



Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report

Version 12.11.20



Northumberland
County Council

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of this year's annual report is STARS: rising stars, shining stars and superstars! We have been learning together and working together in the most exceptional circumstances yet our pupils, their Designated Teachers, their foster carers, residential home workers and the Virtual School team have never given up. This report is therefore bursting with achievements and I am proud to share it widely with everyone interested in the education of our looked after children.

Our purpose remains the same. 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.

This was no ordinary year. We had two terms on track and making good progress with our plans for improvement; we had an Ofsted inspection in January 2020 as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC) which went very well; we are living through a global pandemic involving lockdown and school closure for the entire summer term. We are undeterred however, and rose to the change and challenges responsively and flexibly to demonstrate what a versatile and essential service we are.

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.

This report celebrates the achievements of our pupils in terms 1 and 2, and during lockdown. It also demonstrates how the little things we did made a big difference, and the big things we did that brought about lasting change.

Jane Walker, Virtual School Headteacher (VSH)

HOW WELL ARE WE DOING?

The Virtual School has many strengths and these are the areas in which we are most consistent:

- ★ Strong systems and processes, strong leadership and multi-agency working: Ofsted, January 2020
- ★ A significant improvement in GCSE achievement, with more than twice as many pupils achieving the Basics in 2020 compared to last year, and half of the pupils entered for at least 1 GCSE achieving the Basics
- ★ Numbers of looked after children progressing into further education at 16 has remained consistently high over the last three years
- ★ All of our care leavers studying for level 3 qualifications enjoyed success and secured places on university degree courses
- ★ All of our care leavers in the final year of their university degree courses achieved good classifications
- ★ Good corporate parenting, demonstrated through leadership of the Care Leavers' Covenant and record of no permanent exclusions of looked after children since 2008
- ★ 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
- ★ There were no fixed term exclusions for pupils in Year 6 and Year 11
- ★ Effective use of Pupil Premium Plus funding, with positive impact from the Virtual School's Careers' Advisers, Educational Psychologists and provision of Thrive attachment training
- ★ An effective quality assurance process for ePEPs, showing a considerable increase in the number of ePEPs rated as 'green'

We are improving in areas where performance is not as consistent as we would like it to be. We need to continue to focus on:

- ★ Reducing the number of pupils who are persistent absentees
- ★ Further reducing fixed term exclusions
- ★ Making sure that more children have an initial assessment from an Educational Psychologist when they enter care
- ★ Improving the PEP completion rate
- ★ After lockdown, maintaining school placement stability

WHAT WE DID DIFFERENTLY

Despite the global pandemic which disrupted learning for a term, we made good progress with our plans for improvement.

We said we were going to **improve mental health and resilience for looked after and previously looked after children** and we did this by participating in multi-agency

workstreams to deliver on Northumberland's Local Transformation Plan, rolling out the Trailblazer projects, and implementing an SEND graduated approach to SEMH needs. The Thrive attachment approach is fully embedded and we invested in the new Thrive Adolescent training for 4 secondary schools. We integrated our work with the SALT team when appropriate, and increased the Virtual School's educational psychology capacity.

We said we were going to **make sure all pupils did the best they possibly can at school** and we did this by using a new system to track progress so that we could intervene quickly and challenge under-achievement, launched a Reading Campaign, invested in on-line education resources, provided better 1 to 1 tuition using our own teachers, drove up the standard of PEPs through strong quality assurance, delivered focussed training to more Designated Teachers and had better involvement in placement planning. The VSH contributed to the stability group led by the Service Director Children's Social Care, ensuring that school placement stability is well understood as a driver of permanence

We said that we were going to **focus on secondary** and we did this by developing a secondary hub of good practice with looked after children, provided training to improve understanding of adolescent behaviour, co-ordinated challenging quality assurance of alternative providers and targeted schools to improve attendance, providing leadership through the VSH for our Care Leavers' Covenant.

We said that we were going to safeguard and re-engage **children who are not in school** and we did this by reviewing our procedures for children missing from and missing out on education, participating in MSET and Pre-MSET (missing, sexually exploited and trafficked) from an education perspective, and providing tailored support through the new role of Virtual School Education Welfare Officer for looked after children with attendance lower than 90%.

We said that we were going to **listen carefully to our pupils' voices** and we did this by funding the Mind of My Own app, sending a survey to pupils to ask them how they felt about school, making sure the PEPs captured what pupils wanted to say about their education, and working closely with the Participation Team.

We said that we were going to improve the experience of looked after children with **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities** and we did this by improving our integrated working with SEND teams to reduce the wait for assessments, using our SEND Champion to support all pupils with an EHCP in and out of county. contributing to the NCC Written Statement of Action by supporting IROs and SEND to align looked after children and EHCP reviews, the ESLAC team manager attending the SEND Panel and Early Years Inclusion Panel to support the additional needs of looked after children, the ESLAC team receiving SEND training, co-ordinating a themed audit of looked after children with SEND, using our Virtual School Educational Psychologists to systematically work with schools and professionals to adopt a person-centred approach.

