



HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Annual Report 2024-2025

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Introduction

The statutory duties of the Headteacher of the Virtual School include the production of an annual report to inform key stakeholders about the work of the Virtual School over the course of the year. The following report is a summary of work undertaken and the achievements of the children whose education we oversee.

The Virtual School is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of Looked-After Children (LAC) and strategic oversight for Post Looked-After Children (PLAC) and Children with a Social Worker (CWSW). For Looked-After Children, this includes the oversight and management of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process and distribution of the Pupil Premium + funding. For PLAC and CWSW, the Virtual School has a strategic role in offering support, challenge and training to remove barriers to learning and raise the profile of education as a priority in plans.

There have been several changes within the leadership of the Virtual School this year. The Interim Headteacher became substantive in March 2024. The current team structure is undergoing a consultation process for restructuring due to the imminent changes to the Statutory duties for Virtual Schools. It is expected for the new structure to be live from January 2026.

Over this past academic year, we have focused on four key priorities, identified through the previous year's self-evaluation:

- **To develop a Halton Virtual School Reading Strategy**
- **Develop the Virtual School College**
- **Raise attendance and reduce the number of exclusions for all Children in Care**
- **Enhance the Virtual School offer for Vulnerable groups, including Kinship, Children with a Social Worker, Post-Looked After & UASC cohort**

This report shares a summary of our progress against each of these objectives, as well as wider performance measures, and our areas of focus for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Further documentation relating to the work of the Virtual School (including our policies and guidance documents) can be found on our website <https://www.myvirtualschool.org/>

Staffing and Governance Structure of the Virtual School

The Virtual School team have remained consistent in the last 12 months, with no new joiners or leavers. Due to the promotion of the Interim Headteacher, there is currently a vacancy within the team. As previously mentioned, the current structure is under review to ensure all team members can carry out their statutory duties. There are two team members that are now funded through the Pupil Premium Plus grant due to a review of financial responsibilities, this means that all members of the Virtual School team, excluding the Virtual School Headteacher, are grant funded. The Safeguarding

Children in Education Officer is line managed by the Virtual Headteacher but funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Over the academic year, the Virtual School has worked alongside the Corporate Parenting Board to establish the 'operational group', who now act as the governing body for the Virtual School. They receive termly performance reports, through which they hold the school to account, as well as identify ways in which the Corporate Parenting Board can strengthen their role as Corporate Parent.

Halton Virtual School structure 2024-2025

Corporate Parenting Board			
Corporate Parenting Operational Group / Virtual School Governing Body			
Virtual School Senior Leadership Team			
Role	Name	Funding	Contract type
Headteacher	Joanne Dunning nee Lloyd	Core Funded	Ongoing grant
Secondary and Post 16 PEP and Progress Team Leader	Peter McPartland	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Early Years & Primary PEP and Progress Team Leader	Vacant	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Virtual School PEP and Wider Duties Team			
Early Years Education Support Worker (0.8)	Gemma Donaldson	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Primary PEP Co-ordinator	Sarah Rawnsley	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
Secondary PEP Co-ordinator	Alys James	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
KS4 and Post 16 Education and Employability Officer	Ian Wilson	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Post Looked After Support Worker and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	David Bradshaw	Sec 31 Grant – PLAC / SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
School Age Education Support Worker	Min Ling Lee-Tai	Pupil Premium Plus	Permanent
Safeguarding Children in Education Officer	James Jordan	DSG Funded	Permanent

As well as their 'core' roles outlined above, the Virtual School team provide consultative support and guidance to schools for Children with a Social Worker. This includes support for behaviour, attendance, mental health & wellbeing and SEND.

Through the expansion of duties, it has enabled the Virtual School to have much stronger engagement in multi-agency panels and boards across Halton. This includes:

- Halton Children and Young People's Safeguarding Partnership Executive Board and all Sub-Groups (Including the Safeguarding Practice Group and the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group)

