



Virtual School Headteacher's
Annual Report
Northumberland 2018-19



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INTRODUCTION

We want the very best for our care-experienced children and young people. We want our children to tell us we are doing a good job and that they are doing their very best at school. We want them all to have clear academic or vocational pathways when they leave school so that their lives continue to improve and they feel a sense of belonging in their communities. We want schools and support services to see themselves as corporate parents and do a good job for their children in care.

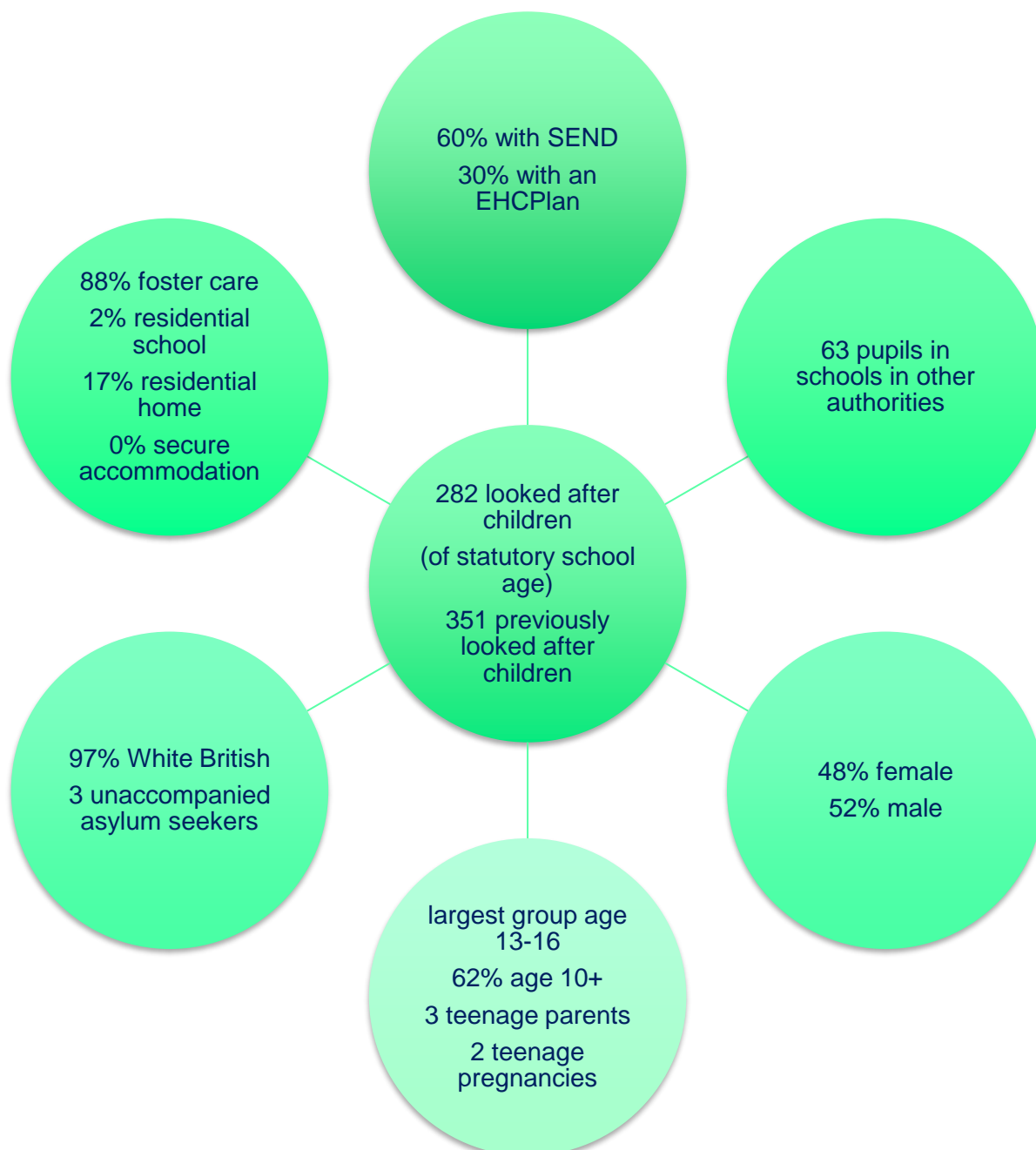
I became the first Virtual School Headteacher in Northumberland in 2011 and for several years after that enjoyed many individual stories of success and celebrated some good education outcomes with our looked after children. But two years ago we realised that if we continued to do the same things in the same way as a Virtual School then we would continue to achieve the same, and not better, outcomes.

When National Curriculum levels were abandoned we were challenged to find a consistent way of gathering timely and meaningful assessment data from our 175 or more schools so that we could identify quickly pupils who needed additional support; we needed to deliver on the broader requirements of the new statutory guidance published in 2018; and we needed to be part of the new direction for Northumberland's children's services under strong new leadership. So we bravely embarked on a long term plan to transform our systems, diversify the skills in the support team and train Designated Teachers.

Two years later I am pleased to be able to share with you the evidence that we are starting to see the positive impact on education outcomes for children and young people of all ages, from the changes that we made.

The names of looked after children and care leavers used in case studies, individual stories and quotations used in this report have been changed to respect privacy and to fulfil safeguarding requirements.

Figure 1: Profile of the pupils age 5 – 16 in Northumberland’s Virtual School (at 31.08.19)



HOW WELL WE ARE DOING

STRENGTHS

We think that we have maintained the strengths we talked about last year and have improved in areas where we knew there was still work to be done.

