



Virtual School Headteacher's

Annual Self-evaluation Report



2015-16

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NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council



Profile of the learners in Northumberland's Virtual School (at 31.08.16)



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Contents

	page
Executive summary	4
What changed in 2015-16	6
Journey through the key stages 2016	7
Improving teaching and learning	13
Achieving stability	17
Promoting inclusion	20
Emotional health and wellbeing	22
Our priorities for 2016-17	24

References

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2. *Outcomes for children looked after by Local Authorities 23rd March 2016*: DfE Statistical First Release (SFR12/2017)
3. *Ofsted framework for inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, care leavers* *Reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards*: February 2016
4. *Ofsted Social Care Annual Report 2016*, DfE 28 June 2016
5. *Children and Social Care Bill 2016-17*
6. *Creating a Culture: how school leaders can optimise behaviour*, Tom Bennett March 2017
7. *Children's attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care: NICE guideline NG26*, November 2015
8. *National Association of Virtual School Headteachers*, www.navsh.org.uk



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. Percentages can therefore vary considerably so that comparisons with other groups of pupils or establishing trends in performance over time are not always meaningful.

Executive summary

1. Northumberland's Virtual School was identified as a **strength in the local authority's Ofsted inspection** of services for *children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers* in February 2016. The report acknowledges the effectiveness of partnership working with Designated Teachers in schools and quotes overwhelmingly positive feedback from the pupils themselves that 'ESLAC is mint'.



"ESLAC is mint"

Ofsted February 2016

2. **Care can make a positive difference to a child's life** and this Annual Report of Northumberland's Virtual School Headteacher sets out how in 2015-16 we can evidence that assertion with good and improving education outcomes. In addition to Ofsted's validation we know we have been successful because our looked after learners make progress from the point that they enter care, school placement stability is good and we are skilled at developing clear vocational and academic pathways into further education, employment and training which improves life chances.

3. Northumberland has sustained its record of **no permanent exclusion** of a looked after child since 2008. This achievement can be attributed to strong partnership working with inclusive schools across the county to ensure that the right intervention is commissioned at the right time for individual pupils. Nationally the rate of permanent exclusions for looked after children is around twice as high as the rate for all children, but continues to be less than the rate for all children in need.

4. Our looked after learners at **Key Stage 1 out-performed their non-looked after peers nationally and their Northumberland peers in mathematics**. Achievement in the other key measures was similarly impressive, with no gap recorded in writing. Looked after learners in Northumberland are twice as likely to achieve age-related expectations in Key Stage 1 than all looked after learners nationally in all three measures.

5. Northumberland looked after children are **twice as likely to succeed in the basics** than looked after pupils nationally, with 29.2% achieving the standard in Northumberland compared to the national average of 17.5%. This represents a **significant improvement in performance at Key Stage 4** since 2015, despite the impact of challenging new GCSE courses being evident for individual learners. The difference with all non-LAC pupils remains large however, at 32.8% and this needs to diminish. The Northumberland gap for those achieving the old measure of 5+A*-C including English and maths closed by 16.4%. More of our learners are progressing into further education in sixth forms and colleges than ever before and almost 100% of pupils who completed accredited courses in Year 11 have been engaged in further education, training or employment since September 2016.

6. For the second consecutive year **100% of our Year 13 pupils progressed to University**, having achieved excellent A'level results. The three students achieved 10 A'levels between them, which includes 3 A* and 3 A grades.

7. **Reducing school moves to improve placement stability** was already good and has improved significantly this year. Only 10.71% of all looked after children have made 1 school move in the last 2 years, compared to 18% in 2015. It was disappointing to see the PEP completion rate dip from 98.2% to 87.53%, due to a combination of long term staff absence and

a sharp increase in caseloads for ESLAC workers. The introduction of an ePEP next year will see completion rates rise again as the new and more efficient mechanism is implemented.

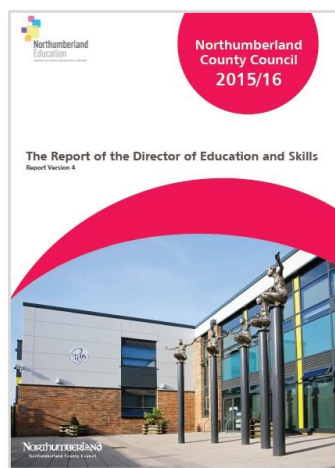
8. We are pleased that the **% of persistent absentees has fallen for the third consecutive year** and by 2 percentage points since 2015. Despite this downward direction of travel however, Northumberland is still much higher than the North East average and the number of pupils classed as persistent absentees needs to reduce. The DfE reports that looked after children are less likely to be classified as persistent absentees than all children and this is the case in Northumberland. Overall absence rates for looked after children (nationally) has decreased very slightly from 4.0% in 2015 to 3.9% in 2016. At 3.8% **Northumberland's performance is better than the national average.**

9. The **% of fixed term exclusions has not risen for three years** but it is high and needs to reduce to minimise the impact of this disruption to learning. We know that the exclusions relate to only 23 out of 258 pupils and we are providing additional support to improve their engagement with learning. In the context of DfE intelligence that looked after children are more than five times more likely to have a fixed period exclusion than all children then the chances of having needs met in an inclusive school are much higher in Northumberland than elsewhere in the country. We are also working in partnership with schools and education settings to improve understanding of attachment and trauma which often results in behaviours which lead to exclusions being used as a sanction.

10. For the previous three consecutive years there had been an improvement in outcomes for looked after pupils at Key Stage 2 and the gap had closed to 17% between Northumberland LAC and non-LAC Northumberland pupils. Against the new curriculum and using new accountability measures comparisons with previous years are no longer possible, but that **gap has increased significantly in 2016** which is disappointing. Achievement at Key Stage 2 was in line with our ambition for individual pupils, with several missing the expected standard by only 1 point. Designated teachers attribute this performance to pupils having only studied two years of a four year curriculum and anxiety as the tests approached.

11. Northumberland's looked after children **make good progress from their starting point** of date of entry into care. Monitoring of progress by the Virtual School for each national curriculum year group shows that for reading, writing/English and mathematics rates of progress have dipped since 2015 as pupils and teachers get to grips with the tougher curriculum and new progress measures. There is convincing evidence that the Pupil Premium Plus continues to have a positive impact on progress and therefore achievement, with PEPs demonstrating that the grant was successful in supporting pupils to achieve their learning objectives.

What changed in 2015-16



12. The *Report of the Director of Education and Skills 2015-16* tells us that from a school performance perspective Northumberland is rebuilding its capacity as an authority and rebuilding its schools. Read alongside this report of the Virtual School Headteacher, Northumberland can demonstrate that as a council it is a committed, improving and effective corporate parent. The council is also self-aware, and it is important to acknowledge that there is still work to be done to ensure that our looked after children attend good and outstanding schools and are given the right level of support at the right time to succeed.

