HALTON VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Visualise your dream

Dare to try

Learn to release your potential

Annual Report

2020-21

Contents

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the work of the Virtual School within the academic year 2020-21.

Where we were the previous year, 2019-20

Summary of performance against Key Priorities

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

Priority	Achieved	Analysis
Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care peers, with a particular focus on those in Key Stage 4.	≈	Due to COVID 19 restrictions only GCSE results were awarded and these were based on teacher assessments. Performance improved in all areas with the exception of the higher grades. This remains a focus for the Virtual School.
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.	≈	Due to COVID 19 formal education was suspended from March 2020, therefore, the PEPs were amended to reflect the new circumstances so a year on year comparison is not possible. Pupil Premium Plus was also not able to be utilised in the same way as no formal teaching was undertaken for the Spring and Summer terms.
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	✗	Due to COVID 19 restrictions it was not possible to complete this.
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	≈	Due to COVID 19 restrictions formal education was suspended from March 2020. However, for the time pupils were in school there was a reduction in exclusions for the Autumn and Spring terms in comparison with the previous year.
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.	≈	Due to COVID 19 restrictions formal education was suspended from March 2020 therefore progress measures cannot be compared across the years. However, challenge and support visits were undertaken in the academic year

		up to the suspension of formal education.
Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	✗	Due to the suspension of formal education as a result of COVID 19 restrictions progress and attendance outcomes for SEND pupils could not be formally monitored from March 2020.
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.	✗	COVID 19 restrictions and the loss of capacity within the Virtual School have impacted on progress in this area.

What we did this year in 2020-21

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.

Percentage of children in care within each category of risk in 2020-21
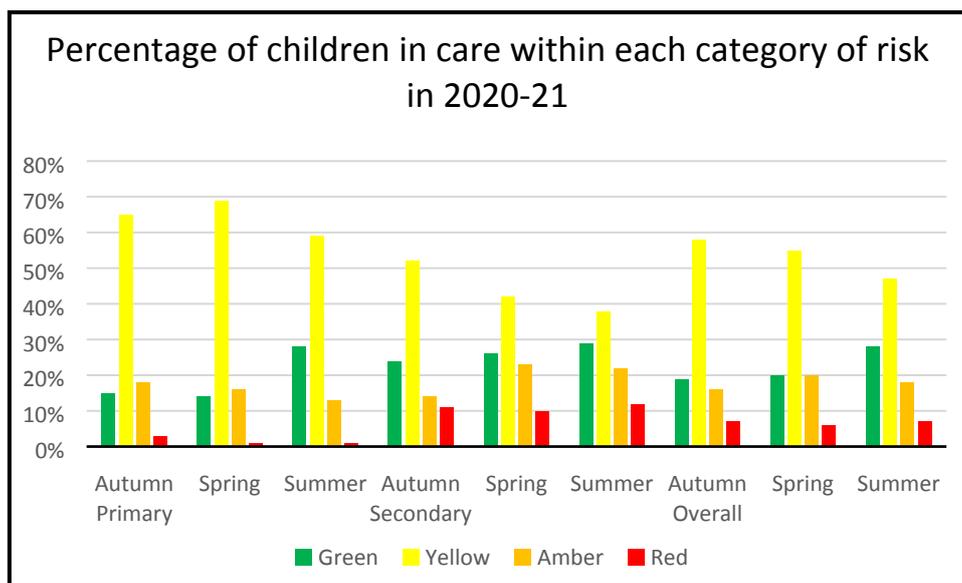
Summary of performance against the Key Priorities identified for the current academic year

COVID 19 pandemic continued to disrupt the education of children in care during the academic year 2020-21. Whilst schools returned to full attendance in Autumn 2020 and Summer 2021 terms, the high transmission rates in Halton and the NW region as a whole did mean that a high percentage of children and young people continued to have interrupted learning. Spring 2021 term was impacted by a national lockdown. Whenever children were not able to access the classroom, learning took place remotely.   The Virtual School has continued to operate with a 'business as usual' approach as much as possible and as can be seen some positive progress has been made – although the COVID 19 restrictions have impacted as some areas so we are not as far on as we would have hoped.

In the following report a summary of the outcomes has been provided but due to the challenging circumstances it has not always been possible to compare this academic year with the previous year.

Below are the overarching key priorities identified 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 and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on achieving the higher grades in Key Stage 4.	≈	All Primary tests were suspended due to the pandemic and KS4 attainment was marked using teacher assessments not formal 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 old care leavers.	≈	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 needed to see the impact.

Other key performance during 2020-21:

The numbers of children having either a school and/or a placement move during the academic year has remained low. This has been as a result of good joint working between the Virtual School, social workers and the Placements Team.

Monitoring of all other key indicators did continue throughout the academic year but this has again been complicated by the COVID restrictions. Nonetheless these outcomes remained positive for our children and young people in care.

As a result of feedback from our schools and social workers no face to face training or activity support has taken place due to COVID 19 restrictions. However, virtual support has been provided to professionals and young people alike.

What we will focus on next year in 2021-22

Priority	Rationale
To continue to mitigate against the risk of lost learning and to increase the percentage of children who are achieving good educational outcomes.	We need to track performance against all key indicators and ensure that children in care are able to access all support necessary to enable them to achieve good outcomes. We need to challenge schools around their use of catch up funding and utilise the Recovery Premium. We need to work collaboratively with CSC to reduce care and placement moves which potentially adds to further lost learning and instability.
Close the progress and attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on achieving the higher grades in Key stage 4.	Although there has been an increase in children in care making progress they are still not performing as well as their non-care peers. This is particularly evident at Key Stage 4 especially with higher levels in English and Maths. It is an important area of focus as it opens up more career avenues for our young people.
Continue to 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.	The PEP is the key document that ensures that children in care are able to achieve their full potential and access the support they need to do this. Although both completion and quality of PEPs is improving the evidence shows that there needs to be a greater focus on improving the SMART targets and creative use of PP+. Early Years and Post 16 also remain areas that need to improve.
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	It has not been possible to achieve this due to COVID restrictions but it remains an important tool to understand how our use of PP+ can have greater impact on improving the outcomes for all children in care.
Develop a Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus model to provide additional support and improve retention.	The DfE are conducting a pilot into the use of Post 16 PP+ and whilst Halton did not bid for this we have embraced the concept as a way of improving our Post 16 young people's outcomes and also the quality of Post 16 PEPs.
To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%	Whilst attendance has remained good in spite of the challenges during the pandemic there still needs to be a focus on KS4 pupils who can become disengaged, particularly when they are experiencing other life issues.
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	It will be important to continue to monitor the impact of returning to education on the social, emotional and behavioural needs of children in care and to ensure that exclusions and resulting time out of school is minimised.
Continue to 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.	We need to ensure that a child in care is not being further disadvantaged by being educated in a school judged as requiring improvement. We need to ensure that they are accessing quality first teaching and all the support they require to make progress.

Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	There have been challenges in placing children requiring specialist education provision due to the national shortage of places. We need to ensure that a child can be effectively supported in a school that best meets their needs and that it will provide high quality provision.
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 22 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	Due to impact of the pandemic the number of young people who are NEET has risen. We now need to support them to re-engage in a career path of their choosing and ensure they have clear progression routes. This will include delivering bespoke CIAEG as required and supporting them through direct work to maintain their engagement.
To develop a proactive and bespoke package of support for UASC.	There has been an increase in the number of UASC. The young people arrive with very little English making it hard to find appropriate education provision for them. Whilst we do currently provide them with support it is done on an ad hoc basis rather than through a bespoke proactive offer of support.

CONTEXT

Halton is a small borough which consists of two towns, Runcorn and Widnes. The population is 129,759 of which around 25,954 are children and young people (0-15).

At the time of writing, the Index of Deprivation Measure (IDM) places Halton as the 23rd most deprived area nationally, a deterioration from previous IDMs. Alongside this we have the 8th highest national Free School Meal population for Nursery and Primary and 4th highest for Secondary. Over half the wards in the borough have a third or more children living in poverty. The local economy is amongst the fastest growing in the Liverpool City region, and has a good proportion of high value industries. However, the educational profile of the borough is not at a level to take advantage of some of the job opportunities.

The purpose of the Virtual School is to enable all children and young people in care to Halton to become resilient and effective independent learners, so that they can achieve their full potential and become full and active participants in society.

Halton Virtual School Team

Role	Name	Funding	New or existing – contract type
Headteacher of the Virtual School	Sharon Williams	Core funded	Existing - permanent
Primary and Early Years PEP and Progress Coordinator	Joanne Lloyd	Pupil Premium Plus	Existing – ongoing grant
Secondary and Post 16 PEP and Progress Coordinator	Peter McPartland	Pupil Premium Plus	Existing – ongoing grant
Early Years Education Support Worker	Gemma Donaldson	Pupil Premium Plus	New – ongoing grant
School Age Education Support Worker	Min Ling Lee-Tai	Core funded	Existing – permanent
School Age Education Support Worker	Louisa Rees	Core funded	Existing - permanent
Post Looked After and Placed with Families Education Support Worker	David Bradshaw	Sec 31 Grant - PLAC	New – ongoing grant
Post 16 PEP Coordinator	Kelly Franklin	Youth Service grant	New – fixed term 2 years
KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer	Ian Wilson	Troubled Families grant	New – fixed term 2 years

We have worked hard to expand the Virtual School in response to the feedback provided in Halton's ILACS inspection which stated that more capacity was needed to further improve the good work of the Virtual School. We have ensured that our key priority areas of Early Years and Post 16 have benefited from this increase. However, we have also recognised that as Halton has a high number of children and young people placed within their families, that additional support was also required for this cohort.

Due to the nature of LA funding, a large number of these posts are grant funded and on short term fixed contracts or rolling contracts with the confirmation of the continuation of the grant. In fact there are only 3 permanent posts within the Virtual School as a whole. This presents a risk to the work of the Virtual School and the LA as a whole in fulfilling its statutory duty to promote the education of children in care and post looked after children. These vital roles will cease if the grants end or further funding is not found.

We work closely with a number of other services within the LA and have additional capacity as a result of corporate parenting responsibilities:

- Named SEN Case Worker – provides support with EHCPs and finding appropriate specialist provision
- Named Education Welfare Officer – provides attendance alerts and advice
- Education Psychology – commissioned to provide training and advice for schools
- Named YOS officer – provides support with YOS risk assessments and securing appropriate education provision
- Named 14-19 Case Worker – ensures priority is given to tracking our post 16 young people accessing education within Halton

We support and promote the education of all children in care (CIC) to Halton regardless of where they are living or being educated, from the age of 3 until they have completed their formal education. For the purposes of national performance reporting the cohort of children and young people consists of those that have been in care to Halton for at least 12 months from 31st March 2021. However, we do support, monitor and evaluate the educational outcomes of all children from the first day they enter care. The following information is accurate at the end of the academic year 2020-21.

295 CIC aged 3 - 19 years

- **270** in care for 12mth+
- **100** Primary
  110 Secondary
- School age
  151 educated in Halton
  59 educated outside of Halton
- School age
  116 in Foster Care
  42 in Residential
  51 with Family/friends
  1 in other accommodation
- **99** female
  111 male
- School age
  52 SEN Support
  1 Undergoing statutory assessment
  47 have an EHCP
- **31** Early Years
  100 Primary
  110 Secondary
  54 16 - 19 years
  57 19-22 years
- **80** Summer born
- School age
  4 have had missing from care episodes
  19 had 1 or more school move
  31 had 1 or more placement move

Governance of the Virtual School is undertaken by the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership Board which has multi-disciplinary membership, including Headteacher representation and the Director of Children and Adults Services, and is chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People. In addition further scrutiny and oversight is provided by Elected Members through the Children and Young People's Policy and Performance Board.

A key area for the Virtual School is to ensure that there is collaborative working with all services that help to support and promote the education of children in care and care leavers. This includes professionals from Children's Social Care, other services across the Local Authority, Schools, carers, key partners and most importantly the children and young people. The Virtual School team achieves this by the following:

- Being fully active support members to the Children in Care and Care Leavers Council attending each session and regularly consulting with the members on educational issues.
- Membership of the Fostering Panel to ensure that providing support for education is a key part of carer's assessments and when placing and matching children to carers.
- Membership of the Foster Carers Forum to ensure that any education related issues for foster carers can be addressed as they arise, including provision of training.

- Membership of the Placement Resource Panel and the Out of Borough Resource Panel to ensure that education provision is not disrupted without the agreement of the Headteacher of the Virtual School and only in exceptional circumstances.
- Membership of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel to ensure that support is provided both in school and at home.
- Membership and Chair of the North West Virtual Heads network group focusing on sharing good practice, developing strategies to overcome shared challenges and to plan effectively on a regional footing.
- Membership of Halton's associations of Primary and Secondary Headteachers.

NOTE

Unless stated the data within this report covers ALL children in care in 2020-21 and not only those in care for 12 months or more. The Attainment and Progress section focuses on the 12 month cohort only.

Profile and Demographics

Joiners and Leavers

The total number of children in care continues to increase and at the end of the academic year 2020 – 21 the total number was 295, 3 – 19 year olds; this is a 4.6%% increase on the end of the previous academic year 2019-20 and there have been previous increases of 11.6% (2017-18 to 2018-19)and 12.8% (2018-19 to 2019-20).

For the school age cohort in August 2020- July 2021 there were 17 Primary aged children who came into care with 14 leaving care. There were 16 young people who came into care in the Secondary phase and 8 who returned home. Years 10 and 11 had the most additions to their cohort a number of whom are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). It is significant when young people come into care during KS4 as they are late entries into care who have had significant disruption due previous issues combined currently with the impact of COVID 19 restrictions, which may impact negatively on their end of key stage outcomes.

