REPORT TO:	Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	8 November 2021
REPORTING OFFICER:	Sharon Williams, Headteacher of Halton Virtual School, People Directorate
PORTFOLIO:	Children, Young People and Families
SUBJECT:	Headteacher of the Virtual School's Annual Report for Halton Children in Care
WARD(S)	All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide the Board with the Headteacher of the Virtual School's annual report on the education outcomes and achievement of Halton Children in Care.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

i) **note the information provided; and**
ii) **accept the Headteacher of the Virtual School's annual report as an accurate account of the performance on the education outcomes and achievement of Halton Children in Care.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Please see the attached report for the detailed data, analysis and summary of the work of Halton Virtual School during the academic year 2020-21.

3.2 Due to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic a decision was made to suspend all Primary tests and to change to teacher assessment for the allocation of GCSE results. This means that it is not possible to provide yearly comparisons for end of Key Stage progress and attainment. Whilst full school attendance did resume for parts of the academic year there was a national lockdown in the Spring term which means it is again difficult to provide yearly comparisons.

3.4 The work of the Virtual School has continued throughout the academic year and the full annual report does provide detailed analysis of how Halton Children in Care have performed against each of the individual key performance indicators, how they have been supported in order to mitigate against the impact of the COVID

restrictions and also a summary of the Virtual School's progress towards it's identified key priorities for the academic year 2020-21 and identifying the priorities for the Virtual School in 2021-22.

3.5 As this is a covering report it only provides a summary of the overall performance of the children and young people and a summary of the Virtual School's performance for 2020-21.

3.6 **Children in care overall performance against key education outcomes**

Halton Virtual School operate an 'At Risk Register' so that we can track and prioritise those children and young people in care who are at risk of not achieving good educational outcomes. On the At Risk Register good performance is considered to be when a child in care:

- Is making at least expected progress across all key subject areas in their phase of education.
- Is currently or likely to achieve age related expectations in all key subject areas
- Has attendance that is above 95%
- Has had no fixed term exclusions
- Is accessing their full educational entitlement
- Has not had any time off school roll

A child will be flagged in the following way against these criteria:

	Has no flags against any of the key performance indicators
	1 flag - Is not making at least expected progress/not going to achieve age related expectations **OR** is not achieving 1 other performance indicator
	2 flags - Is not making at least expected progress/not going to achieve age related expectations **AND** is not achieving 1 other performance indicator
	3 or more flags - Is not making at least expected progress/not going to achieve age related expectations **AND** is not achieving 2 or more other performance indicator

Positive performance is a reduction in the percentage of children who are flagged as red and an increase in the percentage of those flagged as green.

The chart below shows the percentage of children in each of the risk categories across the academic year. As can be seen, despite the significant impact of the disruption to learning as a result of the pandemic, there has been an increase in the number being flagged as green across the academic year. This is as a result of the

collaborative work lead by the Virtual School and including schools and Children's Social Care. This collaboration has helped to mitigate the risks of children and young people not achieving good educational outcomes in challenging circumstances.
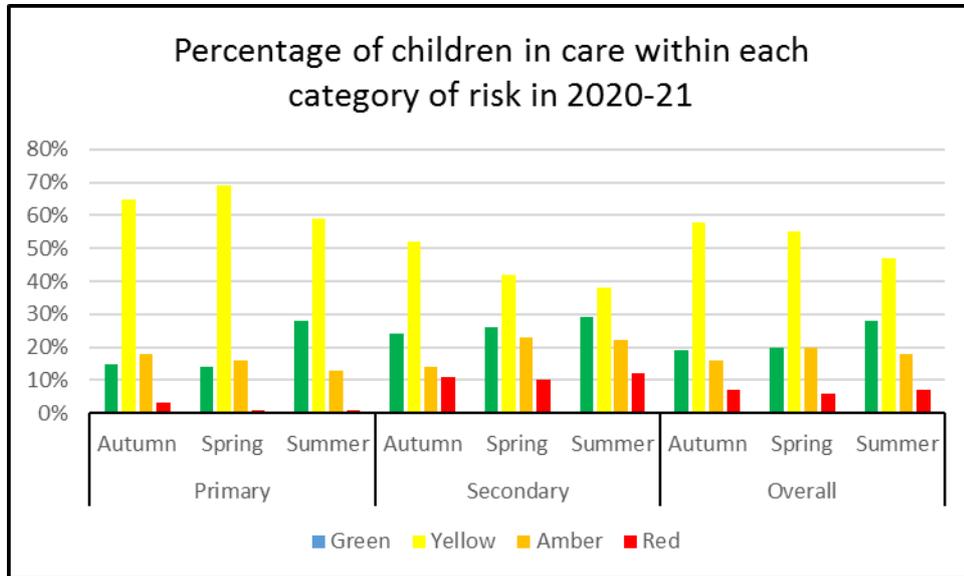
3.7   Performance of Halton Virtual School against its key priorities for 2020-21:

✓ = Good Performance
≈ = there is some improvement but there is still concern
✗ = an area of underperformance