13. The Children and Social Work Bill continues to progress through parliament and when passed will expand the role of the VSH and Designated Teachers for Looked After Children. In Northumberland we are preparing to support looked after and previously looked after pupils ie those learners who achieve permanence from care including those who are adopted, subject to placement orders and special guardianship orders (SGOs). Adopters as well as foster carers are keen to benefit from VSH support with schools around attachment, exclusions, mental health and admissions. A local offer for care leavers and an extension of the role of the Personal Advisor up to the age of 25 for all care leavers are also on the agenda.

14. The Ofsted inspection of *local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers* took place in Northumberland in February 2016. The experience for the Virtual School and education inclusion support services was positive overall, with lessons learned from the inspection resulting in swift actions being taken. An ePEP is now under development to capture the voices of pupils to influence their education progress and planning for the future. The Virtual School has stretched its resources to spread good practice for learners in further education and training as well as sixth forms, and now commissions an Information and Guidance Advisor to support all post-16 looked after children and care leavers.

15. The recently formed National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) continues to unite Virtual Schools and drives an agenda to improve our understanding of why children in care might under-achieve so that we can take action to steer their journey through the education system more successfully. Northumberland is one of 130 local authority Virtual School members and we share the national priorities which seek to change the narrative about the achievement of children in care. Raising awareness and improving understanding of attachment and trauma as the cause of gaps in learning and under-achievement rather than the child itself, alongside the different approach to behaviour management being promoted by DfE tsar Tom Bennett should force a cultural change in how we work with looked after children and eventually improve outcomes for them.

16. The Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) is empowered through a broader senior management role to commission services for vulnerable learners who are at risk of missing out on full time education and who might therefore under-achieve. This under-achievement has a lasting impact and affects a pupil's journey out of school and into education, employment and training. Working with partners in the local authority and through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), the statutory role of the Virtual School Headteacher has a crucial part to play in promoting social mobility.

Journey through the key stages 2016

17. We need to share the amazing success stories of our looked after children to challenge the idea that care inevitably results in failure.

EARLY YEARS

18. In Northumberland in 2016 there were 12 pupils in the Early Years cohort aged from 3 to 5:

- a. the percentage of non-LAC children achieving the expected level or better in all prime areas of learning nationally is unavailable*, for looked after children in Northumberland is 40%;
- b. the percentage of non-LAC children achieving the expected level or better in all specific areas of learning nationally is unavailable*, for looked after children in Northumberland is 20%;
- c. the percentage of non-LAC children achieving the expected level or better in all learning goals nationally is 67.3%, for looked after children in Northumberland is 50%;
- d. the percentage of non-LAC children achieving a good level of development (achieving the expected level or better in all prime areas, all literacy and all mathematics) is 69%, for looked after children in Northumberland is 40%;
- e. the average total EYFS point score in 2016 is 27.6 (for non-LAC children nationally is 34.5).

**where national data is suppressed due to the small cohort*

19. In 2016 more of Northumberland's looked after children had a good level of development (GLD) than last year, although still performed well below the national average for non-looked after children. At such an early starting point in the care system this legacy of under-achievement is well understood. However with our Key Stage 1 children out-performing their non-LAC peers nationally in at least one measure, there is compelling evidence that the introduction of a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to pre-school age children in 2015 has had a positive impact on a looked after child's journey into Year 1 and that the early years pupil premium is effective in closing gaps in achievement by the end of Reception.

20. We were lucky to have two playworkers based with us during 2015-16. Their energy and expertise enabled the Virtual School to promote the development of our younger pupils by engaging them in learning through play. They focussed mainly on those who were not 'school ready' and therefore struggling to cope in school due to their circumstances. Both playworkers were trained as Thrive practitioners and deployed in a reactive way, referred through ESLAC workers who were able to identify those in need early and send in our troubleshooters. The play workers undertook a mixture of work from one to one sessions, to supporting children to be part of their class group, to group work using a programme designed to encourage and promote social integration in the playground leading to better peer relationships. Their work was based in first, middle, primary and special schools and they also held holiday sessions for looked after children, some including carers. The impact of the playworkers was tangible and the improved engagement and development of the children they worked with is captured in their PEPs.

KEY STAGE 1

21. Outcomes for our 7 year olds in 2016 are excellent and this was the best performance for our Year 2 pupils in the history of the Virtual School. In all three measures of the % of pupils meeting national age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics our looked after children significantly out-performed looked after children nationally and challenged their non-

LAC peers across the board. In mathematics at 76.9% they out-performed all non-LAC in Northumberland (76%) and all non-LAC nationally (73%). In writing at 69.2% there was no gap with all non-LAC in Northumberland (70%) and non-LAC nationally (70%). In reading an impressive 69.2% met age-related expectations compared to 78% and 74% respectively for their non-LAC peers in Northumberland and nationally. There were 8 pupils in the cohort, 3 of whom have SEND and 3 were in schools in other local authorities.

22. Pupils at Key Stage 1 took the Phonics test (age 6/Year 1) and Phonics re-check (age 7/Year 2). Only 5 pupils took the test in 2016 and 20%, or one pupil, was assessed as working towards the expected standard. This is a dip compared to last year where achievement reached 72%. No looked after learners were required to take the re-test in Year 2. The gap for the 4 year 1 pupils with their non-LAC peers is a concern which is being addressed in preparation for the re-check in 2017.

KEY STAGE 2

23. Our 2016 Year 6 pupils were the first to be assessed against the new National Curriculum, which significantly raised expectations of young people's mastery of literacy and numeracy by the age of 11. Pupils were tested in reading, maths and SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) and assessed by their teachers in writing.

24. 25% of looked after children nationally reached the new expected standard or above in the headline measure reading, writing and mathematics combined compared to only 11% in Northumberland. The overall % is lower than the percentage reaching the expected standard or above in individual subjects which in Northumberland ranges from 25% in reading, 29% in mathematics and 36% in writing. Compared to non-looked after children (55% of all pupils in Northumberland and 53.3% of all non-LAC pupils nationally) attainment for looked after children is therefore much lower, and the lower performance in reading is consistent with the pattern of attainment in Northumberland in previous years.

25. With 18 looked after children in the cohort it is unusually large, with an over-representation of pupils with a high level of SEND -13 of those 18 pupils have an identified special educational need, including 5 with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). 2 pupils were placed in schools outside of Northumberland, 1 pupil attended a special school and at the time of the end of year assessments 1 pupil was on a placement at the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

26. Despite this profile several pupils missed the expected standard by only one point and the impact of the relentless work of schools and the Virtual School to help learners navigate their way through this new and therefore unknown process is evident. 16 of the 18 pupils attended schools which are judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and 15 of the 18 pupils enjoyed very good school placement stability, with only 3 pupils experiencing 1 school placement move during the four years of Key Stage 2. Attendance was very good and there were no permanent exclusions.