Yr	Joiners	Leavers	Net
R	4	2	2
1	4	1	3
2	1	2	-1
3	1	1	0
4	1	3	-2
5	2	2	0
6	4	3	1
7	0	2	-2
8	1	1	0
9	1	0	1
10	7	2	5
11	7	3	4

Mobility across the school age year groups 2020-21
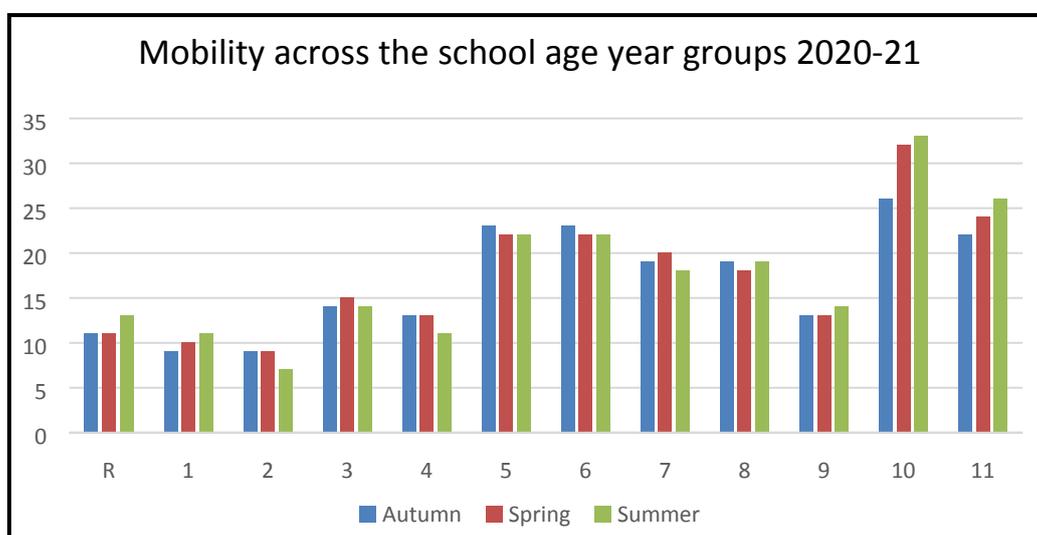
Placement and School Moves

The national research 'Education Matters in Care' suggests that any placement move will have a detrimental impact on a child's educational attainment unless it is carefully planned, timed and supported:

> 'Being able to stay at the same school and avoid disruption to their education has a strong association with educational attainment for looked after children.'

In addition, Sonia Jackson's research suggests that every school move sets a child back by at least 6 months educationally.

Care Planning Regulations and the statutory duty on local authorities 'Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children' clearly state that:

- The views of the Headteacher of the Virtual School should be given appropriate weighting as part of any decisions on placement moves.
- When a child comes into care everything should be done to maintain the child's existing school.
- Where this is not possible and there is a planned entry to care or placement move, then the school should be arranged at the same time as the care placement.
- If a child needs to move in an emergency and the existing school cannot be maintained, then a school should be sourced within 20 school days at the latest.
- A school with an Ofsted rating of Good or better should be prioritised when sourcing a new school for a child in care.

Placement moves

There were 31 children and young people who had 1 or more placement move during the academic year 2020-21. This number is a reduction of 3 on the previous year, due in part to the impact of COVID 19 restrictions. Of these:

- 25 had 1 placement move which in the majority of cases was related to moving to a long term placement.
- 6 had 2 placement moves
- 3 had 3 placement moves
- 1 had 6 placement moves.

The number of children in care who have had 1 or more placement moves in the academic year 2020-21

Moves 6, 1YP
3%

Moves 3, 3YP
9%

Moves 2, 6YP
17%

Moves 1, 25YP
71%

■ Moves 6, 1YP   ■ Moves 3, 3YP   ■ Moves 2, 6YP   ■ Moves 1, 25YP
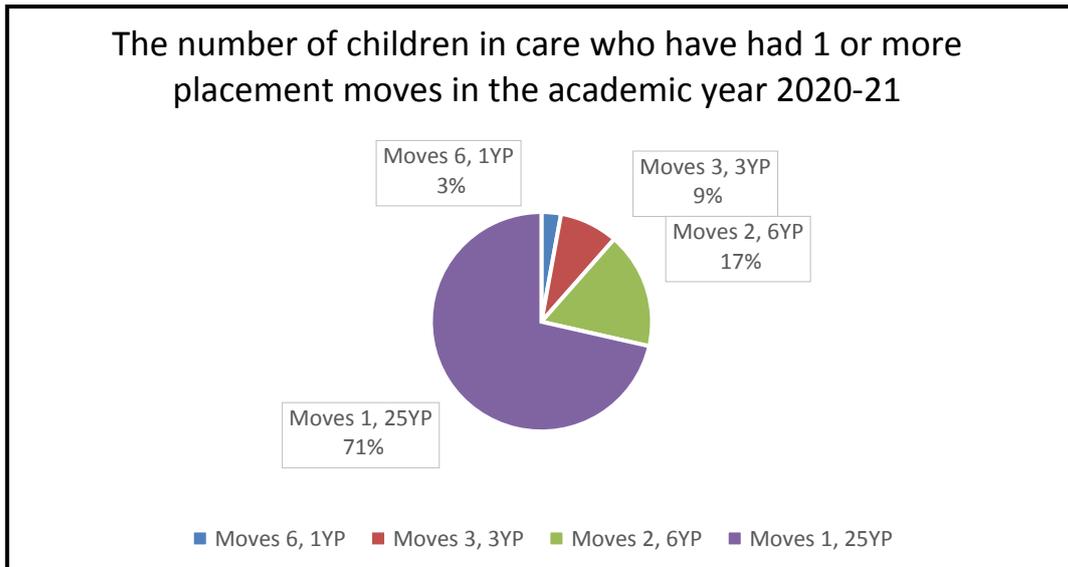
School moves

There were 19 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year, 15 had 1 move, whilst 4 had 2 moves.

There were 15 young people who have had periods of time not on a school roll. There are a high number of UASC in this cohort and it has been difficult to source an appropriate education provision as a result of delays in the age assessment confirming they are of statutory school age and also due to their very low levels of English. There were also 3 young people who had been discharged from secure accommodation and due to the impact of the pandemic care placements and specialist education provision have been hard to acquire at the same time. For all young people awaiting a school place the Virtual School provides tuition and sources an appropriate provision as soon as possible.

The average wait for a school place across the whole academic year was 22 days which is above the required 20 days. This figure was particularly impacted by UASC.

Average days wait for children in care to access a school following a move

—— 2017-18   —— 2018-19   —— 2019-20   —— 2020-21
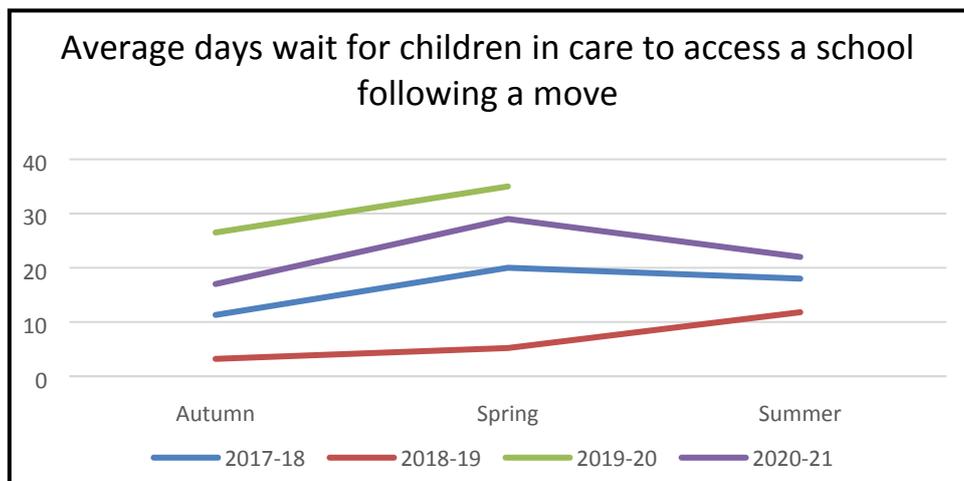
There were 13 children and young people who had both a school and placement move during 2020-21. Of these children:

- 5 had both 1 school and 1 placement move
- 3 had 1 school move and 2 placement moves
- 1 had 2 school moves and 1 placement move
- 2 had 2 school and placement moves each
- 1 had 2 school moves and 3 placement moves
- 1 had 2 school moves with 6 placement moves

The chart below shows the reasons for a school move taking place in 2020-21

Reasons for school moves for children in care in 2020-21

- OOB 56%
- InB 11%
- Crisis 6%
- Secure 21%
- EHCP 6%

Legend: OOB, InB, Crisis, Secure, EHCP
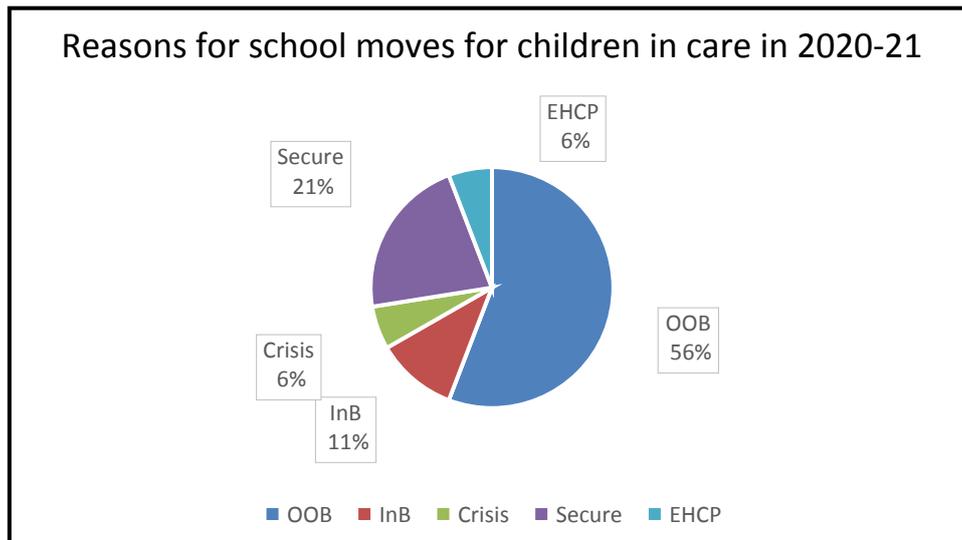
School Phase

The chart below shows a breakdown of children in care by each national curriculum year group for this current year 2020-21 and the previous 3 academic years. There are clear growth areas in pre-school aged children, Years 5 and 6 in Primary and particularly in the older age groups from Year 10 onwards.

Halton children in care at the end of an academic year over the past 4 years

Legend: 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21
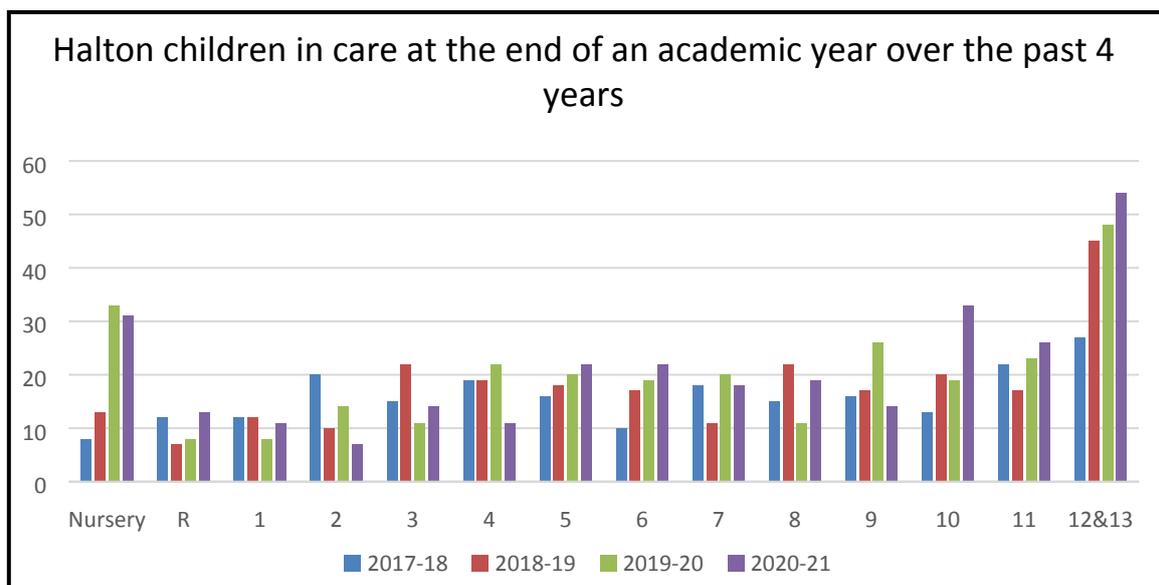
The chart below shows the percentage of children in care across the national curriculum year groups for the period of August 2020-July 2021

Breakdown of children in care in each National Curriculum year group in 2020-21

Year group	Percentage
Nursery	12%
R	4%
Y1	4%
Y2	2%
Y3	5%
Y4	4%
Y5	7%
Y6	7%
Y7	6%
Y8	6%
Y9	5%
Y10	11%
Y11	9%
Y12&13	18%
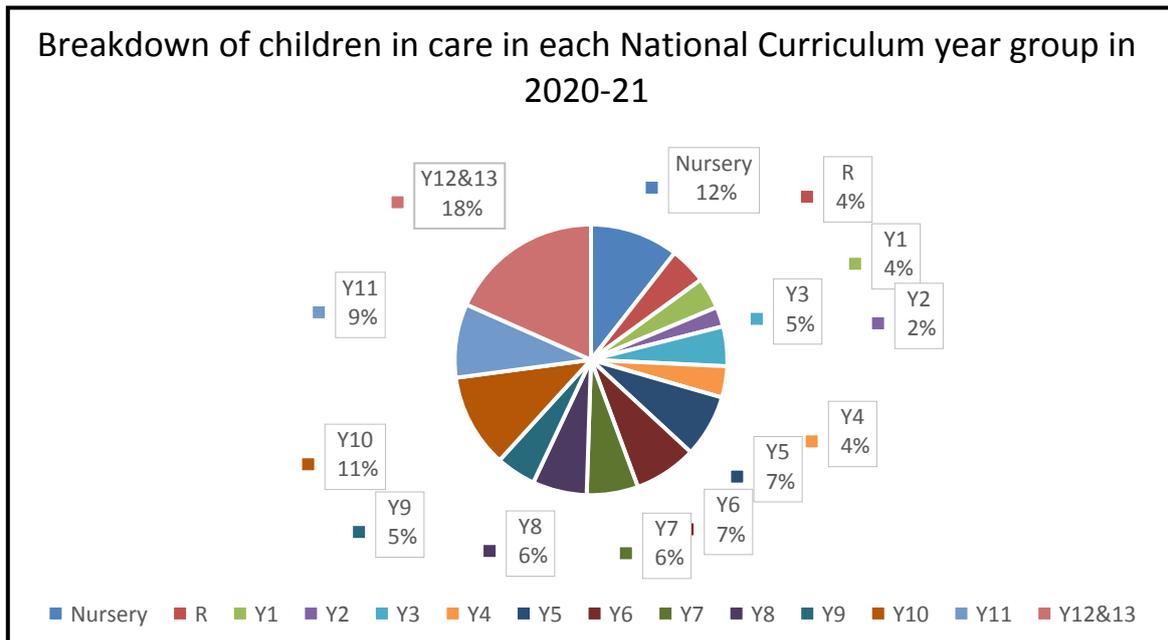
School Ofsted ratings

When a child comes into care it is not appropriate to simply move them from their school because the school is rated as less than Good. However, Halton Virtual School does undertake a risk assessment which takes into account knowledge of the school's overall performance, pastoral support systems, the child's progress and individual circumstances. Once this risk assessment has been completed and the view of the Virtual School is that a school move would be appropriate in the best interests of the child, then discussions take place with the child's social worker, parent/carer, and Independent Reviewing Officer and a supported transition plan is put in place.

