



Virtual School



VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER'S

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



Northumberland
County Council

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Our ambition for our cared for children and care leavers

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 cared for children.

Pupil Profile

Cared for pupils age 5-16 in Northumberland's Virtual School at the end of the summer term 2024



	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Full cohort	28	22	23	21	27	24	25	43	28	46	40	41	47	65
Official cohort*	14	11	12	7	10	15	18	24	15	25	29	26	n/a	n/a

*The official cohort comprises all those pupils of statutory school age who have been in care for 12 months or more from 31st March 2023 and of those how many are matched to the school census.

Introduction from the Virtual School Headteacher



This is a new look Annual Report for 2023-24. Like our priorities for improvement, I am adopting a more relational approach – less data, more people – to capture the breadth and tenacity of the activity that makes the journey through school smoother and more successful for our cared for children and care leavers.

You will hear the voices of children, senior leaders in schools, Designated Teachers and the Education Support for Looked After Children (ESLAC) team telling us first-hand about their experiences and what has worked to improve outcomes. At the time of writing this report the DfE has delayed the publication of provisional achievement data for cared for children, so our local data sources have been used and there is limited comparison with regional and national figures. This will be shared at a later date.

‘Schools can not speak highly enough of the quality of the services they receive from the Virtual School’ is how the Education HMI started her verbal feedback when we were inspected as part of the local authority children’s services Ofsted inspection in May. We were pleased to hear that, delighted to have affirmation that our Virtual School is effective, and grateful to be part of an overall Outstanding judgement for Northumberland.

The characteristics of our cared for community are changing. Although the proportion with SEND is similar to previous years there is greater ethnic diversity. As the number of school age children has increased so too has the number who are living outside of our county. More children have entered care in the secondary phase and with poor attendance.

In March 2024 I was able to attend the annual conference of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers. The keynote speakers were all care experienced and truly inspirational, including Fatima Whitbread, Luke Rodgers and Ashley Jean Baptiste. We have already engaged Luke to deliver training in Northumberland next year and hope we can engage others on our journey to really raise awareness of the needs of our children who are cared for. We want you to be inspired by them too!

The responsibilities of the Virtual School Headteacher continue to grow. We are developing our work to promote the education of children with a social worker and from September 2024 have a new duty to provide support and guidance to children and their carers in kinship arrangements. As the new academic year progresses, we expect the responsibilities for previously looked after children to be revised and strengthened, and to have a role with care leavers up to the age of 25. You will have therefore already seen some new roles in the ESLAC team and the service will evolve alongside demand and national developments.

I hope you find this report insightful and that it inspires you to keep making a difference to the lives of our cared for children and young people in Northumberland.

Jane Walker
Head of Service, Virtual School

Achievement

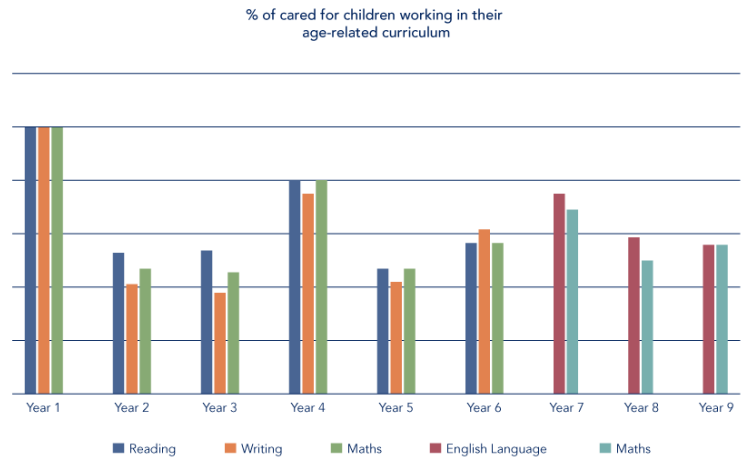
Overall, the educational outcomes for 2024 are encouraging and there are impressive stories of individual achievement that can be hidden within the data.

Educational achievement 2024 at a glance

Year	Test/exam	Achievement	Number achieving	% achieving	Compared to last year
Reception	Early Years	Good level of development	6	32%	Not as good (67%)
Year 1	Phonics	Met pass score (32+/40)	12	76%	Better by 40%
Year 2	Phonics re-sit	Met pass score	4	80%	N/A
Year 4	Multiplication tables check	Achieved score of 20+/35 (no pass)	23	18%	Not as good (25%)
Year 6	KS2 SAT's	Met ARE in reading/writing/maths	25	28%	Not as good (50%)
Year 11	GCSE	Basics 4+	8	21%	Better by 2%
Year 12	EET destination	EET destination September	33	87%	Better by 27%
Year 13	A-level	2 to university, 1 foundation diploma	3	100%	Better by 5 young people
Year 13	Level 3	5 to university, 1 Level 3 course	6	100%	
Higher Education	3 Honours degrees 1 Foundation degree 1 certificate in Higher Education	3 employment 2 Honours degrees	5	100%	N/A

The cohorts may fluctuate but the significant improvement in Phonics shows that more of our cared for children are school ready, and mastering word recognition and spelling is a strong foundation on which to build achievement from Year 1 onwards. Our cared for children are achieving in line with Northumberland's non-cared for children in Phonics which is outstanding. The impact of early success is shown by the gradual improvement in GCSE results year after year, and care leavers who commit to their post 16 pathways in further and higher education.

The proportion of children working in their age-related curriculum has improved since last year, notably in Year 1 and Year 4. It is a concern that in other year groups that the learning of approximately half of our children is behind that of their non-cared for peers.



Some gaps in achievement between cared for and non-cared for children in Northumberland are too big and widening over time:

- good level of development in early years
- meeting expectations in reading/writing/maths at Key Stage 2
- achieving grade 4+ in the Basics at GCSE

Factors affecting learning: our Year 11 cohort

The most positive and the most negative consequences of being in care facing our cared for children in education are exemplified by this year's Year 11 cohort.

There were 38 pupils in Year 11:

- 12 pupils entered care in KS4 (after September 22)
- 23 pupils were entered for at least 1 GCSE (level 3 qualifications) and 11 pupils were entered for foundation stage qualifications (levels 1 and 2 qualifications), 4 were not entered for qualifications
- 14 pupils attended special schools
- 3 pupils had no school roll
- 1 pupil attended a school in Scotland
- 4 were attending full time alternative provision, 3 were attending part time alternative provision
- 2 pupils received EOTAS Health Needs provision due to significant mental health difficulties
- 2 were on a part time timetable
- 15 pupils have EHCPs and 7 have an identified special educational need
- 3 pupils experienced a school move in Year 11
- 11 pupils were placed with family members
- 2 lived in unregulated placements during Year 11, one for the duration
- 2 pupils are unaccompanied asylum seekers with English as an additional language
- 3 pupils are parents, and one was pregnant during her exams
- 20 pupils were persistent absentees (attendance below 90%) and 10 pupils were severe absentees (attendance below 50%)

The positive impact of intervention from the ESLAC team and strong support from Designated Teachers is evident in the progress pupils made despite the challenges in their experiences of education. For example, 10 pupils met age related expectations in reading/writing/maths combined at Key Stage 2 and 5 of those pupils progressed to achieve the Basics at 4+ (3 achieved the Basics at 5+) and 5 pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs.

The achievement of our Year 11 pupils over the last 3 years shows us that, in Northumberland, the longer a pupil is in care the more likely they are to make good progress from KS2 to KS4 and achieve the Basics at GCSE.

Expert learners

There are an astonishing 21 Expert Learners this year, the highest award from the Virtual School and the most challenging to achieve. To acknowledge each learner's significant progress academically, emotionally and socially all our Expert Learners have:

- made progress in literacy and numeracy during all 3 terms
- had attendance of 97% or above during all 3 terms
- engaged in at least one extra-curricular activity
- had no suspensions
- effort over 3 terms is described as Good

One pupil has been an Expert Learner for 6 consecutive years from Year 6 to Year 11. This is an outstanding achievement!

Raising achievement: ESLAC impact evaluation in 3

Successes	1	Overall achievement
	2	Higher expectations of Designated Teachers by challenging the content and quality of PEPs so that for the first time there was 100% completion of PEPs and progress reviews in the summer term
	3	Teaching in residential homes
Challenges	1	Not all targets in children's PEPs are SMART or SMART enough and the language used in PEPs is not always clear for children to understand
	2	Not enough children are working in their age-related curriculum
	3	Children who need extra tuition need to be identified earlier, especially in Year 1 and Year 7; and for writing in Primary and for maths in Secondary
Next steps	1	Provide more tuition in residential homes
	2	Review the PEP quality assurance process
	3	Use the data from the progress tracker to work with schools to accelerate progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2

Stability

Stability is about safeguarding and learning. This is where ESLAC really makes a difference and influences the conditions of learning for cared for children which in turn contributes to their stability and permanence. Our approach is relational, and we encourage schools to see behaviour as communication. The children who achieve well in their education tell us that they feel safe to learn.

