

**Northumberland  
County Council  
2013/14**

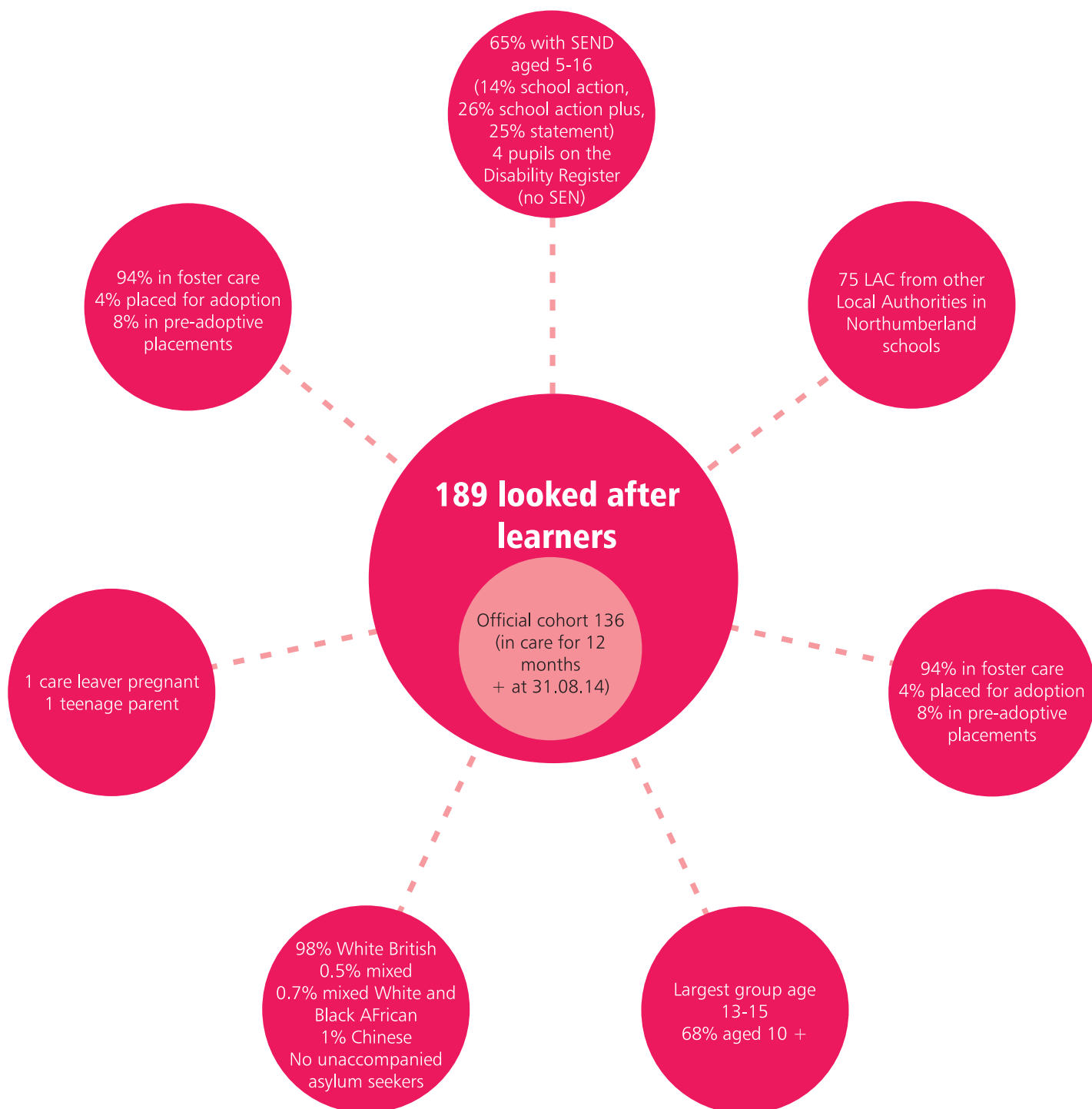
The annual report of the Virtual School Headteacher

# **Virtual school**

How the Virtual School raised the educational achievement of Northumberland's Looked After Children during the academic year 2013-14



## Profile of the learners in Northumberland's Virtual School (at 31.08.14)





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The pictures used throughout the body of this document have all been taken by children in our care as part of a photography project.