27. We measure and monitor progress across the primary years from the point of entry into care. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is initiated immediately and baseline assessments are recorded by the Virtual School. Progress from that starting point can therefore be regularly recorded and we can intervene or challenge to influence continued progress for individuals. In 2015 progress for Years 1 to 6 for looked after children in Northumberland were tracking above the national average in all three areas of reading, writing and maths. In 2016 that picture is less

positive, but due in part to the great variety of methods and measures of progress used in primary phase schools now that national curriculum levels have been abandoned.

28. Previous to 2016 there had been a 3 year trend in RAISE online for attainment and national curriculum levels of progress from Key Stage 1 to 2 indicating that looked after children in Northumberland consistently performed above the national average in all three disciplines. The DfE has emphasised that the statistics are not comparable to previous national standards because of changes to the national curriculum and accountability framework.

KEY STAGE 4

29. The context of the impressive achievements of this Key Stage 4 cohort of 22 pupils is important – half have statements or EHCPlans, with another 6 also being assessed as having a special educational need. Significantly, 6 pupils attend special schools nor non-mainstream settings and 7 pupils did not access GCSE courses. This profile appears not to have been a barrier to achievement with outcomes at Key Stage 4 improving significantly since 2015.

30. Northumberland looked after children are twice as likely to succeed in the basics than looked after pupils nationally, with 29.2% achieving the standard in Northumberland compared to the national average of 17.5%. The difference with all non-LAC pupils remains large however, at 32.8% and this needs to diminish. Our pupils performed better in English (36.36%) than in maths (27.27%) and several pupils exceeded expectations, with for example 2 pupils at Parkside independent special school achieving grade Cs in English.

31. Of the 15 pupils entered for GCSE courses, 5 pupils achieved the old measure of 5+A*-C including English and mathematics (22.7%) compared to 59% achieved by all non-LAC Northumberland pupils. This means that the gap in attainment between our Looked After Children and non-looked after pupils closed significantly by 16.4%. 14 pupils, or 63.4%, achieved 5*A-G.

32. Factors contributing to the improved performance at Key Stage 4 include the fact that 64% of pupils attended schools graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and school/home placement stability were both good during Years 10 and 11. Both the Virtual School and school expectations of these pupils were high, and progress was monitored very closely throughout the two years of the key stage.

33. We still need to improve outcomes at Key Stage 4 but it is important that the extent of the challenge facing some of our pupils is acknowledged so that their achievements can be celebrated with those who achieved the key measures expected nationally. 7 pupils were unable to engage in full time education at school and attended alternative providers for at least part of each week. Alternatives including tuition and work experience were offered which improved engagement and helped to build pathways into education, employment and training at the end of Year 11. Exclusions from school were low but 5 pupils in the cohort were persistent absentees and proved difficult to reach.

34. 2016 is the first year of three new performance measures for schools - Progress 8 measures pupils' progress across eight subjects from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4, while Attainment 8 measures average attainment across those subjects by the end of Key Stage 4. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) allows people to see how many pupils get a A*-C or above in core academic subjects at Key Stage 4.

35. At 22.9 the Virtual School's Attainment 8 score is in line with all other Virtual Schools (LAC average 22.8) with a gap of -26.79 with all other non-LAC pupils. This gap is reduced when the effects of the proportion of children with SEND is removed. None of Northumberland's looked after pupils achieved a grade in a modern foreign language so there is no Virtual School figure to report for the EBacc.

36. Northumberland is in line with the national position that looked after children progress less well than non-looked after children. Compared to all 'real' mainstream schools the Virtual School performed -1.6 below the national average (all schools) for Progress 8. This means that our looked after pupils achieved an average of more than a whole grade worse per subject than non-LAC pupils nationally with the same prior attainment at Key Stage 2 and worse than all LAC nationally where the average is -1.14. This judgement should be qualified however in the context of our looked after pupils' rates of progress.

37. The Virtual School is interested in the progress pupils make from the point they entered care. Without national curriculum levels and a standardised assessment framework it has become more challenging to do this in a meaningful way. However, the assessment process we introduced in September 2015 has had some success and for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils we can report with confidence that progress in English and mathematics remains good, with nearly half of our learners making better than expected progress from the point they entered care. The assessment process is a focus for improvement next year, to refine the system so that smaller steps of progress can be captured from all schools with looked after children on roll.

KEY STAGE 5 AND DESTINATIONS

38. It is very pleasing that for the last four years the number of young people who have continued into education, employment and training by September has stayed consistently high, with the majority in school sixth forms or FE colleges. Individual learners have raised their aspirations in response to the high expectations of professionals and carers.

Age 16 – 18	Sept -12	Sept -13	Sept -14	Sept-15	Sept-16
Number of LAC	29	62	57	23	22
Number in EET	23 (79%)	53 (85%)	48 (84%)	19 (83%)	21 (95%)
Number in FE	10 (34)	25 (40%)	17 (30%)	14 (61%)	13 (59%)
Number in 6th form	9 (31%)	20 (32%)	19 (33%)	5 (22%)	5 (23%)

39. 21 of the 22 pupils of the 2016 Year 11 cohort were in EET by September of the same year. 5 progressed into sixth forms at school, 13 enrolled on college courses, 1 engaged in an apprenticeship and 1 is following a vocational further education course. 1 pupil is receiving education in a secure setting and 1 young person received support from the Virtual School's new Personal Advisor for Information and Guidance (IAG) to secure an appropriate destination.

40. This is evidence that our young people value their achievements. For the second consecutive year 3 of our Year 13 students enjoyed great success at A'level and have secured

University places at Northumbria. Between them they achieved 10 A'levels, which includes 3 A* and 3 A grades.

41. A positive outcome from the local authority's Ofsted inspection in February 2016 was that the Virtual School commissioned a part time IAG Advisor to work with looked after children from the age of 14+ until their 19th birthday (at least). The long-term objective is to reduce the number of care leavers up to the age of 25 who are not in education, employment or training by monitoring engagement in all post 16 destinations to have a positive impact on retention and successful completion of courses. The impact of this professional support is evidenced in the excellent retention rate in EET in September 2016. The post has also improved integration between the Virtual School and other local authority teenage adolescent services which will be evidenced in next year's outcomes.