School stability at a glance

Stability indicator	2024	Compared to last year
Overall absence	14.4%	Not as good
Persistent absence (below 90%)	31.4%	Not as good
Number of suspensions	170	Not as good
Pupils	56	
Schools	33	
Missed sessions	616	
Permanet exclusions	0	Same
Mid-year school moves	46	Better
School placement breakdown	8	
Care placement breakdown/move	27	
Adoption	5	
Return home	6	
In Alternative Provision	12	Better
Full time	4	
Part time	8	

Significantly reducing the number of mid-year school moves and the number of children out of school to attend alternative provision, has had a positive impact: stability has improved overall since last year. However, high levels of persistent absence and the use of suspensions by a small proportion of our schools means that there is still work to be done to change the direction of travel and give more children a better chance to engage with their learning.

Emotional and mental health and wellbeing

Use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) behaviour screening tool supported meaningful discussion in PEP review meetings. The scoring of SDQs shows there has been an improvement in emotional health for our cared for children since last year. The highest proportion of our children are in the 'close to average' banding, however there are still too many individual children scoring in the 'very high' banding and support is detailed for them in their PEPs and Care Plans.

Suspensions

Nationally, suspension rates are high and increasing. Regionally the North East reports higher rates than the national average and suspension rates for cared for children are higher than rates for non-cared for children.

What we know: In 2023-24 there were 170 suspensions, only marginally lower than the 178 in 2022-23. The suspensions were across 33 schools affecting 56 pupils which resulted in 616 missed learning sessions and opportunities for Northumberland cared for children.

What we did: A suspension working group was convened to:

- review DfE guidance and best practices for managing suspensions, particularly for cared for children;
- carry out a suspension process audit. The Virtual School worked in secondary schools in Northumberland using an audit tool to understand their suspension processes and gather insights from school staff;
- pupil feedback during suspensions was collected and incorporated into re-integration meetings, allowing the pupils' experiences to inform the restorative process;
- templates and guidelines were developed to provide a structured approach to managing suspensions and promoting restorative practices across all schools. This includes email response templates, pupil voice forms, re-integration meeting guidelines and a regulation plan;
- support was provided to prevent suspensions and exclusions, including half termly training on topics which are often the driving factors around suspensions including trauma and attachment, emotion coaching and EBSA;
- the group now has a solid foundation of evidence based research on the detrimental and negative impact of suspensions on cared for children which can be used to advocate for alternative approaches.

Spotlight on EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

This year we recruited a full time Educational Psychologist (EP) to join our Lead EP in supporting schools with our most vulnerable learners. This allowed for a greater breadth and depth of work.

Casework

The EP Consultation on Entry to Care system was further developed meaning that, as a minimum, the school of every child who entered care in 2023/24 received a 30-minute EP consultation. The majority were completed within 8-week timescales. A 10 point 'Checklist on Entry to Care' was developed to firm up the process and help upskill staff. This meant that over 100 cared for children received EP oversight.

Our EPs provide ad-hoc advice and guidance to members of the Virtual School as needed: we are there as an extra sounding board and source of knowledge and support. Our EPs have been directly involved in more than 35 pieces of more complex casework when children with higher needs or those at transition points have been flagged by the wider Virtual School team.

Case Example: A Year 1 child with SEND had been suspended 4 times in the autumn term, amounting to 12 missed sessions. His school was offered enhanced EP support in the form of weekly supervision with support staff in the spring term resulting in no further suspensions for the rest of the year.

In the summer term we piloted EP involvement for our nursery children, meaning that the 4 cared for children in their pre-school year had EP involvement with a focus on school readiness. We also carried out 2 statutory assessments for our children with SEND living out of county.

Consultation

The Designated Teachers in 8 settings with high numbers of our most complex children received half termly EP consultation sessions. This amounts to 48 sessions across the year and

includes oversight of 77 children. For the first time this was offered to a post-16 setting. Five of the schools were specialist provisions and one had newly opened so received more intensive support.

Case Example: A newly established special school has been provided wraparound support from the Virtual School and local authority, with EPs contributing whole school and individual child consultations, co-working with NEWST, training for support staff on functional behaviour, individual assessment and casework for children with complex needs, supporting EHCP reviews and coordinating and signposting access to supports.

Our EPs also offer advice and guidance for previously cared for children. This year 23 parents and 4 schools reached out and received an EP telephone consultation often with follow up and signposting.

Training

Our EPs provided an online training programme across the year for Designated Teachers on topics such as Attachment and Trauma, Emotion Coaching and Bereavement and Loss to a total of 162 delegates. For the first time we have been able to offer a recorded session on Attachment and Trauma which school staff can access any time. Sessions on reducing suspensions and staff wellbeing were delivered via our online DT conferences and EPs facilitated a dynamic group problem solving session on Solution Circles.

In addition, our associate EP delivered Theraplay training to 9 foster carers and to the whole staff team at our new children's home.

Authors: Virtual School Educational Psychologists



Embedding trauma informed and relational practice in Northumberland

The Virtual School, Education Psychology Service, Be You, Primary Mental Health and HINT teams have been collaborating on Northumberland's county-wide relational practice and trauma informed schools' project, called **Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E.**, and this is an evaluation of how it's going so far.

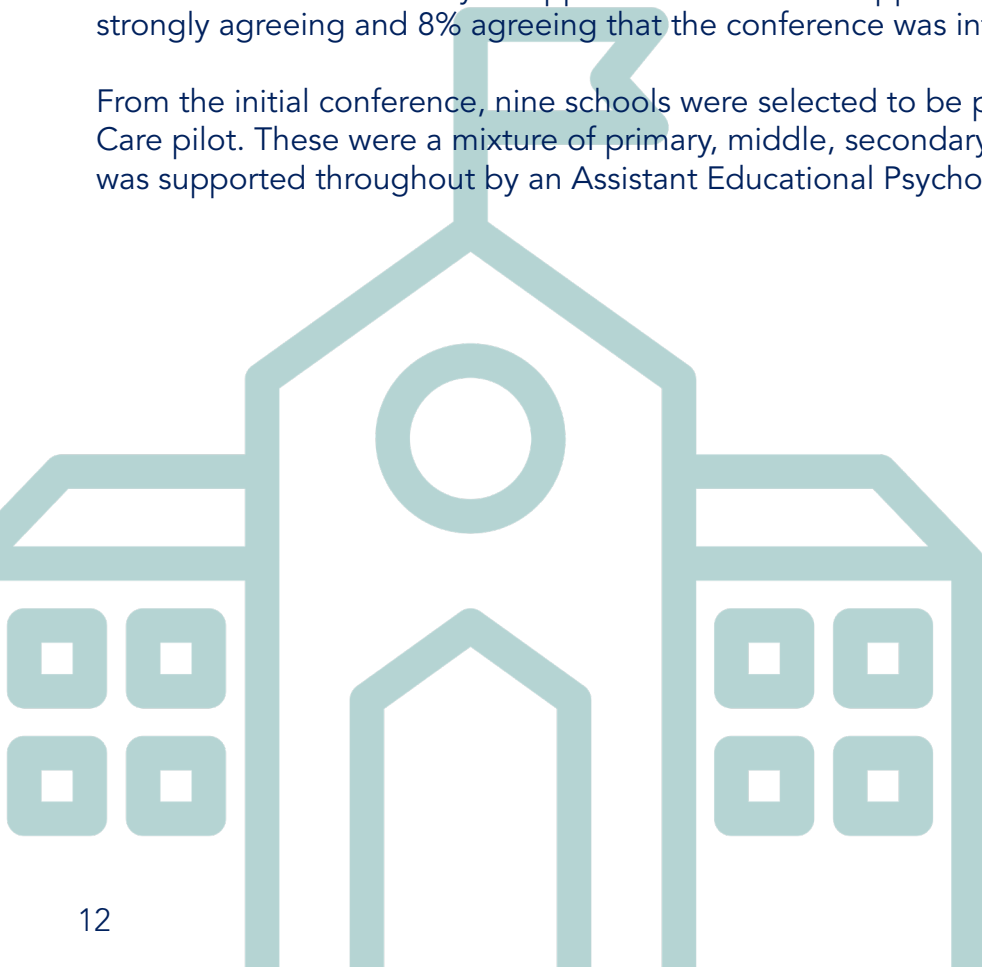


The aim of the project is to develop a consistent approach to trauma-informed practice and care across Northumberland's educational settings, Education SEND & Skills service and Children's Social Care. This will create a relational culture, shift relational practice to a whole school approach and raise awareness that a relational approach does not end at the school gates.

It was initially launched at a **Relationships Matter** conference in March 2023 where Paul Dix delivered a key-note speech followed by presentations from facilitators on topics including Relational Policies and Practice, Trauma Informed Practice, Emotion Coaching and PACE.

The conference was well received by delegates from schools, social care and health services, so a follow up conference **Relationships Still Matter**, also delivered by Paul Dix and his team, was facilitated on 24th April 2024 for colleagues from education and on 25th April 2024 for children's social care. There is clearly an appetite for a different approach in Northumberland, with 92% strongly agreeing and 8% agreeing that the conference was informative and helpful.