On Friday 20th March 2020 schools in England closed until further notice as England went into lockdown as a reaction to the coronavirus global pandemic. Looked after children were then classified by the government as 'vulnerable' and either attended their regular school which provided them with a safe and structured environment, or they were learning at home

with their carers. **Our two priorities were then to keep our children safe and to keep our children learning**, and this kept us very busy!

This is what we did:

- ★ daily and 'live' risk assessments were undertaken jointly by the Virtual School, carers, social workers and the Family Placement Service ensured that every child was in the environment which best met their needs, including those living and learning in other local authorities. Pupils with EHCPs were monitored with the appropriate SEND support services
- ★ ensured that all looked after children had a Virtual School laptop and that care leavers all had access to a laptop and the internet from home
- ★ the Virtual School set up its own virtual google classroom in the first week of lockdown and our teachers made sure on a daily basis that it was full of age appropriate learning activities across a range of subjects. Our teachers were able to communicate with children through the classroom to give encouragement and feedback. This supplemented the work provided by each child's school. We also invested in the Britannica online school and foster carers joined us for the virtual training to maximise its use.
- ★ advice and guidance was provided regularly to foster carers and residential home staff covering topics such as promoting good emotional health and wellbeing, establishing routines, preparing to return to school. Our Educational Psychologists were also available for virtual meetings and phone consultations
- ★ ESLAC staff and Education Welfare Officers supported children in school placements, providing one to one support in compliance with the social distancing and hygiene measures. This helped to stabilise school placements for several children and is appreciated by schools who have operated on much reduced staffing to protect their own staff
- ★ pupils in 'transition', who were due to start a new school in September, were targeted for support with individual contact from ESLAC staff and an age appropriate transition booklet to share with their Designated Teachers
- ★ Designated Teachers from current and receiving schools were encouraged to plan objectives in the PEP and virtual PEP review meetings were attended by the team manager
- ★ we ensured that PEP, EHCP and looked after reviews still took place so that Designated Teachers in 'new' schools could understand and prepare to meet our children's needs as soon as they arrive in September
- ★ the VSH provided evidence of achievement to schools with Year 11 looked after children on roll and was involved in the process of calculating GCSE grades in English and maths to send to exam boards
- ★ individual support for pathway planning into education, training and employment was provided to pupils in Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13 by the Virtual School Careers' Advisers
- ★ for pupils in Year 10, we put high quality tutors in place to provide 1 to 1 tuition in English and maths which will stay in place if needed throughout Year 11
- ★ all Designated Teachers were supported, and when necessary challenged, to maintain good quality PEPs which appropriately reflect the impact of school closure and Covid-19 on each looked after child

- ★ we know that many of our children enjoyed rich learning experiences during lockdown, and they told us about their experiences for a Virtual School pupil newsletter which we introduced in March so that children would still feel a sense of belonging to a 'school' of sorts. In our last edition we heard about looked after children making PPE (at alternative provider Engage), making rainbow sandwiches and raising money for charity through community works and personal challenges
- ★ close contact was maintained with Designated Teachers through the *Learn, Achieve, Celebrate* briefing which we published fortnightly (instead of half termly). The briefing told Designated Teachers what they needed to know about their role even though schools were closed, filtered relevant government guidance and ensured that strong professional relationships between schools and the local authority were maintained
- ★ the Virtual School was able to target specialist resources to ensure that educational needs were still met even though schools were closed. Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) was dispersed to ensure that schools have the right resources to meet pupils' needs
- ★ we continued to make progress with the Care Leavers' Covenant action plan. This will hopefully mitigate the impact of school closure on pathways into education, training and employment.
- ★ attended webinars facilitated by NAVSH (the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers) to share good practice and to keep in touch with national developments
- ★ created a virtual Summer School with a range of resources and activities, shared with children, schools and professionals as *10 ways to enjoy learning this summer*. The offer includes 1 to 1 tuition from our own teachers for pupils starting Year 11 in September
- ★ a weekly return was sent from education providers to the local authority to monitor vulnerable learners, including looked after children and children with EHCPs, to ensure that risk assessments were in place and children's needs were being met. The Virtual School was responsible for monitoring looked after children with SEND and out of county learners
- ★ children in Northumberland's residential homes were offered additional tuition from our own teachers and additional educational psychology support was available
- ★ contact was made weekly by the Virtual School with all homes
- ★ our Virtual School teacher for primary ensured that all children entering care during lockdown were welcomed and supported and attended their first PEP meetings
- ★ Educational Psychologists provided reassurance, advice and guidance to carers and schools and held virtual weekly drop in clinics.
- ★ placement stability was monitored closely and ESLAC arranged temporary school moves when needed
- ★ an immediate response support service was available to schools eg equipment, transport, risk assessment, holidays, timetables etc
- ★ PEPs were reviewed to reflect the current situation for each child and to support the return to school in September
- ★ we changed the criteria for our Expert Learner award so that the most remarkable achievements either before or during lockdown have been recognised and rewarded. We have 10 Expert Learners this year, nominated by their Designated Teachers
- ★ we delivered our first virtual Designated Teacher conference which was constructive and well attended.

