



VIRTUAL  SCHOOL

HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Annual Report 2023-2024



Benjamin Holmes
Headteacher of the Virtual School
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Interim Headteacher of the Virtual School

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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 2024 they have also acted in the role of Acting Director for Education. Consequently, the Virtual School has appointed an interim Headteacher, Joanne Lloyd, who has managed the daily running of the school, along with strategic oversight.

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

- 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 an 'Engagement Hub' within the Virtual School
- Enhance our training offer and engagement with Social Care
- Develop a more rigorous and robust performance and accountability framework.

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 2024-2025 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, we successfully recruited a new Primary PEP Lead, Sarah Rawnsley, who joined the team from the 1st of September 2023. A new SCiE Officer also joined the team in July 2024.

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 2023-2024

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 Headteacher	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	Sarah Rawnsley	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	James Jordan	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 Children's Services Resource Panel
- Halton's Fostering Panel
- Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group

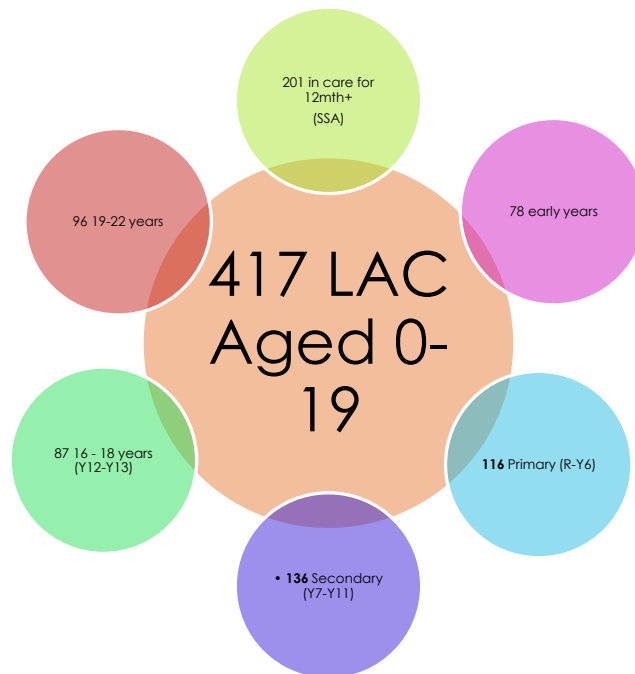
- Children’s Services Improvement Board
- Resource and Placement Panel
- NW 5 Boroughs Post-Looked After Network
- Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Panel

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.

Our Cohort in 2023-2024

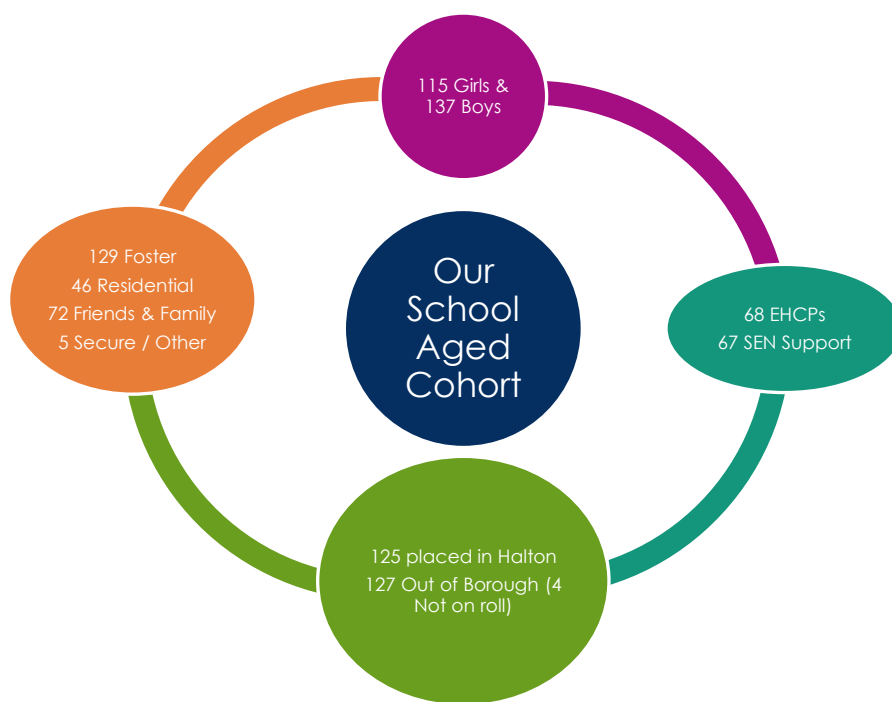
Due to the nature of our work, the cohort of children and young people whom we support is continually evolving as children enter care and also leave care.

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



*Cumulated total for 23/24 academic year.

As of 31st August there were 351 children with an episode of care.



Placement moves.