From the initial conference, nine schools were selected to be part of the Northumberland Schools Care pilot. These were a mixture of primary, middle, secondary and special schools, each school was supported throughout by an Assistant Educational Psychologist.



The schools that took part in a development programme were:

- Cambois Primary School
- Newsham Primary School
- Berwick Middle School
- St Joseph's Catholic Middle School
- The Duchess Community High School
- James Calvert Spence College
- Barndale House School
- Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit
- Emily Wilding Davidson School

They committed to:

- having a named point of contact to champion the process of becoming a trauma informed school;
- undertaking a whole school audit of relational / trauma informed practice resulting in an action plan which was regularly reviewed;
- taking part in at least one whole school training session covering attachment, trauma and ACEs. This was delivered by colleagues from across all of the agencies involved;
- attendance at half termly virtual network meetings to share good practice with other schools in the pilot;
- development of a relational (behaviour) policy.

Each school was asked to set their own goals for the project. These included:

- consistent use of relational and trauma informed approaches across the school including use of language / scripts and strategies such as Emotion Coaching;
- reduction in crisis behaviours through increased staff confidence in using de-escalation techniques with a consistent debrief for staff and young people;
- development of staff reflection skills and awareness of their own triggers;
- improved pupil attendance;
- improved engagement in learning and academic attainment;
- consolidation of school core values, development of a relational policy, forging connections with other schools to share good practice;
- supporting parents / carers' understanding of the approach.

It is too early in the project to see the impact on stability data but early indications are encouraging. Four out of the nine schools who completed the initial pilot have seen reductions in the number of suspensions in 23-24 compared with 22-23 ranging from 1 to 128 and totalling 159 fewer suspensions overall.

Out of 30 schools who expressed an interest, six secondary/middle schools have been selected to be part of Phase Two and will receive the training session in 2024.

A central training pool has been established whereby any school can request a two hour session and it will be delivered by two professionals from the multi agency team consisting of the Virtual School, EPS, Be You, PMH and HINT.

Spotlight on RELATIONAL PRACTICE

“Behaviour is taught not caught” – Our journey towards a relational approach

The last year and a half at James Calvert Spence College has been one of change, we are on a journey! Like all journeys, it has had its ups and downs, moving forward and, sometimes, some wrong turns. When I look back, we have taken every decision in the best interests of the JCSC community, our children are the centre of everything we do. They deserve the best and we are committed to ensuring they get it.

Following our return to a new normal following the pandemic, we predicted real difficulties with our student's emotional regulation - it did not come. Most of our students returned to school happy to regain some level of normality, parents were grateful for the education their children receive having experienced teaching themselves. Then in March 2023 we started to feel the effects of the pandemic- families were struggling financially, parents had experienced job losses, and many children were struggling with their mental health. As a result, in JCSC, suspensions and detentions were rising, attendance was in decline, staff were demoralised, teaching and learning were being impacted by the complex difficulties our community was experiencing- things had to change.

I am aware we are not unique in our experience, many schools across the local authority, and in fact the country, were experiencing the same difficulties. We needed to find a localised solution to the regional and national difficulties we were facing. By chance, the Virtual School delivered a conference entitled “Relationships Matter”, my colleague attended and came back to school talking about a trauma informed approach and developing a relational approach to developing positive behaviours. As a leadership team we started to delve into the work of Paul Dix some of us were sold! In fact, my colleague became his biggest fan. The HINT team and Educational Psychology Team came to discuss the approach further, we decided to become part of the pilot project, we had nothing to lose.

Over the last year we have changed everything we do at JCSC, promoting positive behaviour in a trauma informed way is the golden thread that runs through all aspects of our work. Our Personal Development curriculum is designed to teach positive behaviours and support our students to make informed decisions, we address emerging safeguarding concerns through the PD programme to ensure our students understand how to make safe decisions. Our expectations are clear so that all students learn from the decisions we have made; after all- behaviour is taught not caught. We have been heavily supported by Jennifer Pringle from the HINT team and Emma Holywell from BeYou; they have been a great source of support and guidance when we have needed it.

Winning hearts and minds of staff students and parents has at times, been a challenge. We have worked with our staff, parents and students over the last year to develop positive relationships. Towards the end of the year we completed a pupil, parental and staff voice to assess the impact of the work we have done this year. We were thrilled when 100% of students stated they have a "go to person" they trust to help them if they needed it. 89% of staff stated they feel that they have positive relationships with students in school. The responses from parents showed real impact of the changes that have been made. We asked:

This year JCSC have developed a relational approach to promoting positive behaviours. Please identify any changes this year that have supported positive behaviours.

The responses were as follows:

- My son has had more support
- Recognising achievements
- I can't answer this one as both my children simply do well at school.
- Relaxing some rules
- Having a more positive approach can only be a good thing leading to positive results slowly but surely. Keep up this approach.
- SEND support provided to promote positive behaviour within the school environment.
- My child feels supported within school, I am made aware of praise and encouragement via the praise point system. I have attended meetings with Kerry Payne throughout the year to discuss the merits and room for improvement regarding this approach.
- JCSC are trying to accommodate my son's behaviour

I think the positive responses we received are testament to the time so many of our school community have invested into developing the relational approach. As we start the new academic year we start to think about our next steps. With the support of the Hint and BeYou teams we have developed our new energy scale to support our students to self-regulate and will launch wellness actions plans with students on the first day in September.

At JCSC the relational approach is here to stay; at JCSC relationships really do matter.

Author: Jacqui Johnson, Head of Lower School JCSC

Improving stability: ESLAC impact evaluation in 3

Successes	1	Overall stability has improved since last year
	2	Educational Psychology consultations gave insight into the needs of 77 children so that we could tailor interventions to their needs. Therapeutic interventions improved emotional regulation to enable pupils to engage with learning
	3	Our attendance initiative, including: the attendance audit in 9 schools, high level of challenge to schools regarding attendance, rewards to children for good attendance – 161 pupils' attendance improve, 36 pupils maintained 100% attendance
Challenges	1	Although the record of 0 exclusions since 2008 remains, the team prevented 31 permanent exclusions this year
	2	Some schools continue to use suspensions to manage behaviour and some schools introduce part time timetables or alternative provision too early
	3	Attendance is still not good enough and more pupils are entering care with very poor attendance, for example 3 children entered care in the Spring term with attendance below 13%
Next steps	1	Prioritise embedding a relational and trauma informed approach in schools, including the delivery of training for social workers and foster carers about stability in education and training for Designated Teachers on de-escalation and co-regulation
	2	Distribute Pupil Premium Plus to targeted schools to improve stability
	3	Create new post in the Virtual School to improve attendance and reduce suspensions with the pupils that need the support the most

Supporting teaching and learning

The ESLAC team is here to help children and to help schools. We listen to what schools tell us about our children so that we can provide the right support at the right time so that every child can do their best at school.

Good and outstanding schools

Like last year, 81% of our children attend schools that are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. More cared for children in Northumberland are in Outstanding schools than cared for children nationally.

More cared for children in Northumberland are educated in their home authority compared to the national distribution; approximately 11% of our children are education outside of Northumberland compared to 30% being educated outside of their guardian local authority nationally.

Pupil Premium Plus Evaluation 2023-24

This report is based on eligible cared for children whose schools received PP+ in the academic year 2023-24 (so this does not include all pupils in care in that year). The evaluation focuses on academic progress, and not developmental, health or emotional progress.

VIRTUAL SCHOOL

For the academic year 2023-24 our total PP+ budget was £812 130. In line with our PP+ policy we top-sliced £1035 from each grant of £2530 and used that centrally held funding of £332 235 to provide:

- Support for Designated Teachers
 - » Staffing
 - » Rewards
 - » Crisis support
 - » ePEP development
 - » Training from external providers, including Thrive
- Therapeutic assessments and interventions
- Education resources
 - » Lexia licences and Britannica
 - » IT equipment for pupils
- Teachers
- Prevention of suspensions/attendance improvement funding dispersed to 3 education settings

The Virtual School’s use of PP+ had a positive impact on education outcomes across the support and intervention spectrum by preventing escalation and responding reactively in crisis situations.

Our diverse training programme, free of charge, is our response to what our Designated Teachers tell us they need.

SCHOOLS

Schools were allocated a maximum amount of £1495 of the DfE allocation of £2530 for each eligible pupil which was a total of £354 315. The funding allocated was dependent on providing effective support for each pupil to achieve their individual outcomes and the quality of their Personal Education Plan (PEP).

Key Stage 1

- 42 pupils were eligible for Pupil Premium Plus in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.
- Academic progress in at least one subject was recorded for 68% of pupils compared to 22% last year.

