



VIRTUAL  SCHOOL

HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Annual Report 2022-2023

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Introduction

The statutory duties of the Headteacher of the Virtual School include the production of an annual report to inform key stakeholders about the work of the Virtual School over the course of the year. The following report is a summary of work undertaken and the achievements of the children whose education we oversee.

The Virtual School is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of Looked-After Children (LAC) and strategic oversight for Post Looked-After Children (PLAC) and Children with a Social Worker (CWSW). For Looked-After Children, this includes the oversight and management of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process and distribution of the Pupil Premium + funding. For PLAC and CWSW, the virtual school has a strategic role in offering support, challenge and training to remove barriers to learning and raise the profile of education as a priority in plans.

There have been a number of changes within the leadership of the Virtual School this year. The new Headteacher joined the team in August 2022, but since January 2023 they have also acted in the role of Divisional Manager for Education (0-19). Consequently, the Virtual School has appointed a Deputy Headteacher, Joanne Lloyd, who has managed the daily running of the school, with strategic oversight by the Headteacher.

Over this past academic year, we have focused on four key priorities, identified through the previous year's self-evaluation:

- To reduce the number of LAC leaving statutory education not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- To develop a high-quality moderation process for PEPS
- To embed a strategic delivery plan for the implementation of the expansion of duties to encompass all children with a social worker.
- To develop a more rigorous and robust Quality Assurance and governance model for the virtual school

This report shares a summary of our progress against each of these objectives, as well as wider performance measures, and our areas of focus for the 2023-2024 academic year.

Further documentation relating to the work of the Virtual School (including our policies and guidance documents) can be found on our website <https://www.myvirtualschool.org/>

Staffing and Governance Structure of the Virtual School

As well as the leadership changes outlined previously, Gemma Donaldson, our early year's co-ordinator, returned from maternity leave in May 2023. We also bid farewell to Rachael Williams (Primary PEP Lead) at the end of the summer term. We have successfully recruited a replacement, Sarah Rawnsley, who will join the team from the 1st of September 2023.

Over the academic year, the Virtual School has worked alongside the corporate parenting board to establish the 'operational group', who now act as the governing body for the Virtual School. They receive termly performance reports, through which they hold the school to account, as well as identify ways in which the Corporate Parenting Board can strengthen their role as corporate parent.

Halton Virtual School structure 2022-2023

Corporate Parenting Board			
Corporate Parenting Operational Group / Virtual School Governing Body			
Virtual School Senior Leadership Team			
Role	Name	Funding	Contract type
Headteacher of the Virtual School	Benjamin Holmes	Core funded	Permanent
Interim Deputy Headteacher 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
Virtual School PEP and Wider Duties Team			
Early Years Education Support Worker (0.8)	Gemma Donaldson	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Primary PEP Co-ordinator	Rachael Williams	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
Secondary PEP Co-ordinator	Alys James	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
KS4 and Post 16 Education and Employability Officer	Ian Wilson	Troubled Families grant	From Sept '24 ongoing grant
Post Looked After Support Worker and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	David Bradshaw	Sec 31 Grant – PLAC / SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
School Age Education Support Worker	Min Ling Lee-Tai	Core funded	Permanent
Safeguarding Children in Education Officer	Maria Needham	DSG Funded	Permanent

As well as their 'core' roles outlined above, the Virtual School team provide consultative support and guidance to schools for Children with a Social Worker. This includes support for behaviour, attendance, mental health & wellbeing and SEND.

Through the expansion of duties, it has enabled the Virtual School to have much stronger engagement in multi-agency panels and boards across Halton. This includes:

- Halton Children and Young People's Safeguarding Partnership Executive Board and all Sub-Groups (Including the Safeguarding Practice Group and the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group)
- Halton SEND Strategic Partnership Board and 'The Journey' Sub-Group
- 'Team Around the School' Meetings for those at risk of suspension or extreme persistent absence
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel
- Membership on Halton's Primary and Secondary Headteachers Networks
- Membership on all National Association of Virtual School Headteacher's (NAVSH) NW Sub-Groups
- Halton's Children's Services Permanence Panel
- Halton's Fostering Panel
- Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group
- Children's Services Improvement Board
- Resource and Placement Panel
- NW 5 Boroughs Post-Looked After Network
- Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Panel

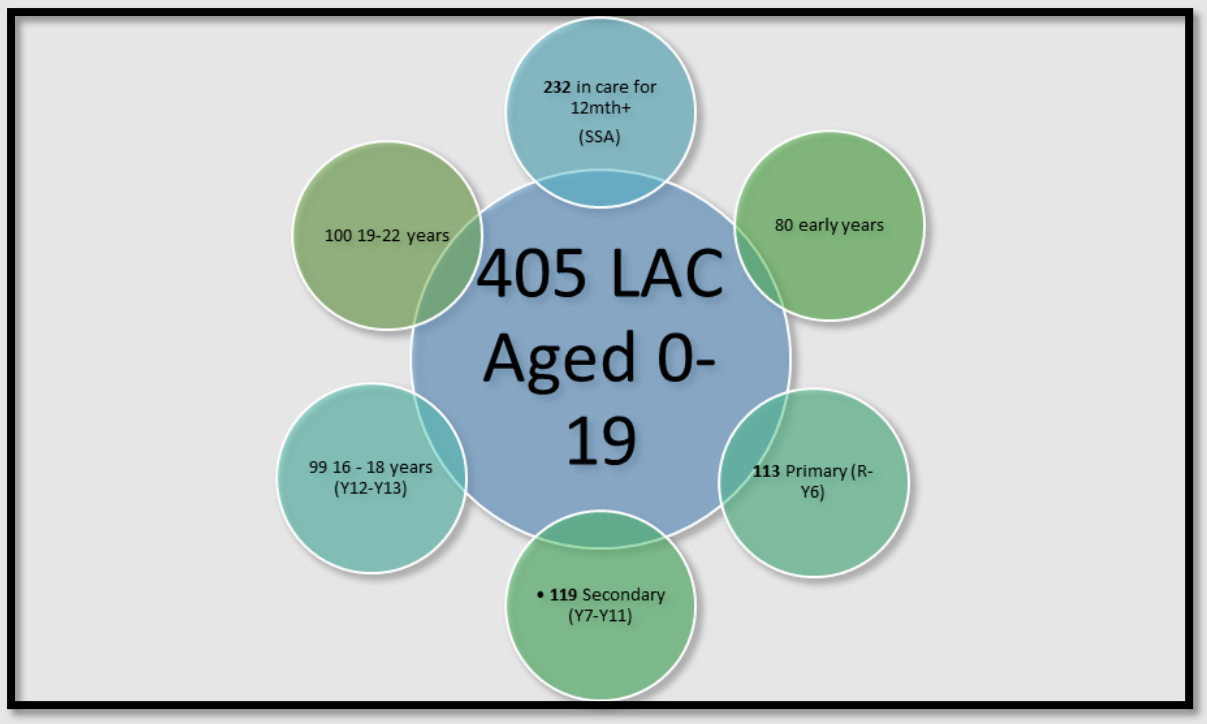
Our SCIE Officer also attends numerous panels including MARAC, Working Together Meetings for Early Help and as the chair of all DSL Networks and Workshops.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the Virtual School will evolve into two distinct teams. One team will focus on our core function relating to PEPs and educational outcomes, while our new 'Engagement Hub' will support children and young people, their carers and schools to remove any barriers to learning. This will include access to Speech and Language and Educational Psychology Services, as well as direct work with our Education Support Worker where attendance or behaviour concerns have been identified and the commissioning of additional services or provision, such as alternative provision and 1:1 tuition may be required. The development of this 'engagement hub' is expanded within our delivery plan at the end of this report and will be communicated across children's services, education providers and key stakeholders.