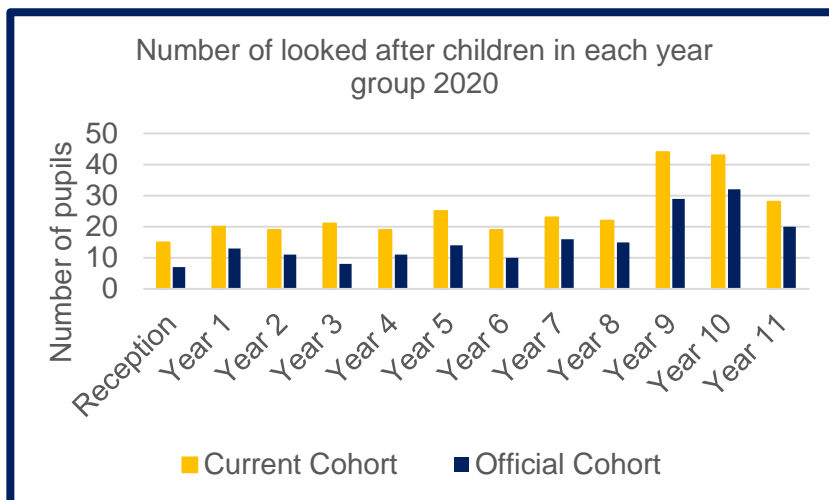
WHAT WE KNOW

Pupil profile

Profile of pupils age 5 – 16 in Northumberland's Virtual School (at 31.08.20)



- ★ The numbers in the current cohort are high and reflects the increase in the number of children entering care in Northumberland since 2019. The largest increases are in years 5, 9 and 10.



The official cohort comprises all pupils in a year group at the proposed time of the assessment, who have been in care for 12 months or more from 31st March of 2019 and of those how many match to the school census.

- ★ Boys are over-represented in the looked after pupil population, comprising 100% of the official cohort in Reception and 70% of the official cohort in Year 6.

Education achievement

The data used in this report is local to Northumberland and quality assured by the Data Unit and Virtual School. Due to coronavirus (Covid-19) exams and assessments were cancelled this summer. Pupils in Year 11 and those following post-16 courses received results using centre assessment grades calculated by their teachers. There is no official summative achievement data for other year groups and the DfE will not be collecting, validating or publishing regional and national data for comparison. Schools, and Virtual Schools, are not required to report on or publish achievement data this year, including for Year 11.

- ★ The national testing and summative assessments for pupils in Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and Phonics screening test for Year 1 pupils have not been carried out this year. However, we do know how many children in Key Stages 1 to 3 were working within their age-related curriculum by 20th March 2020 when schools closed.

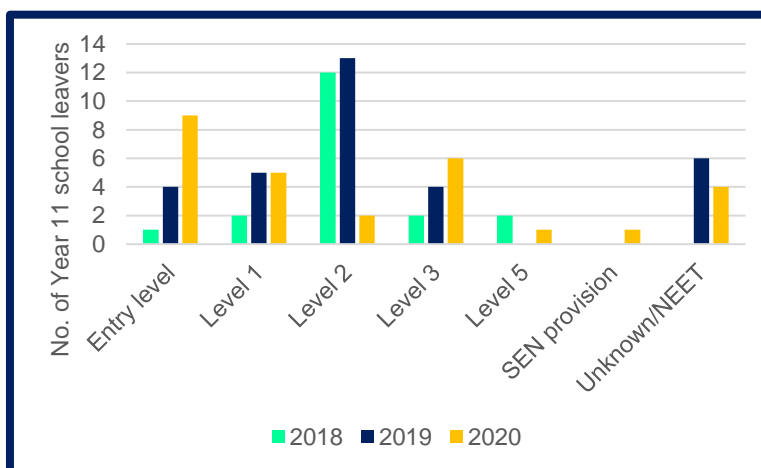
National Curriculum Year Group	Proportion of pupils working in their age related curriculum		
Key Stages 1-2	Reading	Writing	Maths
Year 1	100	100	100
Year 2	73	73	73
Year 3	53	41	59
Year 4	67	67	83
Year 5	65	55	65
Year 6	69	62	69
Key Stages 3-4		English	Maths
Year 7		65	65
Year 8		67	67
Year 9		74	74

- ★ Achievement for Year 11 looked after children is back on track with 29% achieving grade 4+ in the Basics (GCSE English language and maths). 2 pupils achieved the Basics at grade 5+ and more pupils than ever achieved either English or maths at grade 5+.
- ★ 50% of pupils entered for at least 1 GCSE achieved the Basics.
- ★ There were challenging circumstances for the Year 11 cohort:
 - only 16 of the 28 pupils were entered for at least one GCSE
 - half of the cohort have an EHCP and 79% have SEND
 - 11 pupils recently entered care (after the beginning of Key Stage 4 in 2018)
 - the quality of the PEPs was not good enough – none were graded green and a third were graded red
 - over half of the pupils were placed in schools outside of Northumberland
 - a small number of pupils experienced instability in their placements – since September of Year 11, 7 pupils moved placement and 8 pupils moved schools
- ★ From September 2020, 86% of the Year 11 cohort are in education, training and employment, which is an improvement since last year. 4 young people are NEET but are planning pathways with our careers' advisers and will engage with EET when their current circumstances change.

