered in 3 payments.
- There is no change to FSM Pupil Premium allocation or regulation.

- Currently the guidance issued in June 2021 is non-statutory and will be reviewed before the end of March 2022.
- The DfE are appointing a research partner to gather evidence of good practice and the impact the expansion of the role of the VSH has had to the outcomes for children with a social worker
- Pending the outcomes of the research and review of the expansion to the role of the VSH it is anticipated that the guidance will become statutory within the next 2 years (Andrew Baxter Head of the DfE CIN Unit).
- As the guidance is currently non-statutory the DfE have confirmed it will not form part of any Ofsted inspection framework.

Halton's response to the expansion of the role so far

- Map out existing processes and systems
- Identify current cohort and performance
- Establish 'Education not on track' panel
- Ensure CSC planning processes and systems are robust
- Build skills and capacity in all teams to ensure that education is firmly embedded in decision making
- Provide advice and guidance to support professionals in improving the educational outcomes of the cohort

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. This year, the Virtual School have focussed on trauma-informed practice and theory to ensure our schools are supporting our young people throughout the Covid recovery period. PEP Coordinators have also offered a more bespoke approach of improving practice through the Support and Challenge Progress meetings, the joint meetings with the school EP and the Designated Teacher and via feedback on the PEPs.

Training priorities for 2022-23

- Develop a 'new to the role of DT' training course
- Relaunch the training provision for social workers and DTs using termly workshops in addition to cluster / network meetings.
- Re-instate the network meetings for each phase.
- Further developing and embedding our trauma informed practice across all settings
- Expand the training provision to incorporate DSLs (Designated Safeguarding Lead) (Designated Safeguarding Lead) and school safeguarding teams following the expansion of the role of the virtual school.
- Working with Halton's Education Psychology Service and Behaviour Support Service to further develop our package of training focused on supporting mental health issues, including for those working with children who have a social worker.
- Develop induction support for new social workers, including within the 'Child in Need' teams, as well as those in the Children in Care team.

Additional learning and literacy support

Halton Virtual School provides an elevated 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 has continued throughout the academic year and over the holidays to support children and young people to remain engaged in their learning and to mitigate against falling behind. We have also ensured that face to face tuition has taken place for children and young people who have stated a preference this.

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 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. 21 children and young people received the parcels during the academic year.

The Virtual School also has a yearly subscription to Storytime Magazine which is sent out each month to identified children in Key Stage 2 and when appropriate to some Key Stage 3 children. The magazines are brightly illustrated and have short stories. The aim of the magazines is to encourage a love of reading at home particularly for those who struggle accessing a book and to improve reading age and vocabulary development. 45 children have had the Storytime magazine this year.

The Virtual School website (www.myvirtualschool.org) has been enhanced and regularly updated with 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 has also added.

Activity and Support Programme

During the school holidays the Virtual School usually 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 Workers within the Virtual School and others are delivered in partnership with other guests, agencies, and providers. All the activity programme is funded through the Pupil Premium Plus grant.

- Review the activity day offer, to ensure it provides effective and impactful use of the pupil premium + grant for the greatest number of young people.
- To develop the website and social media presence to improve communication with and support for carers and children and young people in care.
- To develop a model of direct support sessions delivered by the Education Support Workers during term time, in line with targets identified within PEPs. These sessions will be focused on developing and supporting quality home learning, through modelling to parents and carers whilst providing homework support for the children.

2022 – 2023 Virtual School Action Plan

As a Virtual School, we will continue to perform our statutory duties and work closely with colleagues across the 'People' directorate, schools, and Halton as a whole, to support all Looked-After Children, Post Looked-After Children, and those with a Social Worker.

However, as a 'school,' it is also essential that we reflect on our strengths and areas for development, as outlined within this report (our equivalent of a school SEF (Self-Evaluation Form)) to formulate our 'School Development Plan.'

I have focussed on the four over-arching priority areas, within which several key actions and targets have been identified, to enable us to track progress and impact towards each of the strands.

Priority	Action / Areas of Focus	Timescale	Lead	Progress / Desired Outcome
To reduce the number of LAC becoming NEET whilst in care or as a care leaver.	Implement the use of a NEET PEP for 16–18-year-olds.	Dec 2022	PMcP IW	
	Stabilise team structure within Virtual School for Post-16 support with PEPs and Employability	Mar 2023	BH	
	Launch Traineeship Model within HBC and broaden post-16 offer (including CSCS Cards and Apprenticeships)	Jan 2023	BH PMcP IW	
	Improve the completion rate and quality of PEPs within Post-16 sector	Dec 2023	PMcP	
Develop a high quality, multi-	Implement PEP deadline each term to allow time	November 2022	BH	

agency moderation process of PEPs, to continue to build upon the progress and attainment within all Key Stages	for analysis and moderation			
	Establish internal moderation process for VS team	December 2022	BH JL PMcP	
	Develop 'model' PEPs to show good practice, including use of PP+ & analysis of impact	December 2022	JL PMcP	
	Write a PEP policy and disseminate out to all professionals to provide consistency and clarity.	December 2022	BH	
	Launch multi-agency moderation panel with feedback disseminated to social care and schools	February 2023	JL PMcP	
	Develop prioritisation and targeted support / attendance of VS at PEPs based on needs-based analysis	January 2023	JL PMcP	
Embed a high-quality strategic model for the implementation of the expansion of duties to encompass all children with a social worker.	Create a baseline data collection to identify areas of focus and need	November 2022	BH	
	Embed the role of the SCiE Officer within the VS and attendance within the HCYPSP.	December 2022	BH	
	Develop training programme for DSLs, HTs, ECTs, SWs and other key professionals based upon areas of focus identified within data and through discussion with schools – including trauma informed	November 2022	BH	
	Work with 'Education, Inclusion, and Provision division' to develop 'pupils causing concern' meetings and a graduated response for those at risk of perm ex.	October 2022	BH/ DB	
	Review the impact of support and liaise with	July 2023	BH	

	colleagues across the Northwest to measure impact of expansion work.			
Develop a more rigorous and robust performance and quality assurance model, including the implementation of a PEP deadline, greater analysis of standards (including the completion rate for initial PEPs within 10 days) and reintegration within the corporate parenting board.	Develop an improved 'new into care' PEP process	November 2022	BH JL PMcP	
	Develop a new performance reporting process to provide greater accountability and challenge with schools and social care on a termly basis.	December 2022	BH	
	Provide regular reports and updates to the governance board, corporate parenting board and the CiC (children in care) Council	July 2023	BH	
	Write a Belonging Strategy, including for those with an EHCP	December 2022	JL	
	Ensure timescales for QA and PP+ analysis is measurable, and impact is demonstrable.	March 2023	JL PMcP	
	Implement 'Pupil Progress Meetings' to review attainment and achievement of pupils, using Analytics	January 2023	JL PMcP	