During 2023-24 we continued to see a high number of CYP (Children and Young People) who experienced a placement move with 65 children and young people having 1 or more placement moves (up 9 from 2022-23).

Of these:

- 46 had 1 placement move (up from 40)
- 16 had 2 placement moves (up from 8)
- 3 had 3 placement moves (down from 6)
- 0 had 4 placement moves (down from 2)

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 18 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year 2023-2024 (down from 19 last year) outside of anticipated phase / key stage transfers.

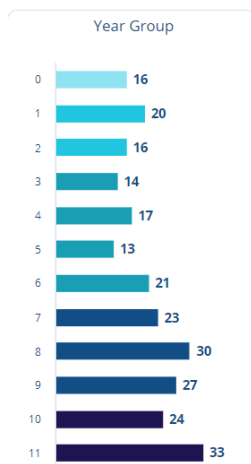
There were 10 young people who have had periods of time not on a school roll, up from 4 in the previous academic year. 7 of these children have an EHCP.

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 shows a breakdown of children in care by each national curriculum year group for 2023/24. There are clear growth areas in pre-school aged children and within secondary.

New into Care and Discharged from Care

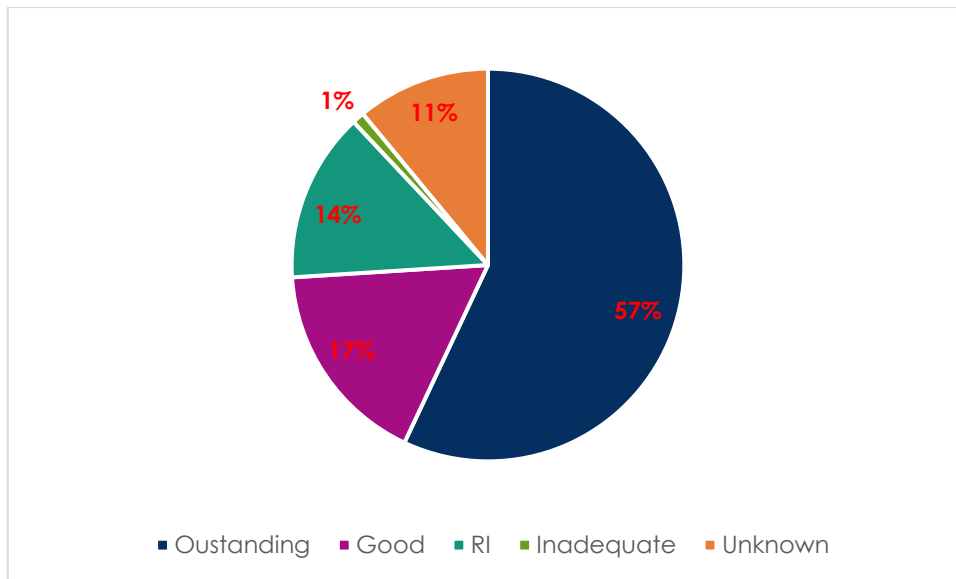
Understandably, our cohort is ever-changing as children come into care and are discharged.

This year, our numbers have decreased with 88 discharged and 44 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, 74% 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 75% at the end of 2022/3. The 11% ‘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.



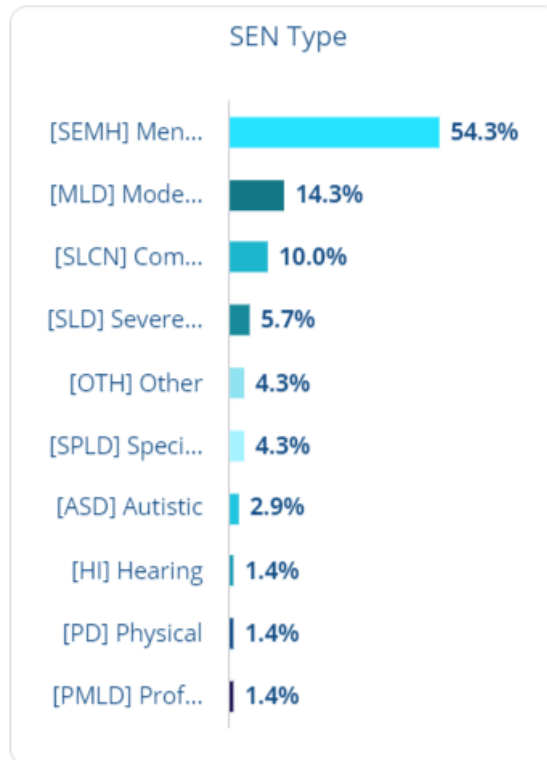
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

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 54% 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 2023-2024

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

Of these, 27% achieved a 'good level of development' (GLD).

Our Reception cohort continue to cause a concern. Throughout the year, this year group has had one of the highest attendance figures, there does not appear to be a trend in placement status and GLD. This year group will be a focus for the Virtual School for the 2024-25 academic year.