42. We are particularly proud of our track record for recruiting an increasing number of pupils into school sixth forms in Year 12. Since 2013 all Looked After Children who progress to Year 12 in school settings continue to be supported by the Personal Education Advisor in the Virtual School and the PEP is maintained to Year 13. Key Stage 4 pupils continue to participate, albeit in lower numbers this year, in the Choices Together programme delivered by Sunderland University to encourage looked after children to aspire to higher education when they leave school. The Virtual School therefore provides intensive careers information and guidance to pupils throughout Key Stage 4 alongside their school/academy or education provider evidenced by better retention on school sixth form courses. The effectiveness of this model was highlighted by Ofsted in February 2016 with the recommendation that 14+ social care services develop parallel EET support processes as part of the Pathway Plan for young people who choose further education in college settings, employment or training.

43. Year on year comparisons are difficult to make for Key Stage 5, but an increasing number of learners remain in contact with us or come back to us for guidance and support when planning for their futures.

NORTHUMBERLAND PUPILS PLACED IN OUT OF AUTHORITY SCHOOLS

44. We believe that Northumberland's Virtual School is unique in continuing to provide face to face support to individual looked after children when their education placement is in another local authority. This is a strength. The PEP, Pupil Premium Plus and social and emotional support continue and the ESLAC workers have good relationships with schools whichever local authority they might be in. Outcomes for that group of learners are in line with looked after children in Northumberland schools and therefore demonstrate the impact of this continuity and persistence.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN FROM OTHER AUTHORITIES

45. Looked after learners from other Local Authorities are not supported directly by the Virtual School but we do facilitate dialogue between our schools and Virtual Schools in other authorities. There were positive outcomes for these learners in 2016 which is a strong indicator of the impact of our training and the inclusive approach of Northumberland's Designated Teachers. 6 pupils from other authorities were in Northumberland schools in Year 6, 3 with SEND. 2 pupils achieved age related expectations for the combined measure. Outcomes at Key Stage 4 were also good. There were 5 pupils in Year 11, 1 with SEND, and 3 achieved 5+ A*-G and 1 pupil achieved 9 A*-C.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

46. 100% of the transitions from statements of special educational need to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for our looked after children were fast tracked and completed within timescale for 2015-16. 50% of our looked after learners have a recognised special educational need or disability and 20% have an EHCP. There is considerable expertise within the ESLAC team of supporting pupils with special and complex need, and the senior Education Support Worker has a remit to work closely with special schools and the Disabled Children's Team. There is now a named officer in the SEND Monitoring team with responsibility for looked after children.

47. Integrated working between the Virtual School and specialist support services has had a positive impact on outcomes in 2016 for all cohorts:

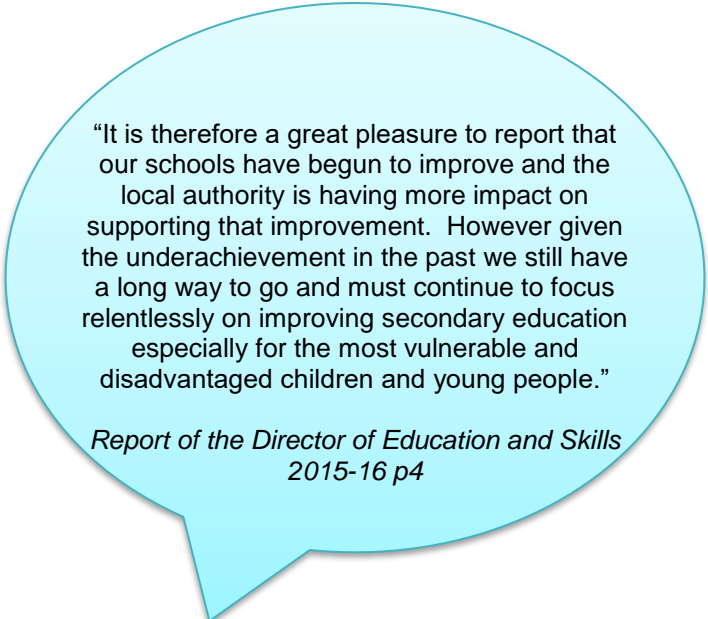
- 13 pupils or 72% of the official Key Stage 2 cohort have SEND, 2 achieved national age related expectations although 2 were not entered for the tests;
- 17 pupils or 77% of the official Key Stage 4 cohort have SEND, 10 achieved 5+A*-G in any combination of GCSE subjects.

48. These achievements are impressive and the context is important as there is a high level of SEND in the Northumberland looked after cohort for 2016. Attainment for looked after children with an identified SEND is similar to non-looked after children, but in 2016 57.3% of looked after children in England had a special educational need compared to 14.4% of all children. Looked after children are four times more likely to have a special educational need than all children and are almost 10 times as likely to have a statement or EHCP.

49. The number of looked after pupils who have special educational needs affects placement stability. 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. Further consideration is therefore 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).

Improving teaching and learning

50. Two thirds (64%) of our looked after children attended good or outstanding schools in Northumberland and one third attended good or outstanding schools in other local authorities. Last year the Virtual School had to place pupils in schools which were less than good after taking into consideration a range of factors including social wellbeing, foster carer placement, the pupil's overall care plan. 2016 saw an upturn in school standard in Northumberland schools and this will benefit our looked after learners. The quality of primary phase schools remains strong with around 87% found by Ofsted to be good or outstanding. At last we are beginning to see signs of recovery in our secondary schools but we remain as one of ten local authorities in England with 40% or more of pupils in secondary schools and academies that are less than good and where attainment and progress measured by the new accountability measures are below average.



"It is therefore a great pleasure to report that our schools have begun to improve and the local authority is having more impact on supporting that improvement. However given the underachievement in the past we still have a long way to go and must continue to focus relentlessly on improving secondary education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people."

*Report of the Director of Education and Skills
2015-16 p4*

51. For those who are in a school which is not yet good the Virtual School applies a monitoring process which is triggered promptly when the outcome of an inspection is known. To date we have not moved a learner because of the Ofsted grade of a school, a decision justified by the outcomes for those learners. There is no correlation between achievement and the Ofsted grade of the school/academy. Progress is a primary factor followed closely by emotional wellbeing and the content of the Care Plan. A placement which supports the stability of the home placement is prioritised.

52. The teaching workforce of the Virtual School is our Designated Teachers. Through them we influence an approach to teaching and learning which creates a context where pupils feel safe and can do their best. Key to achieving consistency in this approach is the Personal Education Plan (PEP) mechanism which is part of our framework for tracking pupil progress. Of the Designated teachers who attended Virtual School training this year, 100% rated it as good with 94% rating it as very good.

53. Although Pupil Premium Plus funding does reach the pupils who most need it and we are flexible with how it is distributed, for the first time in 2016 the Virtual School used the funding more effectively by retaining a fixed amount at the beginning of the financial year. We were able to plan better expenditure for the year to fund central initiatives through the Virtual School to promote the education achievement of all looked after children in the county. This is in keeping with practice in our neighbouring Virtual Schools, although most of our neighbours retain a higher proportion centrally.