This same process is undertaken if a school has an adverse Ofsted inspection and judgement and children in care are currently on roll.

Whenever there is a decision that a child in care remains in a school that is rated as Requires Improvement or below, rigorous monitoring of the child's progress and outcomes is undertaken, particularly through scrutiny of the Personal Education Plan.

All school moves for children in care must be agreed by the Headteacher of the Virtual School prior to the move taking place, unless in emergency and exceptional circumstances. When a request for a school move is made, the Virtual School complete an analysis of any recent Ofsted inspections of possible schools, speak to key staff including the Designated Teacher and where appropriate other local authority Virtual Schools. This is to ensure that the school chosen can meet all of the child's needs.

When a child is transitioning into Reception or to secondary school, the Virtual School provide advice and guidance to social workers and carers to ensure that all children are placed in suitable provision, with priority being given to schools that are judged as Good or better. The Headteacher of the Virtual School makes the final decision.

As a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, Ofsted suspended their inspections of schools, however, they reserved the right to carry out an inspection if the school were overdue and/or there were concerns.

The chart below covers the Ofsted ratings of all schools attended by children in care in Halton and out of borough.

2020-21 Ofsted ratings for schools attended by Halton children in care

- Outstanding, 24%
- Good, 56%
- Requires Improvement, 12%
- Special Measures, 8%

Legend: ■ Outstanding ■ Good ■ Requires Improvement ■ Special Measures
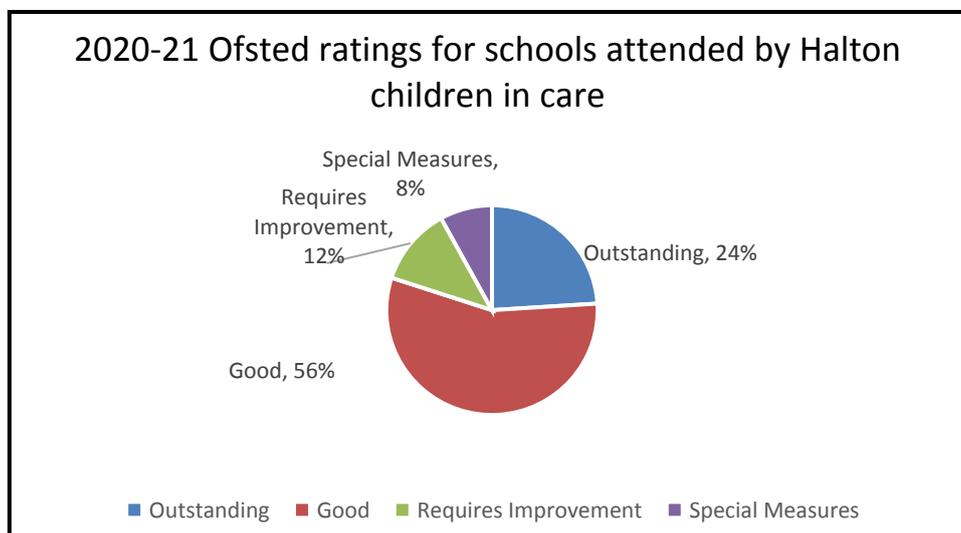
80% of children in care across both phases are attending schools that are judged to be Good or better. Whilst this is a slight decrease of 3% from the previous year it is still significantly higher than previous years. This improvement has come about because of the work that the Virtual School undertakes in sourcing the best school for our children and young people, this figure rises to 93% for those educated outside of Halton as this is when the Virtual School has sourced the provision. However, we do need to be mindful of the fact that the School Inspection Framework has also changed and this has impacted on some of the judgements this year.

Key priority for 2021-22

- Continue to monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school judged as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.

Key actions for 2021-22:

- Through termly tracking identify all schools' whose Ofsted judgement has changed so that the PEP and Progress Coordinator can then carry out a challenge and support visit to discuss progress of the children attending that school.
- The Virtual School will continue to work closely with social workers and carers in discussions around school admissions and transitions to ensure that children in care are only placed in schools that are Requires Improvement in exceptional circumstances.
- Work closely with our ASIAs to ensure that schools judged as Requires Improvement or below are making progress to achieve a better Ofsted outcome.

**Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

Children in care are significantly more likely to have additional needs than their non-care experienced peers, and are more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

As corporate parents Halton SEND services and the Virtual School have agreed that we need to retain responsibility for our most vulnerable children in care who are living outside of Halton but not in a stable placement and are in need of a statutory assessment. In these circumstances the Virtual School commission the Education Psychology Service to undertake the assessments and an SEN Caseworker is allocated to ensure the assessment is completed at least within the statutory timeframe. This decision has been made to ensure that the assessment process is not disrupted should the placement breakdown and to minimise the number of local authorities involved in completing the assessment. For all other children placed outside of Halton in stable placements it is the resident authority that undertake the assessment as per the Belongings Regulations.

There is a named SEN Caseworker and link Education Psychologist for each school within Halton and they monitor children in care as part of their discussions with schools. In addition to this the Virtual School has a named SEN Caseworker whose focus is those placed out of borough and on an EHCP. The case worker ensures that provision and targets within the EHCP are aligned with the termly Personal Education Plan.

In order to ensure that children in care have early identification of their needs and appropriate timely support, the Virtual School have commissioned bespoke children in care education psychology time and this is used to support our most vulnerable children who require statutory assessment but are being educated out of Halton; this time is also used for joint support and challenge meetings between schools, the school EP and the PEP and Progress Coordinator. This ensures that children in care are discussed on at least a termly basis and the graduated approach is implemented in a timely manner.

The following chart shows the percentage of Halton children in care who have an EHCP and the primary reason.

Children in Care who have an EHCP by Primary Need in 2020-21
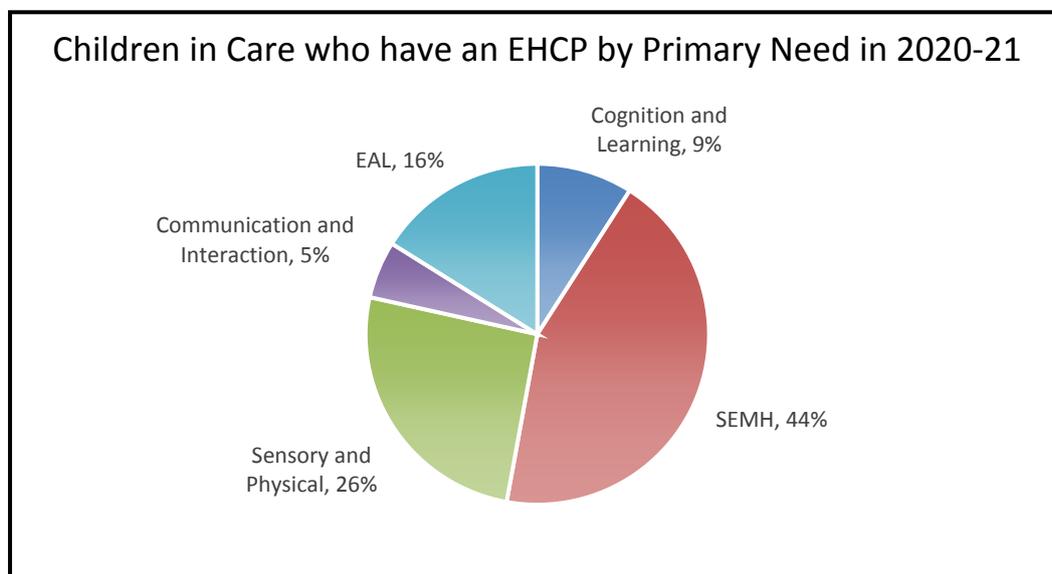
I have included EAL as although it is not within the SEN Code of Practice is it an additional barrier that our increasing number of UASC face in accessing their educational entitlement.

Work undertaken by the Virtual School:

- We have ensured that despite the challenging situation there has been no drift where applications for an EHCP have needed to be made or whilst the child or young person is

undergoing statutory assessment. This has been facilitated by the PEP Coordinators and by our commissioned EP support.

- The Virtual School has continued to work with our SEN Commissioning and SEN Assessment Teams to ensure that when a new specialist provision is required this is done as promptly as possible, including if the child is placed out of Halton on an emergency. However, this has been a challenge at times due to the impact of the pandemic.
- We have supported social workers and carers to complete their elements of any assessment or annual review documentation to ensure that the EHCP is comprehensive and holistic so better meeting the child's needs.
- We have supported, through Pupil Premium Plus, any child in care who has struggled with returning to school both academically and emotionally.
- Whilst a joint 'hands on' quality assurance process for our out of borough provisions was developed with our SEND Commissioning Service it was initially impacted by COVID restrictions. However, this took place remotely and once appropriate has become face to face again.
- During the national lockdown the Virtual School made regular contact with all our children with SEND and ensured that they were engaging in their learning as identified in their dynamic risk assessment. Their engagement was tracked on a daily basis and any issues were dealt with without delay.

Key Priority for 2021-22

- Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.

Key Actions 2021-22

- Continue with the joint school, EPS and Virtual School SEND support and challenge meetings with targeted Halton Primary and all Secondary schools to address early identification of need. This will ensure that schools are assessing needs and under performance early, providing appropriate and timely support and requesting statutory assessment without delay as determined by evidence.
- Resume implementation of an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) approach within two schools to develop whole school understanding and strategies to meet the SEMH needs of children in care. This has to be suspended previously due to COVID restrictions.
- Resume implementation of a PIVOTAL approach to behaviour management support within 4 schools so that SEMH needs of children are more effectively identified and managed without escalation to exclusion. This had to be suspended previously due to COVID restrictions.
- Further enhance scrutiny of SEND provision and related under performance through the termly Personal Education Plans, including challenging schools to request statutory assessment in a timely manner.
- Continue to provide training to develop understanding and awareness of the additional needs and impact of trauma on the learning of children in care.
- Resume implementation of a robust quality assurance process of all out of borough specialist provision attended by Halton children in care.
- Member of the Virtual School to become a SEN Partnership Panel member.

How academically successful have our children in care been in 2020-21?

Attainment and Progress

Whilst the Virtual School scrutinises and monitors the performance of all children in care to Halton, there is only a statutory requirement to nationally report on educational outcomes for those who have been in care for 12 months or more. The data within this section refers only to those children and young people who meet this statutory requirement.

Due to very small cohorts caution is needed in interpreting the educational outcomes for Halton children in care. Although the data may indicate differences between previous years the low numbers make it difficult when making comparisons or looking for generalisations across the cohorts.

Total numbers of children in care for 12 months covering all key stages					
Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number	61	69	72	52	73

-

What is a good educational outcome?

Context:

That a child has been in care for at least 12 months, living in a stable placement, with at least 95% attendance at a Good or better school, with no fixed term exclusions, and making at least expected progress from their starting point.

At Early Years Foundation Stage:

- A child has achieved the measure of Good Level of Development (GLD)

At Year 1 Phonics:

- A child has achieved the threshold of 32 or more in the Phonics test

At Key Stage 1:

- A child has achieved the Expected Standard in each subject area (Reading, Writing, and Maths) and in the 3 combined areas (RWM).

At Key Stage 2:

- A child has achieved the Expected Standard in each subject area (Reading, Writing, and Maths) and in the 3 combined areas (RWM). In addition the child had made at least their expected progress in Reading, Writing and Maths, from their educational starting point at Key Stage 1 (this indicated by a positive number).

<u>At Key Stage 4</u>:

- A young person has achieved English and Maths at grade 5 or above and that they have achieved highly on Attainment 8 and have a positive Progress 8 score.

<u>Attendance and Exclusions</u>:

- A child or young person's attendance has been above 90% for the academic year (the Persistent Absence benchmark). However, Halton Virtual School have set an attendance target of above 95% for the academic year as an internal measure of success.
- In addition they have had no fixed term exclusions or been permanently excluded from school.

<u>EET</u>:

- A young person should be actively engaged in Education, Employment or Training (EET) from the age of leaving school until at least 19 years old.

Educational performance across the Key Stages for children in care for 12 months or more in 2020-21

Due to the impact of the pandemic the Government decided not to hold the end of Key Stages tests in Primary schools and not to award any teacher assessments either. Therefore, there has been no requirement for schools to provide data for Early Years Foundation Stage Good Level of Development, Y1 or Y2 Phonics, end of Key Stage 1 or end of Key Stage 2. This means that no formal assessment data can be compared with previous years.

The Government did decide that results would be provided for those pupils who should have taken GCSEs at the end of Year 11. Schools could decide how to collect evidence of attainment and then collate these into an overall teacher assessment. In Halton this was done via a blend of portfolio work and in-school assessments.

The Virtual School liaised closely with all secondary schools to ensure that the teacher assessments provided took into account, where possible and appropriate, the extenuating circumstances that some of our young people had been facing throughout the academic year.

<u>Key Stage 4</u>

There were 17 young people in the cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more:

- 9 of whom were male.
- 9 were educated in Halton schools.
- 10 schools attended by Halton young people in care in Y11 were rated as Good or better by Ofsted.
- 41% had an EHCP, 29% were educated in non-mainstream provision.
- 53% were placed in residential provision, 53% lived out of borough, and 6% were placed with parents.
- In Year 11, 53% had attendance below 95%, with all but 1 young person in this group having attendance below 90% as well.
- Across Key Stage 4, 5 young people had attendance below 95% both years and of this group, 4 young people had attendance below 90% for both years.

- 1 young person was unable to access full time provision based on a psychology assessment, 1 young person could not access education based on a Court risk assessment, 2 young people had periods of time in secure and the remaining young people had unauthorised absences.
- 17.5% had periods of fixed term exclusions during Key Stage 4, however, all exclusions were below 5 days.
- 1 young person accessed alternative provision and 3 young people had periods on a reduced timetable to re-engage them in their education.
- 4 young people had a school move during KS4, 2 young people as a result of moving into secure and 2 young people following a move out of borough.