Age 16 – 18	Sept-18	Sept 19	Sept 20
Number of LAC	27	37	28
Number in EET	21 (78%)	29 (78%)	24 (86%)
Number in FE	16 (60%)	22 (59%)	21 (75%)
Number in 6 th form	3 (11%)	5 (14%)	5 (18%)

- ★ There has been an increase in the number of pupils progressing to Level 3 qualifications.

Destinations at 16 – level of study of young people continuing in education 2018-20

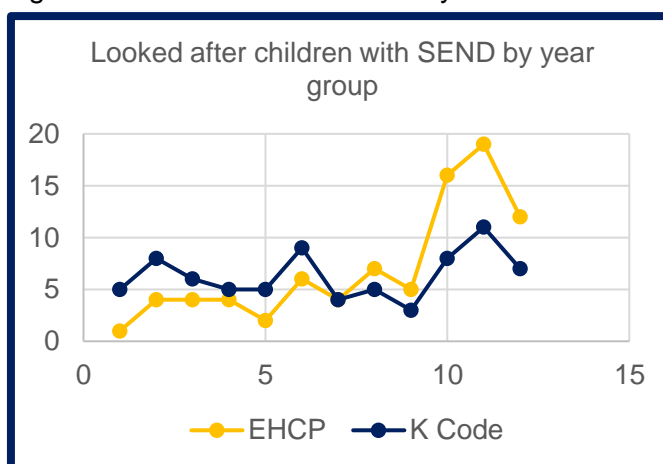


- ★ Four care leavers completed their degrees this summer, achieving:
 - a Performing Arts degree from Sunderland University
 - a Computing degree from Northumbria University

- a Criminology degree from Northumbria University
- a Masters in Human Resources Management from Northumbria University

Factors affecting learning

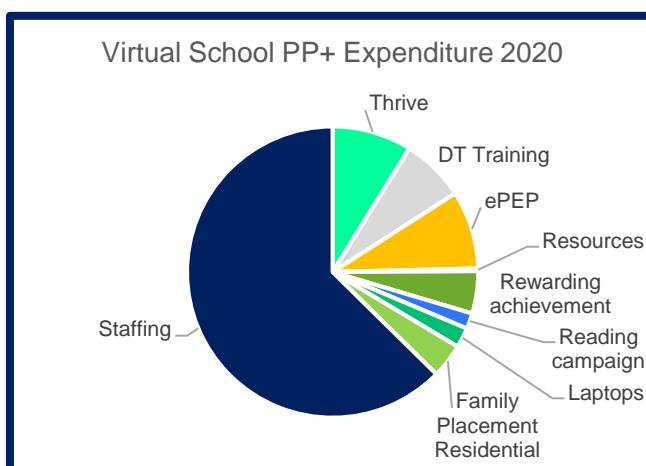
- ★ 71% of looked after children attended good or outstanding schools (both in Northumberland and in other local authorities).
- ★ By March 2020 total absence and persistent absence were much higher than at the same time last year.
- ★ The average attendance of primary age pupils (96.4%) is much better than the average attendance of secondary age pupils (90%).
- ★ The majority of our looked after children remained stable and safe during lockdown, whether attending school or learning at home. The numbers in school placements remained constant at about 1/5th of the school age looked after population, then increased steadily when Reception, Year 1, Year 6 and Year 10 children were offered places after the May half term holiday. 38 of the 43 pupils in Year 10 attended part time to meet with their GCSE teachers.
- ★ There were no fixed term exclusions for pupils in Year 6 and Year 11. By March 2020 the number of fixed term exclusions was higher than at the same time last year.
- ★ Over half of our looked after children have SEND: 25% have an identified special need and 28% have EHCPs.
- ★ EHCPs and K code needs are most common for pupils in Year 10.
- ★ Almost half of pupils with EHCPs attend special schools, including residential special schools.
- ★ The most common primary category of need for pupils with EHCPs is SEMH (65%) followed by ASD (12%).
- ★ Now that our ePEP system is embedded, we know much more about the PEPs:
 - PEP completion has improved since last year to 72%
 - Quality assurance shows that 94% of PEPs are rated as green or amber (40% now green)
 - More than double the number of PEP meetings have been attended by social workers compared to last year
 - 5 times as many PEPs have a contribution from a social worker compared to last year
 - Designated Teachers are using the ePEPs as a live dynamic support system, with 4923 logins recorded this year compared to only 1611 last year.