- No **permanent exclusion** of a looked after child since 2008
- The number of pupils experiencing at least one **fixed term exclusion** has reduced by over 70% since 2018
- No referrals to the Secretary of State to **direct the admission** of a looked after child to school
- The Children's Commissioner Stability Index shows that **school placement stability** for looked after children is good and better than in other local authorities
- Some significant improvements in **education outcomes**, for example:
 - 57.1% of looked after children achieved a good level of development in the Early Years, an improvement from 40% last year
 - 50% of looked after children achieved age related expectations in the combined measure of reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2, an improvement from 30% last year
- Effective use of **Pupil Premium Plus funding**, with positive impact from the Virtual School's Educational Psychologist and provision of Thrive attachment training
- Successful implementation of a **Northumberland ePEP** system and **quality assurance** process
- We celebrated a record number of **Expert Learners awards**
- Numbers of looked after children progressing into **further education at 16** has remained consistently high over the last three years.

THE KEY THINGS WE NEED TO DO NEXT

There is still work to be done to ensure that improvement is continuous so in 2019-20 our plans will focus on:

- continuing to embed the changes we introduced last year to
 - help more pupils to make better progress
 - improve the education experience of looked after children with SEND
 - further reduce the number of persistent absentees
 - improve the quality and completion rate of the ePEP
- and prioritising new areas of work identified through our self-evaluation
 - improving mental health and resilience for looked after and previously looked after children
 - focussing on secondary education to tackle under-achievement at Key Stage 4
 - creating more opportunities for Designated Teachers to engage with the Virtual School

WHAT CHANGED IN 2018-19

What we said we would do

In last year's annual report we identified our priorities for 2018-19:

1. Developing and implementing a new Virtual School model to fulfil revised statutory requirements.
2. Workforce development.
3. Meeting the social, emotional and mental health needs of looked after children to have a positive impact on achievement.
4. Improving the recruitment and retention of care leavers in education, training and employment.
5. Focussing on the quality of teaching and learning so that more pupils make better than expected progress, including those with SEND.
6. Improving school placement stability.
7. Working as a partner agency of the LSCB to safeguarding children, focussing on those missing from education and those who are electively home educated.

This report sets out the progress we have made towards achieving those priorities.

What we did

- Delivered our plan to implement the new statutory guidance for local authority Virtual Schools.
- Participated in Northumberland's Joint Targeted Area Inspection on the theme of child exploitation (June 2019), Northumberland's local authority SEND inspection (October 2018), a Peer Challenge for services for care leavers (September 2018), and the children's social services Practice Week evaluating the quality of practice in the Family Placement team (February 2019).
- Participated in a regional Virtual Schools' conference at Darlington arranged by the North East's regional network of Virtual School Headteachers (VSH).
- Diversified the skills and expertise of the ESLAC team by adding new posts for a Virtual School Assistant Team Manager, Virtual School Business Manager, ESLAC Admin Assistant and three Virtual School teachers (1.3 x fte).
- Invested additional grant funding from the DfE to implement new statutory guidance in an Educational Psychologist for previously looked after children.
- Made a structural change so that the VSH is managed through children's social care.
- Made a different offer of support to schools after listening to what our children and our Designated Teachers told us.
- Supported our care leaver apprentice (business and admin) to complete her apprenticeship ready for permanent employment.

What will change in 2019-20

- A new Ofsted inspection framework for schools from September 2019 which can be used to the advantage of our looked after learners.
- The impact of Northumberland's Care Leavers' Covenant.

- The impact of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Action Plan (Corporate Parenting Strategy).

STABILITY

What we did differently

- Implemented an Active Cases system, including an attendance tracker and weekly team briefings, to target support for the pupils who need it most.
- Trained our ESLAC Education Support Workers to deliver Thrive, emotion coaching, Lego Therapy and Drawing and Talking Therapy.
- Increased the Virtual School's Educational Psychology capacity and then:
 - developed a bespoke Educational Psychology assessment for children new to care, with a report tailored to their individual strengths and difficulties
 - introduced therapeutic interventions using Narrative Therapy, CBT, Power Threat Frameworks, and strength and resilience-based approaches
 - introduced a Vineland Assessment (adaptive functioning assessment) mainly to be used with post 16 in consultation with the Virtual School Careers' Advisers
- Led the education, employment and training workstream of Northumberland's development of a protocol to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers.
- Introduced Virtual School Praise Postcards.
- Implemented a School Placement Move Protocol for Looked After Children.
- Started implementing CPOMs (secure online monitoring of child protection, safeguarding and wider student pastoral welfare for schools).
- Led the implementation of Operation Endeavour with schools to share timely information about looked after children who go missing from home.
- Commissioned education charity Achievement for All to deliver a Designated Teacher training programme, and for 6 volunteer schools funded the Achievement for All Child Looked After (CLA) Achievement programme.

What we know

- No looked after children have been permanently excluded from school since 2008.
- The proportion of looked after pupils experiencing fixed term exclusions has reduced to 6.9%. (Virtual School data).
- Most recent DfE data for 2017-18 shows that at least 27.76% of looked after children had at least one fixed term exclusion which is much higher than the year before (13.82%), but which has reduced to 6.76% in 2019.
- Persistent absence reduced from 15.3% in 2018 (DfE data) to 8.74% in 2019 (Virtual School data) and overall absence has remained constant at around 7% (Virtual School data).
- More looked after children are attending Good and Outstanding schools – the proportion has risen by 58% to 63%.
- The most recent Stability Index (2017-18) published by the Children's Commissioner shows that school placement stability for looked after children in Northumberland is much better than in other local authorities:

- 10% had a mid-year school move in 2017-18, the same as the previous year, which is much better than the national figure and ranks Northumberland 6th in the North East and 55th nationally
- 3% had at least one school move in 2017-18 compared to 4% nationally (which for Northumberland is an increase from 2% in the previous two years).
- Virtual School data shows that 27 of our 282 school age pupils experienced at least one school placement move during the year (which is an increase from 12 since 2018):
 - 14 moved to new care placements and therefore needed to move to their new local school
 - 4 pupils moved to new schools for a fresh start
 - 4 pupils received EHCPlans and moved to special schools
 - 2 pupils moved from special schools into mainstream schools
 - 1 pupil moved to an alternative provider to avoid permanent exclusion
 - and 2 pupils moved to adoptive placements and therefore needed to move to their new local school.
- Regarding educational psychology (EP):
 - 62 children aged Reception and above were referred to the EP
 - carried out consultations at 40 different schools/alternative providers
 - carried out 5 assessments for post 16 looked after children/ care leavers.

Impact assessment

- We know more about the additional needs of our pupils earlier and have a wider range of support to offer to get pupils back on track.
- What we did to improve stability has had the impact of reducing fixed term exclusions and persistent absence in-year for looked after children.
- A significant increase in the number of fixed term exclusions for looked after children in 2018 had a negative impact on school placement stability.
- Training more local authority officers, Designated Teachers and foster carers in the Thrive approach has improved stability.
- The impact of the 6 schools involved in the Achieving Wellbeing CLA programme is that after one year attainment for the 21 pupils in 6 different settings improved, measured by the proportion achieving age related expectations in reading, writing and maths.

What we are going to do next

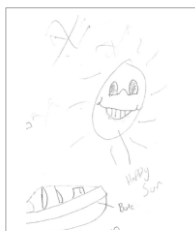
- Focus on transition.
- Focus on further reducing persistent absence.
- Collaborate with social care to monitor stability and reduce in-year school moves to follow new home placements.
- Develop pupil voice further – hear more, do more.
- Develop an approach to be more effective working with SEND - in and out of county.
- Enhance the offer from our Educational Psychologists.

Drawing and Talking Therapy Case Study

I have been delivering Drawing and Talking therapy to 4 students for 12 weeks.

Debbie has really enjoyed the 1-1 time and has not only used her D&T time for drawing but also for asking for support with issues she's been struggling with for some time. School has commented on her being settled and happier in herself.

Douglas has really enjoyed his 1-1 time and was able to draw quite complex and interesting drawings. He was also able to talk in the third person. His behaviour at his sessions has been impeccable and we have been able to form a good relationship. D&T has had an impact on him emotionally and school feels the therapy is helping him with deep rooted issues he has had for some time.



Julie has enjoyed her 1-1 sessions and school has commented that she is “certainly presenting with less emotional distress.”

Jack - was reluctant to draw at first but once into the routine he has really embraced the therapy. His drawings have had purpose and meaning and he has gone through all the emotions described in the training.

Alison Hindaugh, ESLAC Education Support Worker

How the Thrive Approach has worked in our school

We have 2 members of staff (the Deputy Head/SENDCo, and a HLTA) who have received the Thrive training. During this training, we had a child in school who was displaying very challenging behaviour, and finally was refusing to go into class, or engage in any activities.

Following Thrive principles, we completely changed the school experience for that child (eg. providing a safe space, setting up a Nurture Group, offering a bespoke curriculum, using quiet, 'next to you' interventions at times of greatest anxiety, breathing techniques, yoga etc.) This range of strategies did not result in the child working diligently at age appropriate levels, but it **did** mean that we now had a child who would come happily into school, was more willing to engage with adults and activities, and was no longer angry or violent.

Having worked through the processes of these unconventional strategies, a new, looked-after child arrived in our school. This was a child with very similar needs and behaviours. We were able to slot this new child straight into the Nurture Group, and follow our existing strategies. This saved both the staff and the child a huge amount of stress, as we had a plan. We knew where to start, and we had a very structured school day to offer to a very anxious, displaced child.



The key seems to be knowing **why** we are putting these strategies in place. Thinking about how the child is feeling, and why this results in certain behaviours. It is not easy to follow, and requires very skilled, knowledgeable staff to carry it out. But it works, and is definitely what our children need.

Anne Robertson, Headteacher Tweedmouth West First School

QUALITY OF PROVISION

What we did differently

- We reviewed and changed the training programme for Designated Teachers.
- We reviewed and changed the arrangements for dispersing the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) grant in Northumberland to retain more in the Virtual School.
- We implemented the ePEP system and quality assurance audit tool.
- We welcomed teachers onto the ESLAC team who:

- developed and implemented an academic progress tracker which identifies priority intervention pupils (PIPs) who then have rapid improvement plans (RIPs)
- delivered 1:1 tuition for pupils
- challenged Designated Teachers to support our pupils to do better at school
- researched existing provision for reading schemes, trailed the online LEXIA programme, explored ways of improving reading outcomes
- reviewed the impact of 1:1 tuition on education outcomes for looked after children, including research into alternative interventions which might work better

What we know

- During the implementation of the ePEP the completion rate dipped.
- Designated Teachers are becoming more confident at setting SMART academic outcomes for pupils, in discussion with subject teachers when appropriate.
- Many primary schools have good reading schemes in place. Literacy provision in secondary is not as consistent.
- 63% of our looked after children were on roll at Good or Outstanding schools during 2018-19, which is an increase from 58% last year. 60 of those schools were in Northumberland and 38 were in other local authorities. 6 of the Northumberland schools were Outstanding.
- In 2019 our total PP+ budget was £706 000. Schools were allocated £1600 of the DfE allocation of £2300, therefore a total of £433 000 was received by schools during the financial year. The funding was used by schools for:
 - 1 :1 tuition and teaching assistant support
 - Learning resources
 - Behaviour support and intervention
 - Therapeutic assessment and intervention
 - Group provision
 - Educational visits
 - Study support
 - Alternative provision
 - Supporting the role of the Designated Teacher.
- The Virtual School used the centrally held PP+ of £273 000 to provide:
 - Thrive approach attachment training for Designated Teachers and foster carers
 - Educational psychology for looked after and previously looked after children
 - Virtual School teachers
 - Careers' advisers
 - Crisis funding for pupils with high level and complex needs in unstable school placements
 - Laptops for looked after children
 - Achievement for All Designated Teacher training programme
 - Funding for Virtual School Business and Admin apprentice (care leaver)
 - ePEP development
 - Storytime magazine; rewards eg attendance, progress, Expert Learner; enrichment allowance for children at school.