54. The VSH holds schools and academies to account for the impact of the PP+ grant through the Pupil Premium Plus agreement which is part of every looked after child's PEP. We continue to adopt an outcomes based approach, allocating the grant to support agreed personal learning targets which is signed off by the school's Headteacher and the VSH. In 2016 the majority of outcomes for individual pupils were achieved, with the largest type at 64% relating to academic targets then 19% relating to academic/social. 75% of those children achieved or exceeded their

PEP targets which is the same rate as 2015. Outcomes for all year groups is evidence that the funding had a positive impact on achievement.

55. 77% of the grant was dispersed to schools and academies to reach pupils directly:

- pupils eligible for the grant;
- pupils who left care during the financial year;
- Post-16 pupils settling into school sixth forms;
- pupils who came into care during the financial year.

56. The remainder funded planned expenditure from the Virtual School to promote the education achievement of all looked after learners belonging to Northumberland:

- Thrive attachment training for the Virtual School workforce of Designated Teachers and key professionals;
- ePEP development on the Schools' 360 learning platform (to be implemented in 2017);
- intensive tuition for Year 6 and Year 11 pupils in English and maths;
- one to one tuition for pupils who need it – all Year 10 and 11 pupils who request additional tuition receive it;
- commissioning an Education Psychologist to work for the Virtual School;
- provision of full time education and English and maths tuition for persistent absentees – our Pathways Provision;
- equine therapy;
- introduction of an Expert Learner Award;
- rewards for looked after children – attendance, progress, achievement;
- 20 mobile learning licences (nimbl) and iPads for pupils to use with foster carers at home.

57. Northumberland is set to influence national work on the use and impact of PP+ through the National Association of Virtual School Heads. Ed Timpson (Minister for Children and Families) has commissioned a working group to do research around impact to further enhance positive outcomes for looked after children and care leavers, following an initial survey undertaken by NAVSH.

58. In September 2015 the Virtual School started implementation of an assessment system to track pupil progress, based on and adapted from the framework developed by Gateshead Virtual School. The tracking system assesses individual pupils against the national curriculum age-related expectations for early years and each primary phase year group in reading/writing/mathematics where progress is described as *Emerging, Developing, Secure and Mastered*. Designated Teachers use the descriptors to 'best fit' their own school's assessment system so that the Virtual School can monitor and compare pupils in each cohort. In 2017 we will refine the system to measure smaller steps of progress, especially for those pupils who are not yet working through their age-related curriculum.

59. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are very important. They co-ordinate the input of three essential professionals around each looked after learner – the Designated Teacher, the foster carer(s) and the social worker – and therefore promote school placement stability. They enable the VSH to challenge schools and hold them to account for the impact of the PP+. The PEP completion rate in Northumberland for 2016 is 87.53% which is good but lower than previous years when rates have consistently reached 98-100%. We are not making excuses and have

put measures in place for 2017 to rectify this, but staff illness and the resignation of one member of staff do account for the dip. ESLAC team workers have been under pressure as numbers of school age children going into care have risen, and we have extended support for early years and post-16 pupils with no increase in our resources.

60. Individualised learning programmes for Key Stage 4 pupils have a positive impact on attendance at school and attitudes to learning. The ESLAC KS4/5 Personal Education Advisor leads in this area by liaising closely with schools to ensure that schools maintain a fully inclusive approach to their looked after learners. In 2016 we added to the resourcing of a personalised curriculum using e-learning tuition, (nimbl) which took learning into foster homes. The potential impact on our learners of new GCSE courses was closely monitored to ensure learners received the broad and balanced curriculum to which they are entitled as schools came under pressure to deliver on the new Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures. We were particularly concerned about the implications of modular courses being replaced, English literature not being compulsory and no opportunity to resit exams in the majority of subjects. Outcomes at Key Stage 4 indicate that our pupils in 2016 coped well with the change, and were well supported by ESLAC staff and their schools.

61. As good corporate parents we made sure that Northumberland looked after pupils did not miss out on enrichment activities or resources which might be provided to other pupils by their birth parents. For another year we funded a Personal Education Allowance (PEA) which Designated Teachers can apply on behalf of looked after pupils. Unfortunately the Letterbox scheme no longer tracks the acceleration of reading skills for pupils but thanks to the PEA all pupils new into care received a book bag and pupils in every year group received new books at PEP meetings; we invested in education technology so that all Key Stage 4 pupils could access good quality learning at home; we made it possible for pupils to attend school educational trips, and many benefited from enrichment activities such as music tuition.

62. All looked after children in school settings are able to enjoy instrumental tuition from Northumberland's Music Service. No charge is made for instrument hire and tuition fees are subsidised. The number of looked after children participating in these lessons is monitored by the service to ensure that all barriers to accessing the tuition on a long term basis are removed and the service provides termly data to the Arts Council about the numbers of looked after children participating in their programmes. From 1st March 2015 to present the number of LAC receiving regular tuition is 16 and 12 children are involved in the music service programme First Access. 4 children received out of school music tuition through funded by the PEA.

63. Our quality assurance of alternative providers is a strength and ensures that our looked after learners receive their entitlement to good quality full time education. In collaboration with the children's Commissioning team and the education Inclusion team, the 14 providers on the Council's procurement framework are monitored through contract compliance visits and their own self-assessment of standards and outcomes. From September 2016 each provider will receive an annual visit from a School Improvement Partner.

64. A system was implemented during 2015-16 to monitor the registers of the providers of alternative education on the Council's framework to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and the regulations for registering as independent schools. Alternative education provider events are also held so that communication is good and understanding of Northumberland arrangements for safeguarding children are followed.

65. In 2016 we worked with schools to ensure that pupils were re-integrated into mainstream schools whenever possible and that in alternative settings everyone made progress in English and maths. The new role of ESLAC Inclusion Support Worker for 2016 has made a difference. The postholder worked relentlessly to track pupils in alternative provision and had a positive impact on improving education placement stability. Strengthened tracking arrangements for pupils in alternative provision helped to avoid under-achievement and improve engagement. The ESLAC Inclusion Support Worker took responsibility for arranging work experience, college placements and other alternative opportunities for Key Stage 4 pupils.

66. We refreshed our approach to partnership working with foster carers and a guide to promoting education for looked after children is now included in the mandatory *Skills to Foster* training. The guide includes advice on common issues faced by school aged looked after children in education; why education matters from 0-19+; how to seek further support; the impact of mobility on education; information about exclusions, including illegal exclusions; extra-curricular activities. A pilot training session on attachment was also delivered to foster carers by our Education Psychologist and a full programme is now being developed for implementation in 2017.