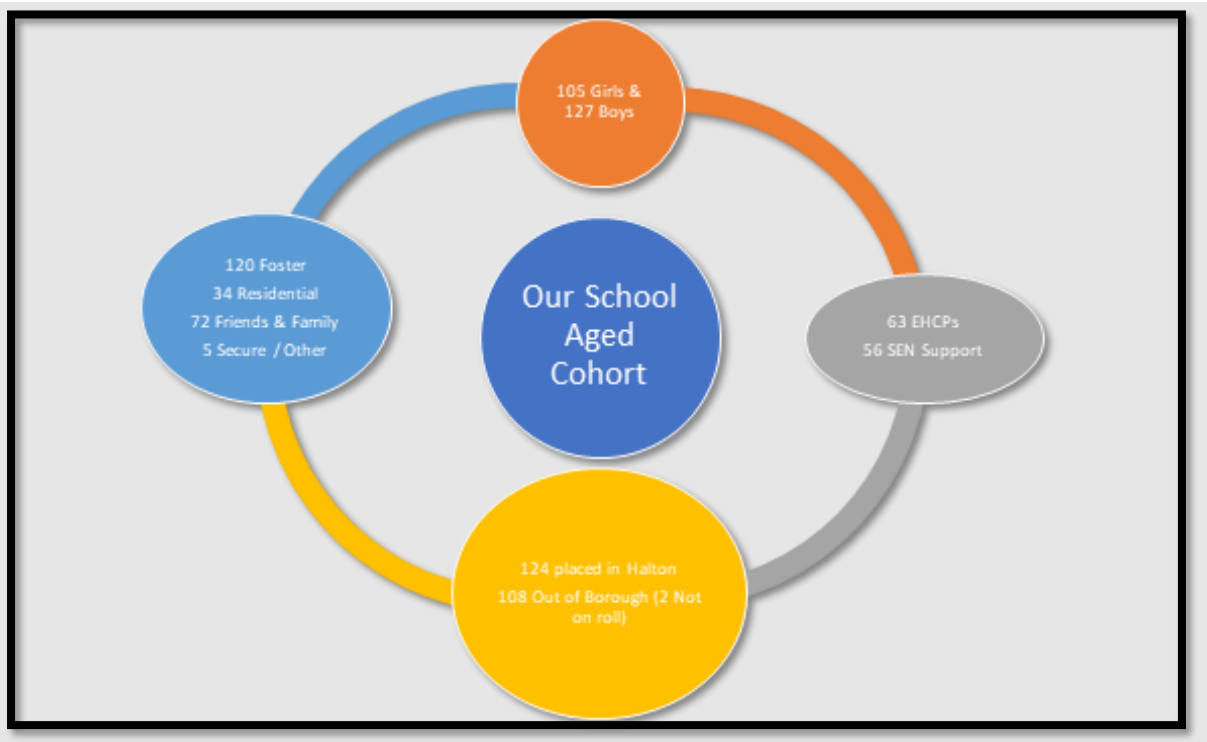
Our Cohort in 2022-2023

Due to the nature of our work, the cohort of children and young people whom we support is continually evolving as children enter care and also leave care.

Over the course of the academic year, our cohort of children and young people has included:



*Cumulated total for 22/23 academic year.
 As of 31st August there were 386 children with an episode of care.



Placement moves.

During 2022-23 we continued to see a high number of CYP (Children and Young People) who experienced a placement move with 56 children and young people having 1 or more placement moves (down 1 from 2021-22).

Of these:

- 40 had 1 placement move (up from 36)
- 8 had 2 placement moves (down from 14)
- 6 had 3 placement moves (down from 7)
- 2 had 4 placement moves (there were no CYP that had this last year)

Whenever there is a placement move, we will always work closely with Social Care and Education to ensure minimal disruption to education and challenge where we feel it would have a detrimental impact and also could impact upon them accessing their current education provision.

School moves

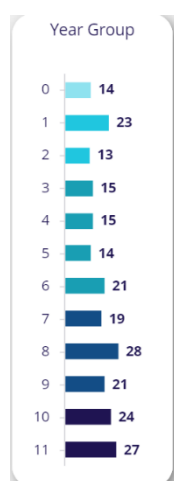
There were 19 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year 2022-2023 (down from 33 last year) outside of anticipated phase / key stage transfers.

There were 4 young people who have had periods of time not on a school roll, down from 19 in the previous academic year.

These are two areas in which we work tirelessly to ensure Children and Young People are able to remain on roll at their current school. However, we will also listen closely to their wishes and feelings within PEP meetings and will consider all direct requests where children ask to move schools. This process has been strengthened following feedback and challenge from our Children in Care Council.

A school move will also be considered whenever a child's school receives an Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement or Inadequate, although this does not mean a move will always be in the child's best interests despite the grading.

To ensure that the Virtual School is involved in all decisions to move schools, we have improved the rigour of processes used within Social Care to alert us to potential school move requests, which has impacted upon greater alerting and early intervention and support being actioned by the school.



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.

New into Care and Discharged from Care

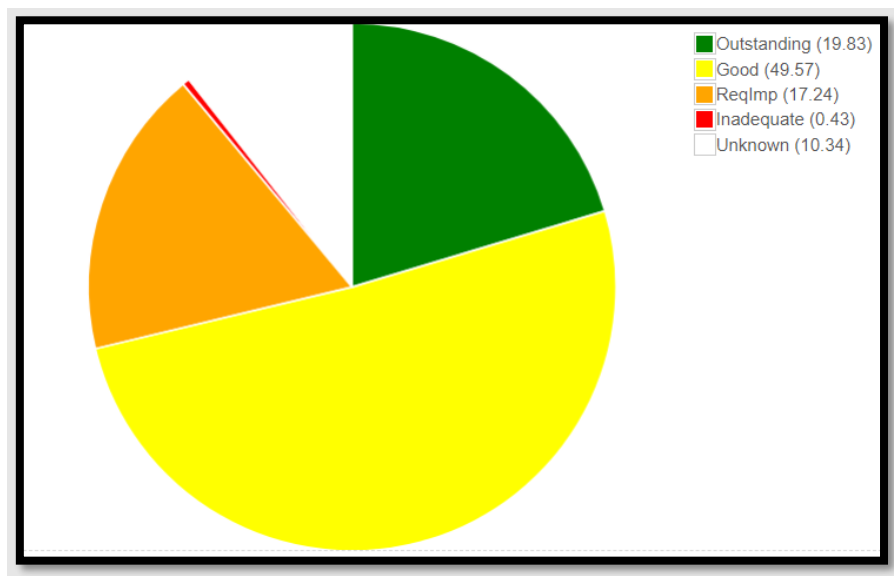
Understandably, our cohort is ever-changing as children come into care and are discharged.