Impact assessment

- Regarding the impact of the PP+ grant, there is some good practice in some of our schools but this is not consistent. There remains some ambiguity about how schools are spending their PP+ to boost achievement.
- Our new Virtual School teachers had impact through their challenge to schools as they developed our new progress tracker, alternatives to 1:1 tuition, and helped pupils to have SMART outcomes in their ePEPs.
- Challenge and support for Designated Teachers is starting to have an impact and PEPs are becoming more focused on academic outcomes as well as the social and emotional aspects of learning.
- 1:1 tuition delivered by our own teachers has greater impact than agency tutors as it is aligned with the schools' schemes and plans.
- The outcome of the Lexia pilot has been positive and demonstrated that good quality online literacy programmes can be successfully accessed by students at home and at school.
- The Virtual School Educational Psychologists are in high demand and have had a positive impact on school placement stability.

Educational Psychology training feedback

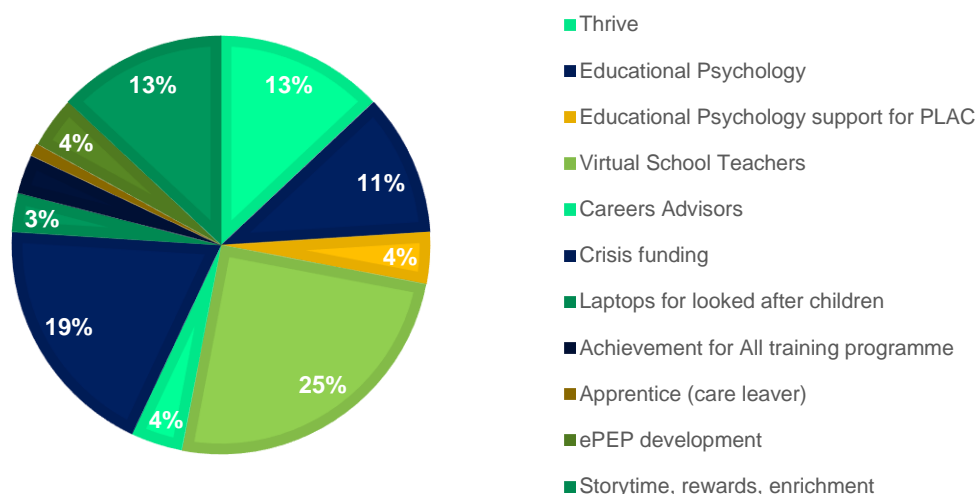
I would like to thank you so so much for the help that you gave Sharon , even if she hadn't maybe been 100% truthful with everyone I feel having someone impartial to talk to always helped her and she really trusted you. Many thanks

Thank you so much for your time and efforts on Monday. We learnt so much and your theory linked straight into Thrive training.

Thanks for taking the time to come in last week and give us all the fab advice for supporting Lucy. I have passed your email onto the appropriate people in school so fingers crossed we will be able to put in the right support for her upcoming exams.

Brilliant advice – I don't think they understand their current struggles are trauma related. I've pondered for a while over how to deliver the information to them

Pupil Premium Plus Expenditure by the Virtual School



What we are going to do next

- Recruit a flexible pool of teachers to provide 1:1 tuition when appropriate for our pupils.
- Develop a better understanding amongst Designated Teachers of corporate parenting principles so that all school staff feel invested in our pupils.
- Continue to work with schools to maximise the impact of PP+.
- Use the ePEP quality assurance process to drive improvement and increase the proportion which are 'green'.
- Launch a reading campaign to provide more opportunities for looked after children to improve literacy outcomes.
- Hold termly conferences for Designated Teachers and convene a Designated Teacher working group to meet half termly to improve engagement with the Virtual School.

ACHIEVEMENT 2019

What we did differently

- Monitored progress differently so that we intervene earlier where there is evidence of under-achievement to get pupils back on track, especially between Key Stages 2 and 4.
- Introduced an Active Cases model to target resources on the children who needed it most.
- Worked with Designated Teachers to accurately benchmark the attainment of individual pupils when they enter care so that ambitious but realistic targets for achievement could be set.
- Continued to challenge Designated Teachers to set SMART targets in PEPs which focussed on accelerating progress in reading/writing/English and maths.
- Used our Virtual School teachers to improve our knowledge of the quality of teaching and learning in schools attended by our looked after children

What we know

Figure 2: Characteristics of official cohorts 2019

2019	Early Years	Phonics	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 4	Total
No. in official cohort	8	6	6	12	29	61
No. with SEND (K)	3	2	1	3	9	18
No. with EHCP	1	1	2	2	11	17
No. in special school	1	1	0	2	8	12
No. in out of authority school	3	2	2	1	8	16
Not entered for tests/exams	0	1	0	2	5	8
No. in Good/Outstanding school	7	5	4	6	17	39

- The official cohorts for 2019 were very small, there was a high incidence of SEND, and a quarter of pupils were placed in out of authority schools (*Figure 2*).
- Virtual School data collected through the Progress Reviews in ePEPs tells us that most pupils in all year groups made progress in English and mathematics:
 - with an increasing number in all year groups making better than expected progress from September to July
 - and a decreasing number making no progress by the end of the academic year.