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:

- 1 child had a school move.
- 3 children had 1 placement move.

GLD	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	29%	60%	30%	27%

Year 1 Phonics

Year 1 Phonics	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	62.5%	33%	57%	50%

Key Stage 1 Outcomes

This year the KS1 assessments were not statutory, therefore we cannot report on this data.

Key Stage 2 Outcomes

Key Stage 2 Outcomes	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Number in Cohort	11	29	18	18
Reading	33%	28%	55%	39%
Writing	40%	31%	55%	33%
GPS	54%	24%	72%	28%
Maths	33%	36%	55%	39%
Science	54%	28%	61%	44%
Combined in RWM	33%	28%	44%	28%

Primary Outcomes Analysis

The Primary Outcomes data identifies that our children's results at Key Stage 2 are in line with 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, however, the cohort group in 2019 was significantly smaller than it is now. 72% of this year group have an EHCP or an identified area of SEND. 61% of the cohort were educated in borough. Individual pupil progress will continue to be measured through PEPS and to ensure even earlier identification of support through targeted plans.

Key Stage 4 Outcomes

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Number in Cohort	12	33	20	27
9 - 4 English	8%	42%	15%	15%
9 – 4 Maths	33%	30%	15%	4%
9 – 4 English & Maths	8%	24%	0%	4%
9-5 English	0%	27%	5%	4%
9-5 Maths	0%	9%	0%	0%
9 – 5 English & Maths	0%	9%	0%	0%

KS4 Analysis

This year's results at the end of KS4 mirror those of the previous cohort.

- 38% of the cohort entered care during KS4.
- 24% of the cohort are also in receipt of an EHCP.
- 62% of the cohort had at least 1 social worker change in the last 12 months.
- 35% of the cohort had at least one placement change during Year 11.
- 18% of the cohort are UASC.
- 41% of the cohort attended out of borough settings

However, 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 low results, we are continuing to strengthen the 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 2023-24			
Year	Total No	Number with Expected Progress	% Expected Progress
R	15	10	67%
1	20	16	80%
2	16	13	81%
3	14	11	79%
4	18	14	78%
5	13	13	100%
6	21	21	100%

R	15	10	67%
KS1	36	29	81%
KS2	66	59	89%
TOT	117	98	84%
KS1&2	102	88	86%

Summer Term 2023-24			
Year	Total No	No Ex Pr	% Ex Pr
7	22	16	73%
8	30	23	77%
9	28	13	46%
10	23	15	65%
11	33	13	39%

KS3	78	52	67%
KS4	56	28	50%
TOT	134	80	60%

This data identifies that our cohort have made good or better progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2 but this dips in EYFS and Key Stage 3 and 4, with our youngest and oldest cohorts. We will therefore feed this into our improvement plan for 2024-25 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 2024'.

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 2023-24

Average % attendance	Primary	Secondary	Overall
Autumn	97%	81%	88%
Spring	97%	78%	87%
Summer	98%	74%	84%

Attendance of all children in care over the past 7 years

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21 COVID	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Primary	97.1%	96.2%	87.5%	93.3%	95.3%	97%	97%
Secondary	88.7%	88.6%	77.9%	90%	84.6	79%	77%
Overall	92.9%	92.4%	81.9%	90.5%	90%	88%	86%

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

This academic year has seen the Virtual School have their first permanent exclusion. Overall there were 3 permanent exclusions for significant one off incidents. All three children have an EHCP and attended a specialist setting. National and regional colleagues have also seen an increase of permanent exclusions for Children in Care.

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 2024 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 2023-24:

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	0%	1%	3%
Secondary	17%	17%	14%
Overall	10%	10%	9%

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

- 75% were educated out of borough.
- 25% were in residential provision.
- 75% had an EHCP and / or were in specialist provision.
- Total days lost learning for Primary children was 9.

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

- 66% were educated out of borough.
- 53% were in residential provision.
- 58% had an EHCP and / or were in specialist provision.
- Total days lost learning for Secondary age young people was 243.5 days.

In comparison to previous years, there has been a significant increase in the number of children in care experiencing suspensions and particularly repeated exclusions. The Virtual School has focussed on 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. Targeted school level support will be provided in the next academic year, along with further training on attachment and trauma.