This year, our numbers have increased with 47 discharged but 63 children entering care.

Ofsted Ratings

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after children' states that schools judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' should be prioritised for looked after children in need of a new school and that, unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, looked after children should never be placed in a school judged to be 'Inadequate'.

At the end of the academic year, 75% of Halton's looked after children in Reception to Year 11 attended 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools which have a rating. This is in comparison to 81% at the end of 2021/2. The 10% 'unknown' are schools which have not yet received an Ofsted rating, such as schools who have recently opened or have converted to an academy. The majority of children who attend Requires Improvement or Inadequate schools were already attending these schools prior to entering care or before the school moved into this category and upon review it was deemed in the child's best interests to remain at the school.



Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

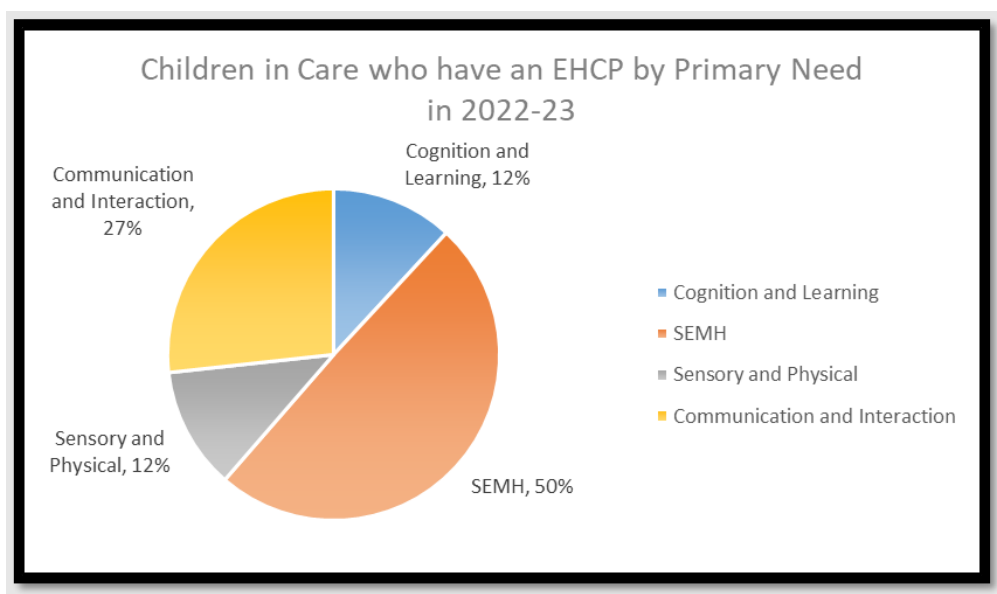
Children in care are significantly more likely to have additional needs than their non-care experienced peers, and are more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

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, whilst working in line with the 'Belonging Regulations'. In these circumstances the Virtual School commission the Educational Psychology (EP) 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.

All EHCPs are reflected within the termly Personal Education Plans, but with 50% of current plans having Social, Emotional and Mental Health as the primary category of need this is reflected in the training offered to individual schools and through our training calendar (and use of EP time) to support schools in enabling our children to flourish and thrive.



Academic Outcomes in 2022-2023

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 cohort numbers and the fluctuation in children coming into (and leaving) care, 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 as they are very specific to the needs to the individual children and young people.

Instead, through the PEP process we analyse the progress of each individual child and young person based upon their starting points and the targets set for their academic outcomes.

Early Years Foundation Stage

There were 10 young people in the EYFS cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more at the time of assessment.

Of these, 30% achieved a 'good level of development' (GLD).

Our Reception cohort continue to cause a concern. Throughout the year, this year group has had the lowest attendance figures, with a high number placed at home with parents.

This year group was significantly impacted during the COVID19 pandemic, and a high level of support will be needed moving forward.

Out of the Reception cohort:

- 2 children were going through an adoption move.
- 1 child had a school move.
- 4 children had 1 placement move.
- 2 children had 2 school moves.
- 1 child had 3 school moves.
- 1 child had 4 school moves.

	2019-19	2021-22	2022-23
GLD	29%	60%	30%

Year 1 Phonics

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23
Year 1 Phonics	62.5%	33%	57%

Key Stage 1 Outcomes

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23
Number in Cohort	11	16	17
Reading	57%	31%	21%
Writing	43%	25%	21%
Maths	43%	38%	25%
Combined	43%	25%	23%

Key Stage 2 Outcomes

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23
Number in Cohort	11	29	18
Reading	33%	28%	55%
Writing	40%	31%	55%
GPS	54%	24%	72%
Maths	33%	36%	55%
Science	54%	28%	61%
Combined in RWM	33.3	28%	44%

Primary Outcomes Analysis

The Primary Outcomes data identifies that our children's results at Key Stage 2 are typically better than those in the earlier years. For example, this year's end of KS2 cohort have sustained or improved their overall attainment compared to their Key Stage 1 outcomes in 2019. Individual pupil progress will continue to be measured through PEPS and to ensure even earlier identification of support through targeted plans, during 2023/24 we will be implementing the use of 2-Year-Old PEPS within Halton.

Key Stage 4 Outcomes

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23
Number in Cohort		33	20
9 - 4 English	8%	42%	15%
9 – 4 Maths	33%	30%	15%
9 – 4 English & Maths	8%	24%	0%
9-5 English	0%	27%	5%
9-5 Maths	0%	9%	0%
9 – 5 English & Maths	0%	9%	0%

KS4 Analysis

Whilst this year's results at the end of KS4 did not mirror those of the previous cohort, there are a number of individual success stories which reflect the work of the schools and Virtual School colleagues in supporting the academic progress of our young people. Due to the lower results, this will heighten the importance of our work in supporting our 16+ cohort in progressing into education, employment or training from September alongside colleagues within the Local Authorities 14-19 team and supporting with the completion of exam resits in the new academic year.

Progress of all Pupils

As well as outcomes, we closely monitor the progress made through the PEP process. Where progress slows or is not on-track based upon their starting points, we work with schools, carers and social workers to use Pupil Premium + in order to provide additional support.

Summer Term 2022-23			
Year	Total No	Number with Expected Progress	% Expected Progress
R	22	8	36%
1	12	10	83%
2	12	6	50%
3	10	10	100%
4	11	10	91%
5	14	12	86%
6	16	15	94%

R	22	8	36%
KS1	24	16	67%
KS2	51	47	92%
TOT	97	71	73%
KS1&2	75	63	84%

Summer Term 2022-23			
Year	Total No	No Ex Pr	% Ex Pr
7	27	26	96
8	23	17	74
9	23	21	91
10	26	11	42
11	19	10	37

KS3	73	44	60%
KS4	45	21	46%
TOT	118	65	55%

This data identifies that our cohort have made good or better progress overall in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, but this dips in EYFS and Key Stage 4 with our youngest and oldest cohorts. We will therefore feed this into our improvement plan for 2023-24 to improve the scrutiny and challenge for these year groups to ensure that progress increases in these year groups.