Key Stage 2

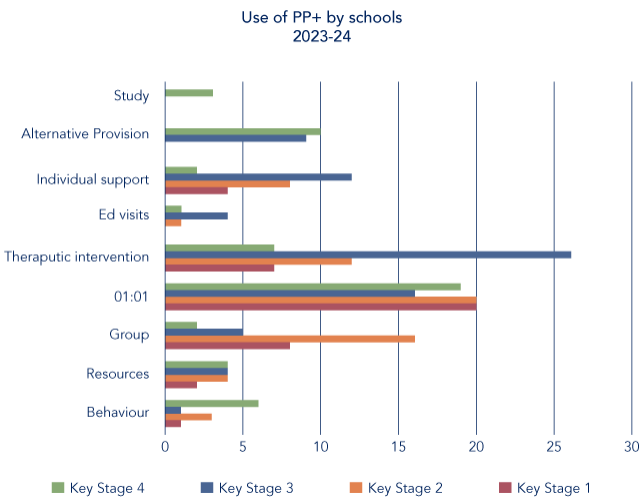
- 64 pupils were eligible for Pupil Premium Plus in Years 3 to 6.
- Academic progress in at least one subject was recorded for 84% of pupils compared to 68% the previous year.

Key Stage 3

- 77 pupils were eligible for Pupil Premium Plus in Years 7 to 9.
- Academic progress was recorded in at least one subject for 69% compared to 82% in 2022-23.

Key Stage 4

- 54 pupils were eligible for Pupil Premium Plus in Years 10 and 11.
- Academic progress was recorded in at least one subject for 52% of pupils compared to 22% last year.



The children’s PEPs are telling us that schools’ use of PP+ is having a greater impact on education outcomes for our cared for children since last year, except at Key Stage 3.

The high use of therapeutic interventions and 1 to 1 tuition at Key Stage 3 gives us an insight into the complex needs of that cohort which have affected their achievement this year.

Overall PP+ had a positive impact on academic progress for 64% of our cared for children. The most common use of PP+ is for 1:1 support.

Other grant funding

- **School Led Tutoring Grant:** used to provide 1 to 1 tuition to pupils with high levels of need who were unable to engage in full time education at school. Providers included Nudge, Teaching Personnel, Engage, Prospero and Academy 21.
- **Covid Recovery Premium:** distributed as additional funding to two secondary schools and one academy chain to pilot strategies that would have an impact on reducing suspensions and improving attendance. The schools were identified using data ie the schools with the most Northumberland cared for children on roll, with the highest rates of suspension and poorest attendance. Some Pupil Premium Plus funding also contributed to this pilot. It is early days to assess impact, but feedback from the schools has been very positive.
- **Post 16 :** funding to improve recruitment and retention in further education. Used in Northumberland for the development of a new statutory 16-18 ePEP, and 2 Post 16 Education Mentors.
- **Promoting the education of previously looked after children (extended duty):** used to fund an Educational Psychologist post, to part fund the Relationships Still Matter conference and to fund a summer holiday residential arranged by the Family Placement Service.
- **Promoting the education of children with a social worker (extended duty):** used to fund an Education Welfare Support Officer post, a Cared for Children Co-ordinator post, a Performance and Intelligence Lead post, a Virtual School Learning Mentor (CWSW) post and a Virtual School Co-ordinator (CWSW) post.



Spotlight on IMPACT OF GRANT FUNDING

King Edward VI Academy in Morpeth received an additional £20 000 of grant funding last year to improve stability for the Northumberland cared for children on roll there. This is what they told us after the first year of the pilot.

The provision of an extra £20,000 to effectively support our cared for children was welcomed as it gave us an opportunity to employ additional resources to best support our cared for students.

We began the academic year with 5 cared for children and currently have 3 cared for children on roll. Whilst these numbers are lower than we have had in previous years, the complexity of these individuals and challenges they face have meant that our service has been under more pressure than ever before to meet their needs.

The money has been spent in the following ways:

- funding for Alternative Provision
- funding for additional curriculum support and subject intervention
- increased pastoral support for these students, including 1:1 mentoring provided by the Deputy Headteacher or Safeguarding Inclusion Lead, counselling sessions and / or additional time with our school chaplain
- funding to attend all relevant meetings, including face to face visits in different localities
- funding to present staff training to staff on the issues that cared for children face, including preparation for our June Training Day
- 1:1 careers support from our in school Careers Advisor
- 1:1 support in our Access (SEND) base to support with consolidation of learning
- time to share best practice with the class teachers of these students

Impact

Inclusion and completion of studies

These measures have ensured that all of our students have remained in education. Two of the three currently on roll are at risk of permanent exclusion. Both will leave us in the summer having sat their exams, with a determined plan for next year. Both of these students have been involved with the Police and have had multiple house / placement moves this year, amongst other significant adverse childhood experiences. School involvement has been their only constant at times and as such they have felt comfortable sharing their emotions with staff.

Academic Outcomes

Both of our Year 11 students could possibly achieve passes in their core subjects, supplemented with successful outcomes in other subjects. Teachers have worked patiently and tirelessly with these students to ensure that they will have the best chance of success from May.

Social skills development

The intensive level of support from highly qualified and experienced senior staff has shown these youngsters how important they are to us. These role models have demonstrated first hand the values of care and compassion, as well as resilience, determination and the need to never give up. We hope these qualities have been transferred to these youngsters, so that they can employ these qualities throughout life, especially when there is less structured support available to them.

Author: Andy Clark, Deputy Headteacher and Designated Teacher



Supporting teaching and learning : ESLAC impact evaluation in 3

Successes	1	Our diversified our training programme that included the Relationships Still Matter conference, Northumberland Schools CARE training, PACE, sensory attachment and advanced solution circles
	2	Different use of Pupil Premium Plus funding
	3	Developing a different relationship with the Pupil Referral Unit, creative use of Pupil Premium Plus funding
Challenges	1	The terms and conditions of grant funding are known about late and are fixed term, and this can have a negative impact on getting best value for money from the Virtual School's allocation
	2	Our influence on the impact of PP+ in schools
	3	Evaluating the impact of training in schools
Next steps	1	Build on the enhanced offer of support to Northumberland's residential children's homes
	2	Review impact of Pupil Premium Plus in schools and consult on how to maximize impact
	3	Review our training offer for schools and social workers



Spotlight on NORTHUMBERLAND PRU

‘Extending collaborative links to work hand-in-hand with cared for children and the Virtual School’

Staff at Northumberland PRU have continued during the current academic year to continue strong collaboration and the sharing of good practice with the Virtual School. The PRU is proud to support the emotional well-being, attendance and academic progress of children who are cared for within Northumberland and these close links ensure that from the initial identification of any learner requiring a placement at the PRU, that key information is exchanged so that the correct levels of support can be put in place to arrange a smooth transition and identify any barriers to learning or attendance that require to be addressed.

“Northumberland PRU serves to meet the needs of all students in the county who require a placement, whatever their barriers to learning or challenges outside of school in their home life. In a number of cases this is for students who have experienced disruption and trauma.

We continue to work hand in hand with the Virtual School to provide an appropriate educational setting for young people facing these challenges and offer support, wrap around care and a trauma-

informed learning environment, underpinned by a broad and diverse curriculum which is tailored to the individual needs of each student whilst also helping to prepare them for their next stage of education.”

Richard Carr – Headteacher, Northumberland PRU

Key to helping the PRU meet its aims is a staffing structure which has resulted in the development of a Pastoral team consisting of a Lead pastoral officer, an Emotional wellbeing manager and a separately funded pupil counsellor, directly seconded from the Virtual School team. Children who are within the care system are prioritized with all other students also benefiting from support and trauma-informed intervention from the team of professionals.

The impact of this critical role has been significant and has evidenced increased attendance, improved academic progress as well as happier young people for most pupils targeted by the member of staff conducting work in this post. This is also supported by the positive feedback from the students themselves, as well as carers.

This seconded post has supported Northumberland PRU in its undertaking of a Mental Health audit and its application to be accredited with nationally recognized Mental Health Awareness Award status. It has also ensured that key issues such as trauma-informed and attachment related professional development has been delivered to all PRU staff across the academic year.

The PRU has also sought external expertise to support staff in their understanding and practice. Most recently, representatives from Northumberland County Council's HINT team have delivered staff training in relation to ‘Zones of Regulation’ and this is now consistently in use across all classrooms by all members of staff. This is in addition to Northumberland PRU electing to become a THRIVE school since the start of the school year which also supports the PRU in offering a trauma-informed, whole school approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Northumberland PRU is also one of ten Northumberland Schools who have joined up to a council backed CARE pilot project which is supporting the delivery and networking of good mental health provision and support across its membership group. It is hoped that following evaluation at the end of the scheme, that a range of proved strategies can be shared with all schools in the county.

The future for the PRU is one that will see mental health and wellbeing support for its learners in the care system and staff grow even further in line with its aim of providing inclusion in its broadest sense.

Students referred to the PRU are escorted by a staff member of the Virtual School for an initial visit. This offers reassurance and an opportunity to meet our highly trained and skilled staff and to see the bespoke facilities at the Seghill site. From here, initial assessments are undertaken which allow students to be assigned to an appropriate curriculum pathway (nurture, vocational, academic) and discussions are also held to ensure correct group placement with peers.