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. This year has seen the rollout to some primary schools, which the Virtual School have also attended.
- Provided tailored packages of support to high-risk pupils, including mentoring through Insight Mentoring Service.
- 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 23/24	Part Time	Full Time Partial Year	Full Time Whole Year
Primary	1	0	0
Secondary	6	1	1
Overall	8	1	1

Post 16 Access to Education, Employment and Training

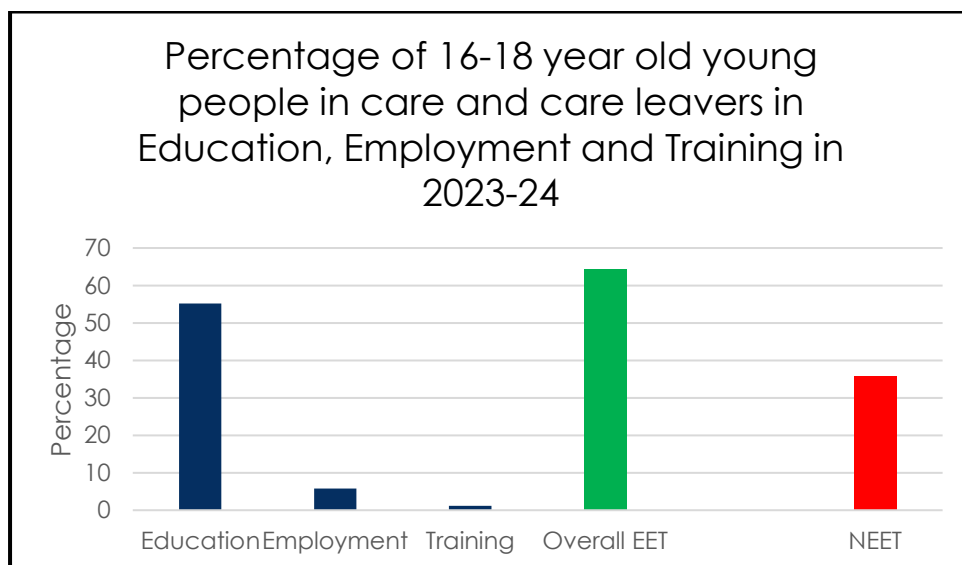
The Virtual School provide support and guidance for all young people in care or care leavers up to the age of 25 around access to Education, Employment and Training (EET), and provide advice and guidance for their social workers or PAs as appropriate.

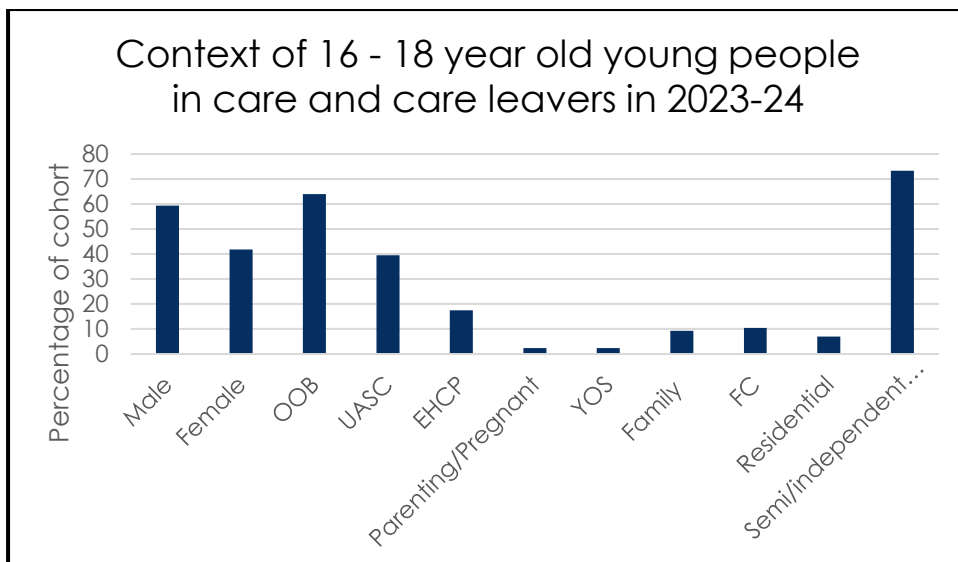
Halton’s ILACS inspection in May 2024 highlighted that the Virtual School required more capacity to further develop its good work, in particular around support for our Post 16 cohort. As a result, our KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer works to improve the engagement of Post 16 young people in care 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. This process is monitored through the NEET Panel, attended by relevant stakeholders.