Pupil Premium Plus

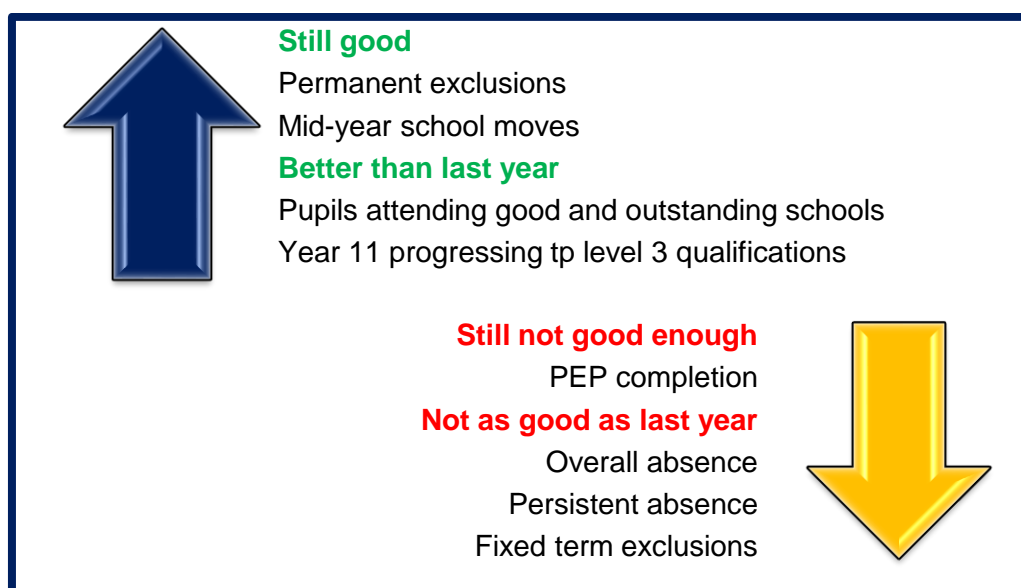
- ★ In 2019-20 our total Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) budget was £706 100. We reviewed our PP+ policy and top-sliced a greater proportion of each grant to use centrally in the Virtual School. The centrally held funding of £380 900 was used to provide:
 - Thrive approach attachment training (childhood and adolescent) for Designated Teachers and foster carers; Thrive licences for trained practitioners

- staffing - Educational Psychologists 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
- ePEP development
- the Reading Campaign
- education resources
- a Family Placement Service residential
- rewards for pupils- including Expert Learner, progress and attendance and the annual celebration event



- ★ Schools were allocated a maximum of £1450 of the DfE allocation of £2300 for each eligible pupil and dependent on the quality of the pupil's PEP (according to the Virtual School PP+ Policy). Schools received a total of £325 200 during the financial year. The funding was used by schools to support the outcomes for pupils in their individual PEPs. During the summer term the Virtual School dispersed the PP+ unconditionally to make sure that pupils received the support they needed during lockdown. The disruption in education means that it is not possible this year to evaluate the impact of PP+ received by schools on the academic achievement of pupils.
- ★ We continued to invest in the Thrive attachment approach: 4 Virtual School staff, 27 foster carers and 58 school staff (in 31 different schools) are Thrive trained. There are an increasing number of Thrive plans in place for looked after children. Whole school approaches work best and Thrive is referenced in PEPs.

★



IMPACT ASSESSMENT

We have flexible and responsive services and our staff our versatile. We can cope with a crisis. A positive legacy of lockdown is stronger professional relationships with SEND and the Family Placement Service.

The increase in the numbers of looked after children in Year 9 and 10 have created cohorts almost twice the size as usual, creating pressure on resources, particularly careers guidance and educational psychology. Temporary arrangements are in place to increase capacity in these support areas, but as both year groups progress into Year 10 and 11 next year, and the potential for Covid 19 to continue to disrupt education, new strategies will be needed to ensure that the pupils all do the best they can at school.

A good reason to have an initial assessment on entry to care

Rosie has been known to me since November 2019 when I carried out an initial assessment on entry to care. The work initially involved some resilience work where Rosie and I completed some assessment together and worked through helping her think about her strengths and how she saw herself. She commented at one point 'wow I never knew I had so many strengths'!

We built up a strong therapeutic relationship and she spoke to me in detail about her past experiences. From there we were beginning to do some Tree of Life narrative work together when lockdown started. Since then we have kept in touch with regular therapeutic phone calls and we finished our Tree of Life over the phone too. She is a lovely young girl who works tirelessly to succeed in both her school work and in the work we have done together. She actively engages and is reflective and open minded.

What struck me most about her was her positive outlook on life, despite difficult life experiences, she always sees the best in the situation and in others. She has come a long way in understanding herself and how she can support herself using her own strengths and attributes and she should be incredibly proud of herself.

Virtual School Educational Psychologist

Overall there are fewer children following their age related curriculum in writing than in reading/English or maths and the general trend from Key Stages 1 to 3 is a steady decrease in the numbers accessing the same curriculum as their peers. This trend reverses by Year 9, but not early enough to ensure that most looked after children can then access English and maths GCSE, potentially resulting in underachievement by the end of Year 11.