Priority	Achieved	Analysis
To ensure that all Halton children in care continue to access their educational entitlement throughout the COVID 19 pandemic.	✓	Despite the challenges of high transmission rates in Halton, children in care attendance and engagement throughout the academic year remained good. During the lockdown period engagement in remote learning was tracked on a daily basis and dynamic risk assessments were continually updated ensuring that any issues were addressed without delay. When a young person could not access their education provision a support package was put in place until this was resolved.
Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care	≈	All Primary tests were suspended due to the pandemic and KS4 attainment was marked using teacher assessments not formal

and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on achieving the higher grades in Key Stage 4.		exams as a result of interrupted learning. There were positive signs in the grades awarded to KS4 pupils although the achievement at the higher levels is still an area of focus. From PEP data there are signs that children in care are continuing to make at least expected progress and this is positive considering the lost learning time the children have experienced.
Improve the quality of Personal Education Plans, including Early Years and Post 16, with a particular focus on target setting, impact measures for Pupil Premium Plus and tracking the curriculum accessed.	✔	There have been issues with the migration to the new CSC Eclipse system which has resulted in some schools struggling to complete the PEPs. However, PEP completion and quality have both improved or at least been maintained despite the challenges.
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	✘	Due to the impact of the pandemic it has not been possible to complete this. However, sharing of good practice has taken place with our schools.
To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%	✔	Secondary aged young people have been particularly impacted by the higher transmission rates both within Halton and the NW region resulting in bubbles collapsing and self-isolation. In addition increases in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and challenges in securing care placements have resulted in some young people having periods of time not on roll. However, given all of the above secondary attendance has been positive on the whole.

Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	✓	Fixed term exclusions have been low across all phases of education.
Monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school rated as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.	≈	Despite the impact of the pandemic and national lockdown progress measures have continued to be monitored and risk assessed on a termly basis. Support and Challenge visits have continued remotely. Data analysis has shown that progress of children in care has improved across all areas from previous years but there is still more improvement needed to close the gap with their non-care peers and to mitigate against lost learning due to the pandemic.
Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	≈	Quality assurance visits to Specialist provisions could not be carried out due to COVID restrictions. Therefore the dashboard could not be fully developed. However, SEND children in care continued to be monitored in the same way as all other children.
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 19 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	≈	A new KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer and also a Post 16 PEP Coordinator have been appointed and direct work has begun. Due to the pandemic it has been challenging for young people to access their chosen EET provision but this is being tracked and the young people are being supported to maintain their engagement.
Improve capacity within the Virtual School to extend the direct approach to include 19-22 year	≈	The KS4 and Post Employability Officer has begun to deliver direct work to our care leavers and support them around their engagement in EET. This is in its infancy so more time will be

old care leavers.		needed to see the impact.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Please see below regarding national policy changes that will have implications for the support provided through Halton Virtual School.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Halton Virtual School relies heavily on the use of Pupil Premium Plus funding from the Government to support the educational outcomes of Children in Care. This includes support provided through the Personal Education Plan, for the staffing required to carry out its duties to a high and effective standard, and the ability to commission specialist psychological assessments, as well as provide direct curriculum support for the children and young people. There is currently an agreement that this funding will remain in place until 2022 but that it will be reviewed to take into account other budgetary changes and pressures, particularly in light of the impact of the COVID pandemic.

5.2 There is a major risk to the outcomes of our most vulnerable children if this funding ceases because Halton Virtual School will no longer be able to provide the high level and necessary educational support for our children in care. Halton's ILACS inspection in 2020 stated that the Virtual School required more capacity in order to keep delivering its very good work so the grant funding has been used to meet this suggestion (details of the staffing structure are contained within the full annual report). If the grant funding used by the Virtual School ceases this will have a direct impact on its capacity to meet not only the statutory requirements but continue to deliver its Ofsted validated bespoke support model to Halton's children in care. Therefore, Council funding of at least the same level will need to be identified to mitigate against this.

5.3 Halton Virtual School continues to look to provide additional employment and training opportunities for Care Leavers through access to apprenticeships and work programmes. There needs to be a review of funding opportunities to support these and also creative opportunities both within the Council and within local businesses.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The educational outcomes of Children in Care remain a key priority for the Council.

6.2   **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

If Children in Care do not achieve their expected educational outcomes, there is a high risk that they will become NEET and therefore not achieve employment which fulfils their aspirations or enables them to be active participants in the community.

6.3   **A Healthy Halton**

Research has demonstrated that issues related to the emotional health and well-being have a significant impact upon the educational outcomes for Children in Care. Timely and effective services are vital in providing emotional support for our young people to enable them to have positive engagement in their learning and achieve their potential.

6.4   **A Safer Halton**

Due to their lived experiences Children in Care can be at higher risk of child sexual exploitation, and episodes of missing from care or school. Research does indicate that these factors all have a negative impact upon educational outcomes for our children and young people in care. Therefore, all agencies need to provide proactive support in order to keep children in care safe.

6.5   **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0   **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1   If the outcomes for our Halton Children in are do not improve then there is a continued risk that they are more likely to become NEET and not become active and positive partners in their community.

8.0   **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1   Children in Care continue to be a vulnerable group whose life experiences of trauma, neglect and abuse mean that they have not had the same start to life as other young people.

9.0   **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.