Attendance and Exclusions

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, in line with 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2023'.

Halton's 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 2022-23

Average % attendance	Primary	Secondary	Overall
Autumn	98%	84%	90%
Spring	97%	82%	88%
Summer	97%	77%	87%

Attendance of all children in care over the past 6 years

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21 COVID	2021-22	2022-23
Primary	97.1%	96.2%	87.5%	93.3%	95.3%	97%
Secondary	88.7%	88.6%	77.9%	90%	84.6	79%
Overall	92.9%	92.4%	81.9%	90.5%	90%	88%

Where attendance is below 95%, this will need to be explored within the PEP and where a concern is raised (for example if there are unauthorised absences, or a deterioration in school attendance), then this should be reflected in the PEP targets and actions as an area of priority.

Exclusions

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

The Virtual School work closely with school leaders and offer training to all schools in Halton (as part of the expansion of our duties) to remind them of the additional anxieties and challenges that our cohort often face. This will be expanded further at our Autumn conference in September 2023 and throughout the next academic year as we offer additional trauma informed practice training.

Percentage of children in care receiving 1 or more suspension in 2022-23:

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	0%	1%	0%
Secondary	8%	10%	10%
Overall	5%	5%	5%

1 Primary child had 1 or more periods of fixed term exclusions:

- 100% were educated out of borough.
- 100% were in residential provision.
- 0% had an EHCP and / or were in specialist provision.
- Total days lost learning for Primary children was 2.

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

- 31% were educated out of borough.
- 42% were in residential provision.
- 15% had an EHCP and / or were in specialist provision.
- Total days lost learning for Secondary age young people was 128.5 days.

In comparison to previous years, there has been a positive decrease in the number of children in care experiencing suspensions and particularly repeated exclusions. This has been as a result of the work by Halton Virtual School in raising awareness of the impact of trauma and neglect on children's behaviours leading to more inclusive practice and the positive support provided through the individual child needs led model of Pupil Premium Plus.

Virtual School Actions and Impact on Exclusions

- Provided support and advice to schools who were experiencing difficulties managing challenging behaviour.
- Established and attended multi-agency, weekly 'Team Around the School' meetings in all secondary schools for children and young people at risk of suspension.
- 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.

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.

Number of CYP who accessed AP during 22/23	Part Time	Full Time Partial Year	Full Time Whole Year
Primary	0	0	0
Secondary	8	1	2
Overall	8	1	2

Post 16 Access to Education, Employment and Training

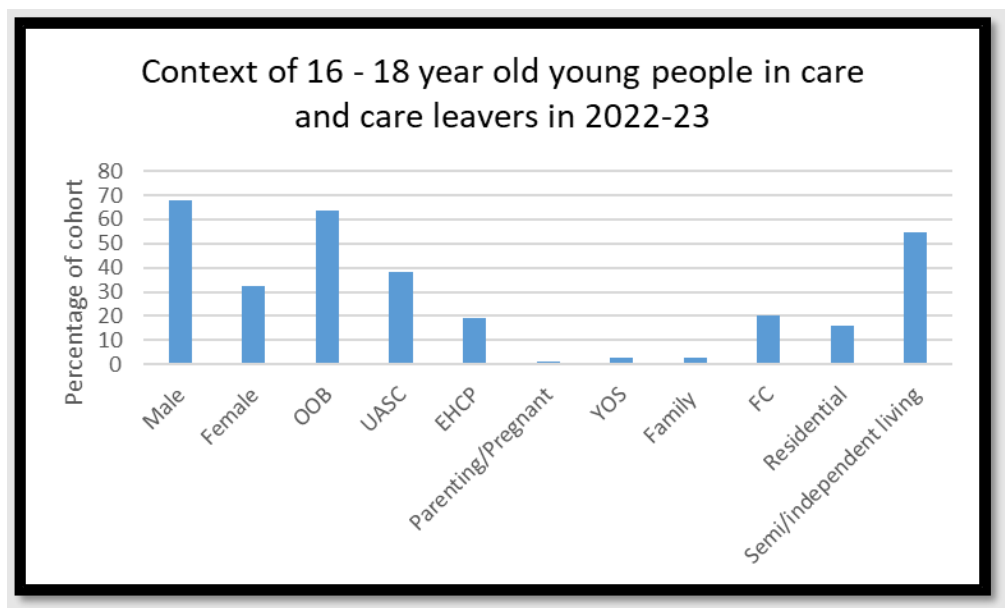
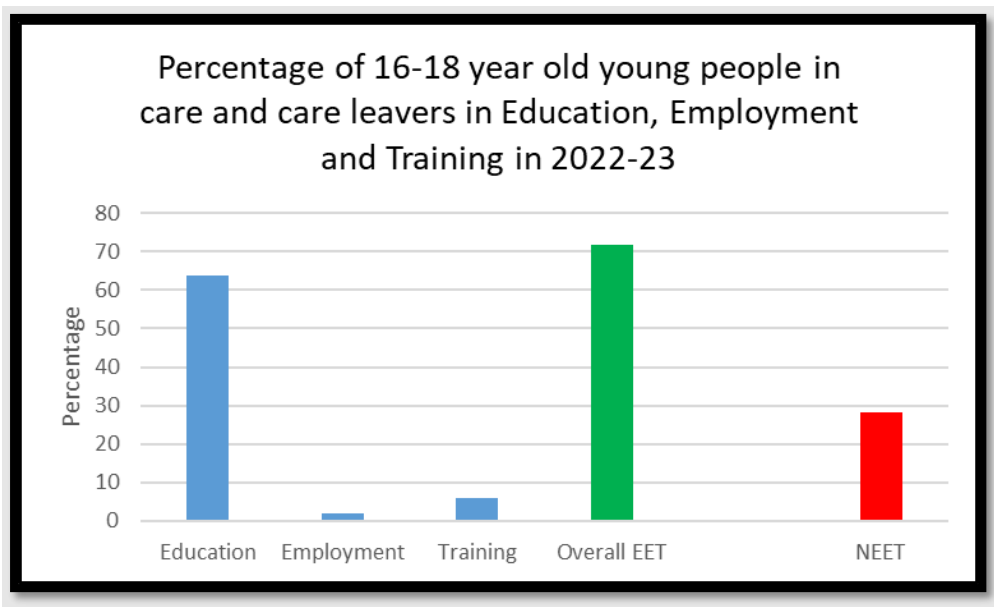
The Virtual School provide support and guidance for all young people in care or care leavers up to the age of 25 around access to Education, Employment and Training (EET), and provide advice and guidance for their social workers or PAs as appropriate.

Halton’s ILACS inspection in March 2020 highlighted that the Virtual School required more capacity to further develop its good work, in particular around support for our Post 16 cohort. As a result, our KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer works 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. This is through the use of our Post 16 PEP and NEET PEP (Not in Education, Employment or Training) process.

Monthly tracking is undertaken 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.

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 also support to enable them to apply if they want to.