67. In July 2016 the Virtual School plans awarded for the first time our new Expert Learner Award for looked after pupils at a well-attended celebration with learners, foster carers and ESLAC. An inspirational talk from a care leaver currently studying at Teesside University added to the evening. The award was introduced to acknowledge and celebrate the outstanding education achievements of our looked after learners and successful pupils received a Virtual School Expert Learner pin badge and an iPad. We wanted the award to have value and to be something which in future years all looked after learners can aspire to achieve. The criteria are challenging but were delighted that 6 pupils were successful. The criteria are:

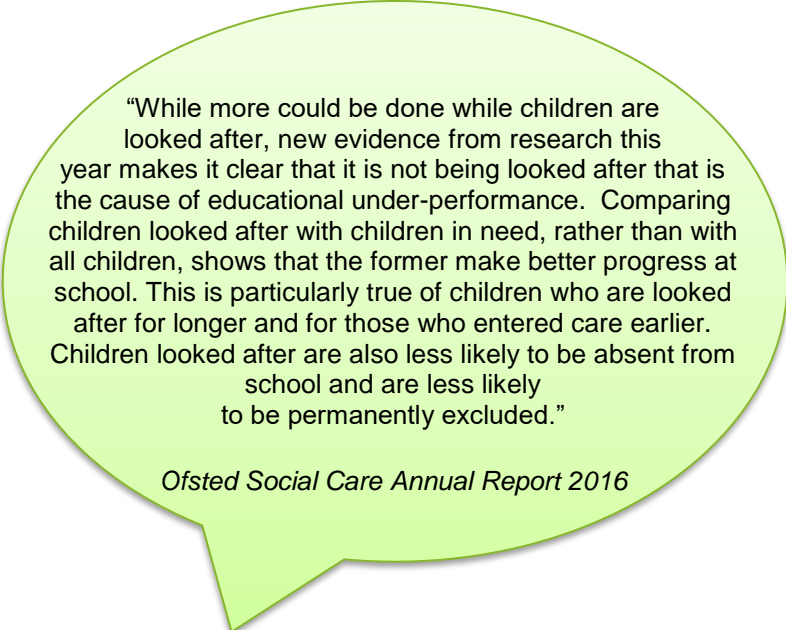
- attendance of 97% for the academic year (average over 3 terms, exceptions made for pupils who have been absent due to illness);
- no exclusions (fixed term or permanent, all 3 terms);
- progress at least good in English and maths for all 3 terms (based on termly assessment of progress);
- effort described/assessed as trying their best (all 3 terms);
- participation in a school based enrichment activity (at least 1 activity and sustained for 3 terms).

68. In July we disseminated an audit tool to Designated Teachers which has been developed by NAVSH to support schools' self-evaluation of the quality and impact of their provision for children in care. A programme has been developed to implement the tool during 2017. The framework is a tool for Designated Teachers to use to inform their annual report, governors and senior leadership team about the quality and impact of provision for looked after children.

69. The ESLAC team is skilled and makes a difference. All team members benefited from professional development this year including training on the new Ofsted section 5 inspection framework with a focus on vulnerable learners (Ofsted inspector, Virtual School Head Gateshead); assessment arrangements and the new national curriculum (VSH); Progress 8 and new performance measures (Northumberland Data Unit); Thrive attachment training (Thrive); Annual Conference of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (keynote speaker Ed Timpson, DfE).

Achieving stability

70. Underpinning all aspects of the Virtual School's work is a commitment to minimising disruptions to learning so that looked after children achieve the stability they need to learn and flourish.



"While more could be done while children are looked after, new evidence from research this year makes it clear that it is not being looked after that is the cause of educational under-performance. Comparing children looked after with children in need, rather than with all children, shows that the former make better progress at school. This is particularly true of children who are looked after for longer and for those who entered care earlier. Children looked after are also less likely to be absent from school and are less likely to be permanently excluded."

Ofsted Social Care Annual Report 2016

71. School placement stability is good and improving, with a reduction from 18% in 2015 to only 10.71% of pupils in 2016 experiencing more than one school placement in the last two years. Years 10 and 11 continue to be the most mobile but improved transition arrangements, especially for mid-term moves, have had a positive impact on stability. The Virtual School continues to have a considerable influence on school placements and this promotes stability. Integrated working between the Placement Referral Co-ordinator and the ESLAC team at the point of admission into care ensures that action is swift. We have a risk averse approach to

placement stability and encourage social workers to communicate early and regularly with ESLAC workers about school concerns.

72. For the eighth consecutive year we sustained our record of no permanent exclusions of Northumberland looked after children, either from our own schools or those out of authority. This achievement can be attributed to strong partnership working with inclusive schools to ensure that the VSH can commission the right intervention at the right time for individual pupils. Nationally the rate of permanent exclusions for looked after children is around twice as high as the rate for all children, but continues to be less than the rate for all children in need. The skilled and early intervention of ESLAC workers to stabilise school placements has also meant that when placement changes were needed they were swift, and there were therefore **no** managed moves for looked after children in 2016 either.

73. It was a priority for 2016 to reduce fixed term exclusions and our own data shows that we were successful with 9% of Northumberland's looked after children having at least one fixed period exclusion, relating to 23 pupils from a virtual school roll of 258. The direction of travel is downwards from 13.36% in 2015 which was significantly higher than the national picture at 10.42%. The reduction is attributable to the impact of Thrive attachment training, targeted work with individuals and challenging the inclusiveness of schools. (*National validated data for exclusions is lagged*).

74. Reducing persistent absence continues to be a priority for the Virtual School and we know that we need to do better. In 2014-15 persistent absence for all Northumberland looked after children, regardless of how long they have been in care, was 10.8% with an improvement to 8.84% for 2015-16. The improvement compares well to rates for all non-LAC pupils at 10% against an England average of 9.1%. This is encouraging and means that our approach is starting to work.

75. For 2016 the DfE introduced a new benchmark measure for persistent absence which counts only those children who have been in care for 12 months or more. Using this measure the percentage of Northumberland's looked after children classed as persistently absent is relatively high at 13.5% compared with the national average of 9.1%, and our existing plans in place should address this.

76. We know who our persistent absentees are and understand the chaos in their lives which inevitably disrupt their education. For 2016 we created a new post in the ESLAC team for a Key Stage 4 Inclusion Support Worker whose caseload is those who already are or who are at risk of becoming persistent absentees from age 14+. The approach is to involve individuals and their carers, including relative carers, in personalised education packages through engagement programmes when appropriate. We aim to intervene before persistence becomes routine.