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





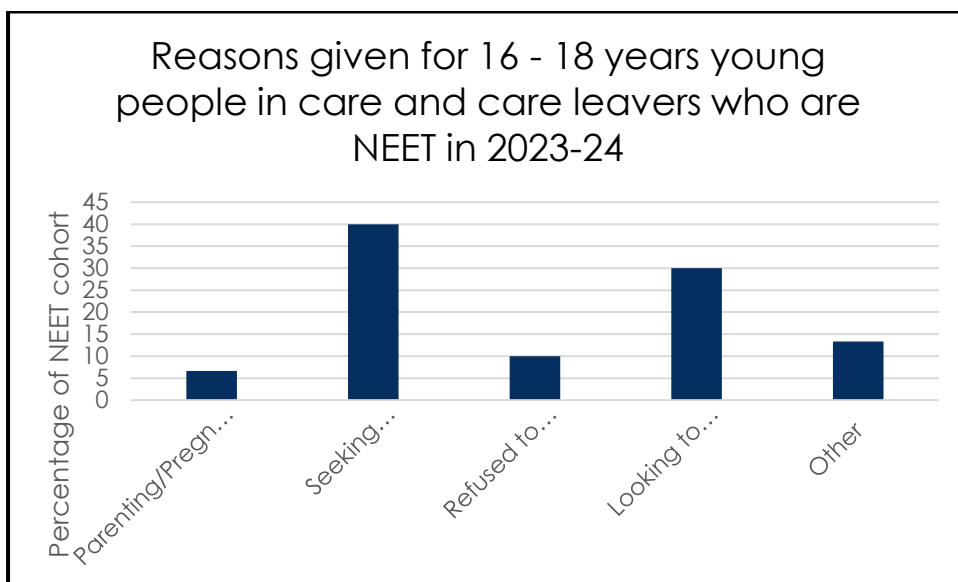
OOB = Out of Borough

UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child

EHCP = Education, Health and Care Plan

YOS = Youth Offending Service Involvement

FC = In Foster Care



The overall cohort is 87 young people of which 64% are in education, employment or training.

There are 31 young people who are not in education, employment or training within this cohort.

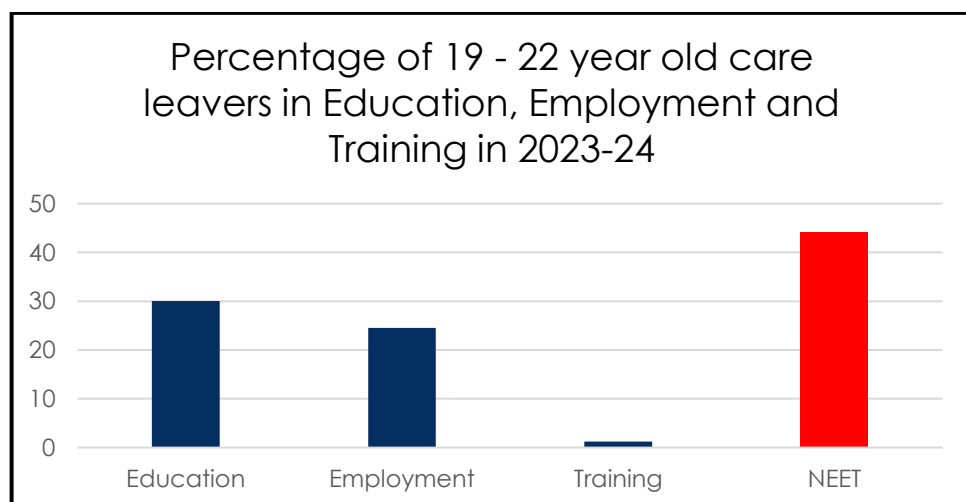
Halton Virtual School liaise with the authorities 14-19 Team referring to Career Connect for bespoke support back into EET via, 1:1 Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), job search, applications and CV support.

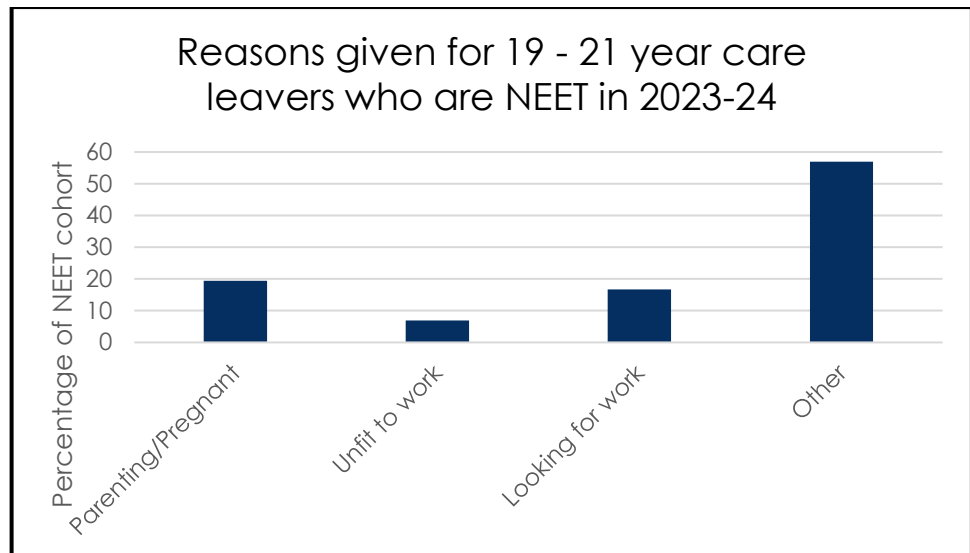
For the more vulnerable of the cohort, support and referrals can be tailored to include Disability Employment Advisers, Princes Trust Volunteers, Talent Match, Housing and Complex Youths.