## Executive Summary

1. **There has been no permanent exclusion of a Northumberland Looked After Child since 2008.** This is an impressive achievement by local and national standards and is strong evidence of the impact of the Virtual School. The careful commissioning of alternative provision, managed moves and effective challenge to schools, academies and alternative providers have delivered this performance.
2. **Overall achievement is improving in line with expectations and is well above the national averages for Looked After Children at every Key Stage. Gaps in attainment between Northumberland's Looked After Children and all non-Looked After Children nationally have closed at every Key Stage.**
3. **Three times as many of Northumberland's Looked After Children achieved 5+A\*-C including English and maths at GCSE than Looked After Children nationally.** This ranks Northumberland third of all Local Authorities in England who submitted validated results and is a testament to the application of the Year 11 pupils, commitment of their teachers, and effectiveness of the Virtual School.
4. **The attainment gap closed by a quarter at Key Stage 4, improving the chances of Northumberland's Looked After Children to achieve on a par with all non-Looked After Children.** There is still work to be done however to sustain this closing trend to ensure that Looked After Children can succeed in their education and follow clearly defined pathways into eventual employment.
5. **None of Northumberland's Looked After Children have had new school placements in schools which are judged by Ofsted to be less than good, despite a challenging landscape in the County and regionally.** For all pupils in Northumberland the proportion attending good or outstanding primary schools increased this year. However, there are major concerns about secondary school provision and it is in this phase where most new school placements occur. Despite this picture the Virtual School continued to apply the 'at least good' principle to ensure that as corporate parents we secured placements where the quality of education for each Looked After pupil met our high standards.
6. **Attainment at Key Stage 2 is bucking the national trend, with continued improvement from a starting point much higher than that of Looked After Children nationally.** Overall attainment also compares well to all non-Looked After Children in Northumberland and gaps are closing.
7. **Looked After Children in Northumberland get a better deal in terms of stability of school placement because of effective multi-agency working co-ordinated by an impressive and consistently high Personal Education Plan**

(PEP) completion rate, averaging 98.9% this year. Quality assurance of the PEP process and introducing a Pupil Premium Plus agreement into the format have contributed to the improved effectiveness of this mechanism.

8. **Attendance at school for Northumberland's Looked After Children needs to improve.** In 2013 the overall absence figure rose significantly and for the first time was above the North East average and England average. The number of persistent absentees is also

rising. Improving attendance is therefore a priority for the Virtual School.

9. **Fixed term exclusions have increased despite the decreasing number up to 2012.** The current picture is from our own data and national and regional comparisons are not possible at this time. However, we know that 10 Looked After Children are facing challenges in their school placements and we continue to work with them and other professionals to achieve better stability.







## Background

10. The Department for Education's statistical first release of outcomes for children looked after by Local Authorities in England (published 10th December 2014) summarises the **national context** for the education outcomes of Northumberland's looked after children for the academic year 2013-14. For the pupils of Northumberland's Virtual School the picture is at least the same as the national one but in some key aspects is much better:

- Nationally and in Northumberland attainment continues to improve for looked after children at key stages 1 and 2;
- Nationally and in Northumberland attainment gaps are broadly similar or have closed slightly, with the exception of Key Stage 4 in Northumberland where the gap has closed significantly;
- Nationally and in Northumberland two thirds of looked after children have SEND;
- Nationally permanent and fixed term exclusions for looked after children continue to fall, whereas in Northumberland although fixed term exclusions have risen there has been no permanent exclusion of a looked after child since November 2008;
- Nationally and in Northumberland just half of looked after children have emotional and behavioural health that is considered normal.

11. From April the **Children and Families Act 2014** made the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) role statutory for a Local Authority, confirming the key contribution the Virtual School makes to safeguarding and improving outcomes for our most vulnerable learners. New statutory guidance for *Promoting the achievement of Looked After Children* was published by the Department for Education (DfE) in July 2014. This enhanced status has added strength to the Virtual School in Northumberland to better meet the needs of our learners, the requirements of the *Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers* (November 2013), allows continued compliance with the Local Authority's statutory duties in this area, and ensures that we focus on continuous service improvement.





# Evidence that education outcomes are improving

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12. Overall achievement is improving in line with expectations and is well above the national averages for Looked After Children at every Key Stage. Gaps in attainment between Northumberland's Looked After Children and all non-Looked After Children nationally have closed at every Key Stage.

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*The official cohorts which are reviewed in this report are small and the individual pupils comprising the cohorts change during the course of each phase. Percentages can therefore vary considerably so that comparisons with other groups of pupils or establishing trends in performance over time are not always meaningful.*

## 13. Early years foundation stage

- There were 20 pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) cohort, aged from 3 to 5.
  - The new Early Years profile assesses pupil progress using the three levels of emerging, expected or exceeding in the prime areas of learning (communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development) and the specific areas of learning (literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, expressive arts and design).
- In 2014 Northumberland's Looked After Children performed below national averages for all other children in all of the assessment areas. As the majority of our children enter care in the category of neglect then this rate of progress is in line with expectations. However, data for looked after children at EYFS is not available for comparison with other Local Authorities. In Northumberland:
    - the percentage of all children achieving the expected level or better in all prime areas of learning is 68%, for Looked After Children **46%**
    - the percentage of all children achieving the expected level or better in all specific areas of learning is 58%, for Looked After Children **31%**
    - the percentage of all children achieving the expected level or better in all learning goals is 55%, for Looked After Children **31%**
    - the percentage of all children achieving a good level of development (achieving the expected level or better in all prime areas, all Literacy and all mathematics) is 57% (nationally 60%), for Looked After Children **38%**
    - the national average total EYFS point score in 2014 is 33.8, for Looked After Children **28.5**