77. One size does not fit all and the challenge for professionals and the pupils themselves is immense. There were 22 pupils in the Key Stage 4 Inclusion Support Worker's caseload in 2016, all of whom were offered alternatives to full time mainstream school including tuition, alternative providers and work experience. 6 of those pupils spent a period of time during the year in Kyoie House secure children's home, 2 pupils were sectioned. 10 of those pupils completed Year 11 in 2016 with an average attendance of 52%. Yet since September only 2 pupils are not engaging at all with us to find education, employment or training, 1 of whom is now pregnant. We refer to this support as the Virtual School's Pathways Provision, with the objective of ensuring that despite missing out on education through school absence all of these pupils have a vocational pathway into education, employment and training when they reach age 16. The success at securing destinations for this group of pupils combined with the downward trend in persistent absence demonstrates what a difference ESLAC workers are making to young people's lives.

78. Every PEP has an attendance target which is monitored by ESLAC and Designated Teachers. Trends are identified quickly both on the PEP itself and by professionals working with each child. Monthly attendance data is collected by the Virtual School and action is taken as soon as attendance dips below 95%.

79. There are benefits from the VSH also being Northumberland's Head of Inclusion. Integrated working with the Education Welfare team started to have an impact in 2016 when one ESLAC team member became a part time Education Welfare Officer and continued to manage looked after children cases. The impact with foster carers and social workers is also encouraging and regular training has been provided regarding attendance and exclusion issues, as well as guidance to schools on completing registers accurately for those pupils who attend alternatives for at least part of each school week.

80. Overall absence for Northumberland's looked after children has improved consistently since 2013, falling from 5.2% to 3.8% in 2016. 86% of pupils achieved attendance for the year of 95% or over and 34 pupils were awarded the Virtual School's Platinum award for 100% attendance all year, an increase from 21 pupils in 2015.

81. Since October 2015 there has been a significant increase in the number of fixed term exclusions of looked after children in Northumberland. There are many reasons for this, however we know that as a measure to modify behaviours and meet individual needs that exclusions simply do not work. The attachment guidance and training and inclusion support services at the local authority can make a difference.

82. In 2016 all looked after learners were admitted within the statutory 20 day school timeframe and the Local Authority has not had to direct a school to admit. The type of provision arranged

for individual pupils is based on a multi-agency assessment of need, with schools and social workers being closely involved.

83. We know that the length of time in care has an impact on achievement. Data from previous years does demonstrate a positive impact, for example in 2016 in Northumberland 80% (4 pupils) pupils gaining 5+A*-C including English and maths had been in care for over seven years with only 20% (1 pupil) achieving 5+A*-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.

Promoting inclusion

84. We listened to the voice of our looked after learners through *Northumberland's Looked After and Accommodated Survey* in 2016 when 96% told us that they felt safe at school, 96% told us that they get enough help at school, and 71% feel that they are coping well or very well at school. We are succeeding at working in partnership with professionals to create inclusive environments where pupils feel safe to learn. We also listened to the voices who told us that 29% are not coping well, that 25% do not know who their Designated Teacher is and that 63% have been bullied at school.

85. For the third consecutive year there were no looked after children recorded as missing from education or left the area and not found or placed onto the lost pupil system, demonstrating the continued effectiveness of our well-established multi-agency protocol. Data is held centrally on all pupils not receiving full time education and is updated monthly. A first day absence protocol is also in place for pupils being educated other than at school.

86. Unfortunately we are not always successful at engaging all CME in learning, but we never give up and during 2015-16 only 1 looked after child went missing from education. This learner had intensive support from ESLAC, social care and other services and a range of options were provided.

87. Northumberland's 'Missing Out' Guidance recognises looked after children as an 'at risk' group and this protocol provides for fast track admission arrangements and specific procedures to monitor carefully their school attendance to take early action where a pattern of non-attendance is identified. The protocol provides for the monitoring of attendance by Education Welfare Officers who must alert ESLAC when a looked after child or young person has 5 consecutive days of absence or 5 days of absence in any school half-term period. On receiving the referral the ESLAC Team manager liaises with the child's Social Worker to decide if further action is needed. If action is required then a multi-agency meeting is convened within 5 working days, to include an Information, Advice and Guidance Personal Advisor if the child attends a high school.

88. Ensuring that pupils who are not able to attend school full time, still receive their entitlement to full time quality education is a strength. The number of looked after pupils going into alternative provision has risen and is related to those who have disengaged and become persistent absentees. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Many pupils are in need of a more diverse and vocational curriculum by the time they reach Year 9 and not all of our schools, for whatever reason, are able to provide that. A combination of factors have contributed to this rise, including the higher number of looked after pupils with SEND or requiring SEND support and the pressure schools are experiencing with the new Progress 8 and Attainment 8 performance measures to offer a more traditional academic curriculum. The fact that numbers have risen but outcomes at Key Stage 4 are improving for this group of pupils, with increasing numbers achieving Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications in English and maths to progress into education, training and employment at 16, shows that pupils can engage in a curriculum which is relevant to them and in which they can succeed.

89. Nevertheless, a significant number of pupils are left in alternative provision when they could be re-integrated back into mainstream school and work needs to be done with schools to ensure that the rate of re-integration improves.

90. In 2016 12 looked after learners attended alternative providers on a part time basis, and 1 learner attended full time. Integrated working with other professionals enables us to plan curriculum packages, often at short notice, to meet individual pupil needs. Always mindful of the need to plan an academic or vocational pathway into age 16+, alternative providers continue to play a crucial part in engaging and motivating our learners. 3 of our Year 11 learners who attended alternative provision during Key Stage 4 progressed into further education or an apprenticeship from September. The attendance overall for Key Stage 4 for those in alternative provision was 64.53% which needs to improve alongside the rate of successful re-integration into mainstream settings and pathways into further training and employment.

91. New this year is a mechanism to support the education of looked after children in who are young offenders and in custody, which was set up by the Key Stage 4 Inclusion Support Worker. Support with education was therefore provided to 1 pupil in custody and 2 who were sectioned during 2016. For those young people who are placed in the secure estate, either on remand or via section 25 placements, the educational lead within the various establishments and the Virtual School Head can work in partnership with the Virtual School to:

- ensure that information about prior education achievement is received by the secure setting;
- ensure that a PEP is in place – either received from or initiated by the belonging local authority;
- encourage settings to adopt an inclusive approach to newly arrived pupils e.g. issue a unique pupil number (UPN) if necessary;
- work with the setting to establish an achievement ‘history’ for each pupil;
- collect progress data and information for the Virtual School in the belonging authority;
- provide support and guidance for education professionals in secure settings, including on-going communication with professionals in the belonging local authority;
- ensure that at the end of the custodial period the belonging local authority receives a copy of the up to date PEP including a full achievement history and re-integration/destination plan for the individual.