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



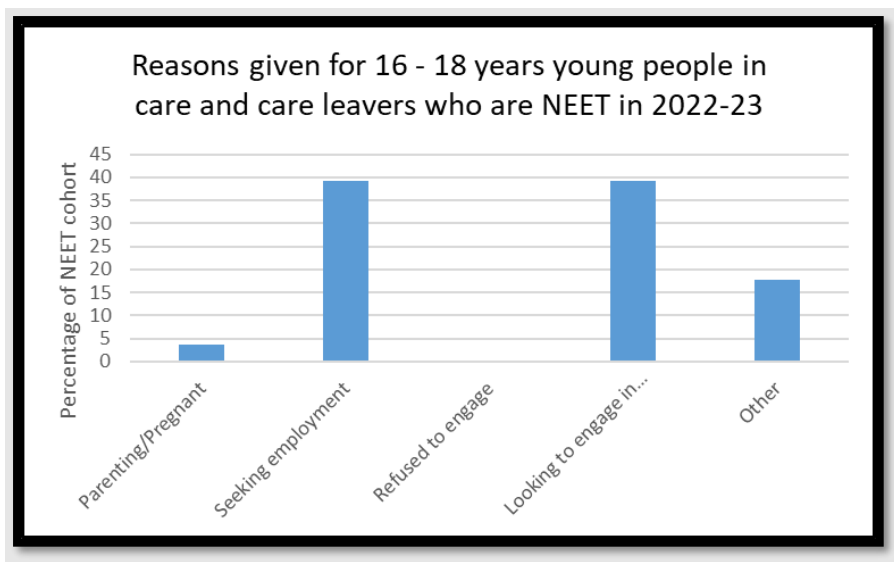
OOB = Out of Borough

UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child

EHCP = Education, Health and Care Plan

YOS = Youth Offending Service Involvement

FC = In Foster Care



The overall cohort is 99 young people of which 72% are in education, employment or training.

There are 28 young people who are not in education, employment or training within this cohort.

Halton Virtual School liaise with the authorities 14-19 Team referring to Career Connect for bespoke support back into EET via, 1:1 Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), job search, applications and CV support.

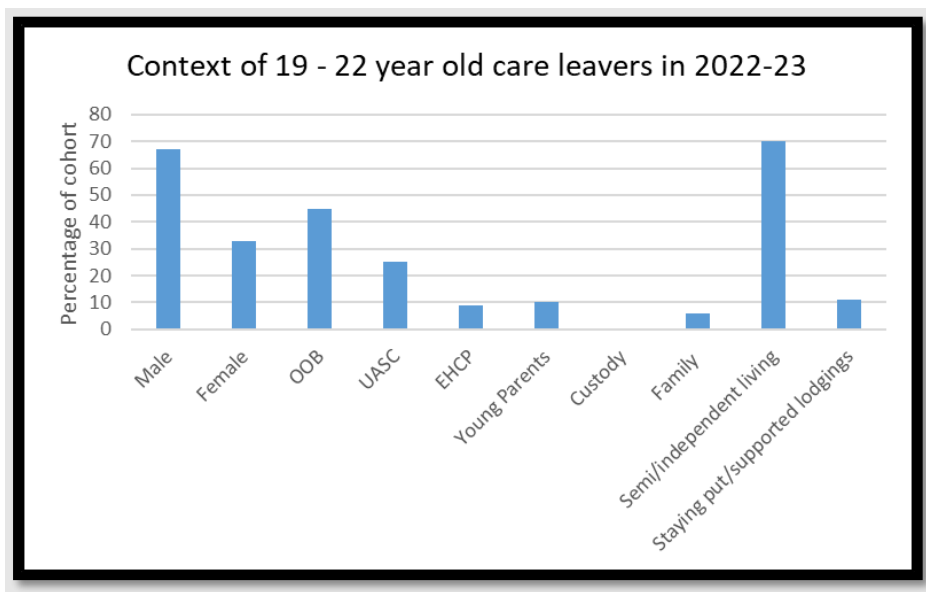
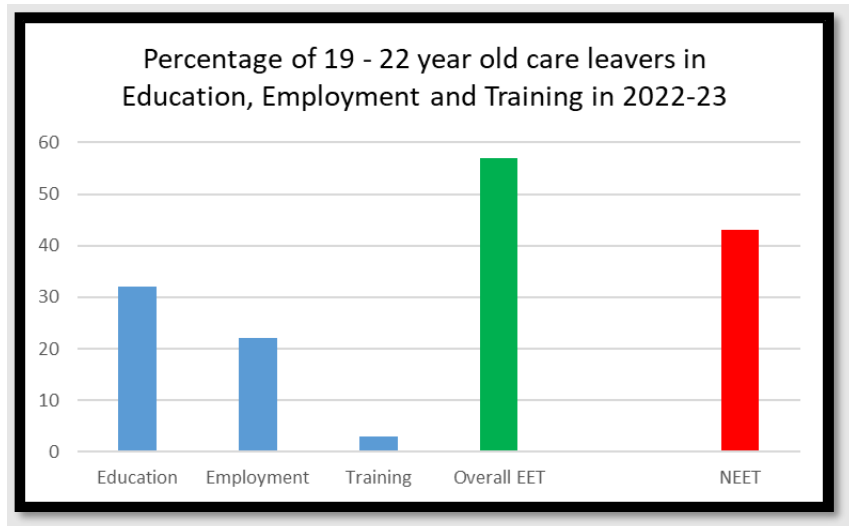
For the more vulnerable of the cohort, support and referrals can be tailored to include Disability Employment Advisers, Princes Trust Volunteers, Talent Match, Housing and Complex Youths.

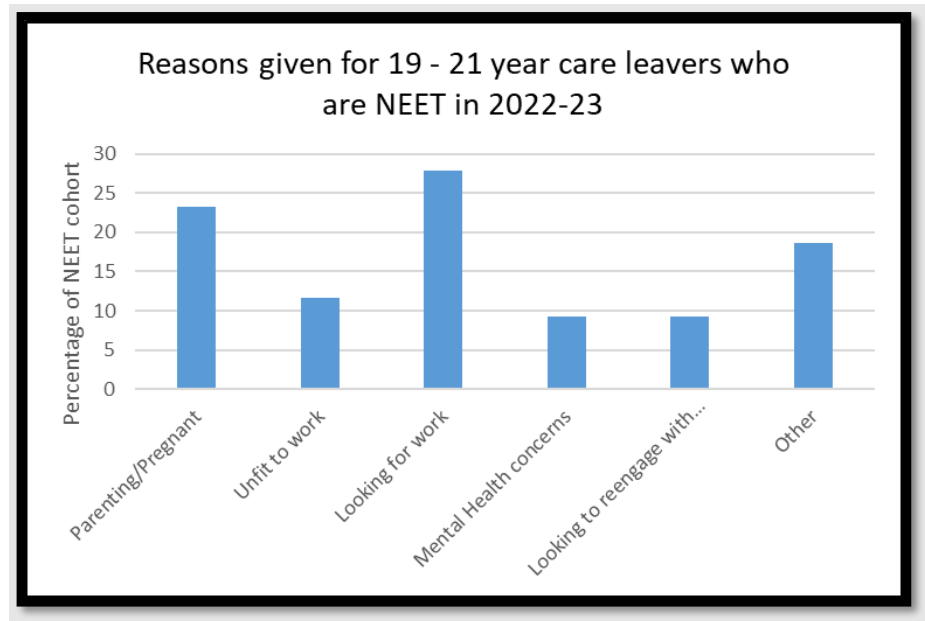
Of those who refused to engage in education, employment or training, 18 live outside of Halton.