Figure 2: Outcomes for looked after children in all key measures, 2019

2019	Northumberland CLA* (all) %	Northumberland OC2** %	National CLA %	National All %
Early Years GLD	55.6 (18)	57.1 (7)	48	71.9
Phonics Year 1	62.5 (16)	50 (6)	63	81.9
KS1 R/W/M	37.5 (16)	0 (6)	38	65.1
KS1 Reading	56.3	33.3	53	75.2
KS1 Writing	43.8	16.7	43	69.5
KS1 Maths	56.3	16.7	51	75.9
KS2 R/W/M	47.4 (19)	50 (12)	37	64.9
KS2 Reading	57.9	58.3	50	73.2
KS2 Writing	57.9	58.3	51	78.3
KS2 GPS	63.2	66.7	53	78
KS2 Maths	68.4	75	52	78.7
KS2 Progress Reading	0.28	-1.56	-0.26	0.03
KS2 Progress Writing	0.07	-1.27	-0.84	0.03
KS2 Progress Maths	-0.89	-2.21	-0.97	0.04
KS4 Basics 4+	11.1 (36)	10.3 (29)	17	65
KS4 Basics 5+	2.7 (36)	3.4 (29)	7	43
KS4 English 4+	16.6 (36)	17.2 (29)	25	71
KS4 Maths 4+	19.4 (36)	17.2 (29)	23	65
KS4 Progress 8	-1.59	-1.6	-1.28	-0.08
KS4 Attainment 8	17.5	16.5	19.1	44.8

* where CLA is child looked after

** OC2 is the official cohort which does not comprise all pupils in a year group at the time of the assessment, but all those of statutory school age who have been in care for 12 months or ore from 31st March of any given year, and of those how many match to the school census of the same year. At the time of publication there is a variance between the 903 return and DfE data which has excluded one eligible pupil who achieved the Basics.

Where green/red indicates above/below the national average for looked after children

Early Years

Official cohort	SEND	EHCP	Special school setting	Out of authority setting	Good or Outstanding setting	Not entered for tests/exams
7	3	1	1	3	7	

57.1% of children achieved a good level of development in the Early Years Stage in 2019 which is significantly better than last year (25%). This is better than the national average of 48%. National (all schools) is 71.9%, Northumberland (all schools) so the gap in achievement is closing.

Phonics

Official cohort	SEND	EHCP	Special school	Out of authority school	Good or Outstanding school	Not entered for tests/exams
6	2	1	1	2	5	1

50% of looked after children achieved the Phonics standard, which is lower than the previous year (75%). This is below the national average of 63%. The gap in achievement is therefore wide, with national (all schools) achieving 81.9%.

1 pupil took the Phonics re-test in Year 2 and has still not achieved the expected standard.

Key Stage 1

Official cohort	SEND	EHCP	Special school	Out of authority school	Good or Outstanding school	Not entered for tests/exams
6	1	2	0	2	4	0

Some pupils at Key stage 1 achieved age related expectations in either reading, writing, maths or science, but no pupils met that standard in the combined measure. This outcome is much lower than last year but in line with expectations for those pupils during Key Stage 1. This is below the national average of 38% and represents a wide gap in achievement with non-looked after children nationally (65.1%).

Key Stage 2

Official cohort	SEND	EHCP	Special school	Out of authority school	Good or Outstanding school	Not entered for tests/exams
12	3	2	2	1	6	2

Key Stage 2 achievement has greatly improved since 2018, with 50% of our looked after children meeting the expected standard in the combined measure of reading, writing and maths (from 30% in 2018). This is better than looked after children nationally (37%) and is getting closer to the achievement of non-looked after children nationally (64.9%). 2 pupils achieved a greater depth of learning.

Stability during Key Stage 2 was very good:

- 4 of the 6 pupils who achieved the expected standard in the combined measure had been in care for more than 3 years
- only 1 pupil experienced at least 1 fixed term exclusion
- the average attendance of the cohort was 98.58%, with half of the pupils in the cohort achieving 100% attendance
- 8 pupils were in foster care placements, 3 were with relative carers and 1 was in a residential children's home
- only 1 pupil had a school move to stabilise a long-term placement.

Key Stage 4

Official cohort	SEND	EHCP	Special school	Out of authority school	Good or Outstanding school	Not entered for GCSE
28	9	11	8	8	17	5

24 pupils were entered for GCSEs and 3 of them achieved 5 or more passes. 5 pupils achieved grade 4+ in English, 5 pupils achieved grade 4+ in maths. The proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving the Basics dipped to 10% (3 of 29 pupils) this year.

Our looked after pupils have a Progress 8 score of -1.6 which means they achieved approximately 1.5 grades lower than pupils with the same starting point nationally. The average Attainment 8 score for looked after pupils in Northumberland is 16.5 which is lower than last year and below the regional and national averages.

At the time of the exams 4 pupils were attending alternative provision, and the 7 pupils in special schools were not entered for GCSEs.

Stability during Key Stage 4 for the majority of pupils was good:

- only 1 pupil in the cohort experienced at least one fixed term exclusion during Year 11
- the average attendance of the cohort was 92% (ranging from 30% to 100%) with 13 pupils achieving 100%
- 21 pupils were in foster care placements, 2 with relative carers and 6 in residential placements
- 24 of the 29 pupils in the cohort had no school move at all (other than at usual transition times) for 3 years from the beginning of Year 9
- Only 1 pupil experienced at least 1 school move and 1 home placement move during the 3 years (and this pupil was not expected to achieve the Basics).