Pupils taking GCSEs and other qualifications this year benefited from being awarded centre assessment grades rather than taking exams. It meant they all achieved their best, based on their hard work and commitment during Key Stage 4. Stability also had a positive impact, as the majority of the 28 pupils were placed in provision judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding, were placed with foster carers, experienced a relatively low number of school

moves and placement moves during Key Stage 4 and there were no fixed term or permanent exclusions from school.

Improved outcomes in the Basics means that more young people are continuing in education and have accessed higher level qualifications, particularly at level 3. As half of the cohort have EHCPs this is particularly pleasing and demonstrates the commitment of our schools as well as the strength of our Virtual School careers guidance. The hard work and commitment of the Virtual School's careers' advisers throughout lockdown has mitigated the impact of this disruption on destinations for our Year 11 school leavers. They focussed on building pupils' confidence about their options for the future.

Finding the right pathway into education, training and employment

Gemma had a difficult Year 11 but despite some extremely challenging personal circumstances she was determined to make post-16 education work for her and to work towards her goal of working with children. Gemma and I visited college together to explain to them everything that had been happening in her life, to ask for a chance at college and to discuss her support needs. Gemma was given a place and the support she needed to allow her to start in September due to her honesty and the tutor being persuaded that Gemma really was ready to change her life.

Gemma successfully applied for a part time job earlier in the year and has taken her responsibilities seriously, prioritising college and her job, working hard and turning away from previous negative influences. Gemma wants others to learn from her difficult experiences and has been volunteering with a local charity as well as talking about her experiences at events within NCC through the Participation Team.

Covid lockdown has been really challenging for her with college and work closed and there was a period where she returned to previous risky behaviours. But she stopped, asked for help and is now back on track. Her job has now re-started and she has found out she has passed her college course and can progress to the next level in September. Gemma is a pleasure to work with and it has been lovely to see her succeed this year.

Virtual School Careers' Adviser

The second aspect of the care leavers covenant – to get more care leavers into education, training and employment – has had a positive impact this year and the impact of our partnership working is evident:

- ★ 13 looked after children and care leavers were supported successfully by the Learning and Skills Apprenticeship Mentoring Team into traineeships, apprenticeships, further training and 4 referrals were received by the LAC Progression Support Group which is facilitated by the Apprenticeship Mentoring Team

- ★ 19 looked after children and care leavers were given one to one support from the dedicated apprenticeship mentor for care leavers and Apprenticeship and Traineeship Sales Adviser
- ★ The Council has made available a minimum of 10 funded apprenticeship places available for looked after children and care leavers. By 23rd March 2020 there were 2 care leavers in NCC funded apprenticeships and 3 looked after children and care leavers were recruited to 'Care for Life', our social care apprenticeship programme (in a cohort of 14 new apprentices).

We would like all of our looked after children to attend good and outstanding schools, but the proportion of 71% is slowly improving and there is no evidence to indicate that pupils in *requires improvement* schools are underachieving because of that Ofsted judgement.

Supporting a self-motivated and emotionally aware pupil

During my assessment of her (and in her report) I noted Ella's strengths: She is a cognitively able student who is achieving well in school. She is ambitious and has plans for her future. She is an articulate student and she can examine viewpoints to come to a conclusion. She has a number of hobbies, including writing, art, reading that she uses to manage her thoughts and stress. She can self-reflect, she is aware of what causes her stress and she wants to be able to manage that. She is interested in developing her meta-cognitive skills, she is aware of her thinking patterns. She has a strong sense of right and wrong and she will stand up for what she believes in. She has a close relationship with school staff. She wants to please those around her and she presents as being mature.

Ella has engaged with a Virtual School EP throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. She has, at times, during this period felt quite emotionally and psychologically unwell. She has had an unexpected placement move, a final court hearing and a change of social worker, yet she continues to want to develop her understanding of herself, to develop her resilience and to manage the quite significant exam anxiety that she experiences. She was self-isolating and then she returned to school, realising that this was an important factor in maintaining her wellbeing. She continues to engage in education and support networks, in whatever way that she can.

Ella engages with each ESLAC team member and is incredibly appreciative of any support offered.

Virtual School Educational Psychologist

The seasonal trend in total absence and persistent absence from school shows a low point at the turn of the year (January) which improves considerably by the end of July. This year that trend was interrupted by school closure at the end of the Spring term. The latest data therefore demonstrates high rates of absence compared to the same time last year, so

reducing this swiftly is a priority for when schools re-open in September 2020, particularly in the secondary phase.

Similarly, by March the number of fixed term exclusions is high compared to the same time last year. However, there were no fixed term exclusions at all experienced by pupils in Year 6 and Year 11, and no permanent exclusions at all for the 12th consecutive year. This is attributed to the positive impact of the support delivered by the ESLAC team, which includes therapies, educational psychology, one to one teaching, education welfare and training for Designated Teachers.

Achieving stability to enjoy success at school

When she became looked after Chloe was struggling with being placed out of the area but wanting to remain at the same school. Chloe's behaviour, attitude and attendance deteriorated at school, she was at risk of exclusion and had missing episodes and sometimes refused to attend. ESLAC as a team attended meetings and worked with school to have a reintegrated return on a part time timetable with the support of an ESLAC teacher and Drawing and Talking therapy sessions. She gradually returned to a full timetable with extra sessions of maths and English.