There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who have very limited English and would therefore struggle accessing mainstream Further Education. For each of these young people, they have an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support package in place, with a view to then enrolling them at college once their career aspirations are more fully understood.

During 2022-23 we have established the use of a NEET PEP alongside a NEET panel with our social care and Personal Advisor colleagues to provide further support, actions and accountability for engaging this group of Young People.

Outcomes for our 19- 22-year-old care leavers





Of these 100 young people, 57% are currently accessing education, employment or training (EET) but there are 43 young people in this cohort who are not (NEET).

As a virtual school, for our Care Leaver NEET cohort, we offer signposting to local services such as Halton People into Jobs, Households into Work and Halton Adult Education Service as well as advice and guidance in supporting our Leaving Care cohort alongside our Personal Advisor colleagues.

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.

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 in our termly performance reports to our Governing Body.

Statutory Compliance and Quality Assurance

The PEP completion rate has remained consistently high in spite of the challenging circumstances throughout this year.

	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	100%	100%	100%	100%
Primary	100%	100%	98%	99%
Secondary	96%	89%	95%	93%
Post 16	79%	80%	95%	87%
Combined	89.5%	90%	97%	93.5%
New into Care in Timescale	86%	57%	75%	71.5%

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.

During 22/23 we implemented a new moderation process from Spring 2023 for PEPs to ensure consistency across schools, PEP co-ordinators and age ranges. This resulted in an increase in amber graded PEPs due to increased rigour, but training and support and been provided to respond to this, as well as providing high quality materials to Designated Teachers to support the completion of future PEPs. It is therefore anticipated that figures will continue to increase yet retaining our new higher standards in the quality of submissions.

Good or Better PEPS	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	100%	52%	41%	64%
Primary	84%	62%	81%	76%
Secondary	67%	64%	66%	66%
Post 16	77%	78%	88%	81%
Combined	82%	64%	69%	72%

During 23/24 we will work to enhance the moderation of PEPs to be multi-agency and consistent with neighbouring Virtual Schools.

Our PEP policy and supporting documents expand upon what ‘makes an effective (green or gold) PEP.

Pupil Premium Plus and Wider Funding

This year, the total grant allocated for Halton was £646,261.

47% (£324,130) was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes through distributed payments to schools and education provision.

	2021 - 22	2022- 23
PEP Allocation	27%	33%
Direct YP Support	19%	14%
Training	5%	2%
Centrally Retained	49%	51%

The centrally retained portion is for the attendance service the Virtual School commission, dedicated Education Psychology time (and the training they delivery), speech and language support (from 23/24), purchasing of Boxall Profile licences, and for staff within the Virtual School. It is important to note that this central allocation is vital to ensuring that we are able to track the educational outcomes and also provide support for both schools and children in care.

During the 23/24 academic year, we aim to benchmark the spending of PP+ in comparison to other LAs and Virtual Schools and develop greater measurement of IMPACT of spending, which will feed into the longer-term planning for the virtual school.

School’s use the funding allocated through the PEPs to commission support themselves (including tuition, nurture and emotional literacy support, or 1:1 support and access to additional interventions), to enhance the curriculum, offer opportunities to nurture talents, or support them in their talents and academic interests.

Post Looked After Children

238 school age pupils known to be previously looked after are currently attending Halton schools.

Children and young people who have experienced early life trauma can continue to experience a range of challenges in school. We understand the long-term impact of trauma, and this informs the support and guidance we give to parents, carers and professionals who live and work with previously looked after children. The Virtual School’s relationship with Together for Adoption (TFA) is strong and collaborative working is good. We have participated in half termly meeting sessions convened by TFA.

Additionally, Halton works very closely within a sub region of other Virtual Schools, to upskill staff and share good practice and resources. The quality of Halton Virtual School resources has been recognised and distributed throughout schools in the borough.

Improved knowledge and communication have led to an increase in adoptive parents contacting the Virtual School for a range of advice to reduce difficulties for their children at school, or to recommend school placements that might match their needs. Halton's Virtual School has delivered a training session for those parents who have already adopted, those in the process of being assessed or at the matching stage. Content includes the role of the Virtual School, potential difficulties previously looked after children can experience at key points such as school transition, why additional support is needed and how to access this. Our contribution to the effectiveness of the TFA is enhanced by a member of the Virtual School being a member of the adoption panel.

Areas of Celebration

- Support and advice to schools, adoptive parents, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers and local authority social care staff
- Providing a channel of communication and support for parents and carers of children / YP transitioning from LAC to PLAC.
- Signposting, advising, and directing for all PLAC related concerns.
- Despatching of resource documents and instruction manuals to schools for PLAC matters including census guidance and provision suggestions.
- Designated training for adopter parents and SGO carers.
- Working closely in conjunction with adoption agency (TFA) to refine offers and training for parents / carers.
- PLAC updates for schools on our VS newsletter and bulletins
- Updating Virtual School website's PLAC tab so that it can be used as a resource.
- Providing guidance regarding accessing additional support networks and funding for PLAC e.g., ASF, Barnardo's and Resolve.
- Development of a PLAC Personal Education Plan.
- Termly networking meetings with Virtual School PLAC leads in the North-West to share information, ideas and collaborative learning experiences.
- Specific point of contact within the VS team.
- Data collection of school age PLA children / YP.
- Raising the profile of the role of the virtual school for children previously looked after ensuring provision and support is in place.
- Responding to requests for information and advice to parents and colleagues working in adoption services. Support is provided in relation to requests from the Admissions team to place previously looked after children (PLAC) in a suitable education setting.

Areas of Development and Targets for 2023 – 2024

- New flightpath support package for all children leaving care: including active communication with schools, carers and other services following care discharge. This will provide the backbone for an extended offer for Halton’s children who were formerly in care and will be a pro-active vehicle to prevent potential crises occurring.
 - Robust challenge and refinement of local adoption agency (Together for Adoption’s) training calendar.
 - Delivery of a ‘coffee morning’ surgery every two months for adoptive parents and SGO carers connected to Halton.
 - Refinement and rolling out to schools of PEP style document for children formerly in care.
 - In person visits to schools to meet Designated Teachers in order to raise the profile of the Children Formerly Looked After Offer / tangible support for Children with a Social Worker (CWSW).
- *Delivery of joint cross authority training for schools focussed on the ‘adoption journey’. Training to be organised and facilitated by the Northwest Five Borough Partnership (Halton, Cheshire West, Wigan, Warrington, St. Helens).

Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

The expansion of our role to offer strategic support for all children with a social worker has been a key focus for the Virtual School this year.

We have co-produced and launched a new ‘Team Around the School’ model for children at risk of exclusion within 100% of our secondary schools. We have also enhanced our presence on key multi-agency groups to support those at risk of exploitation.

We have launched the use of CPOMS Engage as a Virtual School to provide instant access to attendance data and enable us to provide immediate support and guidance to schools.