- We need to ensure that outcomes improve in Early Years. Playing a key role in the development of the Early Help offer is a priority for the Virtual School in 2014-15 as we plan for the introduction of a Pupil Premium Grant for 3 and 4 year olds. The development of nurture provision to address the issue of school readiness is of particular significance for our early years learners.

#### 14. Key Stage 1

- There were 12 pupils in the official cohort in 2014 compared to 9 in 2013.
- Those achieving the expected Level 2 or above in the separate measures of reading, writing and maths has improved significantly since 2013. As the achievement of all other Northumberland pupils remained constant, this means that the gap in attainment closed from 35% to 2.5% in reading, from 30.3% to 10.4% in writing and from 24.7% to 15.3% in maths. Data is not available for national comparison with all non-LAC pupils, but attainment was well above national averages for all Looked After pupils.
- Pupils at Key Stage 1 also took the Phonics test (age 6/Year 1) and Phonics re-check (age 7/Year 2). 21 Looked After Children took the Phonics test in 2014 and 38.5% were assessed as working towards the expected standard, which is a decline since 2013 from 57.1%. The 2013 cohort were re-assessed in 2014 and the percentage assessed as working towards the expected standard improved to 60%, indicating that rates of progress at Key Stage 1 from starting points in early years are good, helping learners to catch up with their non-LAC peers.

#### 15. Key Stage 2

- There were 12 pupils in the official cohort, 8 of whom had an identified special educational need of which 4 have a statement.
- Validated data from the DfE confirms that

57% achieved Level 4 or above in the combined reading writing and maths measure, well above the national average for Looked After Children of 48% and an increase in 7% for Northumberland pupils since 2013. Overall attainment compares well with the attainment of all Northumberland pupils. The gap in attainment between Northumberland pupils and all other pupils nationally is therefore closing.

- Attainment compares well with our Local Authority neighbours and ranks us third amongst Local Authorities in the North East.
- Attainment in writing continues to be where performance is weakest, although at 57% in 2014 there has been a 7% improvement since 2013.
- Encouragingly, 6 of the cohort achieved at least one Level 5 in either reading, writing or maths, and 1 pupil achieved Level 6 in maths.
- Throughout Key Stage 2 (from the end of Year 2 and up to the end of Year 6) all pupils are expected to make 2 levels or more progress in maths, reading and writing. For our Looked After pupils 75% met expectations for maths, 81% for reading and 82% for writing, all of which were at least 10% below that of all non-LAC pupils nationally.
- Additional County-wide literacy and numeracy tests were taken by all Year 4 and Year 8 pupils to support their transition into Middle and High Schools. 6 of our 16 Looked After pupils in Year 4 and 9 of our 18 Looked After pupils in Year 8 took the tests and achieved a score.
- Schools, academies and alternative providers co-operated well with our data collection and progress monitoring processes. However, at Key Stage 2 the predictions of teachers were consistently below the actual achievement of pupils in the national tests.



This evidence of low expectations for our learners is not acceptable and is currently being addressed through the Virtual School Improvement Plan 2014-15.

#### 16. Key Stage 4

- There were 24 pupils in the official cohort at Key Stage 4 of whom 14 had a special educational need including 7 statements. 11 of those pupils were placed in a school in another Local Authority and 17 were entered for at least 1 GCSE.
- Results show an improvement in performance since 2013. 36.4%<sup>1</sup> achieved 5+A\*-C including English and maths compared to the national figure of 12% for LAC and 55.4% for national non-LAC. This is an improvement of 22.4% since 2013 and Northumberland ranked 3rd out of all Local Authorities nationally for 2014 and highest in the North East region. The gap with non-LAC closed by 25.6%.
- 50% achieved 5+A\*-C in any subject compared with 31.1% for Looked After Children nationally.
- The percentage of Looked After Children making at least 3 levels of progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in English was 68.8%