Of those who refused to engage in education, employment or training, 19 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 2023-24 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. These are completed by the KS4 & Post 16 Employability Officer for the Virtual School.

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





Of these 163 young people, 56% are currently accessing education, employment or training (EET) however, there are 72 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. All data for this cohort is obtained through Eclipse on the care leaver report, the context of this cohort is not provided.

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%	95%	100%	98%
Primary	100%	94%	98%	97%
Secondary	91%	95%	95%	94%
Post 16	95%	86%	100%	94%
Combined	96%	93%	97%	95%
New into Care in Timescale	57%	100%	88%	82%

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. For EYFS and school age PEPs, the quality of adults working with the child is lacking.

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. Following on from our moderation process in 2023, we have now embedded a multi-agency approach to ensure appropriate scrutiny and feedback on the Virtual School quality assurance process. In the next academic year, we will be working with neighbouring authorities to moderate a selection of PEPs throughout the year.

Good or Better PEPS	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	82%	40%	48%	57%
Primary	79%	75%	80%	78%
Secondary	62%	53%	49%	55%
Post 16	92%	77%	83%	84%
Combined	75%	67%	67%	70%

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 £695,750

51% (£356,972) 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	2023-24
PEP Allocation	27%	33%	44%
Direct YP Support	19%	14%	7%
Training	5%	2%	2%
Centrally Retained	49%	51%	47%

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 24/25 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. Over a quarter of this cohort are described as ‘in the highest quartile of deprivation’ with 38 having an EHCP.

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

- 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).
- The Halton offer for previously looked after has also been redefined, and republished (online) with rudimentary policies written for both kinship and children with a social worker.
- 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 2024 – 2025

- Launch and consolidation of the new 5 boroughs 'Post Looked After Holistic Offer' with a focus on post adoption support.
- Distribution of the new 5 boroughs Support Policy that sets out a clear, concise and professional remit whilst continuing to provide support to TFA and signpost their adoption offer.
- Training- Requisition providers and finance this ourselves as a collective group with training that is more specific to the Previously Looked After, Care Experienced cohort rather than just concentrating upon adoption. Delivery of joint cross authority training to be organised and facilitated by the Northwest Five Borough Partnership (Halton, Cheshire West, Wigan, Warrington, St. Helens).
- Continuation of the Care Experienced support group and offer of service with the new Halton digital family hub application.
- Develop the new kinship and children with a social worker professional and associated sharing of good practice.

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, with a member of the Virtual School team being the strategic lead on this area. There is now a better understanding of the role of education in Social Care. The audit tool is now embedded in CiN and CP plans, with education consistently being referenced to. The training offer from the Virtual School has expanded this year to ensure all professionals that work with our children and young people are invited to attend.

We have continued to play an active role in the '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 2024/25 will be to develop a comprehensive and accurate tracking system of attendance using DfE and local data in order to provide regular updates to education and social care colleagues. This will then identify key areas of scrutiny, challenge and support to our most vulnerable cohorts. Further information can be found in the Virtual School Delivery Plan for 2024/25.

Training and Development

During 2023-24, the Virtual School delivered training and hosted network meetings to 275 delegates from across 105 Schools. This year, we also invited all social care and fostering colleagues to all of our training sessions.

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
- Multi-agency working
- Termly DT Network Meetings

Our next Virtual School Conference for Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers, Headteacher and Social Care takes place on 18th September 2024 with over 150 delegates expected to join us for what is sure to be a fantastic day's professional development!

Virtual School Team Training

This year, the Virtual School team have accessed CPD opportunities through AC Education. The Early Years Support Worker is now trained to deliver PEEP Training and 'Tots Talking' Speech and Language Programme. One team member has completed their NPQ Leading Behaviour and culture and the Interim Head is part way through the NPQH. Both NPQ qualifications have been funded directly from the DfE.

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.

This year, we have also commissioned mentoring support for a number of our young people. Through Insight mentoring, we have also commissioned whole school staff training to all Secondary Schools in the borough. Feedback from the service includes, *‘It was amazing to have Nick with us on Tuesday. He shared his experiences with staff, really targeting their influence and place they have in a child in care’s life. Each staff member left feeling very touched by his words, encouraged to be that child’s champion and also the correct language to use in PEP’s. It was so beneficial to us all, so thank you.’* One of young people also commented, *‘The sessions are really helping me as it’s someone I can talk to that isn’t linked to all of this and gives me advice.’*