Our Safeguarding Children in Education Officer also provides active support to schools relating to escalations, case support and training for DSLs.

Our key focus for 2023/24 will be the expansion of our use of CPOMS and redefining Educational Neglect across the Authority; working with schools, social care and the safeguarding partnership to review the neglect strategy and where school attendance sits within our continuum of need.

Training and Development

During 2022-23, the Virtual School delivered training and hosted network meetings to 109 delegates from across 105 Schools.

Training and support were provided in relation to three key aims this year, to ensure we get our core business to the highest standard possible, especially following the increased expectations around what constitutes a 'good' PEP:

- New to the Role of Designated Teacher
- Quality PEPs and Smart Targets
- Termly DT Network Meetings

Our Virtual School Conference for Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers, Headteacher and Social Care takes place on 27th September 2023 with over 150 delegates expected to join us for what is sure to be a fantastic day's professional development!

Additional learning and literacy support

Halton Virtual School provides a high level of 'outside the classroom' educational support for our children and young people in care.

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 pupil voice and moved to provide online tuition where preferred.

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.

The Virtual School also has a yearly subscription to Storytime Magazine which is sent out each month to identified children in Key Stage 1 and when appropriate to some Key Stage 2 children. 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. 44 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.

2022 – 2023 Virtual School Action Plan

A summary of our Action Plan for the previous academic year

Priority	Action / Areas of Focus	Progress / Desired Outcome	End of year review & RAG Rating
To reduce the proportion of LAC becoming NEET whilst in care or as a care leaver.	Implement the use of a NEET PEP for 16–18-year-olds.	NEET PEP had now been introduced and is completed via the Welfare call system. SMART Target & QA guidance produced to support the completion of these documents to ensure these are completed to a high standard.	P16 NEET PEP, 100% completion in the summer term. This area will continue to be a focus to improve the quality of the NEET PEP document.
	Stabilise team structure within Virtual School for Post-16 support with PEPs and Employability		Clear roles across the whole Virtual School agreed with development of Post 16 Education Officer role to include PEPS.
	Launch Traineeship Model within HBC and broaden post-16 offer (including CSCS Cards and Apprenticeships)	<p>We have developed the traineeship model across the authority which has been a collaborative piece of work between the virtual school and the 14 –19 team. This has supported three young people on to this offer who are working towards completion of their traineeship by the end of the year and will be supported to move to employment, apprenticeship or college course following the completion.</p> <p>The Virtual school was able to commission a CSCS card course and six young people able to successfully complete.</p> <p>April - 4 young people have attended to meet with managers at various placements since February 2023, with 1 YP is due to start w/c 08.05.23 at Waste Services.</p> <p>In collaboration with the 14-19 Team, the Traineeship offer is now extended to placements across 6 Directorates with 2 new potential placements in Adult Services.</p>	<p>The collaboration with both Power in Partnership and 14-19 Team has been very productive in securing the placements and underpinning the educational element to the programme. The Traineeship offer has been launched but requires further embedding to ensure the clear communication is in place with all agencies to allow the young people to maintain their placements and to successfully complete this element.</p> <p>Next steps are to further develop the outcomes for young people on completion of the traineeship and what can be offered as a progression route.</p>
	Improve the completion rate and quality of PEPs within Post-16 sector	<p>The profile of the post 16 PEP has been raised by working closely with social care teams. SMART Target & QA guidance produced for settings.</p> <p>Autumn – Leadership team conducted random moderation of each cohort. Individual feedback provided, followed by team training on PEP QA.</p> <p>Spring – Leadership team conducting mid-term moderation to identify any emerging themes and address with PEP Leads where necessary. Random moderation will be completed at end of term, followed by individual moderation.</p>	<p>There has been an increase in the percentage of PEPs completed in the summer term compared with the same period last year. NEET PEP completion has been 100% in the summer term.</p> <p>There has been a reduction in the quality of the PEP with more being graded as inadequate. This is still going to be an area for development across the next academic year.</p>
Develop a high quality, multi-agency moderation process	Implement PEP deadline each term to allow time for analysis and moderation	Completed and continue to monitor – further challenge will be implemented from summer 2023 to prevent drift and delay. Identified	PEP deadline introduced, will continue to review into next academic year.

of PEPs, to continue to build upon the progress and attainment within all Key Stages		new into care PEP requires greater oversight – allocated team member to lead upon these.	
	Establish internal moderation process for VS team	Autumn – Leadership team conducted random moderation of each cohort. Individual feedback provided, followed by team training on PEP QA. Spring – Leadership team conducting mid-term moderation to identify any emerging themes and address with PEP Leads where necessary. Random moderation will be completed at end of term, followed by individual moderation. Summer – Continue with model identified above and Implement ToR for multi-agency moderation panel	Following initial moderation identifying inconsistent judgements across the Key Stages, further internal training, development of policies and guidance materials have been produced and implemented. Further moderation has demonstrated greater accuracy and consistency of judgements and standardised systems are now embedded.
	Develop ‘model’ PEPs to show good practice, including use of PP+ & analysis of impact	Examples for all age ranges written and shared with settings – Jan 2022. These will be updated for the summer term to reflect any changes to PEP document. SMART Target & QA guidance produced for settings. PP+ Autumn analysis to take place at end of Spring term to analyse impact of spending across the term. Examples of positive impact of PP+ spending will be shared with settings. April 2023 – Analysis completed and included in Performance Report – to be discussed at Team meeting and shared with settings. SMART target training has been rolled out to all designated teacher and lead by PEP leads.	These were shared at network meetings, included in PEP & PP+ policy, will be shared again in September 2023.
	Write a PEP policy and disseminate out to all professionals to provide consistency and clarity.	Written in Dec and will be shared by corporate parenting board – Jan 2023. April 2023 – Shared with Social care & settings, to be uploaded to website	Completed – Jan 2023
	Launch multi-agency moderation panel with feedback disseminated to social care and schools	ToR to be written in Spring/Summer 2023 due to internal moderation process being developed.	Due to internal moderation & capacity issue within other teams, this needs to take place in the next academic year.
	Develop prioritisation and targeted support / attendance of VS at PEPs based on needs-based analysis	Weekly cohort discussions take place between PEP Lead and Team member. Termly cohort analysis takes place at the start of each term to identify settings/young people that need to be a priority. Clear line of escalation needs to be embedded within the team.	Completed – termly meetings held with Deputy Head/Team Leader to prioritise attendance at meetings by PEP Leads.
	Embed a high-quality strategic model for the implementation of the expansion of duties to encompass all children with a social worker (CWSW).	Create a baseline data collection to identify areas of focus and need	January 2023 – At risk register completed and data analysis completed to inform areas of focus for team for Spring 2023. CPOMS Engage commissioned to create instant communication pathway with education provision and enable access to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding data.
Embed the role of the SCiE Officer within the VS and attendance within the HCYPSP.		Achieved – started with the team in January 2023. Resulted in greater consultation of CWSW advice within VS.	
Develop training programme for DSLs, HTs, ECTs, SWs and other key professionals based upon areas of focus identified within data and through discussion		April 2023 – SMART Target training rolled out to all DSLs, DTs & Social workers. New to DT role completed termly. Education Champions Guidance developed for induction of new social workers.	Training focus has prioritised quality of PEPs and Smart Targets. Instead, developed the Team around the School model to prevent suspensions.