For a small number of pupils stability was not good:

- 4 pupils were classed as persistent absentees
- From the beginning of Year 9 to the end of Year 11, 11 pupils experienced at least 1 home placement move (of which 5 pupils had 2, and 7 pupils had 1 move)

Individual stories of success

Year 11 Alistair

Alistair is a Year 11 student who always has excellent attendance in school. His school reports were consistently positive and highlighted his hardworking approach in all subject areas, despite any challenges he was faced with. ESLAC got involved at the beginning of Year 11 because at that time he was achieving below the rest of his year group. The Virtual School educational psychologist carried out a holistic assessment and intensive support was put in place for his reading.

Alistair has exceptional ability in rugby and was keen to further his development. His ability, potential and dedication to this sport have enabled him to successfully gain a place on the BTEC 90cr Diploma in Sport and Excel Rugby course through Tynemet College. He will be training with The Falcons at Kingston Park.

Year 11 Caroline

Caroline was pregnant during Year 11 and followed a part time timetable at school. She gave birth only 3 days after her English exam but still managed to achieve a grade 4. She was entered for 3 GCSEs and achieved them all. Caroline is enjoying some maternity time with her baby and is in close contact with ESLAC and our Careers' Adviser to plan a pathway into education, training or employment when she is ready. She hopes to follow an equestrian course at Durham College next year.

Impact assessment

- Pupils in Early Years were school ready for September 2019.
- Not enough pupils achieved the Phonics standard.
- Achievement at Key Stage 2 is back on track - pupils in the Year 6 cohort enjoyed stable school placements, engaged well and received good quality education in Good or Outstanding schools.
- For Year 11 pupils, length of time in care had a positive impact on achievement. 15 of the 29 pupils had been in care for more than 5 years at the time they took their exams, including the 3 pupils who achieved the Basics.
- Stability for Year 11 was good and suggests that most pupils did their best at school with the additional support provided.
- In Year 11 4 pupils attended Outstanding schools, 13 attended Good schools which gave them a very good chance to succeed.
- The likelihood of more pupils achieving well at GCSE was affected by the over-representation of SEND in the cohort. For example, Attainment 8 increases from 16.5 to 25.2 if pupils with SEND are not counted.
- There is evidence of slow progress from Key Stage 2 resulting in under-achievement for some pupils at the end of Key Stage 4. Although additional support was put in place using PP+ and school resources where appropriate, expectations were not high enough for long enough for some pupils and progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 was too slow.
- For the Year 6 cohort those pupils who had an average or better SDQ score achieved better than the rest of the pupils in reading, writing and maths. However for Year 11 pupils there is no evidence that average or better SDQ scores had a positive impact on achievement.

What we are going to do next

- Use the ePEP and progress tracker so that pupils are identified for additional support earlier, and to develop our challenge to schools to avoid drift.
- Using the educational psychology initial assessments on entry to care, target resources so that more pupils make better than expected progress in reading/writing, English and maths when they enter care.
- Continue to work with Designated Teachers to accurately benchmark pupils when they enter care so that ambitious but realistic targets for achievement can be set for individual pupils.
- Pilot different ways of working between the Virtual School and targeted secondary schools in Northumberland, to maximise the impact of PP+ on progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- As Ofsted judgements of Northumberland schools improve, seek to place more pupils in Good and Outstanding schools when appropriate.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

What we did differently

- Focussed on achieving placement stability for looked after children with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) by working with partners to establish clear pathways into different levels of intervention for individual pupils.
- Explored the low incidence of SEND in our looked after population compared to nationally and supported schools to refer for statutory assessment when appropriate.
- Improved the involvement of ESLAC with the statutory assessment process.
- Started developing a performance framework to gather evidence that looked after children with SEND are prioritised and gain swift access to services, including school placements.
- Collaborated with the SEND team and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) team to plan a process for aligning EHCP reviews with looked after children reviews.

What we know

- At 60% the proportion of looked after children with SEND is below the national average.
- 30% of our looked after children age 5-16 have an EHCP which is in line with the national average.
- The majority of those pupils with EHCPs (52 of the 84 pupils) attended special schools - 7 were in residential schools and 34 (or over half) were in school placements in other local authorities.
- Northumberland has 8 local authority special schools, all of which have an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding, and looked after children attend 5 of them.
- 7 Northumberland pupils were placed out of county in independent day special schools and 7 looked after children were placed in independent specialist residential provision.
- By September 2019, 0 looked after children were waiting for special school places
- A small proportion of looked after children are placed with Alternative Providers (4%).
- The most prolific primary need is *social, emotional and mental health* (SEMH) followed by *autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and severe learning difficulty (SLD)*.

- Education outcomes for this group of pupils in 2019 was good for those in Early Years and for Phonics where achievement is comparable with all of our looked after children. However at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 outcomes are poor with no pupils achieving age related expectations or the Basics at GCSE.
- The number of looked after children with SEND being entered for and achieving GCSEs is low but improving - 6 out of 11 pupils with EHCPs and all pupils with SEND (K) were entered for at least 1 GCSE.