2023 – 2024 Virtual School Action Plan

A summary of our Action Plan for the previous academic year

Objective	Action to reach objective	Progress	Strengths, Risks & RAG Rating
1.0 To increase the number of EET & widen participation whilst in care or as a care leaver.	1.1 Develop Traineeship model 1.2 Training & support for PA’s 1.3 Explore vocational offers 1.4 Protected characteristic 1.5 Widen apprenticeship and employment offer. 1.6 Ensure quality assurance of Alternative Provision is robust and in line with EIP division	<u>April 2024</u> 1.1 Traineeship Model renamed as CIC Pathway due to Govt ceasing Traineeships in July 2023. 1.2 Leaving Care PA’s informed via e-mails, team meetings and also at P16 NEET Panels. Placement Information shared with PA’s for them to explore with their caseloads as appropriate. 1.3 Vocational offers now expanded to include NHS Bridgewater Trust, Park Rangers and Adult Social Care. 1.4 Progression of adopting Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic, still on going. 1.5 Halton Virtual School continue to work with our local partners and stakeholders both academically and vocationally via Halton Employer Partnership (HEP) to develop opportunities for our cohort.	Positive progress in widening the offer across more directorates. Leaving Care Practice Lead explored what incentives/support can be offered to make this more feasible. Leaving Care Practice Lead offered payments for the one day for Care Leavers. We currently have 1 YP about to start on one of the placements.
		<u>Aug 2024</u> 1.1 EET figures above 60% for both Yr 12 & 13, continued collaboration with 14-19 Team via exchange of updated information, eg, new into area and agreement on next steps and actions required for identified NEET YP’s. 1.2 Increased attendee’s at P16 NEET Panels, DWP, Halton People into Jobs, Health, to form a multi-agency panel to offer support from a wide range of agencies and 3 rd sector stakeholders.	<u>August 2024</u> 1.3 Collaborative work with local Training Provider resulting in 1 YP gaining FT employment via CIC Pathway. Lack of young people being able to take opportunities due to issues such as benefits and housing.
			<u>August 2024</u> 1.1 Reduced number of P16 places for September within Halton. 1.3 Lack of embedded Careers Information, Advice & Guidance

			(CIAG) for some of CIC/CL cohort leading to unrealistic aspirations. 1.4 Further progress needed with adopting Care Experience as a Protective Characteristic.
	1.7 Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of PEPs within Post-16 sector	<p><u>April 2024</u></p> <p>Due to PMcP focussing on CwSW non-statutory duties, the lead person for this area has changed to JL. Aut & Spring data is below.</p> <p>Autumn completion overall – 96%</p> <p>Spring completion overall – 92%</p> <p>Autmn PEP QA overall good or better – 76%</p> <p>Spring PEP QA overall good or better – 67%</p> <p><u>August 2024</u></p> <p>Summer PEP completion rate 100%</p> <p>Summer PEP QA overall good or better – 83%</p> <p>QA Overall good or better for the academic year- 84%</p>	<p>Multi-agency PEP moderation has taken place in March 2024.</p> <p>Internal half termly moderation is now embedded in the team.</p> <p><u>August 2024</u></p> <p>Increased attendance, communication and cultivation of positive relationships with agencies by The Virtual School.</p> <p>Completion rate dropped in the Spring term. The Virtual School will continue to share PEP completion updates with social care teams to ensure dates are arranged in a timely manner.</p>
	1.8 Stabilise team structure within Virtual School for Post-16 support with PEPs and Employability	<p><u>April 2024</u></p> <p>Due to the Virtual Head covering various other roles within the EIP, there are interim arrangements for a Deputy Head of the Virtual School to cover operational duties of the Virtual School. P16 PEPs are being monitored by the KS4 & P16 Education & Employability Office in the interim. The 2024-25 budget will be reviewed to ensure that this post is filled for the new academic year.</p> <p><u>August 2024</u></p> <p>Due to the Virtual Head continuing to cover the Director of Education role, interim arrangements for the Deputy Head to cover more of the strategic role of the Head Teacher have been in place since May 2024. The P16 cohort continue to be supported by the KS4 & P16 Education and Employability Officer. Finances have been explored to add additional capacity to the P16 offer, some of this additional capacity will be from a 14-19 team caseworker.</p>	<p>A high level of support is being provided to our P16 providers.</p> <p>Capacity continues to be a concern for the Virtual School, whilst these areas are being covered, this is only a short term option, however this has been addressed for the 2024-25 academic year.</p>
2.0 Develop the social care role in education	2.1 Build on established internal process to bring in social care,	<u>April 2024</u>	Increase in Initial PEP completion within timescales.