In the current academic year, a number of students have been referred into Northumberland PRU via the Virtual School. This is proportionate to previous years:

Impact upon attendance and behaviour

No of students (4)	Attendance in previous schools	Attendance on PRU roll	Diff +/-	Fixed-term suspensions in previous schools	Fixed-term suspensions on PRU roll	Diff +/-
Student A	70.3%	93%	+22.7%	0	2	-2
Student B	59%	70.5%	+11.5%	4	0	+4
Student C	66%	62.3%	-3.7%	2	5	-3
Student D	70%	33.7%	-36.4%	7	3	+4

NB: Student D refused to engage/attend PRU for large periods during placement.

Impact upon academic progress

No of students (4)	English Baseline	English EOY	Maths Baseline	Maths EOY	Science Baseline	Science EOY	Reading Baseline	Reading 2nd assessment
Student A	Refused	WTS	Below	Expect	Below	Expect	Refused	16.09 yrs
Student B	Only attended 4 weeks	Only attended 4 weeks	Only attended 4 weeks	Only attended 4 weeks	Only attended 4 weeks	Only attended 4 weeks	11.04 yrs	Only attended 4 weeks
Student C	WTS	Expect	Below	WTS	WTS	WTS	6.02 yrs	14.07 yrs
Student D	Refused	Refused	Refused	WTS	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused

NB: Student D refused to engage/attend PRU for large periods during placement.

Richard Carr - Headteacher, Northumberland PRU

16+

Our Post 16 offer to cared for children and care leavers has strengthened and diversified over recent years. Outcomes in education Post 16 are improving year after year. The Post 16 team in ESLAC comprises a Lead Careers Adviser, Careers Adviser and Post 16 Education Intervention Worker.

Some of the unique achievements of the ESLAC careers team this year include:

- enhanced transition work for young people leaving Year 11 and progressing into Year 12;
- all young people in EET outside of Northumberland have been visited, including those in Ayrshire and Oldham;
- Northumberland has the highest number of young people in the region on the Choices Together Programme since pre-Covid (an engagement programme offered by a consortium of the 5 regional universities);
- The Virtual School Headteacher and Lead Careers Adviser have had key roles in the ICB's Universal Family Project to recruit care leavers into careers in the NHS;
- piloted drop-in sessions for young people who are NEET in the main supported accommodation providers used by our young people.

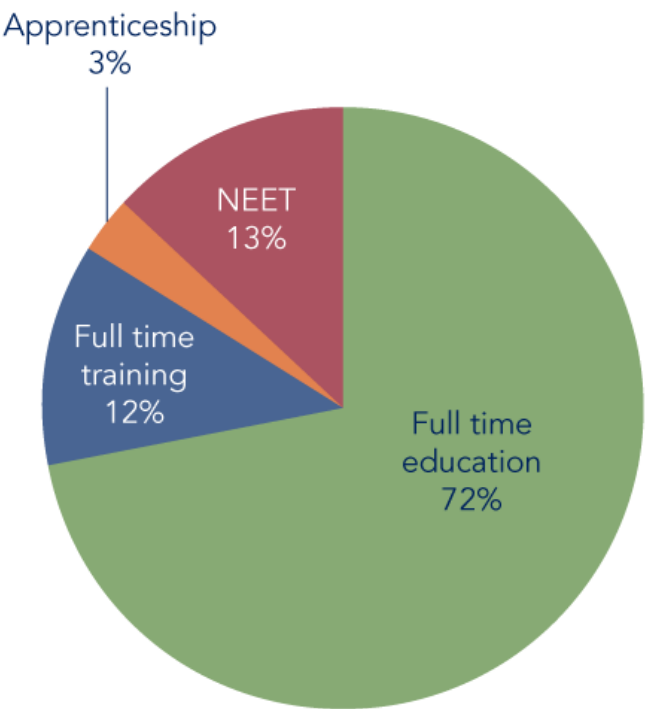
Destinations Post 16: September 2024

Year 11 leavers/new Year 12: cared for children

At the beginning of September 2024 33 (87%) of Year 11 cared for leavers were in education, employment and training. The EET rate has improved from 74% in September 2023 and has returned to the same level as 2022 and previous years.

23 (60%) of our Year 11 pupils had SEND including 9 who had an EHCP. 5 pupils with SEND were NEET in September 2024, either working with careers' advisers, waiting to hear their start dates or feeling unable to engage in EET because they had health/medical needs. Our careers advisers are continuing to support these young people to ensure they are able to re-engage as soon as possible.

7 cared for children are following Level 3 courses which is an improvement since 2022.

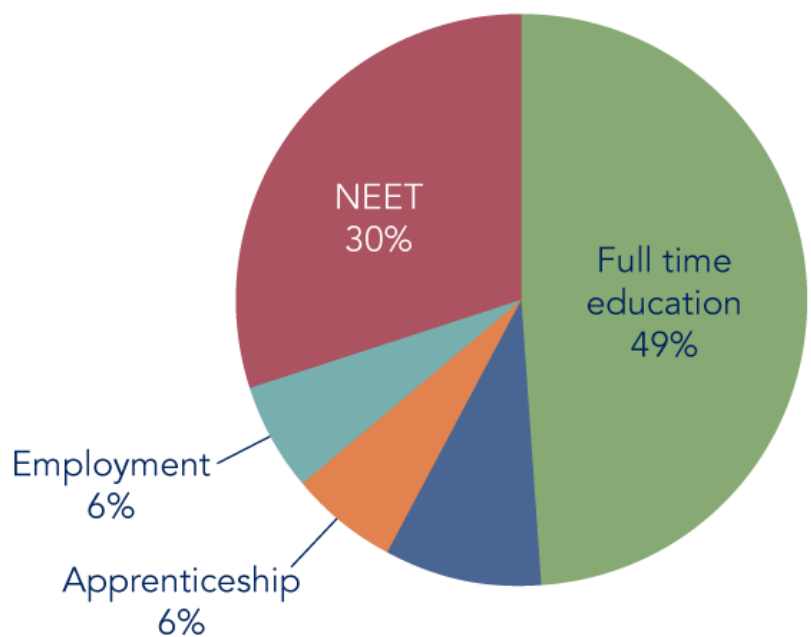


Year 13: cared for children and care leavers

At the beginning of September 2024 23 (70%) young people in Year 13 – cared for children and care leavers – were in EET. 15 of those young people have an EHCP.

The percentage in EET is not as good as September 2023 but we know that as a cohort they faced exceptional challenges when they were in Key Stage 4.

Nationally there is a significant reduction in EET from Year 12 to Year 13 so it is encouraging that this year group which started on 74% has sustained 70% in EET. This reflects the impact of the support provided to the cohort Post-16



Education Intervention Worker and Careers Advisers, and the introduction of the Post-16 PEP that retains our young people on their EET pathways.

Of the 14 young people who are NEET, one is parenting and the 13 are experiencing significant life challenges but are being supported to explore ways to re-engage in EET.

6 young people started Level 3 courses in 2023 and they are all still engaged ready to complete in July 2025.

Level 3 Qualifications

9 young people have achieved Level 3 qualifications this year, this is an improvement from 4 in 2023 and 5 in 2022. 8 of these high achievers have progressed to University and one has joined the police force.

One of the students progressing into HE had arrived in the UK as an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child in Year 12 and has worked his way through ESOL courses before achieving an Access to HE course in computing which met the entry requirements for his degree.

Higher Education

5 young people graduated from HE courses this summer; 3 with degrees, 1 with a HE Certificate and 1 with a Foundation Degree. All 5 are either in employment or continuing their higher education.

Factors leading to success for care leavers Post 16

An analysis of Year 11 has given us a helpful insight into what motivates our learners and therefore has the greatest impact on successfully progressing into education, training and employment.

- The favourite subjects at GCSE are English, Science and Health & Social Care.
- Our pupils choose to follow mainly academic courses rather than practical and vocational ones. At 16 however, the majority are progressing onto a vocational pathway.
- Most of our young people stay at their current school if they are choosing to study A' levels in Year 12. Staying in a stable education placement where young people feel safe and have existing peer and staff relationships is a key factor in decision making for cared for children at age 16.
- Our pupils achieve higher in English than they do in maths.
- Pupils following vocational/practical courses are more likely to follow a vocational route into employment, either courses which allow the development of practical skills based on the application of theory or offer training and qualifications related to a specific job or industry.



Pathways at 16		Subject preferences on different pathways	
Destinations	No of pupils	Pathway	Courses
Pupils staying in their current education provision	8	A Levels	Psychology, Biology, Chemistry, English Language
Pupils who will study A Levels at a school 6th Form	2	T Levels/BTEC courses (6th Form)	Engineering Health & Social Care
Pupils who will study T Level/BTEC at a school 6th Form	4	SEND pathway/LifeSkills	Hillcrest Northern Counties
Pupils who will attend 6th form at their specialist school	1	College courses	Health & Social Care Travel & Tourism Sports Coaching Business Studies Animal Care Engineering Childcare Hair & Beauty Art & Design
Pupils who will continue their SEND pathway	2	Vocational provision (SEND)	NACRO Azure
Pupils pursuing practical/vocational qualifications at college	15	Apprenticeships	Childcare, Trades, Retail
Pupils studying at a vocational provision	2	Military Preparation Technical College	Military Preparation
Pupils seeking an apprenticeship	3		
Pupils whose plans are still to be completed	5		
Pupils who will re-sit Year 11	1		
Pupils joining the Military Training Prep College	1		
Pupils who have not yet made a choice	2		

Education Employment and Training Clinics

EET Clinics gather together a panel of multi-agency partners committed to improving the life chances of care leavers through education, employment and training. At the clinics the partners meet with social workers and leaving care workers to discuss individual young people and make plans to help them return to EET. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Bernicia support has been outstanding throughout the year, allowing for creative solutions to support young people towards EET.