Due to the way the GCSE grades were awarded this year there cannot be a like for like comparison with previous years. However, performance does show that young people did achieve in line with their PEP predictions.

| 2020-21	E4+	E5+	M4+	M5+	EM4+	EM5+	SC4+	SC5+	5GCSEs EM4+	5GCSEs EM4+	5GCSEs 4+	5GCSEs 5+
% CIC achieving	35	23.5	18	6	18	6	23.5	0	18	0	18	0

Summary

Attainment	≈	Improvements were made in both single English and Maths at all levels. Performance on the combined measure at Grade 5+ also improved. However, there are still no young people in care in Halton achieving 5 GCSES including the combined English and maths at grade 5. This is a priority focus for the next academic year.

What the Virtual School has done and its impact:

- Scrutinised the appropriateness of the targets within each PEP and ensured that the Pupil Premium Plus funding had impact.
- The Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator held termly challenge and support visits with schools to discuss individual young people's progress and the impact of Pupil Premium Plus interventions. This ensured that the interventions were targeted at the areas of development identified through their outcomes.
- Progress Improvement Clinics were chaired by the Director of Children's and Adults Services with the aim of removing any barriers to Key Stage 4 young people making the maximum progress they can.
- Provided one-to-one tuition on core subjects when identified as an area of development in the PEP.
- Maintained contact with the young people and their carers to ensure that all resources and support were made available as required.
- Provided appropriate IT equipment to enable the young people to continue to access learning remotely.
- Worked closely with Secondary Designated Teachers to ensure that the young people had the opportunity to complete their work portfolios and assessments prior to the Teacher Assessed grades being awarded.

Progress of other children in care:

Halton Virtual School monitor the progress of all children in care on a termly basis using data provided by schools through the PEP and the termly data collection.   As can be seen from the chart below despite the disruption to learning experienced through the Spring term children and young people did continue to make at least expected progress.

Percentage of children in care making at least expected progress across all core areas in each Key Stage and overall in 2020-21

	Reception	Primary	Secondary	Overall
Autumn	100%	49%	45%	50%
Spring	90%	42%	42%	44%
Summer	100%	79%	54%	67%
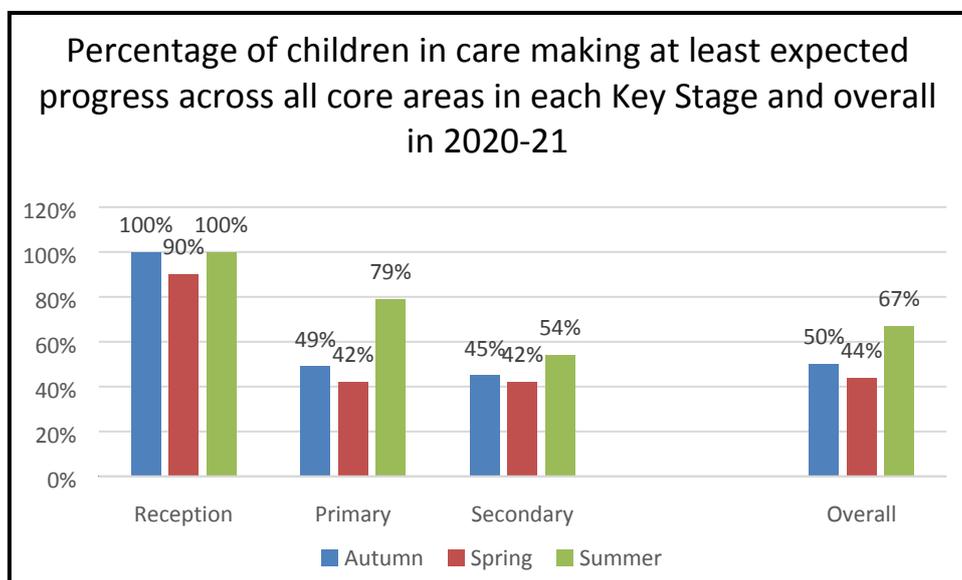
Whilst the data in the chart below is cohort specific it does demonstrate that the support provided by schools and Halton Virtual School has ensured that our children and young people have continued to make expected progress at similar rates to previous academic years. This is important in mitigating against the impact of the disruption they have experienced in the last 2 academic years. However, we still need to continue to prioritise all support required to ensure that our children in care do recover any lost learning and continue to close the gap on their non-care experienced peers. This is being done through close scrutiny of the PEPs, termly attainment data and also access to catch up support and Recovery Premium.

Percentage of children in care overall making at least expected progress from 2016-17 to 2020-21

Autumn					Spring					Summer				
2016-17 Overall	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21
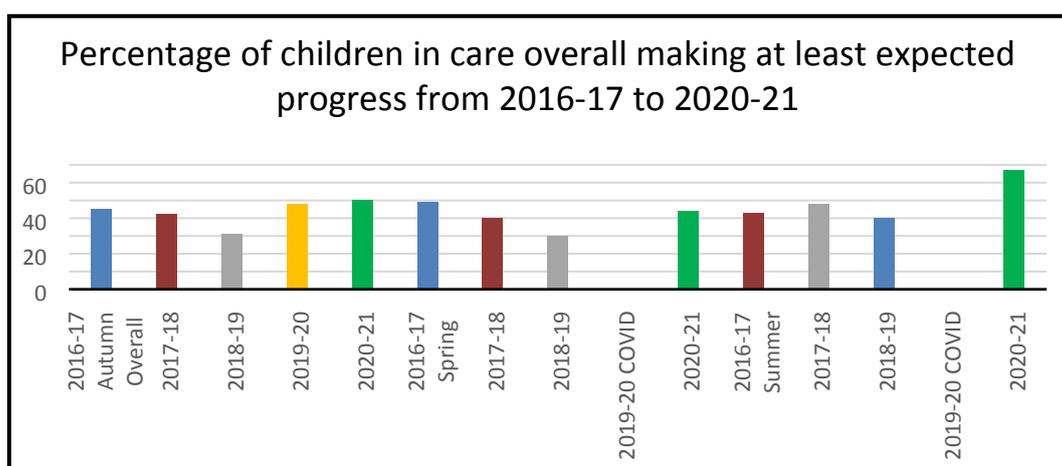
Other work undertaken by the Virtual School to promote continued engagement with learning:

- Virtual School have been working with carers and schools to ensure that children and young people in care have been able to access learning online during the COVID restrictions.
- Monitored on a daily basis engagement in remote learning during the national lockdown.

- The Virtual School worked to ensure that as many children and young people in care as possible were provided with a DfE laptop and router as required. Along with the IT equipment that the Virtual School have already provided this now means that only a very small number of children who have complex needs do not have IT access – the Virtual School are looking into purchasing the correct equipment for these children so that they do not miss out.

Key Priorities 2021-22:

- Ensure that all Halton children in care continue to access their educational entitlement
- Close the progress and attainment gap between Halton Children in Care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on Key Stage 4.

Key actions for 2021-22:

- Provide support for those young people who will need to re-sit their English and Maths GCSEs
- Strengthen transition support from the end of the secondary phase to post 16 to ensure that all appropriate support is put in place to maintain post 16 engagement.
- Strengthen our Key Stage 3 and 4 Activity Programme and look to enhance skill development as well as curriculum knowledge and understanding.
- Undertake question level analysis with our Primary and Secondary schools to ensure that our children and young people are ready and prepared for the examinations.
- Work with our Secondary schools to conduct 'deep dives' to gain a greater understanding of why our KS4 pupils are not achieving the higher grades.

Progress	≈	Data shows that children in care have continued to make progress in spite of the disruption to learning. However there is still some who are not making the progress they should.

Attendance and Exclusions

NOTE: The data presented in this section covers all children in care through the academic year of 2020-21 up until 23rd March when formal education was suspended due to COVID regulations. Attendance was still monitored after this point but was subject to individual risk assessments.

Regular school attendance is a key part of giving any child the best possible start in life. However, it is highly likely that a child who comes into care has already missed some time in school, and for some this is a considerable amount. Therefore, it is vital that children in care are supported to attend regularly to mitigate against the impact of previously lost learning. Government research has shown that:
- 14 days absence across Years 3 – 6 (Key Stage 2) makes it less likely for a child to achieve the expected standards in their subjects. (This equates to 84 lessons missed)
- 7 days absence across Years 10 and 11 (Key Stage 4) reduces the prospects of the young person achieving 5 GCSEs at Level 5 or above. (This equates to 42 lessons missed)

Attendance during one school year	Equivalent days	Equivalent sessions	Equivalent weeks	Equivalent lessons missed
95%	9 days	18 sessions	2 weeks	54 lessons
90%	19 days	38 sessions	4 weeks	114 lessons

85%	29 days	58 sessions	6 weeks	174 lessons
80%	38 days	72 sessions	8 weeks	228 lessons
75%	48 days	96 sessions	10 weeks	288 lessons
70%	57 days	114 sessions	11.5 weeks	342 lessons
65%	67 days	134 sessions	13.5 weeks	402 lessons

Halton Virtual School commission a company called 'Welfare Call' to monitor the attendance and exclusions of all Halton children in care regardless of where they are educated. This is done by daily contact with all schools and alternative providers to ensure that attendance is tracked and recorded appropriately and to comply with safeguarding procedures.

Whilst the DfE have determined below 90% attendance to constitute persistent absence, Halton Virtual School monitor both below 90% and 95% attendance, with the latter aspiration target being the benchmark for analysis.

Attendance 2020-21:

Given the COVID restrictions and the national lockdown during the Spring term it has been a difficult year for school attendance. However, the Virtual School has ensured that each child in care had a dynamic multi-agency risk assessment which enabled them to continue to access their education in the best way possible for them.

The Virtual School maintained Welfare Call monitoring attendance processes throughout the year, but developed a bespoke approach during the lockdown period until schools reopened for the summer term. This approach was developed as a result of the high transmission rates within Halton as an additional measure of safeguarding our children and young people in care. This included constantly reviewing the dynamic multi-agency risk assessment for each child and through that process deciding if the child should access remote learning at home rather than attend school. If this decision was made then engagement with remote learning data was gathered from the schools on a daily basis with a baseline of 95% engagement being set to warrant an attendance mark for that day – this was done to allow for any technical difficulties and also in recognition that some schools provided both remote teaching and off line resources to be completed. The Virtual School team also contacted both carers and young people to ensure they had everything they needed to complete their remote learning and to address any issues of non-engagement with a view to the child returning to school. Therefore for the period of the national lockdown the attendance for each child was calculated based not only on being in the classroom but also engagement with remote learning above 95%.

Attendance of all children in care 2020-21

Average % attendance	Primary	Secondary	Overall
Autumn	96.5%	90.1%	93.3%
Spring	96.4%	83.5%	90%
Summer	96.5%	84.5%	90.5%

Attendance of all children in care over the past 5 years (COVID impact in 2019-20 and 202-21):

|	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21 COVID
Primary	96.0%	97.1%	96.2%	87.5%	93.3%
Secondary	86.9%	88.7%	88.6%	77.9%	90%
Overall	91.4%	92.9%	92.4%	81.9%	90.5%
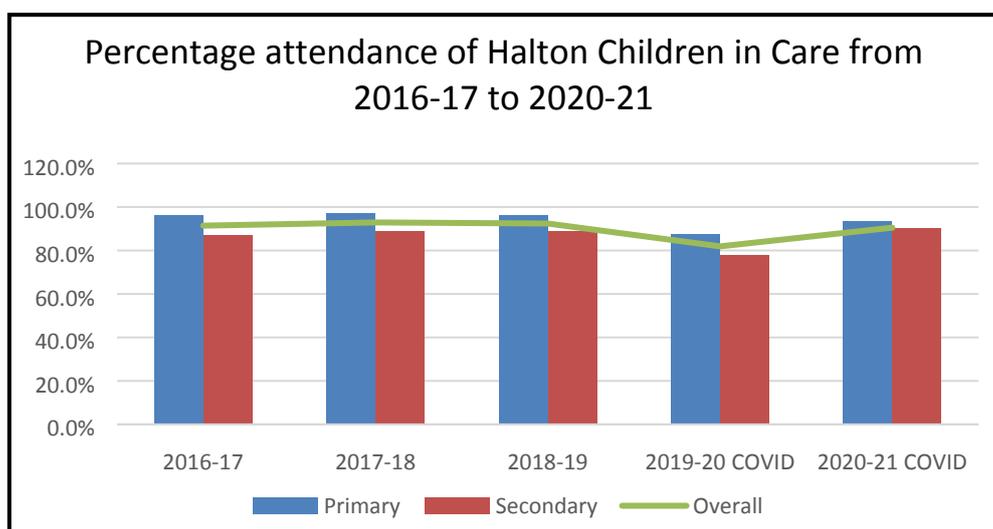
As can be seen, in spite of the pandemic the attendance of Halton children in care has remained positive with only a relatively low drop overall.

During 2020-21:

19 Primary children had attendance below 95% - of this cohort;

- 10 children live with parents/family members and 2 live in residential accommodation
- 5 came into care during the academic year
- The main reasons for absence were illness (60 days lost learning) and authorised absences (62 days lost learning)
- 9 children had unauthorised absences (30 days lost learning).
- 2 children had time not on roll of a school, 1 child was 2 days late starting Reception and 1 because of an emergency placement move (which occurred in the national lockdown) and requiring specialist education provision (39 days not on roll).
- 2 children had a holiday in term time (5 days lost learning each)
- 2 children also received fixed term exclusions (5 days lost learning)
- 2 children had emergency placement moves out of borough
- 1 child has profound health issues.