	with schools – including trauma informed		DSL training delivered by SCIE Officer. Training calendar with greater focus on CWSW - including trauma informed practice and educational neglect. Bespoke training also embedded through Right to Succeed Project's Education Subgroup – chaired by the HT of the Virtual School.
	Work with 'Education, Inclusion, and Provision division' to develop 'pupils causing concern' meetings and a graduated response for those at risk of perm ex.	Monthly 'pupils causing concern' meetings held with VS Leadership team to discuss CIC cohort and raise any setting/placement concerns. April 2023 –ToR written & shared with social care & health, 1st meeting date to be arranged with Principal Managers Project has evolved and has taken the format of a round robin visit to each secondary provision in the borough. Attendees included senior / pastoral leads from high school, HBC school improvement, Virtual School, Health team, Attendance, SEND Team, Education Psychology. Each session (12 in total) takes the form of an information gathering exercise where behaviour policies, strategies and systems are discussed; achievements celebrated and points for development addressed. Eventually to be followed up with training, support and guidance from the LA.	Completed – May 2023. Impact will be measured from September 2023 by tracking the outcomes for those children discussed and their onward journeys.
	Review the impact of support and liaise with colleagues across the Northwest to measure impact of expansion work.	Joined group for CWSW across NW VS's. To continue to develop through summer 2023	Limited cross-authority work has been completed following conference in Summer 2023 – this will be actioned in Autumn 2023.
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	Oct 2022 – new 'initial PEP' process in place. Needs time to embed to see impact. Mar 2022 – Initial PEP process needs more time to embed given that within social care there have been a lot of changes and new social workers need to become more familiar with Halton's PEP process including initial PEPs. . April 2023 – Initial PEP data analysis started being collated and reviewed for impact	Lead for new into care PEPs is now fully trained and leading upon this. Further communication of data and expectations with social are required – scheduled for team meeting in September 2023. Data demonstrates impact on timeliness and quality of new into care PEPs
	Develop a new performance reporting process to provide greater accountability and challenge with schools and social care on a termly basis.	Worked with colleagues to relaunch corporate parenting board and a new working group, which acts as the governance for the VS and receives performance reports – launched in Spring 2023 – will now measure impact and challenge to other services as well as to the VS. Performance clinics within EIP will then also feed into this work from May 2023	Completed – monthly meetings take place with senior social care managers, including a focus on data and performance measures.
	Provide regular reports and updates to the governance board, corporate parenting board and the CiC (children in care) Council	Established and launched with operational group of the Corporate Parenting board – January 2023.	Corporate Parenting Boards Operational Group established and acting as governing body for Virtual School – Terms of Reference identify 3 meetings annually to focus on Virtual School for greater

			accountability, oversight and challenge.
	Write a Belonging Strategy, including for those with an EHCP	Written. To be shared with colleagues in the SEN division before being shared more widely.	Written, needs to be discussed with senior management and shared across the authority. Delayed due to discrepancy between Local Authorities. DfE webinar scheduled for Autumn 23.
	Ensure timescales for QA and PP+ analysis is measurable, and impact is demonstrable.	Timescales implemented in Autumn 2022. Impact of moderation to be analysed in April 2023. April 2023 – Analysis has been completed & included in Performance Monitoring Report	Deadlines have now been established but not yet fully adhered to. This has impacted upon the amount of direct work which can be completed with schools around the quality of documents and delivery of bespoke training. This will be reinforced during Autumn 2023 conference, to bring us in line with other Virtual Schools.
	Implement 'Pupil Progress Meetings' to review attainment and achievement of pupils, using Analytics	Autumn progress meetings arranged for Jan 2023. April 2023 – Progress meetings to take place with PEP Leads in May	Initial meetings have been trialled, but further work to establish this will be required in 2023/24.

Our Plans for 2023-2024

A summary of our plans for this academic year can be found below. These are expanded within our delivery plan for the academic year, including timescales, success measures and identified actions.

To increase the number of Children in Care and Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training & widen participation whilst in care or as a care leaver.

- Develop and embed a Care Experienced apprenticeship pathway programme with ring fenced investment, funding and commitment.
- Halton to adopt Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic to ensure that all our Care Experienced cohort will not be discriminated against and will continue to be supported in all aspects of their lives with unfettered access to services including, housing, accommodation, health, education, training and employment.
- Strengthen our Post 16 offer through the introduction of the new Post 16 Grant.
- Develop a mentoring program to support young people who are disengaged in education. This program will work directly with young people and carers to support reengagement with education, employment, or training.
- Improve the completion and quality of Post 16 PEPs and NEET PEPs
- The development of a formalised Virtual School offer of support for all Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entering Halton's care. Including:
 - Temporary English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision and tuition prior to gaining a substantive educational place.
 - A laptop (registered through the PEP process) following entry into an established and assured educational provider.
 - Hand-in-glove partnership and communication with the engagement teams from outside of borough if a UASC becomes NEET.

- Tracking and support of NEET UASC through Halton's NEET panel and direct abetment from personal assistants.
- Deployment of Halton's 14-19 team should a UASC residing in Halton become NEET.

Develop an 'Engagement Hub' within the Virtual School

- Provide bespoke support, challenge and guidance for all vulnerable children across Halton to remove barriers to learning and provide access or signposting to support, services and training.
- Specialist support for attendance, educational neglect, mental health, challenging behaviours including persistent disruptive behaviour resulting in being at risk of suspension or exclusion.
- Access to commissioned 1:1 work with our education support worker.
- Support for those with SEND to get the right support when it is needed including access to our new S&L service and our educational psychologist.

Enhance our training offer and engagement with Social Care

- Launch our new multi-agency conference model for training and enhancing multi-agency working.
- Launch a new training cycle for social workers to upskill and develop knowledge around the education system for social care colleagues who are working within the remit of 'children with a social worker'. Lead on the training of social care relating to 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance.'
- Redefine Educational Neglect within Halton through the safeguarding partnership.
- As part of our work to improve attendance and reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions, the virtual school are looking to develop a training package to support education colleagues in the area of attachment, trauma and mental health training.

Develop a more rigorous and robust performance and accountability framework.

- Early identification of need, linked to initial PEPs, the launch of new multi-agency 2-year-old PEP with health colleagues and the continued close working relationship/sharing of information with the SEND team through monthly meetings with SEN Team Manager, to escalate cases to avoid drift and delay with statutory assessments.
- Refine and enhance the Virtual School's use of Eclipse and CPOMS
- Develop the use of Performance and Accountability meetings alongside the use of a monthly scorecard for the virtual school to be shared across social care and education.
- Multi-agency moderation panel launch on the 4th of December, linked to better collaboration between education and social care, with a shared vision of the progress of the child.
- Closer working relations with neighbouring local authorities to improve consistency in the use of the Belonging Regulations and peer review of PEPs.
- Appoint a new data and performance analyst / business manager (0.4) to enhance our oversight and accountability through performance indicators.