This year 11 clinics were held to discuss and develop plans for 183 young people. 15 young people progressed quickly into EET and 30 are involved in engagement programmes from which they will progress into EET. Plans continue to be developed for those young people who are still undecided about their options or not able yet to engage fully.

All of our Year 12 and 13 young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have an allocated Careers Adviser who works as part of their care team and with the young person to re-integrate into EET through direct work which may include Information Advice and Guidance (IAG), CV and application support, visits to providers, referrals to employability/training partners and liaising with SEND teams. We have worked with those furthest from EET and in these cases work is often long term and centres around relationship building and exploring motivations, strengths and life goals before moving on to exploring opportunities, often including short courses or personal development and voluntary activities as a starting point.

Post 16 Personal Education Plans

For the first time, we have completed PEPs with Year 12 and Year 13 young people who are in education. All cared for children have had two PEP meetings and those who turned 18 and became care leavers during Year 13 have also continued to have the option of a PEP. Our Post 16 Education Intervention Worker has attended every PEP meeting and this has supported the young people to feel that their voice is heard and their concerns listened to.

This is what is being said about the PEP.

Having the Post 16 PEP meetings face-to-face have been great when exploring support/next steps/destinations, giving the students the opportunity to advocate for themselves, and what they feel they need in their education.

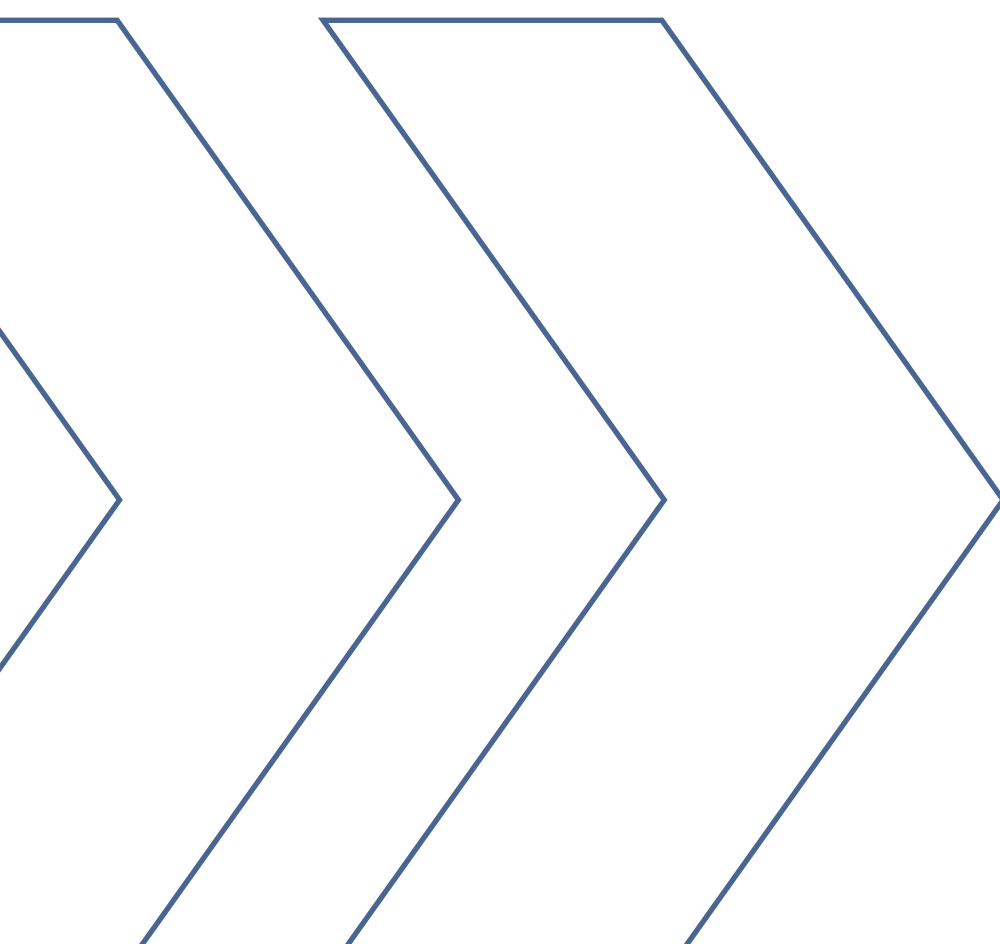
Hannah [Education Intervention Worker] has a great relationship with each of the students, this is obvious when students are reminded of their meetings, it's something they look forward to. Her relaxed and nurturing approach is evident, her drive and compassion ensure that the students feel that they can share all aspects of their education journey with her. Northumberland College.

It gives me an understanding of what she is doing/achieving and if there is anything I can be doing to help her progress. KB Foster Carer

PEP meetings have highlighted a range of issues which we have then been able to resolve. Issues have included not being in receipt of bursary, issues with teachers or specific parts of courses, peer issues, the need for additional academic support, and the need for supported self-study time.

Pathways at 16: ESLAC impact evaluation in 3

Successes	1	Implemented a new Post 16 ePEP to support care leavers in education, training and employment
	2	Impact of the Post 16 Education Intervention Worker
	3	Strong working relationship with private sector company Bernicia, demonstrating exemplary practice in our Care Leavers' Covenant
Challenges	1	EET opportunities for young people with SEND, specifically SEMH
	2	Monitoring attendance of young people with such a broad range of providers, in and out of county
	3	Reliance on grant funding to sustain support through ESLAC
Next steps	1	Embed the Post 16 ePEP and align with Pathway Plans
	2	Use the embedded PEP to monitor attendance
	3	Refresh the Care Leavers' Covenant to engage more private sector EET providers



Special educational needs and disabilities

A high proportion of our cared for children have SEND (38%), as is the case nationally. An increasing number of children are entering care and being referred straight away for statutory assessment and 27 EHCPs were put in place this year. This tells us that their needs have not yet been identified and the challenges in getting on track with their education are significant. Nevertheless, the next steps we put in place last year have started to have a positive impact.

Work is still ongoing to:

- Work with SEND services to refine new processes to ensure that cared for children are prioritised through all systems and panels whilst complying with the relevant terms of reference;
- Further align decision making about home placements with decision making about education so that Northumberland retains ownership of more EHCPs;
- Work with regional and National Association of Virtual School Headteachers to address the issue of communication between local authorities that can cause drift and delay for cared for children with SEND;
- Promote an EHCP review on entry to care as good practice;
- Develop guidance for SEND and Care Teams on supporting school moves for pupils with an EHCP that includes promoting the graduated approach to meeting SEND needs prior to a special school request;
- Review Belongings Regulations with the regional ADCS.