Individual Primary children in care's attendance in 2020-21
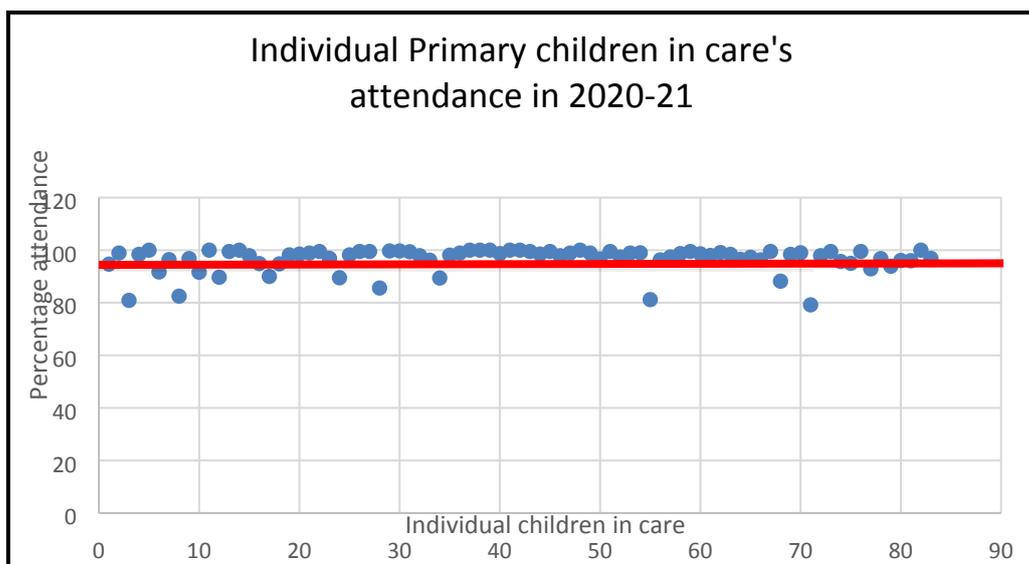
51 secondary pupils had attendance below 95% - of this cohort:

- 11 young people live with parents/family and 26 are placed in residential settings
- 11 young people came into care during the academic year.
- 6 are UASC – all these young people had a delay in their age assessments and extremely low levels of English so making it challenging to find education provision.
- The main reasons for absence were unauthorised (678 days lost learning), illness (178 days lost learning) and authorised absences (172 days lost learning)
- 30 young people had unauthorised absences. 17 of these live in residential accommodation, 9 are with family, 3 were new into care and 5 had missing from care episodes.
- 28 young people had authorised absences. 2 were new into care, 19 live in residential accommodation and 5 are living with family.
- 14 young people had periods of not being on roll, of these 3 had multiple times within secure accommodation, 2 had mental health issues meaning that they were not able to access education at that time, 2 had emergency placement moves and required specialist education provision once they had moved, 1 could not access education due to Court restrictions, and 6 were UASC.
- 10 young people had periods of reduced timetables, 4 young people required this to stabilise their education placements due to high risk of exclusion, 3 due to mental health issues, 1 because of profound health issues and 2 following discharge from secure accommodation.
- 4 young people had exclusions (17.5 days lost learning)
- 8 girls experienced mental health issues through the year which impacted upon their access to education.
- 4 young people had periods of time in secure accommodation

Individual Secondary young people in care's attendance in 2020-21
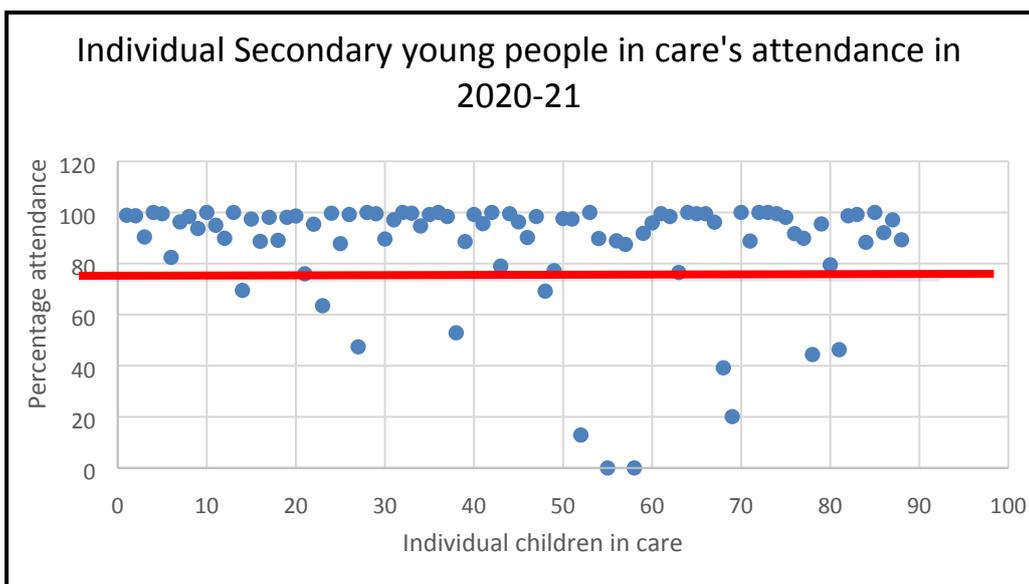
In order to ensure that attendance marks were not impacted by COVID measures the DfE introduced the use of an X code which covered periods when bubbles were collapsed and for self-isolation. Whilst the children and young people were able to access remote learning they were not in the classroom. As the table below shows this situation arose for some young people multiple times over the academic year causing disruption to their learning.

Primary X codes	Aut	Spr	Sum
Days	450	34.5	99
# CIC	56	11	20
% cohort	56%	10.8%	20.4
# CIC 1 time	41	11	37
# CIC 2 times	12	0	16
# CIC 3 times	3	0	2

Secondary X codes	Aut	Spr	Sum
Days	617.5	69.5	129
# CIC	69	12	27
% cohort	69.7%	11.2%	24.5%
# CIC 1 time	40	10	20
# CIC 2 times	17	2	6
# CIC 3 times	10	0	2
# CIC 4 times	2	0	0

Attendance	✔	Data shows that attendance for both passes has stayed above the persistent absence rate of 90% despite the challenges of the pandemic and has broadly stayed in line with pre-pandemic rates.

Exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions of a child in care since the Headteacher of the Virtual School has been in post.

Use of exclusions was re-instated from September following the Government's decision to suspend their use during the previous academic year.

Work was done with all schools attended by our children and young people in care to remind them of the additional anxieties and challenges that our cohort often face. These issues could be exacerbated due to the anxiety of returning to a more open society and a relaxing of rules within schools.

Percentage of children in care receiving 1 or more fixed term exclusions in 2020-21:

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	1	1	1
Secondary	6.1	0.9	5
Overall	3.5	1	2.9

As can be seen from the graph below this has resulted in a low number of children in care receiving an exclusion during this academic year and a reduction in the number of days lost learning. In order to mitigate against this individual plans were put in place to reduce the possibility of repeated exclusions. All 3 Primary pupils only had 1 period of exclusion and of the 9 Secondary pupils only 2 had more than 1 exclusion.
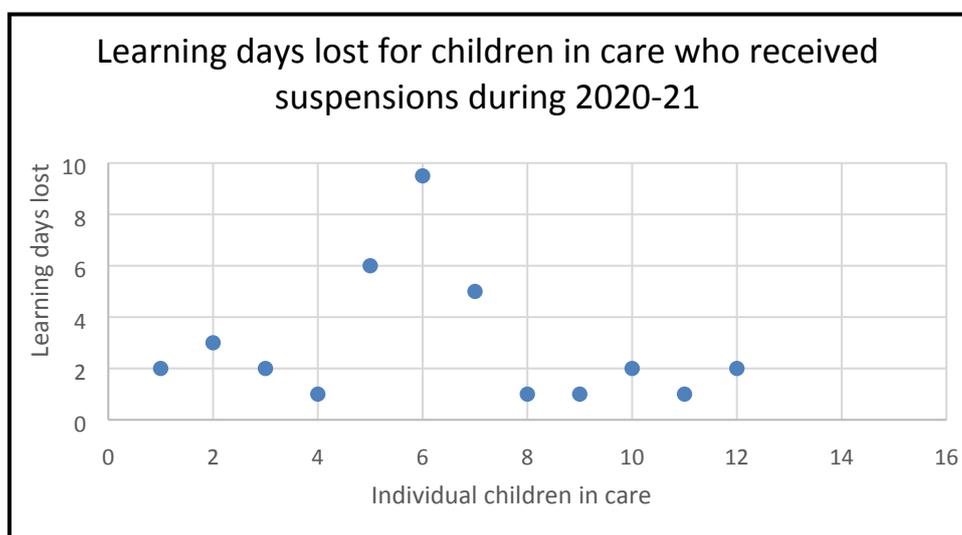
Analysis of exclusions 2020-21:

3 Primary children had 1 or more periods of fixed term exclusions

- 2 were educated out of borough
- 1 was in residential provision and 1 placed with family
- 1 had an EHCP, was in specialist SEMH provision and had an emergency placement move out of borough (Number 2 on the chart above)
- Total days lost learning for Primary children was 7 days

9 Secondary pupils had 1 or more periods of fixed term exclusions:

- 3 young people attend out of borough schools and 6 attend Halton schools.
- 2 have an EHCP
- 3 attend specialist provision or a PRU
- 4 live in residential provision and 2 are placed with family
- There are 6 girls, 4 of whom were in Y9 and Y10

- 2 young people had 3 periods of exclusion (Numbers 5 and 6 on the chart above)
- Total days lost learning for Secondary young people was 9.5 days

As can be seen from the chart below although the last 2 academic years children have had disruption to their access to school, there has still be a positive decrease in the number of children in care experiencing fixed term exclusions and particularly repeated exclusions. This has been as a result of the work by Halton Virtual School in raising awareness of the impact of trauma and neglect on children's behaviours leading to more inclusive practice and the positive support provided through the individual child needs led model of Pupil Premium Plus.

Percentage of all Children in Care who have had 1 or more fixed term exclusions from 2016-17 to 2020-21
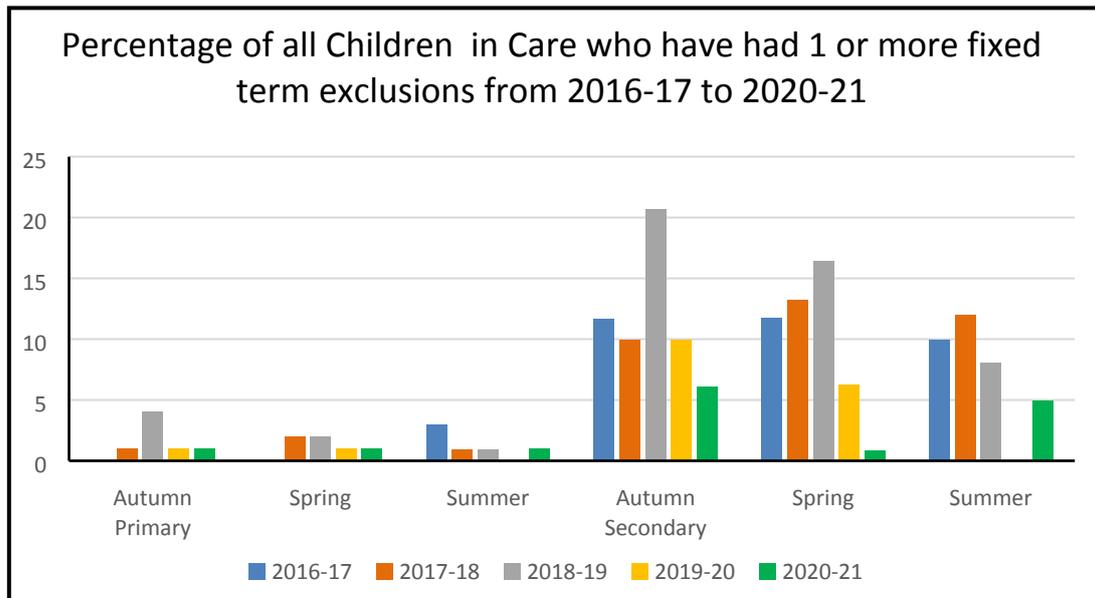
| Exclusions | ✅ | Exclusion rates have remained low across both phases and overall. |

What the Virtual School has done and its impact:

- Provided support and advice to schools who were experiencing difficulties managing challenging behaviour.
- Provided tailored packages of support to high risk pupils
- Provided attendance support through Pupil Premium Plus
- Commissioned specialist assessments to support schools to meet the needs of complex children
- Supported schools to undertake the graduated approach in relation to SEMH needs.
- Supported schools in applying for and securing an EHCP when appropriate.
- Provided ongoing advice to increase awareness and improve practice in meeting the needs of children with attachment difficulties

Key Priorities for attendance and exclusions 2021-22:

- Continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%
- Continue to reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and frequency
- To enable our UASC to access education as soon as possible.

Key actions 2020-21:

- Continue to work with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to provide early alerts of any child who has had more than 3 days absence and those whose attendance is falling below 95%. The EWO will provide advice and guidance to carers around proactive support for attendance and also liaise with a school link EWO to ensure that issues related to school are addressed.
- Resume our work on developing 'Adverse Childhood Experiences Aware' (ACEs) schools which will focus on increasing awareness of the impact of ACEs and toxic stress and the impact they have on a child's resilience and ability to learn.
- Resume our work with the Behaviour Support Service to implement the PIVOTAL Approach to managing behaviour within 4 pilot schools.
- Work with our secondary schools to develop more bespoke and proactive support for children in care who are presenting with behaviour issues, particularly girls who are experiencing emotional and anxiety related issues.
- Develop a bespoke and proactive support package for UASC so enabling them to access full time education provision in a more timely manner.

Accessing Alternative provision

The Bridge School (Halton's PRU) provide an Engagement Programme for Y10 and Y11 young people who require access to alternative provision. This alternative provision is quality assured by The Bridge School.

If a school purchases alternative provision placements for young people with providers who are not part of The Bridge School Engagement Programme, then it is the school's responsibility to quality assure the provision.

Agreement must be gained from the Headteacher of the Virtual School prior to a young person in care being placed on alternative provision. This is to ensure that the provision will meet the educational needs of the young person and their long term aspirations. Scrutiny of the outcomes of these young people is undertaken through the termly Personal Education Plan.

Any alternative provision that is not through the Engagement Programme is quality assured by the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator. If the provision is via the Engagement Programme the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator liaises with The Bridge School to ascertain quality assurance outcomes.

Access to alternative provision 2020-21:

Due to the ongoing COVID restrictions access to Alternative Provision during the academic year was limited. However, 4 young people did access alternative provision at some point, with 1 young person accessing across all 3 terms, the remaining young people only accessed alternative provision for 1 term. 3 of the young people were accessing their alternative provision to enhance their skills and for post 16 progression, with the final young person having access as a result of a permanent exclusion prior to coming into care.

Post 16 Access to Education, Employment and Training

The Virtual School provide support and guidance for all young people in care or care leavers up to the age of 25 around access to Education, Employment and Training (EET), and provide advice and guidance for their social workers or PAs as appropriate.