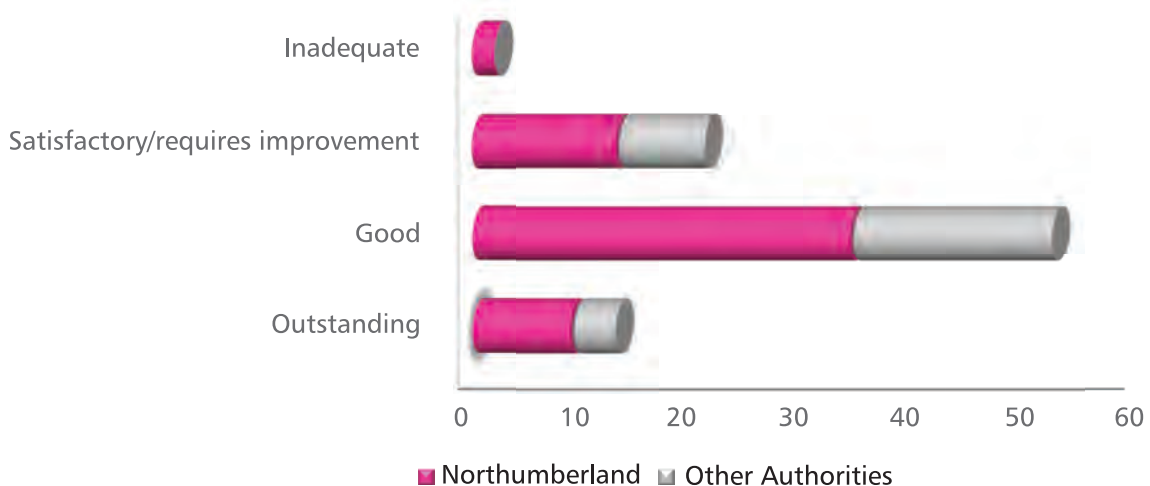
in 2014 which is the same as the achievement of national non-LAC pupils in 2013 (2014 national data is currently not available). For maths the same progress measure is 81.3% compared to 69.1% for national non-LAC pupils, indicating at this time that our pupils' progress is significantly above that of pupils nationally who are not in care.

*Key Stage 4 data is provisional until March 2015*

#### 17. Destinations

- From September 2012, all looked after children and care leavers who have progressed to Year 12 in school/academy settings have had a Personal Education Plan (PEP) co-ordinated by the Virtual School Personal Education Adviser KS4/5 providing continuity of support from Year 11. This post was developed further for 2013-14 and has had a significant impact on recruitment, retention and completion rates for post-16 school based learners. There is evidence that the academic and vocational pathways developed for these learners is improving outcomes, for example the percentage of 19 year old Care Leavers engaged in Education, Training and Employment has risen from 32% in 2013 to 47% in 2014.

### Number of Northumberland Looked After Children in schools by Ofsted category



<sup>1</sup> this figure is based on best outcome and is consistent with the data used by the DfE in the Statistical First Release. Based on first entry, 27.3% achieved 5+A\*-C including English and maths, which is still the highest in the North East region and ranks Northumberland 4th of all Local Authorities nationally.

- More pupils are continuing their education in school sixth forms. Of those pupils who were 16 in the academic year 2013-2014 20 pupils (or 69%) continued to participate in learning from September 2014, with most enrolling in Year 12 in schools. 3 of the 4 pupils who completed Year 12 courses in July 2014 will progress to Year 13 in September 2014. At the end of the 2013-14 academic year 71% of the school leaving cohort from 2011-12 were still engaged in further education, training or employment. 2 care leavers completed Year 13 and secured university places for September 2014.
- 47% of the 72 care leavers in Northumberland aged 19, 20 or 21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This is a new measure for care leavers around their 20th and 21st birthdays. The breakdown by age group is:
  - o 19th birthday – 32% NEET – of those in EET, 47% are in education, 53% in training / employment
  - o 20th birthday – 48% NEET - of those in EET, 33% are in education, 67% in training / employment
  - o 21st birthday – 67% NEET - of those in EET, 33% are in education, 67% in training / employment
- 6% of care leavers (5 young people) were in higher education which is the same as the national average.
- We know that sustaining engagement in education, employment and training to age 19 and beyond for our care leavers is a challenge and the Virtual School continues to prioritise collaborative working with Targeted Adolescent Services.

## 18. School placements and achievement

- The Virtual School continues to apply the principle as a good Corporate Parent, that when making new school placements pupils are placed in a school which is judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding. In 2014

75% attended schools which are good or outstanding with 47% of those pupils placed in schools in Northumberland. This is contrary to the more negative national trend.