	<p>fostering and education colleagues.</p> <p>2.2 Develop Virtual School induction for new social workers</p> <p>2.3 Termly training to focus on quality of PEPs and accountability of educational neglect.</p>	<p>Meeting with social worker academy due to take place in Summer term to discuss Virtual School induction packs for social workers.</p> <p>Termly 'new to DT role' sessions have taken place, alongside 1:1 individual school visits. Training offer is shared with all social care colleagues, with high attendance at the Virtual School conference. Weekly social worker clinics are now embedded in the CiN team to share good practice in education with social care colleagues.</p> <p><u>August 2024</u></p> <p>Work with Social Care Academy is ongoing. All training provided has had a high attendance by education. There has been some attendance by Social Care colleagues, however, this has varied by teams. Virtual School Induction pack for children and Social Care colleagues has been developed and will be launched in September 2024.</p> <p>Educational Neglect Strategy has been launched, which the SCiE Officer will continue to focus on with schools in the new academic year.</p>	<p>Communication between educational settings and the Virtual School continue to be good.</p> <p>Staff turnaround meant we have thought creatively around our induction model and how best to reach the audience – this will be developed and implemented for the Summer term.</p>
<p>3.0 Embed a high-quality Virtual School structure to ensure all statutory and non-statutory duties are fulfilled.</p>	<p>3.1 Re-structure of current Virtual School to include a focus on CSE, CWSW, attendance & exclusion, including direct work, SEN and Educational neglect</p> <p>3.2 Commission a Peer review</p>	<p><u>April 2024</u></p> <p>Due to the Virtual Head covering various other roles within the EIP, there are interim arrangements for a Deputy Head of the Virtual School to cover operational duties of the Virtual School. CWSW non-statutory duties are being managed by the Secondary PEP Coordinator, working closely with the SCiE Officer. The Interim Deputy Head continues to manage any SEN duties for CiC. Some direct work sessions have taken place, although the uptake for school age is currently low.</p> <p><u>August 2024</u></p> <p>Due to the Virtual Head continuing to cover the Director of Education role, interim arrangements for the Deputy Head to cover more of the strategic role of the Head Teacher have been in place since May 2024. CWSW non-statutory duties continue to be managed by the Secondary PEP Coordinator, additional operational capacity will be provided to this area in the new academic year. Current Interim Virtual Head is due to complete peer review training in Nov 2024.</p>	<p>Progress has been made in the non-statutory area, ensuring we are in line with neighbouring local authorities.</p> <p>Capacity continues to be a concern for the Virtual School, whilst these areas are being covered, this is only a short term option, however, this has been addressed for the 2024-25 academic year.</p>
<p>4.0 Develop a more rigorous and robust performance and accountability framework</p>	<p>4.1 Develop the use of Eclipse</p> <p>4.2 Develop and embed CPOMs</p>	<p><u>April 2024</u></p> <p>CPOMs is now embedded within the Virtual School team, however, there continues to be some barriers with the system, meaning that communication with settings is still via email.</p>	<p>Completed and embedded reporting is now in place.</p>

	<p>4.3 Monthly PAMs & performance report to wider management teams</p> <p>4.4 Termly data analysis to provide challenge and support to social care and education colleagues.</p> <p>4.5 Develop and embed a governance board for the Virtual School</p>	<p>All communication is recorded on CPOMs by the Virtual School.</p> <p>Reports from Eclipse are being utilised with the CwSW non-statutory duties, this is an on-going piece of work due to the different systems used by education and social care. Termly performance monitoring reports and analysis is completed by the Interim Deputy Head and shared with leaders. Monthly reporting through the Aiming higher data is now embedded within the Virtual School.</p> <p><u>August 2024</u></p> <p>CPOMs is now embedded within the team. Barriers around school recording have now been rectified. Virtual School performance monitoring is now embedded, with a clear timetable of reporting. Reporting of CwSW non-statutory duties has now been identified and will be embedded in the termly reporting from Autumn 2024.</p>	
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Our Plans for 2024-2025

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 develop a Halton Virtual School Reading Strategy.

- Develop a Virtual School Reading survey to identify themes and trends in our schools, placements and to understand the views of our children
- Develop a training plan to raise educational outcomes in reading.
- Strengthen our Reading support offer.
- Develop the analysis of the data we collect around reading age and assessments.
- Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care peers.

Develop the Virtual School College

- Strengthen and develop the NEET Panel to ensure Social Care colleagues have the skills to support our young people into education, training or employment.
- 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.
- Increase capacity within The Virtual School to widen our current offer.
- Continue to improve the completion and quality of Post 16 PEPs and NEET PEPs
- Embed the formalised Virtual School offer of support for all Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entering Halton's care.

Raise attendance and reduce the number of exclusions for all Children in Care

- Strengthen training offer for all adults working with vulnerable children

- Develop the use of data to ensure that our analysis is robust and identifies trends early.
- Provide thorough weekly analysis of attendance of all school age looked after children.
- Relaunch Halton Virtual School attendance policy.
- Upskill social care colleagues in understanding and improving school attendance
- Complete a Peer review of PP+
- Develop commissioned services offer to meet need.

Enhance the Virtual School offer for Vulnerable groups, including Kinship, Children with a Social Worker, Post-Looked After & UASC cohort

- 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.
- New flightpath support package for all children leaving care
- Refinement and rolling out to schools of PEP style document for children formerly in care.
- Continue to develop the Kinship and Children with a Social Worker offer
- Strengthen EAL offer