Figure 4: Representation of SEND pupils in each cohort 2019

2019	Early Years	Phonics	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 4	Total
No. in official cohort	8	6	6	12	29	61
No. with SEND	3	2	1	3	9	18
No. with EHCP	1	1	2	2	11	17
No. in special school	1	1	0	2	8	12
No. in out of authority school	3	2	2	1	8	16
Not entered for tests/exams	0	1	0	2	5	8
No. in Good/Outstanding school	7	5	4	6	17	39

Impact assessment

- There are stories of individual success for looked after children with SEND in all phases.
- The overall picture of achievement for looked after children with SEND was not as good as last year and there were poorer outcomes for pupils with EHCPlans.
- Looked after children with SEND are prepared well for adulthood. 100% of Year 11 were in education, training or employment in September 2019, with most following pathways into further education.
- Absence data of children with SEND indicates that in Northumberland more children with SEND regularly attend school than in most other parts of the country.
- In the current context of a lack of special school places, delays in admissions for looked after children with SEND were kept as short as possible but are still too long.

What we are going to do next

- Improve understanding of SEND support and statutory assessment teams of good corporate parenting.
- Improve integrated working with SEND support services so that looked after children are prioritised and gain swift access to services and school places when they need them.
- Implement a performance framework to gather more evidence so that we understand better what it is like to be a looked after child with SEND in Northumberland.

- All of our maintained special schools have been judged to be Good or Outstanding but we still need to improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream settings.

PATHWAYS AT 16

What we did differently

- Embedded the PEP to Pathway Plan transition process.
- Appointed a Virtual School Careers' Adviser to work with care leavers age 19+.
- Set up EET clinics with Virtual School Careers Advisers, 14/18+ team managers and social workers.
- Contributed to the delivery of the Care Leaver's Covenant action plan which is now the responsibility of the VSH.
- Our Careers' Advisers raised awareness of the importance of careers' guidance from primary age.
- Our Careers' Advisers collaborated with the Learning and Skills Service to plan an offer for Year 9 pupils from September 2019 to identify those suitable for the employability support through the apprenticeship preparation programme.
- Attended weekly/ fortnightly planning meetings for those being discharged from secure accommodation to ensure EET provision was a key part of the discharge planning.
- Identified care leavers who are young parents with children who qualify for paid care, and guided and supported them to move into education.

What we know

Figure 5: School leavers' destinations at 16, 2017 to 2019

Age 16 – 18	Sept-17	Sept-18	Sept 19
Number of LAC	48	27	37
Number in EET	43 (90%)	21 (78%)	29 (78%)
Number in FE	25 (52%)	16 (60%)	22 (59%)
Number in 6 th form	13 (27%)	3 (11%)	5 (14%)

- 85% of Year 11 leavers (age 16 only) were in education, training or employment in September 2019. This is an improvement since 2018 and is particularly pleasing as 16 of the 26 pupils have SEND.
- 3 care leavers were following A' level courses which they all completed, achieved the grades they needed and have started degree courses at university.
- A record 5 care leavers achieved university degrees in 2019 and are following routes in to further study or employment.
- Of those progressing into further education, a greater proportion than last year are following level 2 courses, and there has been an increase in those working for level 3 qualifications.

- The overall proportion of EET is rising again and remains above the national average.
- At the end of the academic year 162 young people in the cohort aged between 17 and 21 (95.7% or 155 individuals) were eligible and had their EET status recorded:
 - 47 were recorded as being in education (30.3%)
 - 37 were recorded as being in training (23.9%)
 - 71 were recorded as NEET (45.8%)
- In the same period there were 115 care leavers aged between 19 and 21 of whom 107 had their EET status recorded :
 - 23 were recorded as being in education (21.5%)
 - 32 were recorded as being in employment (29.9%)
 - 52 were recorded as NEET (48.6%)

**The percentage of care leavers who are regarded as being in employment, education or training (EET) is a nationally reported indicator for every local authority. In order to qualify the young person's social worker or personal adviser must be in touch with them within a 4 month window – between 3 months before and 1 month after their birthday.*

- The Care Leavers' Covenant is progressing on target.

Impact assessment

- Peer Challenge feedback was very positive and highlighted the strengths of our integrated work with Northumberland Adolescent Services and the Pathway Plan.
- The Care Leavers' Covenant is already having a positive impact on recruitment and retention into education training and employment.
- Offering dedicated careers guidance through the Virtual School has a positive impact, demonstrated by 2018-19 being the 5th consecutive year that the proportion of school leavers progressing into EET at 16 has been good and better than the national average
- The NEET rate does increase with age but at a slower rate than previously.

What we are going to do next

- Build on success at recruiting into EET after leaving school to further improve retention up to age 21.
- Broaden the PEP to Pathway Plan process to see as many Year 9 pupils as possible.
- Continue delivery of the Care Leavers' Covenant action plan.

Voice of a graduate care leaver speaking to looked after children still at school

Looking back years ago, I could not imagine a positive future for myself...GCSE's are a stressful time for any young person, I think it is incredibly hard for someone who is still so young to have so much pressure on them to do well, especially when being told that these results will impact so much on your future. ...I was very anxious at the thought of starting college, I felt as though I had finally settled into my school and now had to start all over again in a new place with new people. ...University was not something I had considered throughout school or college; it was talked about a lot but I had never given it real thought until the last months of my college course. The thought of university is scary, a big new place filled with such smart people, I didn't feel worthy. ... University helped me develop confidence in myself to achieve things I never thought I could. ...Unlike school, the teachers are not there to hold your hand; sometimes you just need to talk things through with someone who will give you honest feedback, this is not criticism, it will help you achieve a higher standard. Most teachers give you their full support, no matter how much you doubt yourself they see your potential to do well and will try their best to support you with your journey. ...I have learned that doubting yourself is like a self-fulfilling prophecy, if you expect to fail then you aren't as motivated to succeed. I never felt like I deserved to be around those throughout my education, I always felt like everybody was smarter than me or that I was too stupid. Often, people don't realise their own potential and put themselves down as a result. This is why it is so important to listen to those around you who want to encourage you and support you. They see through your cloud of self-doubt and more often than not, they only want what is best for you. ... 😊