- In 99% of cases our Looked After Children are consulted about their school placement when being newly admitted in Northumberland and they are able to attend their school of choice. The only reason that a placement might not be agreed is if there is a safeguarding issue related to their choice of school. When school placements break down or a change of placement is needed for another reason then pupils are always consulted.
- Local and national data tells us that placement stability has a close correlation with attainment. At Key Stage2 in 2013-14 those in a single placement during their period of care performed better than those with two or more placements.
- Similarly, the length of time in care has an impact on attainment. In 2014 in Northumberland 62.5% (5 pupils) pupils gaining 5+A\*-C including English and maths had been in care for seven to eight years with only 37.5% (3 pupils) achieving 5A+\*-C including English and maths who had been in care for two years or less. This correlation is understood in Northumberland and affects the way school placements are planned.
- Placement stability is affected by the number of looked after pupils who have **special educational needs**. Data tells us that in Northumberland, as nationally, there is a pattern emerging that those pupils with behavioural difficulties are more likely to have more placements than those with physical disabilities. Consequently, further consideration is being given to how we might best achieve placement stability for particularly vulnerable children, for example Looked After with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).

## 19. Special educational needs and disabilities

- We know that looked after SEND pupils have poorer outcomes than all other SEND nationally and that SEND should not be a barrier to progression. The Virtual School therefore works closely with specialist support services to ensure that needs are identified, understood and met and the progress of individuals with SEND is monitored regularly. Outcomes at Key Stage 2 in 2014 indicate that this method is effective, where for example of the 8 pupils with SEND 4 achieved level 5 in reading and 5 achieved level 4 and above in maths. Also in 2014 at Key Stage 4 2 pupils with SEND (or 8.3% of the official cohort) achieved 5+A-C including English and maths.

*National LAC and non-LAC data for SEND is not yet available for comparison.*

## 20. Looked after children from other authorities

- In 2014 there were 94 Looked After Children from 12 different Local Authorities placed in Northumberland schools. These learners are supported by the Virtual School in their belonging Authority, which is also responsible for the quality of their PEP, and do not benefit from the support of Northumberland's ESLAC team.
- At Key Stage 2 there were 3 pupils in Year 6, one of whom had a special educational need. 1 pupil achieved Level 4+ in reading, writing and maths combined. At Key Stage 4 there were 5 pupils in Year 11, all of whom had special educational needs of which 3 had statements. 2 pupils were placed in special schools. None of these pupils achieved 5+A\*-C including English and maths or 5A\*-C in any subjects. Only 3 pupils were entered for and achieved at least 1 A\*-G.





## Improving learning

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21. We aim to identify the diverse and complex needs of our looked after children early to further develop a range of interventions so that their learning improves.
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22. Completion rates of **Personal Education Plans (PEPs)** are consistently high with an average of 98.9% for the academic year. This is significantly better than completion rates in most other Local Authorities where arrangements for co-ordinating the PEP are different to our own. In Northumberland responsibility for the completion of the PEP and its quality belongs to the Virtual School's ESLAC officers (not the social worker as in other Local Authorities). PEPs are linked to other support plans (eg Care Plan, Pathway Plan, Education Health and Care Plan) in place and are widely distributed to professionals involved with individuals so that there is a timely response to emerging issues such as attendance or under-achievement.
23. A PEP quality assurance process is now in place which is managed by the ESLAC team manager and accounted for to the VSH. The process has enabled us this year to:
- o monitor usage of all PEPs;
  - o achieve a high PEP standard in all school placements, including those out of authority or in alternative provision;
  - o provide feedback to social workers (via Team Managers) on education progress, achievement or emerging issues;
  - o identify areas for future development of our social workers regarding education.
- Key features of the process are:
- o half termly sample of PEPs;
  - o case file audit pro forma;
  - o feedback to ESLAC team members and schools/academies/providers;
  - o moderation within the ESLAC team to ensure consistency and high standards.
24. **Designated teachers for Looked After Children** benefit from induction training which is offered termly on their roles and responsibilities. During 2013-14, in partnership with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), we introduced attachment and resilience training and a training package developed by our children in care council Voices Making Choices for Designated Teachers to deliver to their own school workforce about understanding the education needs of Looked After Children.
25. Participation in this training was good, with all three regional workshops over-subscribed. The quality of the training is endorsed by course evaluations where 100% of participants say they would recommend the training to others, and 77% scored the training as 10/10 for enjoyment and meeting the identified aims.