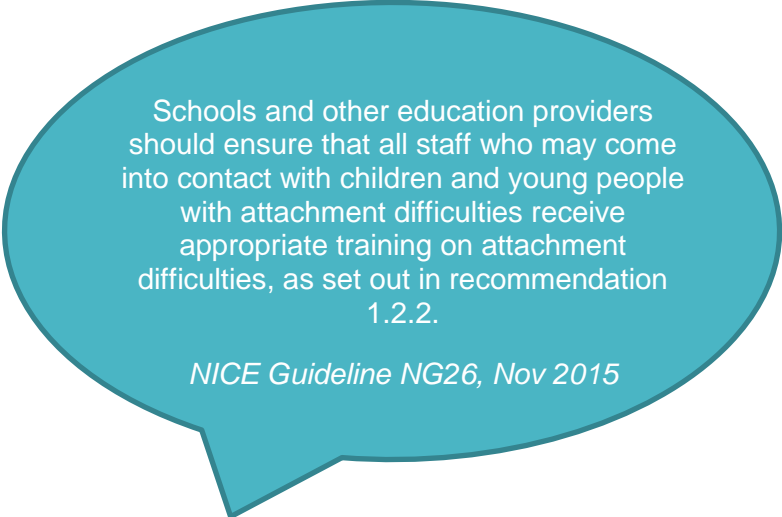
92. In these circumstances we aim to also influence the quality of provision and the curriculum offered (including alternative education programmes where practical for a secure setting), and work with professionals to manage the transition back into the community and mainstream education or training settings. The benefits of supporting the resettlement plans through the coordination of education or training with the social care and youth offending teams will promote better outcomes for young people.

93. Building on the work done in 2015 to address our looked after children’s experiences of bullying, Northumberland’s residential homes worked with the Schools’ Wellbeing Co-ordinator to adapt the Healthy Schools Award. Consequently they now all have a Healthy Homes Award and meet high standards for promoting inclusive and safe environments conducive to learning and good emotional wellbeing at the home.

Emotional health and wellbeing

94. Looked after children are approximately four times more likely to have a mental disorder than children living in their birth families. Almost half meet the criteria for a psychiatric disorder. The majority present with attachment issues, some with attachment disorder, and have difficulty forming lasting relationships. They do not learn to trust and lack the ability to be affectionate with others. In a school setting this manifests

itself in many ways, but often in behaviours which teachers find challenging to manage and which are at odds with the school's behaviour policy. Co-ordination between health, education and social services at a local level is seen as being at the heart of effective support for looked after children with mental health difficulties.



Schools and other education providers should ensure that all staff who may come into contact with children and young people with attachment difficulties receive appropriate training on attachment difficulties, as set out in recommendation 1.2.2.

NICE Guideline NG26, Nov 2015

95. Northumberland's Virtual School commissioned an Education Psychologist to work with Designated Teachers and foster carers to roll out a programme of attachment training to develop capacity to deal effectively with issues relating to the emotional health and wellbeing of our looked after pupils. The work began in April 2016 and impact is already evident. By September 2016 there had been evidence based assessment and intervention for targeted looked after children as identified and in collaboration with ESLAC and schools; planned delivery of training sessions for teachers of Year 6 and Year 11 looked after children and their carers to effectively manage anxiety; consultation to Year 6 teachers to ensure evidence-based inclusive teaching and behaviour management approaches are offered to targeted looked after children; and plans in place to develop and deliver regular training and networking events for foster carers to support the development of stable care placements.

96. We continue to invest in the Thrive Strategy, initiated last year in partnership with Ponteland Middle Teaching School Alliance. Last year we trained Thrive practitioners in local authority teams, schools and the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). This year we purchased Thrive licences so that the trained practitioners can now apply this approach to support individual children. We are also offering awareness sessions regionally so that all Designated Teachers can easily access this approach to managing attachment and resilience in the classroom. The aspiration is to roll out the training as core professional development for all teachers. Building on the National Institute for Health Care and Excellence (NICE) guidelines, and with NAVSH, we plan to celebrate the practice of attachment aware schools to showcase best practice for children with unmet attachment needs and trauma. A bespoke training programme was delivered for Designated Teachers to include training for attachment and working with the impact of early adversity. The training was well attended with positive feedback.

97. We need to improve our understanding of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and how that might support the Virtual School and Designated Teachers to understand better the emotional health of our looked after children.

Giving young people voice and influence is recognised by professionals as an effective way to improve support for the emotional wellbeing of children in care. In 2016 we continued to encourage participation and kept in close contact with our children in care council Voices Making Choices (VMC). Work is underway to re-brand and then promote the Virtual School by VMC in 2017.

Our priorities for 2016-17

98. Northumberland's Virtual School aspires to compare with the best nationally and we think we have the right model in place to achieve that ambition. The VSH's senior role as Head of Inclusion and position on the LSCB reinforces the safeguarding dimension of the model and raises the profile of the Virtual School across partner agencies. The MALAP continues to act as the school's governing body with terms of reference agreed in December 2011, through which the VSH is accountable to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

99. We are proud of the achievements of our learners and our Virtual School set out in this annual report. To continue to improve, our four key priorities for the academic year 2016-17 are to:

- improve engagement in full time education by reducing fixed term exclusions and the number of Looked After Children who are persistent absentees;
- develop new and improve existing strategies to develop clear academic and vocational pathways of education provision for Looked After learners and Care Leavers;
- using an approach under-pinned by attachment and nurture principles, work collaboratively with schools/academies/alternative providers to better meet the social and emotional needs of our Looked After children in education settings to improve their readiness to learn;
- embrace and utilize *new ways of working* to improve integrated working and communication between professionals who contribute to improved achievement for Looked After Children.

100. In addition we will take action to:

- prepare for and play a key role in the full inclusion of unaccompanied migrant children who might be placed in Northumberland;
- prepare for the expansion of the Virtual School Headteacher role locally and through new legislation;
- participate fully with the post-inspection quality assurance plan following the *Ofsted inspection of children in need of help and protection, care leavers and children looked after* (February 2016);
- contribute to inspection assurance processes for the local area inspection of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND);
- work collaboratively with the school improvement function of the Education and Skills Service to ensure that our Looked After Children have the opportunity to attend schools which are judged by Ofsted to be Good or Outstanding.

101. This is a self-aware Virtual School. We know our learners well and have developed data sets which inform the way we deliver our services relating to education achievement and safeguarding. We use feedback from looked after children and foster carers to plan improvements for the future alongside the multi-agency overview of priorities for looked after children gained through MALAP. The NAVSH is adding another dimension to that planning and is starting to support our priorities well.

102. The VSH meets with the ESLAC team manager on a weekly basis to monitor those not receiving full time education, progress of pupils placed in requires improvement/inadequate schools or academies, quality assurance and completion rates of PEPs, progress for pupils with Education Health and Care Plans, Pupil Premium Plus agreements, progress through the

School Improvement Plan, attendance and exclusions (including those at risk of exclusion).
The ESLAC team provide half termly updates to the VSH regarding attitude, effort and progress of all looked after pupils, and schools submit a half termly progress report on each looked after child on their roll.