Halton's ILACS inspection in March 2020 highlighted that the Virtual School required more capacity to further develop its good work, in particular around support for our Post 16 cohort. As a result of this we have created 2 new roles, a Post 16 PEP Coordinator and also a KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer. The purpose of these 2 roles is to improve the engagement of Post 16 young people in care and care leavers in EET and to also ensure that they have access to direct support to explore a range of EET options and achieve good post 16 outcomes. The Post 16 PEP Coordinator focuses on those in FE and moving to HE, ensuring that PEPs are high quality and the young people have all the support they require to achieve their educational outcomes. The KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer focuses on those who may require more bespoke guidance on choosing a Post 16 career path, including developing and improving our apprenticeship support or moving into employment when age appropriate. The KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer also undertakes direct work with young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment and Training) and this has been extended from previous years to now include young people up to the age of 22 years (which was an area for improvement from the last inspection).

Planned transition meetings during the Spring and Summer terms take place between the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator and both the Post 16 officers for early identification of those leaving school who may become NEET, or who are unclear about their chosen career path.

Monthly tracking is undertaken by the Post 16 PEP Coordinator to ensure that there are early alerts for young people who are at risk of becoming NEET as well as those currently NEET. The direct work to re-engage this group, undertaken by the KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer, is to ensure that the views of the young person are heard and that any barriers are addressed when formulating a plan for re-engagement. Both Post 16 Officers work with young people regardless of where they live or are educated, and they also liaise with the 14-19 team if the young person is resident in Halton and their equivalents out of area, other agencies, providers, social workers and PAs.

Creating the right apprenticeship opportunities and support structure remains a struggle for us in the current financial and political climate. However, the KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer is working closely with the Apprenticeship Hub to ensure that children in care and care leavers have access to high quality information regarding apprenticeships and also support to enable them to apply if they want to. In addition to this we are working with other parts of the Council to develop a Care Leaver Apprenticeship Strategy to broaden the support our young people can access but also increase their range of opportunities.

As a result of COVID restrictions, Post 16 learners have experienced a lot of disruption not only to their college courses, but also to apprenticeship and traineeships opportunities. Employment opportunities have also been impacted due to the uncertain economic climate.

Outcomes for our 16-19 year old young people in care:

The overall cohort is 70 young people of which 46% are EET

Context of 16 - 19 year old young people in care and care leavers in 2020-21

Percentage of 16-19 year old young people in care and care leavers in Education, Employment and Training in 2020-21
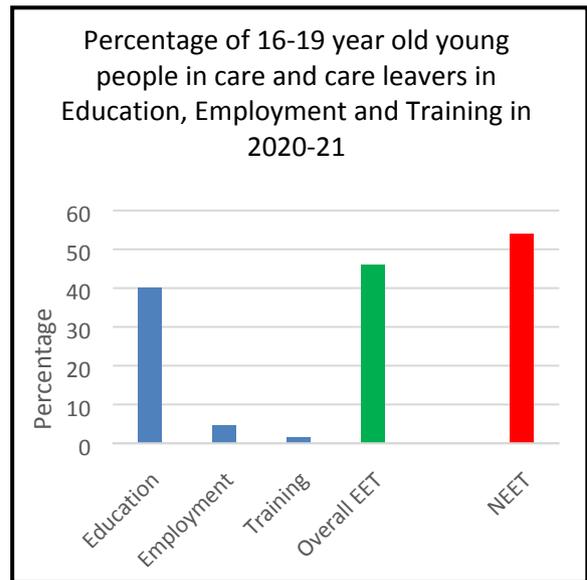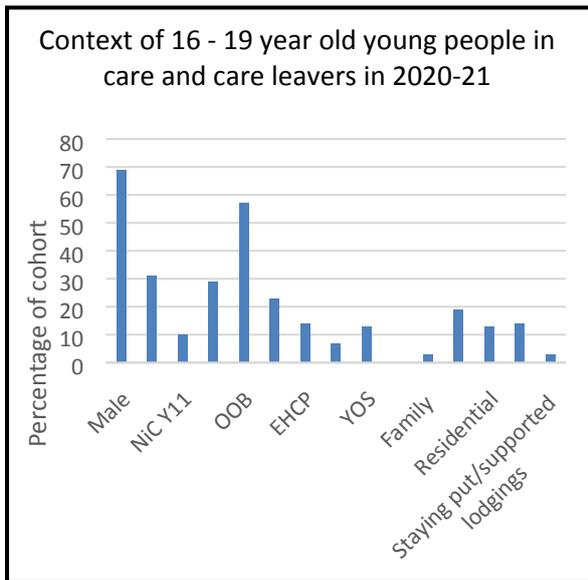
There are 38 young people who are NEET

Context of 16-19 year old young people in care and care leavers who are NEET in 2020-21

Percentage of NEET cohort (y-axis, 0 to 90)

Categories (x-axis): Male, NiC Y11, OOB, EHCP, YOS, Family, Residential, Staying put/supported lodgings

Reasons given for 16 - 19 years young people in care and care leavers who are NEET in 2020-21

Percentage of NEET cohort (y-axis, 0 to 30)

Categories (x-axis): Young parent, Custody, Seeking employment, Refused to engage, ESOL/EAL, Wants Apprenticeship, No reason given

The chart above gives the main reasons for being NEET. Of those who refused to engage in EET activities, 5 lived outside of Halton. There has been a sharp increase in the number of UASC who have very limited English and would therefore struggle accessing mainstream FE. For each of these young people they have an ESOL support package in place with a view to then enrolling them at college once their career aspirations are more fully understood.

Outcomes for our 19 - 22 year old care leavers:

The overall cohort is 56 young people of which 37.5% are EET

Context of 19 - 22 year old care leavers in 2020-21

A bar chart titled "Context of 19 - 22 year old care leavers in 2020-21" with y-axis "Percentage of cohort" (0 to 70). Categories: Male (~61), Female (~40), OOB (~44), UASC (~11), EHCP (~23), Young Parents (~13), YOS (~31), Custody (~2), Family (~14), Semi/independent living Staying put/supported lodgings (~54), Halls (~21).

Percentage of 19 - 22 year old care leavers in Education, Employment and Training in 2020-21

A bar chart with y-axis (0 to 70). Categories: Education (~25), Employment (~11), Training (~2), Overall EET (~38, green), NEET (~62, red).

There are 35 young people in this cohort who are NEET:

Context of 19 - 22 year old care leavers who are NEET in 2020-21

A bar chart with y-axis "Percentage of NEET cohort" (0 to 70). Categories: Male (~55), Female (~46), OOB (~31), UASC (~6), EHCP (~26), Young Parents (~14), YOS (~40), Custody (~3), Family (~17), Semi/independent living Staying put/supported lodgings (~63), (~6).

Reasons given for 19 - 22 year care leavers who are NEET in 2020-21

A bar chart with y-axis "Percentage of NEET cohort" (0 to 25). Categories: Young parent (~11), Custody (~3), Unfit to work (~11), Missing from care (0), Looking for work (~23), Mental Health (~6), Refused to engage (~23), No reason (~23).

Of our overall Post 16 cohort 2 young people are accessing higher education courses and 1 young person has joined the Navy. Unfortunately we currently do not have any young people on an apprenticeship, as the COVID restrictions have impacted upon this area of opportunity.

What the Virtual School has done and its impact:

- Created 2 new roles within the Virtual School to have a greater focus on post 16.
- A dedicated member of the team now has a direct work case load of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET.
- Strengthened transition support from the end of the secondary phase to post 16 to ensure that all appropriate support is put in place to maintain post 16 engagement.

- Reviewed approaches used by other local authorities and is working towards implementing an improved model of support for care leavers, with a particular focus on increasing access to apprenticeships.

Key Priorities for 2021-22:

- To improve the percentage of Post 16 young people in care and care leavers 16 – 22 years who are in EET.
- Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 22 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on ensuring that they are accessing their chosen career pathway.
- Improve support for those young people who wish to undertake an apprenticeship.

Key actions for 2020-21:

- Ensure all young people in care and care leavers receive an appropriate offer of learning and progress onto a suitable and sustained learning programme of employment.
- Improve the number of apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers
- Establish the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Strategy to focus on removing barriers to care leavers accessing support and employment opportunities both within the Council and the broader community.
- Re-establish the work with colleagues in Adult Social Care to establish a graduated programme from work experience to possible apprenticeships within the local care home sector – this was suspended due to COVID restrictions.
- Develop closer links with the Chamber of Commerce and Halton Employment Partnership, with a view to increasing apprenticeship possibilities.
- Work with colleagues who are looking at Supported Internships to ensure that appropriate care leavers are prioritised for opportunities within the programme.

Personal Education Plans

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children' (February 2018) places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain a Personal Education Plan

(PEP) for every child in care in an educational setting up to the end of the school year that s/he turns 18 (Year 13). On coming into care a PEP must be initiated and completed no later than 20 working days so that it can inform the first statutory review (28 days) and then be reviewed termly from that point on.

For a PEP to be high quality and effective, the guidance states that it should be:
    A 'living', evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's experience, progress and achievement (academic and otherwise), and inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child's wider care plan' (Para 23 pg 15)

It is a process that should enable each child or young person to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. It should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the identified educational needs of the child, raises aspirations and builds life chances.

As the PEP is an integral part of the care plan it is the responsibility of the child's social worker to initiate the first PEP and ensure each PEP is completed from that point onwards. However, the guidance is clear that the quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the Local Authority and the school.

The role of the school, via the Designated Teacher, is to ensure that all appropriate educational information is shared, that SMART targets are set to accelerate the progress of the child in their education, that all appropriate support is in place for the child to be successful within their provision, and to demonstrate the impact of any Pupil Premium Plus funding. The Designated Teacher leads on how the PEP is developed and used in school to make sure the child's progress towards education targets is monitored.

The role of the Virtual School is to ensure that there are effective systems in place to ensure social workers, Designated Teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's PEP and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP; ensure that PEPs are up-to-date, effective and high quality and focus on educational outcomes; ensure that all children in care (aged 3 – 18), wherever they are placed, have such a PEP; undertake regular quality assurance of all PEPs.

The Virtual School track on a termly basis the number and quality of PEPs completed. This is then reported to schools and also senior Children's Social Care managers.

PEP Completion

In alignment with CSC the Virtual School migrated the PEPs from being uploaded on to CareFirst to being completed online via the new Eclipse system. Training was delivered to all designated professionals in all phases of education and social workers.   However, the new process created many problems for schools in particular when trying to complete the PEP. Therefore, some of the PEPs had to be uploaded manually on to the system by the PEP and Progress Coordinators which created its own capacity issues and built delay into the process. Following feedback from schools and social workers at the end of the academic year, the Virtual School made the decision to remove the PEPs form Eclipse and commission a new online ePEP from Welfare Call, a company we already use for attendance and assessment data collection. This new ePEP is something that a number of our schools are already familiar with as it is used by a number of other LAs nationally and regionally. The new online PEP will be rolled out in the next academic year 2021-22.

<u>Work undertaken by the Virtual School to ensure statutory compliance with PEP completion and quality assurance:</u>

- PEPs have been used as one of the monitoring mechanisms to ensure that our children in care have accessed their education throughout the pandemic, including the lockdown in the Spring term.
- PEPs have provided a clear mechanism to address any concerns foster carers have had in supporting children and young people with their education at home and in reducing anxieties around children and young people returning to school.
- PEPs have focused on identifying interventions to support transition of young people back into education settings and have allowed schools to plan ahead including providing any extra support required to facilitate reintegration. This has included virtual tours of school prior to a child or young person's return.

For 2020-21, overall PEP completion for the Autumn term was 85%, this improved in the Spring term to 89% and this rate was sustained in the Summer term. As can be seen by the chart below Primary PEP completion was 100% across all terms. The rates in the other phases were impacted by issues with the Eclipse system as the EY settings had difficulty accessing the system. Within Secondary and Post 16 there are a higher number of out of borough provisions who also struggled with the system. However, there has been positive impact from the additional capacity of the Early Years Education Support Worker and the Post 16 PEP Coordinator, where rates rose once they had been appointed.
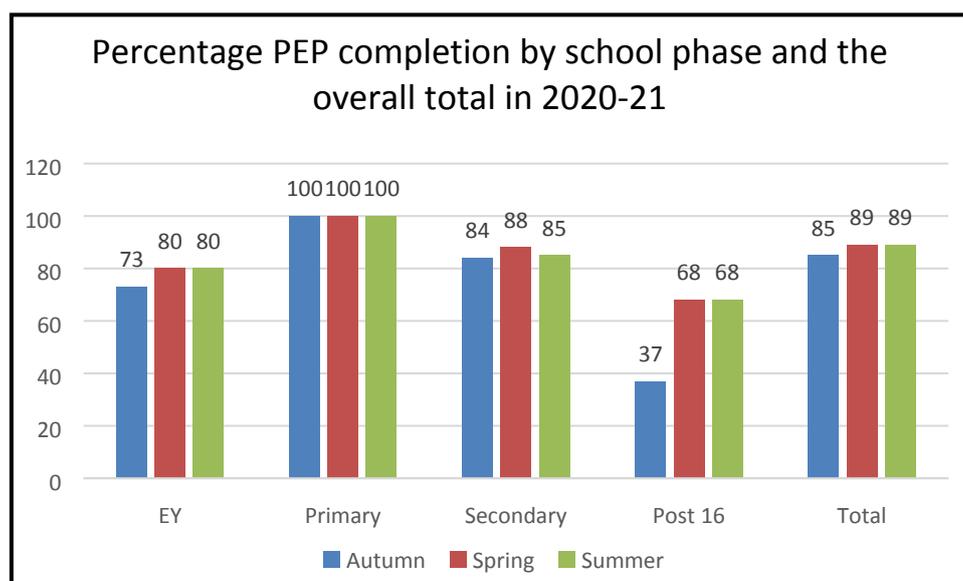

The chart below shows the completion rate for school age children across the full academic year and this demonstrates that despite a slight dip in the Spring term the PEP completion rate has remained consistently high in spite of the challenging circumstances.