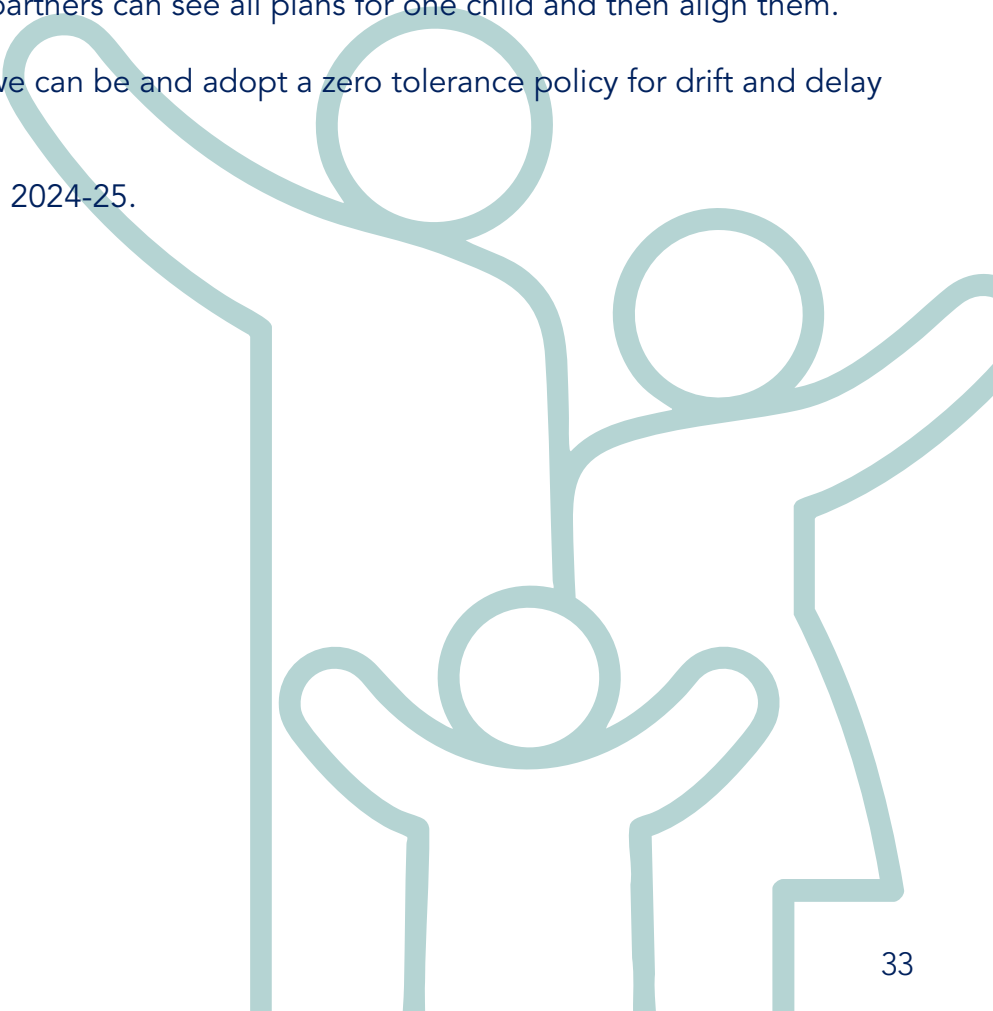
Multi-agency themed audit

Northumberland's Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy 2023-25 sets out for our families, local authority officers and relevant partners how we fulfil our responsibility to apply the statutory corporate parenting principles to our services. A multi-agency themed audit, chaired by the Virtual School Headteacher, was undertaken to provide insight into what it's like to be a cared for child with SEND in Northumberland. The objective was to identify good practice and disseminate learning to inform service improvement.

Auditors representing over 10 different services used an audit tool to review the records of 5 randomly selected cared for children with EHCPs. The key learning that emerged that will improve our corporate parenting is to:

- Make sure that as multi-agency partners the right training, guidance and information is available to everyone to inform decision making about cared for children with SEND.
- Be mindful of timescales from the perspective of the cared for child, and record information to monitor as appropriate, thus ensuring that cared for children are prioritised through services and their needs are swiftly met.
- Encourage a culture of curiosity amongst partners.
- Actively promote education as a protective factor to raise awareness of the importance of stability in cared for children's lives, and how that has a positive impact on education outcomes.
- Review systems to ensure that partners can see all plans for one child and then align them.
- Be the best corporate parents we can be and adopt a zero tolerance policy for drift and delay for cared for children.

We will start sharing the learning in 2024-25.



Education of cared for children with SEND: ESLAC evaluation in 3

Successes	1	The DVSH now attends all SEND Panels and waiting times for cared for children have reduced
	2	Good practice was identified in the multi-agency themed audit
	3	Individual stories of success amongst cared for children and care leavers with SEND
Challenges	1	High proportion of special schools using suspensions frequently to manage behaviour
	2	Children and young people with EHCPs being placed out of county
	3	Alignments of PEPs and EHCPlans, including the Post 16 ePEP and Pathway Plans
Next steps	1	Work with partners to identify gaps in Post 16 provision for young people with SEMH
	2	Continued review of Belonging Regs with regional local authorities and the ADCS
	3	Disseminate and embed learning from the themed audit

Pupil voice

We listen carefully to what our cared for children tell us so that we can keep them safe and support them in their education. They communicate that to us in a variety of ways, including through their PEPs, use of feedback apps and in our direct work with them. Our young people are also skilled at communicating with us in their creative writing, letter writing and art.

Foster Panel

Our children and young people were asked what they would like to know from adults who want to be new foster carers, or from foster carers they might be placed with.

This is what they said:



Removing barriers to education for children with a social worker

The Virtual School's Learning Mentor for children with a social worker is a new post that was created from DfE grant funding to listen to what children are telling us are their barriers to education. The mentor prioritised attendance as a focus this year and found out more about the underlying reasons that children with a social worker can struggle to attend school.

This is a sample of what the Learning Mentor did to give children with a social worker a space to be heard.

- **Space for children with a social worker to be heard:** Created opportunities for children with a social worker to express their concerns and experiences. This ensured that their voices were central to the projects undertaken.
- **Projects Undertaken:** Two significant projects focused on attendance and suspensions. Active work took place in 15 education settings, involving 100 children with a social worker. The projects engaged students across various types of schools, including primary, middle, secondary, specialist, and alternative provision.
- **Wide Range of Voices:** Pupil voices were collected from a broad spectrum of schools, such as NCEA Bishops, Hexham Middle, Berwick Middle, Ponteland, The Blyth Academy, and others. Input was gathered from pupils in mainstream, specialist, and alternative educational settings.
- **Pupil Engagement:** Through methods like the Signs of Safety 3-houses model, authentic pupil voices were captured and presented in their own words making the feedback more impactful when shared with schools.
- **Building Relationships:** Engaged with Designated Safeguarding Leads, Senior Leadership Teams, Designated Teachers, and pastoral leaders in schools. This helped build relationships with key stakeholders, ensuring that the feedback and needs of CWSW were communicated to those who could implement change.
- **Incorporating Cared for Children:** Voices of cared for children were included, addressing issues and concerns that were previously unknown to the Care Team. An independent figure facilitated open communication, providing children a safe space to share their thoughts.
- **Project Findings and Impact:** Findings from the attendance project were presented to various teams, including the Education Support for Looked After Children team, Social Care Team Managers, and Social Care Locality Teams.
- **Key themes and insights as shown below were shared:** Cascaded and shared through various channels, such as the Safer in Education Sway, team managers and Children's Social Care

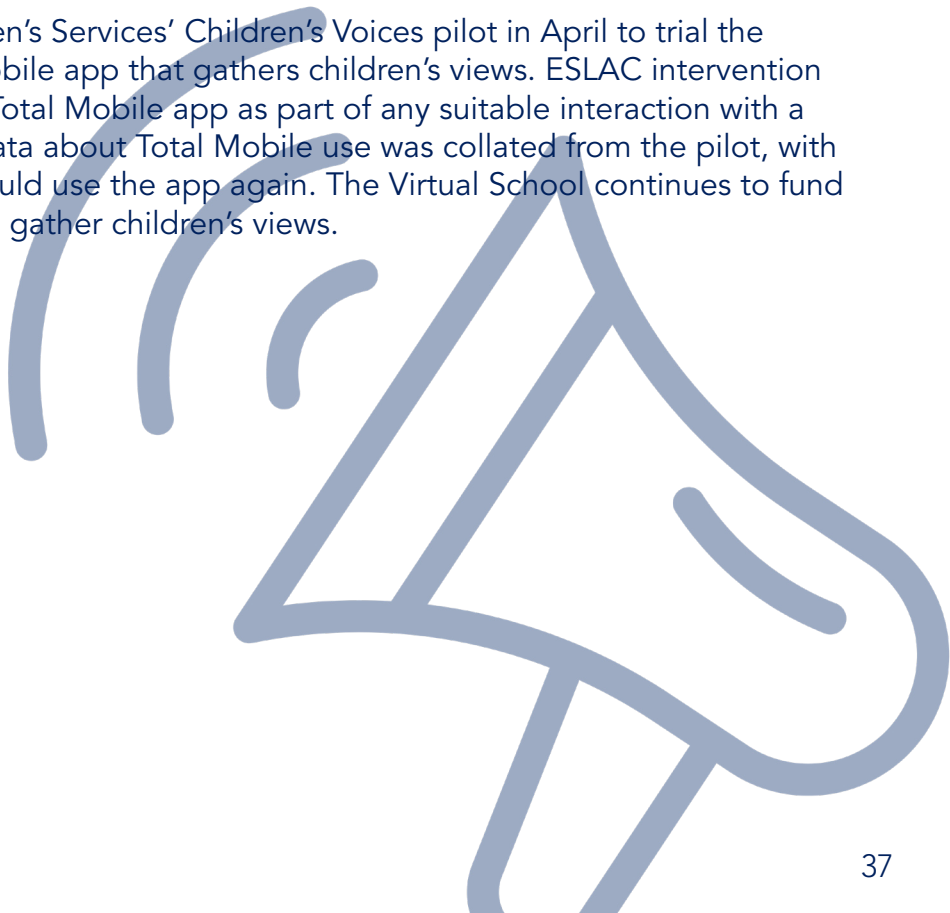
The impact of listening to what children had to say has been substantial, for example:

- **Curriculum Changes:** Pupil voice directly informed curriculum changes at The Blyth Academy Pyramid provision.
- **Ongoing Engagement:** Two schools, Emily Wilding Davison School and The Blyth Academy, invited further pupil voice work indicating the success and value of the initial projects.
- **Informed Social Care Practice:** The findings were valuable to Children's Social Care Team Managers who requested that the session be repeated for their teams to inform future practice.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Strengthened connections with social workers, creating an environment where they could seek educational advice, particularly around suspensions and preventing permanent exclusions.
- **Training and Upskilling:** Developed training materials for social workers, with feedback collected during team meetings to identify specific areas where they required additional support.
- **Education in CIN/CP Planning:** Discussions within CSC Locality Teams highlighted the importance of integrating education, especially attendance, into all Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) planning.