26. Communication with professionals working with our Looked After Children has improved this year. [The Virtual School](#) web area on the Northumberland County Council website has been updated and expanded. Professionals can now access a suite of 27 resources comprising policies, procedures, guidance, exemplar and other publications either developed or recommended by the Virtual School. A termly **Designated Teacher newsletter** was introduced titled *Learn, Achieve, Celebrate*.
27. We continued to work closely with other professionals to ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs. **Alternative providers** are crucial in creating the opportunity for all young people to achieve and feel motivated. 2 Year 10 students and 7 Year 11 students accessed alternative provision, of whom 4 have SEND. Our achievement data tells us that the curriculum offered does meet the needs of the majority of pupils. However, our attendance data tells us that further work needs to be done to improve engagement with Alternative Providers, and this is consistent with the national picture.
28. Targeted services such as **Locality Inclusion Support Teams (LISTs)** are key partners of the Virtual School. In 2013-14 21 Looked After Children were open to the LIST teams, mostly in the Central and South East areas (where our looked after number predominate), with only 3 in the North and 2 in the West. Inclusion support and behaviour support are the most common needs.
29. In 2013-14 our largest age group of looked after children was aged 13-15, a recognised Age of Concern. **Targeted Adolescent Services (TAS)** are therefore key partners in our work to improve the achievement of pupils in Years 9 to 11, and in establishing academic and vocational pathways from age 16 and beyond.
30. **Education 3+** is a strength in Northumberland and Virtual School Education Support Workers have incorporated the Inclusion Toolkit assessment wheel into their PEP management with the under 5s. Education starting points are therefore identified early and progress is monitored from the first point of contact. All looked after children are registered at Children's Centres who are then involved in allocating childcare placements, ensuring that early child development and progress is captured for the PEP.
31. The Virtual School aims to guide schools' usage of the **Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)** towards interventions that have the best outcomes and are the most cost effective. For 2013-14 the PPG increased to £900 per Looked After pupil. The Virtual School monitors the use and impact of the PPG through the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and this has allowed us to identify and disseminate good practice to Designated Teachers in all settings. The VSH attended two Pupil Premium conferences during the year, the learning from which was shared through the Virtual School Website and the *Learn, Achieve, Celebrate* newsletter. The Virtual School Website now has a dedicated section on Closing Gaps and this is a source of comprehensive resources, exemplar and guidance to schools/academies/alternative providers on what works best with Looked After learners.
32. Schools are encouraged to consider using any pupil premium funding they receive on **one to one tuition**, as national research shows it is the intervention which has the most impact on achievement for Looked After Children and this is endorsed by our own data. In 2013-14 one to one tuition was provided to 59 of our learners by our ESLAC teacher (18 pupils), through PEA funding (24 tutors) and using agency tutors (17 pupils). 28% of the Personal Education Allowance (PEA) is spent on one to one tuition each year.

33. For the last 7 years 85 of our learners have participated in the **Letterbox** scheme, a programme for Year 3, 5 and 7 pupils, and received direct mail-to-home parcels to supplement their literacy and numeracy. There has been continued success in accelerating the reading age of participants, demonstrated by the scheme's test results. In 2013-14 the pupils participating made an average gain of 15 points during the year, with some gaining as many as 36 points.
34. Feedback from all participants was extremely positive - everyone enjoyed receiving the parcels, reading different kinds of books and also the anticipation of the

following month's delivery. The scheme is also reliant on the co-operation of the foster carers as they are encouraged to fully support the young people.

35. In April 2014 an **incentive scheme** was introduced for Year 11 pupils with the guarantee of financial reward (high street vouchers) on a sliding scale for the number and grades of GCSEs achieved. The Key Stage 4 outcomes overall indicate that this had some impact on achievement, and the attendance of 100% of those pupils at an awards ceremony in September suggests that the incentive really did work.





## Behaviour and safety

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36. In Northumberland we strive to keep Looked After Children safe from harm in environments where they feel safe to learn. We know that attitudes to learning and feeling safe have an impact on educational achievement.

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37. Improving **attendance** is a priority for the Virtual School. Attendance data shows that the overall absence of Looked After Children in Northumberland improved for the last three years to 2012, but disappointingly this has risen for 2013 which at 5.2% is above the North East average of 3.2% and England average of 4.4%.

38. For 2012-13 the previously improving trend of falling **persistent absentees** changed and there was an increase from 7 to 9 pupils, or 7.6% which is twice the North East average of 3.6% and higher than the national average of 5%. The pupils are known to us and plans are in place to support individuals, however the impact needs to be more positive more quickly. The closure of the residential homes in Northumberland and re-location of pupils in smaller more inclusive settings is expected to have a positive impact on absence for subsequent academic years.

39. School **attendance** is monitored through the Virtual School database via a termly

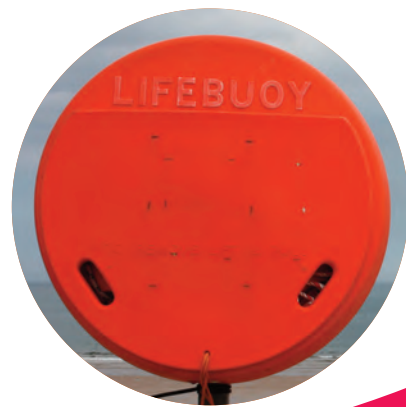
collection from schools and individual PEPs. There is evidence that our attendance reward scheme is popular and effective, for example in Summer 2014 32 looked after pupils received a platinum award from the Virtual School for 100% attendance all year.