Percentage PEP compleiton for school age children in care by term in 2020-21

Autumn	92%
Spring	91%
Summer	92%
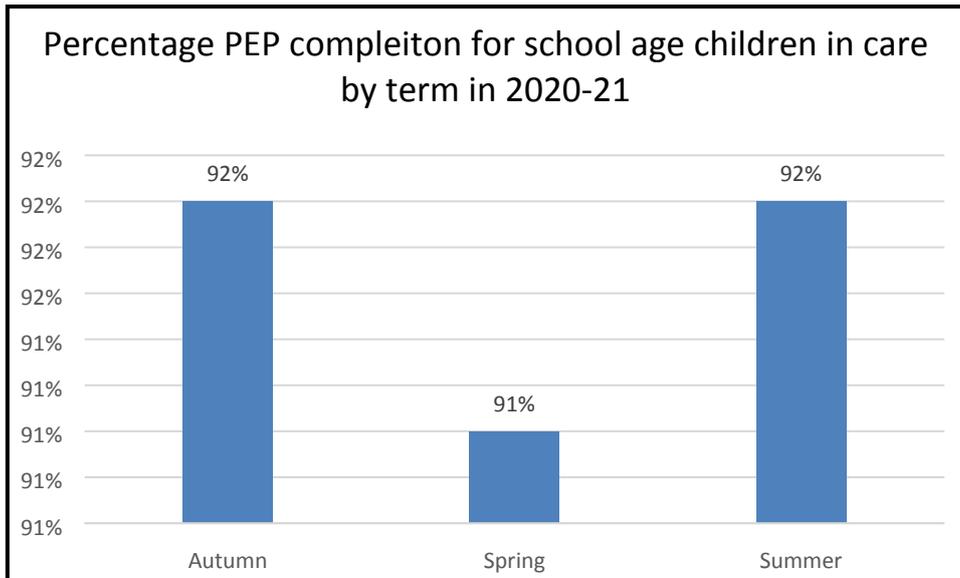
The chart below shows the number of PEPs completed for those children and young people who have been in care for the whole of the academic year 2020-21. As can be seen there is a high percentage who have had a PEP each term as per the statutory requirement. There were 5 children who did not have a PEP at all over the year. One child has been placed for adoption out of borough and has not accessed nursery provision as part of his adoption plan. For the remaining 4 young people (2 Secondary and 2 Post 16) PEP meetings actually occurred each term and support was put in place but no paperwork was provided so the PEPs could not be counted as complete. This has been addressed by the relevant PEP Coordinator.

Percentage of children who have been in care for the academic year 2020-21 who had 0 - 3 PEPs completed

0	2%
1	6%
2	11%
3	81%
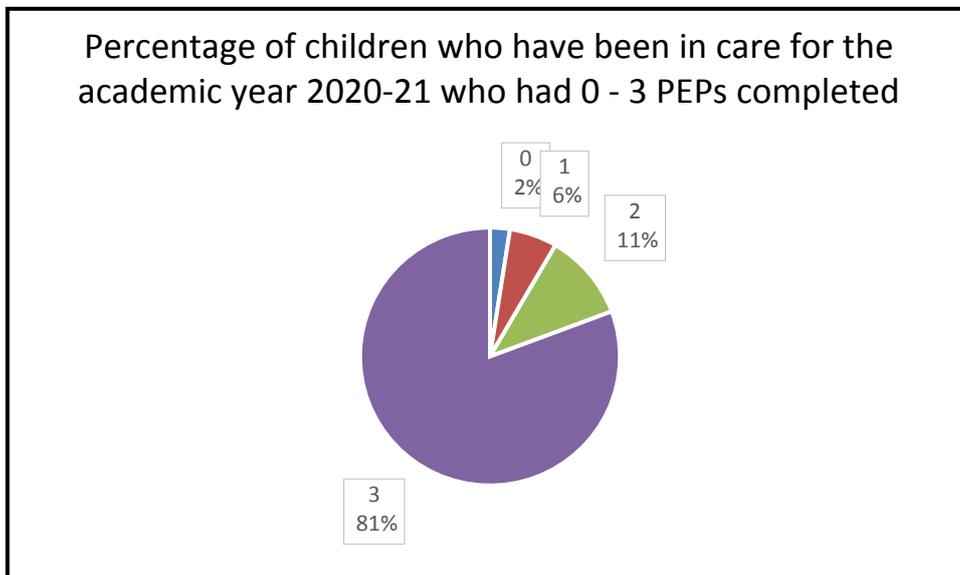
The chart below shows the PEP completion rate by CSC teams. There have been capacity issues within the CIN teams as a result of transmission rates of COVID and also the agreement that workers who had gained positions elsewhere could now move to their new posts resulting in some instability. However, PEP and Progress Coordinators have ensured that new members of staff were fully aware of their roles and responsibilities around PEPs and so the completion rates have remained relatively high.

Percentage PEP completion by Children's Social Care Team in 2020-21

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
CIN W	92%	92%	86%
CIN R	94%	86%	85%
CICCL	84%	92%	92%
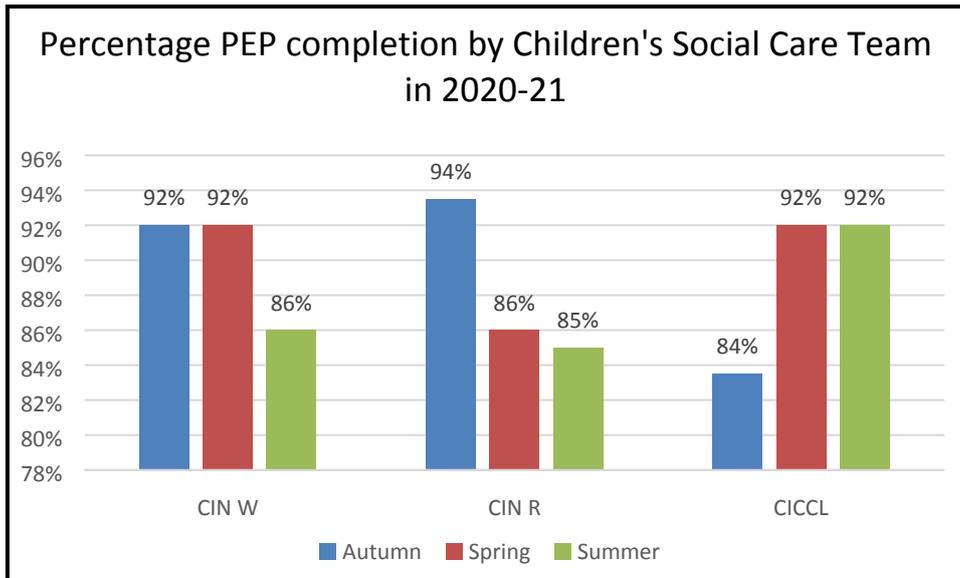
Quality Assurance

The Virtual School quality assure every PEP that is completed each term and provide feedback to schools around areas of improvement. Analysis has shown that in Post 16 and Secondary PEPs it is the SMART targets and impact of Pupil Premium Plus sections that continue to need improvement. However, the overall percentage of PEPs that are rated as Good or better is increasing each year.

Percentage of PEPs completed that are rated as Good+ across each phase for 2020-21

	Aut %	Spr %	Sum %
EY	75%	62.5%	80%
Primary	88%	90%	94%
Secondary	63%	81%	67%
Post 16	50%	60%	53%
Overall	76%	83%	82%

Percentage PEPs completed that are rated as good or better from 2017-18 to 2020-21

Year	Percentage
2020-21	80.5%
2019-20	76%
2018-19	66.9%
2017-18	57%
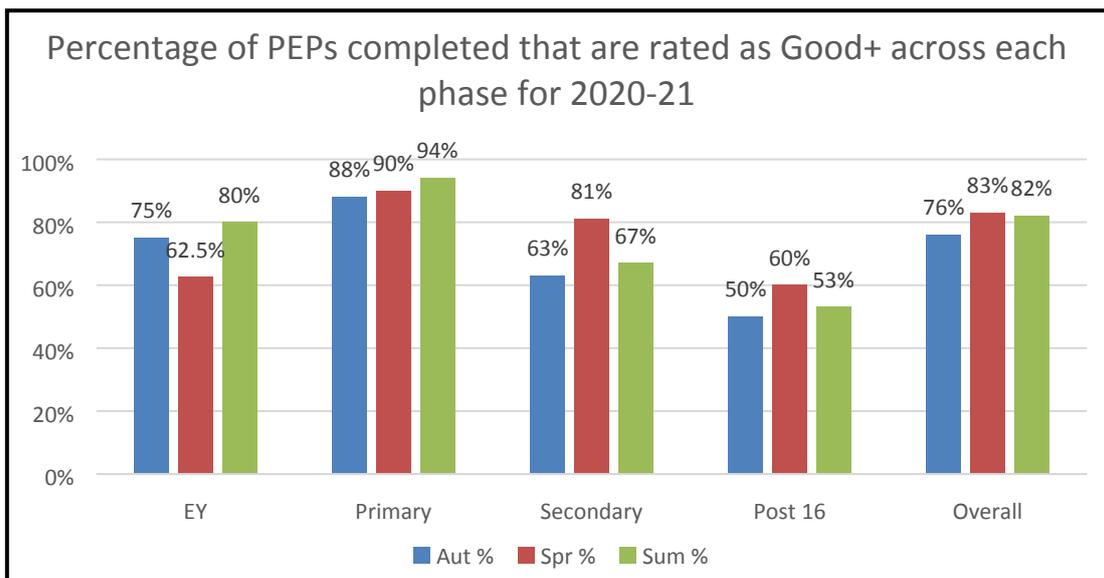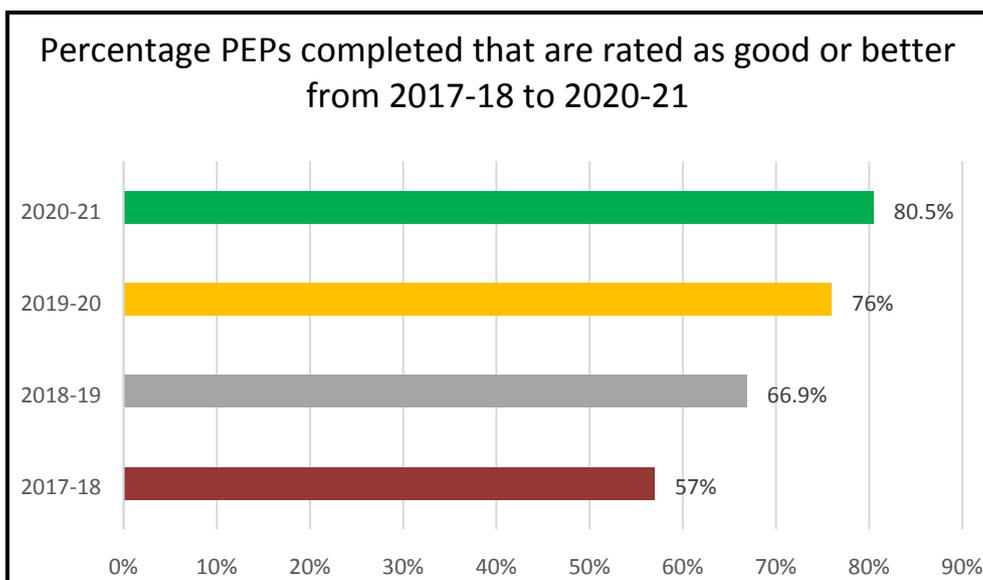
Key Priority for 2021-22:

- 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.

Key Actions for 2021-22:

- To embed the new Welfare Call online ePEP system and address any barriers to completion as they occur.
- To continue to support social workers to improve the completion across all phases. This will be done in collaboration with team and Divisional Managers through their performance clinics.
- To continue to provide support and challenge to schools to improve the quality of all PEPs. This will be done through the termly support and challenge meetings and also through Designated Teacher network meetings.
- Build on the positive feedback to schools by completing quality assurance in 'real time' with targeted schools to drive improvements.
- Develop an accountability framework to address schools that have 'stuck' PEPs.
- Deliver SMART target training across all schools that have PEPs judged as Requiring Improvement or below.
- Further develop capacity within the Virtual School to drive improvements in PEP completion and quality.
- To establish a network of Post 16 providers to offer support and training and also target improving PEP quality. This will be done through the work of the Post 16 PEP Coordinator, social workers and PAs.
- To work directly with Riverside College to ensure that the completion and quality of their Post 16 PEPs improve – this will be done through the work of the Post 16 PEP and Progress Coordinator.
- To review our PEPs to ensure that we are tracking the child's journey through the curriculum to ensure that it is broad and balanced, they are accessing their entitlement and that any learning 'building blocks' that are missing are addressed.
- Halton is leading on a cross LA PEP quality assurance group to ensure that are judgements are sound.

Pupil Premium Plus

Children and young people who have been in care for 1 day or more and are of statutory school age are entitled to access Pupil Premium Plus funding (PP+). The PP+ allocation of £2300, is made per child for the number of children looked after for at least one day as recorded in the March Children Looked After Data Return (SSDA903) and aged 4 to 15 at 31 August the previous year. The funding runs in line with the financial year (1st April – 31st March) and not an academic year. The conditions of grant clearly state that the grant allocation must be managed by the Headteacher of the Virtual School and does not go directly to the school the child is attending. The total grant is the number of eligible children multiplied by £2300. This does not mean that every single child has to be allocated the full £2300. The Headteacher can manage the grant in the best interests of individuals or the full cohort. The Virtual School can top slice the PP+ grant and retain this centrally in order to undertake additional activities, projects or to more effectively discharge some of its statutory duties.

Halton have adopted an individual child needs led model for the allocation of PP+. This is in recognition that the needs of each child can vary significantly over time depending on their life experiences and the barriers to learning that they encounter. Each individual child's needs and circumstances are taken into account and the allocation of funding is managed carefully and robustly through the completion of effective, timely and high quality PEPs.

PP+ expenditure 2020-21:

One of our priorities for this academic year was to undertake a review of the impact of our PP+ expenditure, which was acknowledged in the Ofsted ILACs inspection as a good step towards identifying key areas of impact. However, given the COVID restrictions this was put on hold.

The PP+ grant is awarded on a financial year basis and for 2020-21 the total grant allocated for Halton was £551, 235. The chart below demonstrates that through PEP allocation and other Virtual School support 46% was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes. Whilst PP+ has continued to be made available to schools, the PEP allocation of funding has been impacted as a result of COVID restrictions and interruptions to education.

Area of expenditure of Pupil Premium Plus grant 2020-21

YP 19%
PEPs 27%
Training 5%
Central 49%
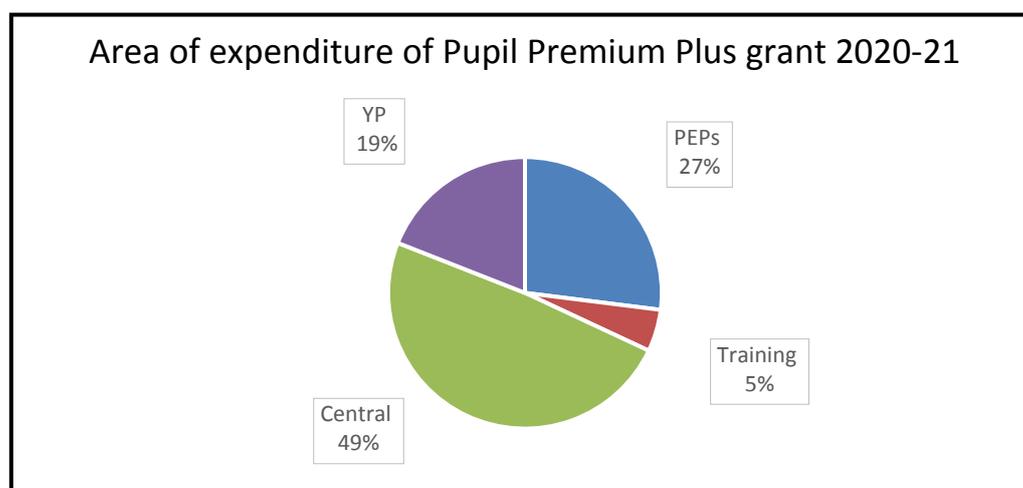
Training was impacted by COVID restrictions and so is a much lower amount than previous years. The centrally retained portion is for the attendance service the Virtual School commission, for

dedicated Education Psychology time, purchasing of Boxall Profile licences, and for staff within the Virtual School. It is important to note that this central allocation is vital to ensuring that we are able to track the educational outcomes and also provide support for both schools and children in care.