Next Steps are planned and will include monitoring the impact of the power of the children's voices on their attendance.

Children's Voices Pilot

The Virtual School joined the Children's Services' Children's Voices pilot in April to trial the use and functionality of the Total Mobile app that gathers children's views. ESLAC intervention workers are encouraged to use the Total Mobile app as part of any suitable interaction with a child or young person. A range of data about Total Mobile use was collated from the pilot, with most ESLAC workers saying they would use the app again. The Virtual School continues to fund and use the Mind of My Own app to gather children's views.



Reflections of the Deputy Virtual School Headteacher



I am delighted and proud to be able to share some of the many positive experiences of the ESLAC team this year.

It's been a year marked by effort and determination to provide the best possible support to those involved in meeting the needs of our cared for children. Despite the challenges, the ESLAC team has consistently shown unwavering commitment, working tirelessly to provide the best possible support to ensure our children's needs are met and they have access to opportunities to maximise their attainment, achievement and outcomes.

In Northumberland we have the most amazing cared for children. Their talent, resilience and successes are a testament to their hard work. I've had the pleasure of meeting several of our young people this year, who like all of children are truly remarkable and have amazing futures ahead of them, reminding us of why we do what we do!

There have been too many successes to name. Some highlights include outstanding Post 16 results, the continued effort and achievement of one Year 11 pupil who achieved Expert Learner for the sixth consecutive year and one, who after a challenging year is now on his chosen pathway having enrolled in Military Preparation College, with the support of our Careers Adviser.

The launch of the Post 16 PEP in September 2023 was a huge success for the team. All Year 12 and 13 pupils in education, employment or training have received an in person PEP meeting attended by our Post 16 Education Mentor. We recognised the process could be improved for pupils who were not in education, employment or training and have adapted the PEP to ensure it is a more supportive experience.

Our transformational project, Northumberland Schools CARE, is now into its second year and continues to support schools in adopting a relational approach. This coming year there will be a focus on Secondary schools.

School move delays and stability were significant challenges for all of us. In year school moves caused delays due to lack of school places, particularly for those moving out of county. We are actively working with other local authorities and the Children's Commissioner to address this as it is a national issue. Attendance and the overuse of suspensions remains a concern; however, the challenges allowed us to reflect and adapt our practice, listening to pupil voice to better support schools to ensure our children feel safe, supported and that they belong.

Lastly, a huge and sincere thank you to our Designated Teachers (DTs), we are lucky in Northumberland to have a team of such supportive, committed DTs, your dedication is invaluable, thank you!!!!

As Deputy Virtual School Headteacher I am the manager of the ESLAC team. This Spotlight on ESLAC demonstrates perfectly how this extraordinary multi-disciplinary team works together to make a difference to cared for children and the schools they attend.

Tara Prescott
Deputy Virtual School Headteacher

Spotlight on ESLAC

What we were concerned about: Lyle, a Year 1 pupils with an EHCP, received 4 suspensions in the autumn term amounting to 12 missed sessions and he was placed on a part-time timetable. As a cared for child this would have seemed to Lyle like further rejection from a place of safety and missing six days of education would have put him at further risk of poor educational outcomes. In terms of stability, mounting suspensions not only put his school place at risk but, coupled with a part-time timetable, also put extra pressure on his foster carer.

What we did (ESLAC):

- EPs went into school for observation and consultation about Lyle in September 2023. A report was written translating his presenting behaviours into unmet needs and then into strategies to meet those needs. The school used this as the basis of an individual support plan for Lyle.
- Two Education Intervention Workers provided 1:1 support to Layton four mornings per week for five weeks during the autumn term to bolster in-school support, model good practice and help school staff feel supported.
- In the spring term EPs provided intensive 1:1 support to staff in the form of weekly supervision sessions for the two teaching assistants supporting Lyle. The aim of the sessions was to help staff feel nurtured and empowered while working with a child with complex trauma. The sessions reduced to fortnightly and came to an end by Easter as staff were managing well.
- Our EP also had regular contact with the Head Teacher and DT via emails, phone calls and face to face check-ins, helping them to feel cared for by our team.
- Our Lead Teacher for primary oversaw the plan for Lyle, attending all of his education meetings.
- Our SEN Officer wrote Lyle's EHCP 1 month ahead of timescales.

Impact: following the intense support from the ESLAC team Lyle received no further suspensions in Year 1 and attended school full time for the rest of the year. His attendance improved from 70% in the autumn term to 99% and 97% in the spring and summer terms respectively.

Lyle remained in the same foster placement for the whole of the academic year.

With his EHCP in place, Lyle has a place at a special school from September 2024. A sudden change of school placement was avoided for Lyle during Year 1 and instead he will start his new school at the beginning of Year 2 following a carefully planned transition.

Feedback from school described the EP input as invaluable, flexible and supportive. "Her ability to provide supportive yet challenging conversations, to keep the child's needs at the centre of all around them, and to help others stay positive and empathetic in the face of behavioural challenges is exceptional.

Northumberland's Virtual School

Northumberland's Virtual School Headteacher is managed through children's social care and has Head of Service oversight of the work of four teams that fulfil statutory duties for the local authority to ensure that children are safer in education. Those services they provide are:

- Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children
- Promoting the education of children who have and have had a social worker
- School attendance
- Children missing and at risk of missing education
- Elective home education
- Licensing for children in entertainment and employment
- Safeguarding standards in schools, including the training of Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Providing education for children with health and medical needs who cannot attend school

The Virtual School Headteacher chairs the Safer in Education Group of the Northumberland Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Partnership.

The ESLAC – education support for looked after children – team is the operational arm of the Virtual School that is dedicated to cared for and previously cared for children. It is a multi-disciplinary team with 21 staff/18.66 fte providing a range of expertise in teaching, educational psychology, education welfare, careers' guidance and therapeutic interventions.

The team provides training and support for Designated Teachers for looked after and previously looked after children in all education settings.

The MALAP – multi agency looked after partnership – has terms of reference as the governing body of the Virtual School. Governance is provided by the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG).

ESLAC is funded by NCC and the Pupil Premium Plus grant from the DfE.

Northumberland's Virtual School is a member of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers.

Priorities for continuous improvement

Summary of progress 2023-24

Overall, the Virtual School made good progress in achieving its improvement priorities for 2022-23:

- We said we were going to embed the whole Children's Services approach to relational and trauma-informed practice, this work is on-going and starting to have an impact.
- We said we were going to improve all aspects of school stability and although we have had a positive impact in some aspects of that this work is on-going.
- We said we were going to improve recruitment and retention into Post 16 education, employment and training, and we have achieved that for September 2024.
- We said we were going to provide strong leadership to promote good corporate parenting, this work is on-going and starting to have an impact.

Our priorities for improvement 2024-25

This annual evaluation of has identified 3 clear priorities for continuous improvement for 2024-25, to:



Improve stability



Accelerate Progress



Embed a relational Approach

Specific actions under-pinning each priority are set out in the separate document that is the Virtual School Improvement Plan 2024-25.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations			
Abbreviation	Definition	Abbreviation	Definition
AP	Alternative Provision	K	SEND need
A8	Attainment 8 is an average of pupils' highest scores in a secondary school in 8 specific subjects	KS1	Key Stage 1
COSA	Consideration of Statutory Assessment	KS2	Key Stage 2
CYPS	Children and Young People's Service	KS4	Key Stage 4
DVSH	Deputy Virtual School Headteacher	NEWST	Northumberland Emotional Wellbeing Support Team
EBSA	Emotionally based school avoidance	NEET	Not in education, employment and training
EET	Education, employment and training	PP+	Pupil Premium Plus
EHCP or E	Education, Health and Care Plan	PACE	Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy
EIW	Education Intervention Worker	PEP	Personal Education Plan
EMHWP	Emotional and mental health and wellbeing	PMH	Primary Mental Health

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition	Abbreviation	Definition
EP	Educational Psychologist	P8	Progress is an average score measuring progress over 5 years since KS2. 0 means in line with the average rate of progress of all children nationally
ePEP	Electronic Personal Education Plan	SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
ESLAC	Education Support for Looked After Children team	SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health
ESOL	English as a second language	UASC	Unaccompanied asylum seeking child
EY	Early Years	VS	Virtual School
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education	VSH	Virtual School Headteacher

A note about the data

At the time of writing this report the provisional DfE data is not yet available. The data used is local and unless otherwise indicated it refers to all pupils and not the official cohort.

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

The official cohort does not comprise all pupils in a year group at the time of the assessment, but all those of statutory school age who have been in care for 12 months or more from 31st March of 2023 and of those how many match to the school census. This can change what the data might be telling us significantly.

The Virtual School captures data for whole cohorts, so where local data (and not validated DfE data) is quoted then it refers to all pupils in one year group at one time regardless of the length of time they have been in care or the school census.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this publication is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate at the time of production. Data sources are available upon request.

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