40. However, this data tells us that we need to review measures in place to improve attendance. Those which are having an impact include:

- o ensuring that every pupil has attendance as a target in their PEP
- o further prioritising good attendance through the PEP process by involving social workers, pupils and foster carers
- o monitoring school attendance through EMS for individuals and by year group
- o continuing to promote the school attendance reward scheme
- o raising awareness of good school attendance through recruitment of new foster carers (the VSH and ESLAC team manager are both Foster Panel members)
- o using intelligence from the *Children missing from or missing out on full time education* protocol
- o developing our collaborative approach to arranging appropriate provision for individuals to improve overall engagement in courses at schools, academies and alternative providers

41. In Northumberland there have been no **permanent exclusions** from school of looked after children since November 2008. This is contrary to the national and regional position and is an impressive achievement of which we are very proud.
42. The percentage of children with at least one **fixed term exclusion** from school has fallen since 2011 and in 2012 was in line with national averages. The 2012-13 data is the latest validated data available but we know from our own records that in 2013-14 there were 10 Looked After Children who had at least one fixed term exclusion during the year. Three of those pupils had 5, 6 and 7 exclusions each and 7 of them were placed in Special Schools.
43. Reducing fixed term exclusions has to remain a priority for the Virtual School. Measures are already in place to reduce exclusions and there is evidence that they are starting to have an impact, for example:
- o the VSH is also the manager of the EOTAS service and this has improved integrated working with the ESLAC team
  - o regular school contact from the ESLAC Education Support Worker (ESW) and the PEP mechanism alert stakeholders early to potential problems an individual pupil might be experiencing
  - o LIST team referrals and Early Help Assessments are initiated by Virtual School officers when appropriate
  - o closure of residential homes where pupils with high rates of fixed term exclusion are placed.
44. In Northumberland we understand that every child has the right to be **safe to learn** and flourish in discrimination-free environments. During this year our residential homes met the standards required to achieve the Northumberland Anti-bullying Accreditation, as have many of the schools and academies which our pupils attend.
45. The County Council commissions football charity Show Racism the Red Card to deliver anti-racist education to all schools, and before closure in 2014 the residential setting Netherton Park enjoyed training for staff and workshops for the pupils in response to the increasing number of racist incidents that were occurring. By choice, the homes comply with the Local Authority procedure for reporting racist incidents.





## Aspiration and participation

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46. Promoting access to leisure and recreation is a priority and our track record for motivating learners and raising aspirations is good.
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47. Northumberland has maintained the **Personal Education Allowance** (PEA) to allow the Virtual School as a corporate parent to fund swimming lessons, equipment for judo and dance, trips to London and places of cultural interest during holidays, books and school trips. Learners are able to attend clubs to support their social development such as Beavers and Activity holidays (YHA, Do it 4 Real). In 2013-14 over 197 Looked After Children benefited from the PEA which also funds the attendance awards and GCSE incentive scheme.
48. Key Stage 4 pupils continued to participate in the **Choices Together** programme offered by Sunderland and Newcastle Universities, to raise aspirations and understanding about further learning post-16. Again Northumberland had the highest number of young people taking part in the region, and 20 pupils from the 2014 Year 11 cohort are now in sixth forms or at college. Two care leavers who are now undergraduates at Sunderland University attended our Year 11 rewards evening in September to motivate those now in Year 12.
49. All Looked After Children in school settings are now able to enjoy instrumental tuition from Northumberland's Music Service. For Looked After Children, no charge is made for instrument hire and tuition fees are subsidised. The numbers of Looked After Children receiving regular tuition has more than doubled. PEA funding is made available to Looked After Children who want to enjoy music lessons outside of their school setting.



## Leadership and management

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50. The Virtual School aspires to compare with the best nationally. Our relentless focus on identifying and meeting the individual needs of our Looked After learners demonstrates clearly our commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination to ensure that we make a difference to their lives.
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51. A model for **self-evaluation** has been developed to identify priorities for further school improvement. The model involves:
- o being self-aware - knowing our existing strengths and being honest about where we need to improve;
  - o knowing our learners well;
  - o data sets relating to educational achievement, safeguarding and looked after children's services (local and national);
  - o data sets created by the Virtual School database regarding progress and attainment;
  - o feedback from our looked after children and their foster carers
    - o from Viewpoint (survey)
    - o from attendance at Voices Making Choices (Children in Care Council) meetings
    - o from the Fostering and Adoption Service
- o regular monitoring of progress through the School Improvement Plan by the Headteacher and Governing body (Multi-agency Looked After Partnership, or MALAP)
  - o multi-agency overview of emerging issues from MALAP;
  - o participation in the national and North East Regional Network of Virtual School Headteachers.
52. Northumberland's MALAP continued to act as the **Governing body** of the Virtual School, with terms of reference agreed in December 2011. The Virtual School Head is therefore accountable to the Corporate Parenting Panel via the MALAP and presented verbal and written updates to both bodies during the course of the year. The positive support and feedback was both motivational and appreciated.
53. During the year the VSH strengthened **monitoring arrangements** within the Virtual School to ensure that emerging issues for individuals were identified early and that the right level of challenge was delivered at the right time to schools/academies/alternative providers.
54. The VSH met with the ESLAC team manager on a fortnightly basis to consider the following aspects:

- o those not receiving full time education;
  - o progress of pupils placed in Requires Improvement/Special Measures schools/academies and in schools/academies below the floor targets;
  - o PEP quality assurance and completion rates;
  - o case file audits;
  - o progress with transitions from statements of SEN to Education Health Care Plans;
  - o Pupil Premium Plus agreements;
  - o progress through the School Improvement Plan;
  - o attendance;
  - o exclusions, including those at risk of exclusion.
55. The VSH meets with the ESLAC team on a half termly basis to monitor progress of pupils in every year group using a RAG (red, amber, green) system.
56. An ambitious Virtual School Improvement Plan was in place for the academic year 2013-14 and overall it was successfully delivered within timescales. All Virtual School officers contributed to the leadership of actions against the five key priorities and significant achievements, also referenced throughout this report, include:
- o delivering on Our Promise to Northumberland's Looked After Children to do more to reduce bullying and help young people feel safe in school and further education;
  - o working to meet the standards required to achieve the Northumberland Anti-bullying accreditation;
  - o introducing a professionally presented train the trainer resource which was delivered to all Designated Teachers for Looked After Children and developed by Voices Making Choices (children in care council);
  - o targeted support for Year 6 pupils with the outcome that writing outcomes improved by 7% in the 2014 tests;
  - o introduction of attachment and resilience training for Designated Teachers in partnership with the LSCB;
  - o implementation of a Pupil Premium Plus agreement as part of the PEP mechanism;
  - o developing the influence of the Virtual School on Post-16 destinations;
  - o preparation for the SEND reforms of the Children and Families Act 2014 by participating as key players in the development of plans for implementation in Northumberland and adapting our Virtual School practices accordingly;
  - o improved attainment at Key Stage 4. A range of strategies were used to achieve this, although the newly implemented process for quality assurance of alternative providers certainly had a positive effect.
57. Our self-evaluation processes helped to identify our **five key priorities** for the academic year 2014-2015 which are to:
1. Deliver on Our Promise to our looked after children in relation to Priority 2 identified by Voices Making Choices (our Children in Care Council):
 

*Make sure young people are involved in planning strategies to support them at school, particularly through the PEP process and spending of the Pupil Premium Plus Grant*
  2. Ensure that the additional needs of looked after learners are identified early and met through Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP), SEND support pathways and the Local Offer

3. Facilitate the effective distribution of the Pupil Premium Plus and support schools to ensure maximum impact which closes gaps in achievement between looked after children and their peers (locally and nationally)
  4. Improve attendance and reduce fixed term exclusions
  5. Implement a communication strategy with Foster Carers to build confidence and improve understanding of how to support the education achievement of the children in their care through school and at home
- o LSCB (safeguarding) courses in bereavement, attachment, emotional abuse and lessons from serious case reviews;
  - o ipad use for learners;
  - o e-safety;
  - o data management and analysis;
  - o SEND reforms;
  - o appraisal skills;
  - o First aid;
  - o mandatory training on Learning Together.

In addition we will take action to:

- o develop the statutory role of the Virtual School Headteacher in accordance with DfE statutory guidance and local priorities for vulnerable learners;
  - o consider the impact of the new primary curriculum on learners in care;
  - o work collaboratively with schools to ensure that new assessment arrangements are understood by all stakeholders and captured in Personal Education Plans appropriately;
  - o The Virtual School Headteacher will contribute to the self-assessment and quarterly assurance processes for the Ofsted inspection of services for *children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers* and for the *Ofsted inspection of school improvement services*.
58. Following the retirement of the previous post-holder, from September 2013 the ESLAC team had an interim manager who prioritised a **workforce development programme** for the Virtual School workforce. By July 2014 officers had participated in and disseminated learning from:
59. Northumberland Local Authority's safeguarding and looked after children's services were last inspected in March 2012. Paragraph 3.5 of this report provides an update on the subsequent recommendation relating to the Virtual School to increase its influence on the development of Post-16 pathways for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
60. This Annual Report is informed by the self-evaluation framework maintained by the Virtual School Headteacher, and includes:
- o Virtual School Information 2014
  - o Virtual School Outcomes 2014
  - o Virtual School Improvement Plan 2013-14
  - o Virtual School Improvement Plan 2014-15
  - o Education Reports to MALAP by the Virtual School Headteacher 2013-14.