Since September Chloe has had 44 Positive Comments. She also received an award this term for having the most merits for which she received a certificate and an Amazon gift voucher. Examples of her Positive Comments were for excellent work in OE and excellent effort in English and history. Chloe also delivered a group prepared radio advert on blood transfusions in WW1 to the whole class. She did an outstanding interpretation of a very difficult poem in English.

Placement with paternal relatives was a positive step and working together as part of a Care Team has resulted in Chloe being committed to her studies and the feedback on her home learning during lockdown is fantastic, one of the best in the school.

Virtual School Education Support Worker

The management of learning for looked after children during the school closure period, whether at school or at home, was strong and stability was achieved for the majority until the end of the summer term. The impact of providing laptops for children and the Reading Campaign is evident in the stable placements which most looked after children enjoyed during lockdown, having the technology and resources to learn effectively from home.

The ePEP is a dynamic and innovative tool to support and drive education achievement. It continues to develop and is becoming an effective way for professionals to communicate about the education of individual children. Improved involvement of social workers with the PEP process is excellent, and as a dynamic support system there is further potential for the ePEP to have a greater impact on education outcomes. The ePEP has transformed how we work. Quality assurance shows that 94% of PEPs are rated as green or amber (40% now

green). This is a big improvement, despite lockdown. It represents good value for money from the PP+, was complimented by Ofsted, and our Designated Teachers tell other local authorities how good it is! PEP completion has improved since last year but at 71% is still too low.

Partnership working to bridge the gap between mainstream and specialist education provision

Robert presented as unhappy in his foster family, although he felt some loyalty towards them and didn't really want to speak against them. His behaviour in school deteriorated after holiday times when he was able to spend time with his grandfather. Robert was unable to regulate his emotions and has a background of severe neglect. When placed with the family it was only meant to be short term until a more therapeutic placement came up. Robert got an EHCP to support him in school where he had a bespoke timetable and a key worker, but after a while even this didn't work for him.

School and Virtual School working together were able to put together a bespoke package including Clarty Commandos, Active Northumberland piano lessons in school, cookery and tuition with ESLAC staff at home, sessions with a psychotherapist and 1:1 tuition with STARS, whilst waiting for the outcome of an EHCP and a therapeutic educational placement. Eventually in April Robert moved into a residential placement with school attached. He found it hard at first but he is now settling in and is especially enjoying the outdoor activities. He is also enjoying the banter with the other boys and they have prepared a meal together.

Senior Education Support Worker. ESLAC

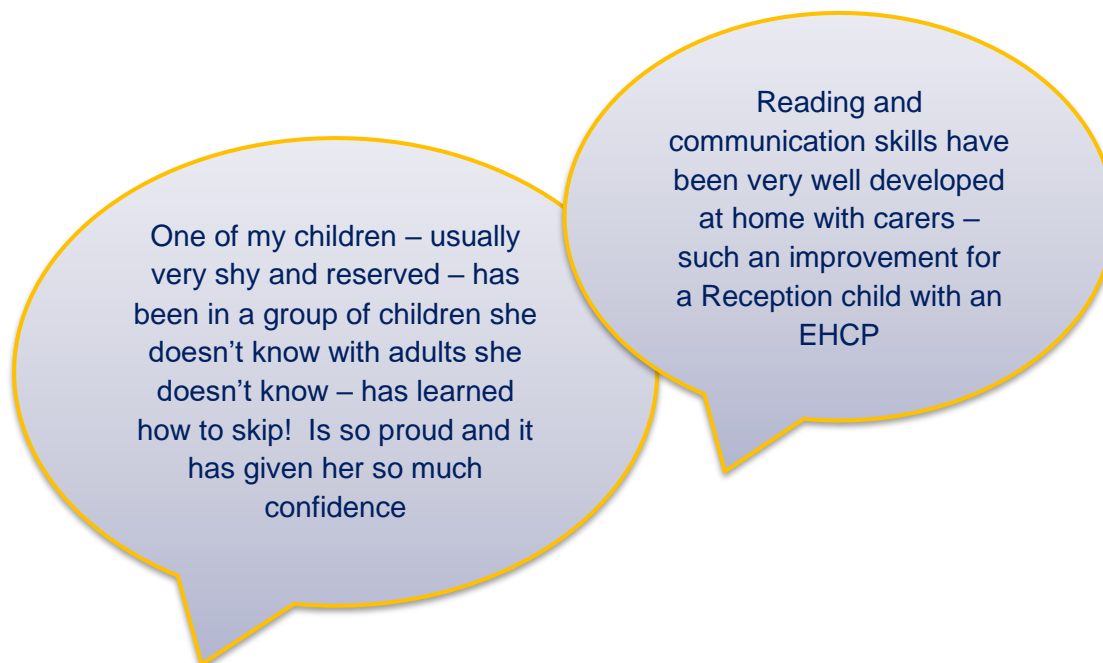
The impact of the Pupil Premium Plus funding held centrally by the Virtual School is positive. The investment in educational psychology, teachers and careers' guidance is demonstrated by our record for achieving school placement stability and destinations of school leavers at age 16. Evaluating the impact of the grant dispersed to schools will be a priority next year to ensure good value for money and the effectiveness of our PP+ policy.