Comparison of areas of expenditure of Pupil Premium Plus grant over past academic years

Category	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
PEPs	40%	49%	48%	37%	27%
Training	9%	6%	2%	2%	5%
Central	14%	15%	19%	22%	49%
Young People	37%	30%	31%	39%	19%
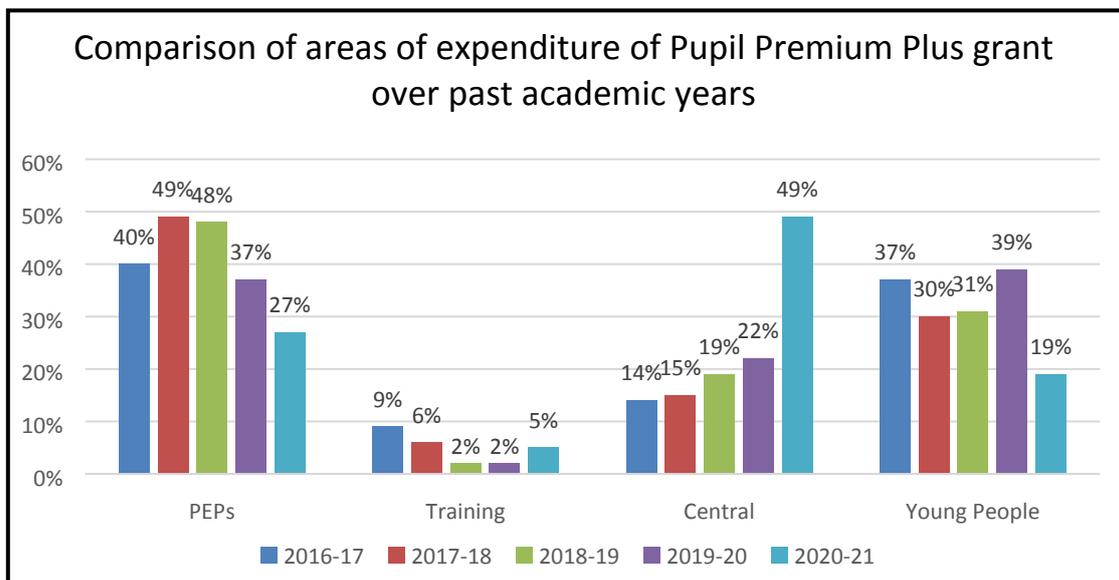
Key Priority for 2021-22:

- To undertake a Pupil Premium Plus review to look more closely at the best evidence based impact approaches.
- To develop a system of support for our Post 16 young people

Key Actions for 2021-22:

- To continue to scrutinise the use and impact of PP+ funding through the PEPs and the termly support and challenge progress meetings.
- To develop and share a good practice guide with our local schools and across the region through the Designated Teachers network meetings and the regional meetings.
- To review and disseminate the EEF Toolkit for PP+ to all schools to ensure that they are utilising evidence based approaches.
- To deliver training at our annual conference on effective use of PP+
- Work with our Post 16 providers to develop a Post 16 PP+ fund linked to the PEP and aimed at improving educational outcomes and retention.

Additional work of the Virtual School

Training and Development

The Virtual School usually offers a comprehensive training programme that is based on feedback from schools and analysis of the educational experiences of our children in care. Any costs incurred are covered through the Pupil Premium Plus grant. However, following feedback from schools and social workers this was suspended for this academic year. In its place, PEP Coordinators offered a more bespoke approach of improving practice through the Support and Challenge Progress meetings, the joint meetings with the school EP and the Designated Teacher and via feedback on the PEPs.

Training priorities for 2021-22

- Host an annual conference focused on improving the quality of PEPs, using the new online PEP system and partnership workshops on key areas for development.
- Re-instate the network meetings for each phase.
- Further developing and embedding our trauma informed practice across all settings
- Working with Halton's Education Psychology Service and Behaviour Support Service to further develop our package of training focused on supporting mental health issues, including anxieties as a result of the pandemic.
- Linked in to the need for promoting catch up learning and recovery, work with our Designated Teachers to source and deliver training on our identified areas for improvement – for example, Writing in Primary and Maths across all areas. In addition to this to keep this training programme current using progress analysis from the PEPs.

Additional learning and literacy support

Halton Virtual School provides a high level of 'outside the classroom' educational support for our children and young people in care. We have worked hard to find different and creative ways to continue this support despite the COVID restrictions being in place.

The Virtual School coordinate additional one-to-one tuition for any Halton child in care who requests support with a subject regardless of where they are educated or living. The tutors are always qualified teachers and subject specialists and provide regular tuition reports. Whilst our original 1:1 tuition offer has been face to face, we have responded to the current situation and moved to provide online tuition. This has continued throughout the academic year and over the holidays to support children and young people to remain engaged in their learning and to mitigate against falling behind. We have also ensured that face to face tuition has taken place for children and young people who have stated a preference this.

In partnership with a local bookshop (The Curiosity Book shop) the Virtual School send an individualised book parcel to each identified child in their placement on a half termly basis. The children are identified through analysis of the PEP outcomes and also all Reception age children receive them. The parcels are tailored to the child's interests and their reading and writing levels. The aims of the book parcels are to encourage a love of reading at home; and improve reading ages and vocabulary development. 21 children and young people received the parcels during the academic year.

The Virtual School also has a yearly subscription to Storytime Magazine which is sent out each month to identified children in Key Stage 2 and when appropriate to some Key Stage 3 children. The magazines are brightly illustrated and have short stories. The aim of the magazines are to encourage a love of reading at home particularly for those who struggle accessing a book and to improve reading age and vocabulary development. 45 children have had the Storytime magazine this year.

The Virtual School website (www.myvirtualschool.org) has been enhanced and regularly updated with curriculum links particularly Maths and English and other subjects; resources to support learning at home; other activities to support carers in keeping children and young people engaged in their learning such as virtual tours of museums, cross curricular activities, coding projects, arts & craft ideas, fun ideas from famous authors etc. A new section with ideas and resources to support Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing has also added.

Keeping in Touch Packs:

As the Virtual School's Activity Day programme could not be delivered due to COVID restrictions we decided to develop 'Keeping in Touch' packs which were sent out to 280 children and young people aged 0 to 16 years for the holidays with resources and activity ideas, including opportunities for them to engage in some activities virtually with the Virtual School. Packs were tailored to different age groups and specific SEN needs.

The items and activities were designed to:
- Improve reading skills,
- Develop creative writing and use of language skills,
- Encourage STEM by giving them hands on experiments to do using household items,
- Develop number, logic and strategy skills through card games and activities,
- Improve fluency of multiplication.

The variety of items included:
- Virtual School Newsletter – giving them ideas of things to do and guiding them to the website.
- Worksheets
- Competitions
- Books
- Games
- Creative activities
- Wellbeing packs

Feedback from children, young people, carers and social workers has been overwhelmingly positive. Some young people who have never engaged in our activity programme have enjoyed receiving the parcels and completing the activities. Therefore, even though we are planning to run our activity day programme as usual next year we will retain the 'Keeping in Touch' packs as well.

Activity and Support Programme

During the school holidays the Virtual School usually provide a range of activity days to engage and support our children and young people to develop a variety of academic, personal and independence skills. Some days are fully developed and led by the Education Support Workers within the Virtual School and others are delivered in partnership with other guests, agencies and providers. All the activity programme is funded through the Pupil Premium Plus grant.

Due to COVID restrictions we had to suspend the activities planned for this academic year. However, we were able to run some days over the summer holidays using COVID risk assessments and measures.

Target group	Details	Aims
Teddy Bear's Picnic		
Pre-school	An AM/PM session to be held at Norton Priory where parents and carers will be invited to come along with their children to enjoy some fun outdoor activities.	To enhance and embed Parent/Carer child interaction and engagement with activities
Forest Schools		
Reception and KS1	A child led woodland adventure. Based around a traditional tale followed by activities led by children's imaginations and interests linked to the story. **Curriculum links:** PSED/PSHE - Confident to try new activities, to work together and to talk about their ideas and take other's ideas into account. Communication and language/spoken language – Maintaining attention, joining in with discussions and bringing narrative to their experiences. Science – Exploring the environment. Expressive arts and design/art and design – exploring and using different materials. Bringing imagination into play.	To take part in outdoor activities promoting well-being and communication. To work together – building relationships. To use problem-solving skills. To explore the area imaginatively and create their own stories.
Animal Olympics		
KS2 Secondary	A range of activities including mini sports day, team games, quizzes, arts and crafts all based on the theme of the Olympics. **Curriculum links:** PSHE – intrapersonal skills – building confidence, self-expression and resilience. D&T skills PE skills Improved mental health and well being Problem solving skills	Take part in physical activities to help promote health and wellbeing. To build an animal Olympic team for entering into the "Animal Olympics". To take part in Olympic themed activities.
Moving Up		
Year 6	A trip to Round Ponds Adventure in Frodsham for some fun outdoor activities including bush craft and raft building.	To celebrate the end of primary school. A chance for personal development.

	Curriculum links: Transition – managing change positively and knowing where they can go for support if needed. PSHE – intrapersonal skills – building confidence and resilience. PSHE – intrapersonal skills – communication and team work. P.E	Offer support around transition to secondary school.
Next Steps		
Year 11	A trip to Round Ponds Adventure in Frodsham for some fun outdoor activities including vertical challenge, abseil and raft building. **Curriculum links:** Transition – managing change positively and knowing where they can go for support if needed. PSHE – intrapersonal skills – building confidence and resilience. PSHE – intrapersonal skills – communication and team work. P.E	To celebrate the end of secondary school. A chance for personal development. Offer support around transition to post-16.

Some feedback from our young people:

My favourite activity was the raft building and jumping into the water at the end

I can't believe I got to the top – and I didn't break any of my nails!" (This YP managed to get to the top of a vertical climb challenge with a revolving barrel, rope net and wooden beams whilst managing to keep all her nail extensions intact – double achievement!)

Can we come again?

I am really looking forward to coming back again and to see you next time

It's great to have these activities.

Key actions for 2020-21**:**

- To deliver our full activity day programme either face to face or remotely
- To develop the website to improve communication with and support for carers and children and young people in care.
- To continue to send the Keeping in Touch packs out to all children and young people over Easter and Summer holidays
- To develop a model of direct support sessions delivered by the Education Support Workers. These sessions will be focused on developing and supporting good home learning, through modelling to parents and carers whilst providing homework support for the children.

Key Priorities for 2021-22

Priority	Rationale
To continue to mitigate against the risk of lost learning and to increase the percentage of children who are achieving good educational outcomes.	We need to track performance against all key indicators and ensure that children in care are able to access all support necessary to enable them to achieve good outcomes. We need to challenge schools around their use of catch up funding and utilise the Recovery Premium. We need to work collaboratively with CSC to reduce care and placement moves which potentially adds to further lost learning and instability.
Close the progress and attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care experienced peers, with a particular focus on achieving the higher grades in Key stage 4.	Although there has been an increase in children in care making progress they are still not performing as well as their non-care peers. This is particularly evident at Key Stage 4 especially with higher levels in English and Maths. It is an important area of focus as it opens up more career avenues for our young people.
Continue to 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.	The PEP is the key document that ensures that children in care are able to achieve their full potential and access the support they need to do this. Although both completion and quality of PEPs is improving the evidence shows that there needs to be a greater focus on improving the SMART targets and creative use of PP+. Early Years and Post 16 also remain areas that need to improve.
Commission and conduct a Halton Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Review to ascertain impact, areas of good practice and areas for development.	It has not been possible to achieve this due to COVID restrictions but it remains an important tool to understand how our use of PP+ can have greater impact on improving the outcomes for all children in care.
Develop a Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus model to provide additional support and improve retention.	The DfE are conducting a pilot into the use of Post 16 PP+ and whilst Halton did not bid for this we have embraced the concept as a way of improving our Post 16 young people's outcomes and also the quality of Post 16 PEPs.
To continue to improve the number of secondary age young people in care having attendance above 95%	Whilst attendance has remained good in spite of the challenges during the pandemic there still needs to be a focus on KS4 pupils who can become disengaged, particularly when they are experiencing other life issues.
Reduce the number of children in care receiving one or more fixed term exclusion, and the length and the frequency.	It will be important to continue to monitor the impact of returning to education on the social, emotional and behavioural needs of children in care and to ensure that exclusions and resulting time out of school is minimised.
Continue to monitor and risk assess the progress of any child in care attending a school judged as Requires Improvement or below by Ofsted, including	We need to ensure that a child in care is not being further disadvantaged by being educated in a school judged as Requiring Improvement. We need to ensure that they are accessing quality first teaching and all the support they require to make progress.

undertaking additional support and challenge visits to the school.	
Develop a SEND dashboard in order to more effectively monitor the outcomes, support and quality of provision.	There have been challenges in placing children requiring specialist education provision due to the national shortage of places. We need to ensure that a child can be effectively supported in a school that best meets their needs and that it will provide high quality provision.
Embed the direct working approach for 16 – 22 year olds to continue to improve engagement in Education, Employment and Training with a particular focus on apprenticeships.	Due to the impact of the pandemic the number of young people who are NEET has risen. We now need to support them to re-engage in a career path of their choosing and ensure they have clear progression routes. This will include delivering bespoke CIAEG as required and supporting them through direct work to maintain their engagement.
To develop a proactive and bespoke package of support for UASC.	There has been an increase in the number of UASC. The young people arrive with very little English making it hard to find appropriate education provision for them. Whilst we do currently provide them with support it is done on an ad hoc basis rather than through a bespoke proactive offer of support.