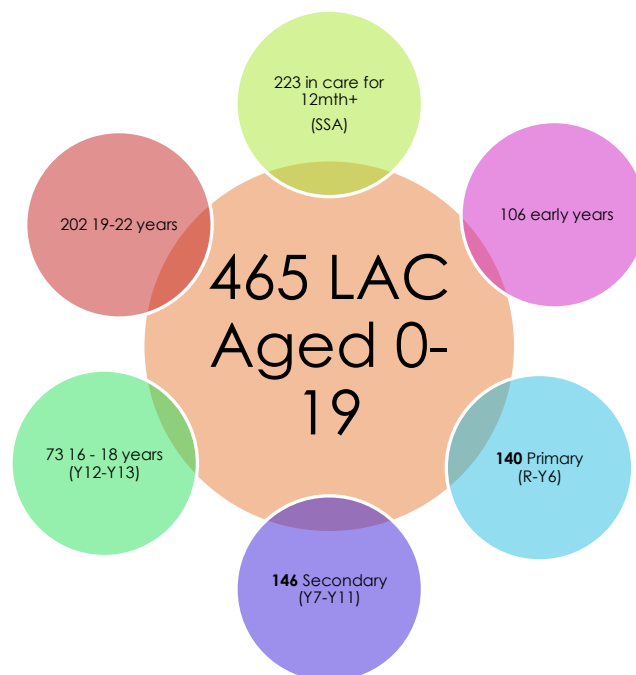
- 'Team Around the School' Meetings for those at risk of suspension or extreme persistent absence
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel
- Membership on Halton's Primary and Secondary Headteachers Networks
- Membership on all National Association of Virtual School Headteacher's (NAVSH) NW Sub-Groups
- Section 19 panel
- Halton's Children's Services Permanence Panel
- Halton's Children's Services Resource Panel
- Halton's Fostering Panel
- Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group
- Children's Services Improvement Board
- Resource and Placement Panel
- NW 5 Boroughs Post-Looked After Network
- Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Panel

Our SCIE Officer also attends numerous panels including MARAC, Working Together Meetings for Early Help and is the Chair of all DSL Networks and Workshops.

Our Cohort in 2024-2025

Due to the nature of our work, the cohort of children and young people whom we support is continually evolving as children enter care and leave care.

Over the course of the academic year, our cohort of children and young people has included:



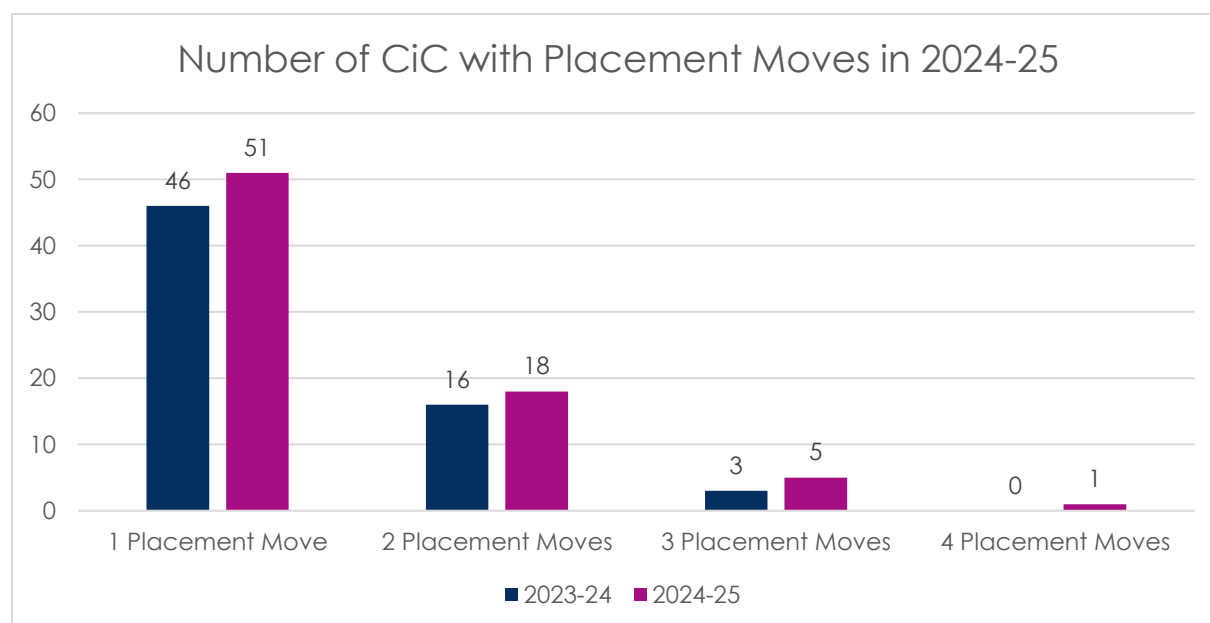
*Cumulated total for 24/25 academic year.