More Designated Teachers see themselves as proud corporate parents and many boasted about their children at our virtual conference in July, here are some of them:

Has helped less confident to shine in a class of 10

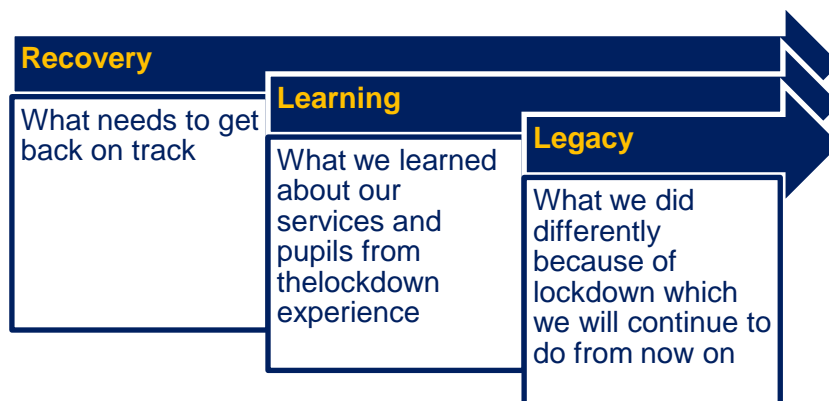
College student with high level of needs really flourishing in his now small group of 3 children attending during college lockdown

So happy to learn to tie their shoe laces so they can wear more grown up shoes!



WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO NEXT

Our priorities are captured in our Virtual School Future Services Plan 2020-21, after a self-evaluation process which focussed on:



Immediately we are going to:

- ★ Return pupils safely back to school in September 2020
- ★ Work with Designated Teachers to stabilise school placements
- ★ For pupils who start a new school, ensure that their transition is as smooth as possible
- ★ Equip schools with the resources they need to support emotional wellbeing, using Thrive and guidance from the *Preparing to return to school* workstream
- ★ Collaborate with schools to benchmark pupils at the beginning of term to gain an insight into their starting points and then plan additional support and interventions to accelerate progress and minimise the impact of lockdown
- ★ Ensure that 2020 school leavers have the right support and guidance to progress into education, training and employment

- ★ Encourage schools to hold PEP reviews early in the Autumn term
- ★ Focus on supporting pupils in Year 6 and Year 11, and their schools and carers
- ★ Prioritise the wellbeing of our staff

During the year we are going to:

- ★ Be prepared for a second wave of Covid-19 or another crisis
- ★ Continue to support the development of attachment aware and trauma informed schools in Northumberland
- ★ Deliver a flexible and diverse virtual training programme for Designated Teachers
- ★ 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
- ★ Sustain intensive academic and careers' guidance support for Year 11
- ★ improve outcomes for looked after children with SEND by developing the roles of the Virtual School SENDCO and LAC EHCP Co-ordinator
- ★ Make sure that all school age children new to care have an initial assessment from a Virtual School Educational Psychologist
- ★ When schools are fully open, further reduce the number of persistent absentees
- ★ Improve the completion rate of the PEP
- ★ Continue to focus on secondary education to tackle under-achievement at Key Stage 4
- ★ Closely monitor Year 10, a large cohort characterised by disruption and high levels of need
- ★ Support IROs and SEND to further align looked after children and EHCP reviews
- ★ Implement Signs of Safety as a practice model, with appropriate adaptations for education and school training and support
- ★ Develop integrated working with SALT
- ★ Deliver on the Care Leavers' Covenant

REFERENCES

1. *Inspection of local authority children's services in Northumberland, Ofsted January 2020*
2. *Northumberland Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-2020*
3. *National Association of Virtual School Headteachers, www.navsh.org.uk*

Coram competition winner 2020, Northumberland care leaver

What dreams are made of

I dream of a world where no one is alone and we travel in numbers as a pack, I dream of a world where the people are happy and when you smile at them they smile back.

I dream of a world where children aren't neglected and domestic abuse is a thing of the past. I dream of a world where women feel good and can wear a dress without being harassed.

I dream of a world where education is priority and schools teach us what we should know, I dream of a world where students aren't statistics and they're all given some room to grow.

I dream of a world where your voice is heard no matter how big or small, I dream of a world where the brand of your shoes doesn't really matter at all.

I dream of a world where racism doesn't exist and your sexuality isn't defined by a box, I dream of a world where it's okay to be weird and we are all as odd as our socks!

I dream of a world where there are no sorrowful children and that parents don't get divorced, I dream of a world where everyone feels valued and nothing again feels forced.

I dream of a world where animals are worshipped again, never tortured or abused, I dream of a world without hatred in it where the majority aren't confused.

I dream of a world where we swap goods and services and not the materials from our trees, I dream of a world where the government listens and we're not all on our knees.