Post -16 Case Study

Sally was seen by an ESLAC careers adviser mid-way through year 11 and a positive guidance interview led to the creation of a detailed careers action plan. Towards the end of year 11, Sally entered secure accommodation but as there was already a plan in place and a relationship between the adviser and Sally, we were able to continue our plan without delay. Sally wanted to study Health and Social care at college and we completed the application and enrolment process (through requesting college visit through her mobility programme). Sally was supported by her adviser to explain her circumstances openly to a college manager who agreed to support her application. Sally began college while still in secure accommodation, receiving decreasing levels of support and supervision from accommodation staff, and when she left secure accommodation she continued to attend college from her home. Sally is doing well and feels positive about her future, despite the difficult circumstances she was dealing with at the end of Year 11.

PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

What we did differently

- Engaged an Educational Psychologist to research the needs of previously looked after children.
- Our Educational Psychologists developed a Resources Directory for teachers working with previously looked after children, published at our Summer Conference 2019.
- Published guidance to professionals on our Virtual School webpage.
- Provided Educational Psychologist support and intervention for individual cases referred by schools.
- Delivered Virtual School Educational Psychologist training for Northumberland Designated Teachers on loss, bereavement and trauma.
- Sign-posted parents/adoptive parents/ guardians to good quality online advice and support eg PAC UK and Adoption UK.
- Liaised with regional Virtual Schools in the North of Tyne partnership to plan delivery of face to face training for parents/adoptive parents/carers.

- Met with Adoption North East to raise awareness of support from Virtual Schools and plan training for professionals and parents/adoptive parents/carers.
- Advised schools on appropriate use of PP+ for previously looked after children.

What we know

Figure 6: children becoming previously looked after in Northumberland 2018

Number of children	Left care through
233	Adoption
91	Special guardianship order (SGO)
27	Child arrangements/residence order
351	TOTAL @ 31.08.19

We are aware that not all adoptive parents and guardians will want schools to record the status of their children, so these figures are those who agreed to identify their children on the school census as previously looked after. These children are not on the roll of the Virtual School and we are not required to monitor their progress or be accountable for their achievement.

- We achieved good value for money from the additional funding to implement this new part of our statutory role.
- Schools are actively seeking advice from us on effective use of Pupil Premium Plus for this group of children.
- Demand for support and guidance on meeting the needs of previously looked after children from our Education Psychologist is high.
- Parents and guardians have contacted the Virtual School directly for advice and guidance.

Impact assessment

- We fulfilled our duty towards previously looked after children by providing or signposting to information and advice to parents, carers and education professionals.
- We made a difference for previously looked after children by raising awareness of their needs through educational psychology and developing resources for carers, parents and professionals to support their education achievement.

What we are going to do next

- Arrange face to face training for parents/adoptive parents/carers.
- Continue to provide educational psychology support for schools and individual previously looked after children.
- Develop a sustainable offer for previously looked after children through links with partners and services to raise the profile of this group and their needs in schools.

OUR PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD

Our priorities for 2017-18 are set out in the Virtual School Improvement Plan:

1. Improved mental health and resilience for looked after and previously looked after children

- Active participation in:
 - Local Transformation Plan
 - CYPS access and pathways into other EMHWP services
 - Trailblazer pilot
 - SEND graduated response to SEMH needs
 - Mental health leads in schools
- Embed Thrive attachment approach
- SALT to improve communication skills and develop relationships
- Maximise impact of Virtual School Educational Psychology

2. Everyone doing the best they possibly can at school

- Tracking progress to challenge under-achievement
- Launch our Reading Campaign
- Better 1 to 1 tuition using our own teachers
- All PEPs are great PEPs
- All Designated Teachers are great Designated Teachers
- Smooth phase-change transition
- Co-production of a SEND Pledge to looked after children
- Better involvement in placement planning

3. Focus on secondary

- Deliver the Care leavers' covenant
- Develop secondary hubs of good practice with looked after children
- Improve understanding of adolescent behaviour
- Challenging quality assurance of alternative providers
- Improve secondary school attendance – all pupils
- Improve attendance of permanently excluded pupils

4. Children who are not in school

- Improve procedures for children missing from and missing out on education
- Focus on safeguarding of children who are electively home educated
- Raise awareness of contextual safeguarding
- Get better value for money from the EOTAS health needs budget

5. Investing in our staff

- Respond to what our workers told us in the staff survey
- Deliver a comprehensive training programme for local authority services (including our own)

6. More new ways of working

- Implement Signs of Safety
- Act on feedback from children and families

- Pupil voice – gathering children’s views about school and acting on what they say
- Find out more about improving education outcomes for children in need
- Implement EMS across the Virtual School
- Explore use of CPOMS as a safeguarding tool

A note about the data

The official cohorts reviewed in this report are small and the individual pupils comprising the cohorts change during the course of each phase. In some of the DfE’s validated tables therefore the Northumberland data is suppressed because the statistical samples are too small. Percentages can vary considerably so that comparisons with other groups of pupils or establishing trends in performance over time are not always meaningful.

The official cohort does not comprise all pupils in a year group at the time of the assessment, but all those of statutory school age who have been in care for 12 months or more from 31st March of 2018 (which is 182) and of those how many match to the school census (which is 150). The Virtual School captures data for whole cohorts, so where local data and not validated DfE data is quoted then it refers to all pupils in one year group at one time regardless of the length of time they have been in care or the school census.

The full data set used to write this report is available in a separate Virtual School Education Outcomes 2018-19 document.

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