As of 31st August there were 351 children with an episode of care.



Placement moves.

During 2024-25 we continued to see a high number of CYP (Children and Young People) who experienced a placement move with 75 children and young people having 1 or more placement moves (up 65 from 2023-24).



Whenever there is a placement move, we will always work closely with Social Care and Education colleagues to ensure minimal disruption to education. We will challenge where we feel it would have a detrimental impact and also could impact upon them accessing their current education provision, through the Resource Panel held on a weekly basis.

School moves

There were 26 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year 2024-2025 (up from 18 last year) outside of anticipated phase/key stage transfers. All of these moves were completed in a coordinated way, taking into account the pupil voice.

There were 11 young people who have had periods of time not on a school roll, up from 10 in the previous academic year. 7 of these children have an EHCP.

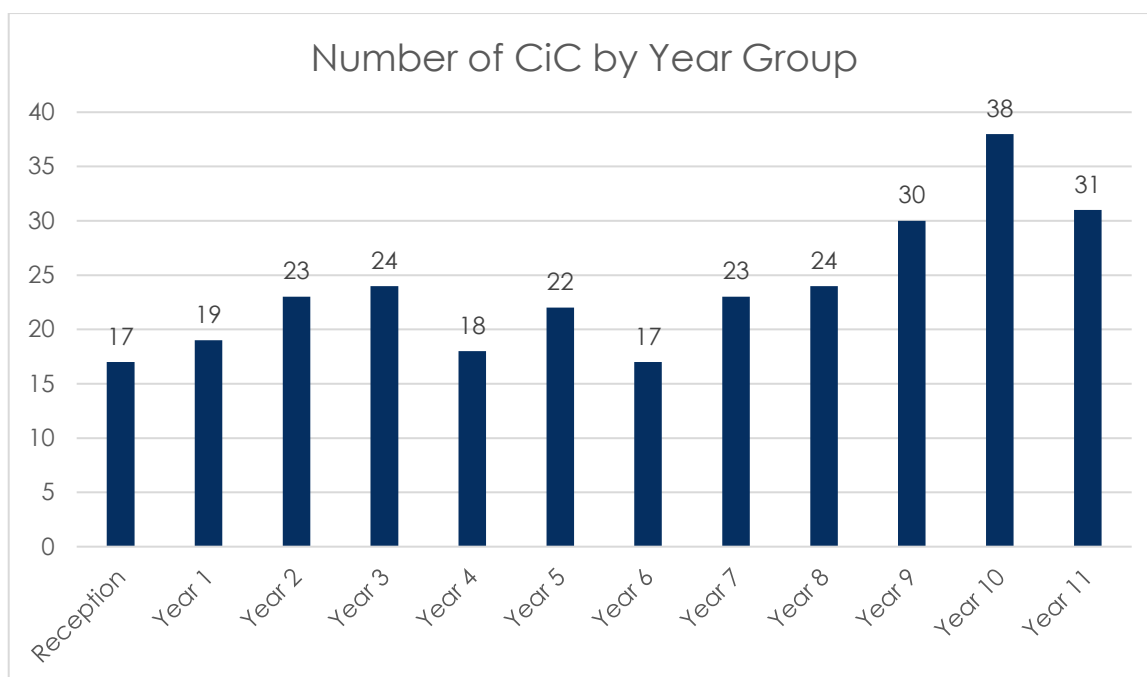
These are two areas in which we work tirelessly to ensure Children and Young People are able to remain on roll at their current school. However, we will also listen closely to their wishes and feelings within PEP meetings and will consider all direct requests where children ask to move schools. This process has been strengthened following feedback and challenge from our Children in Care Council.

A school move will also be considered whenever a child's school receives an Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement or Inadequate, although this does not mean a move will always be in the child's best interests despite the grading.

To ensure that the Virtual School is involved in all decisions to move schools, we have improved the rigour of processes used within Social Care to alert us to potential school move requests, which has impacted upon greater alerting and early intervention and support being actioned by the school.

School Phase

The chart shows a breakdown of children in care by each national curriculum year group for 2024-25. There are clear growth areas in pre-school aged children and within secondary.



New into Care and Discharged from Care

Understandably, our cohort is ever-changing as children come into care and are discharged.

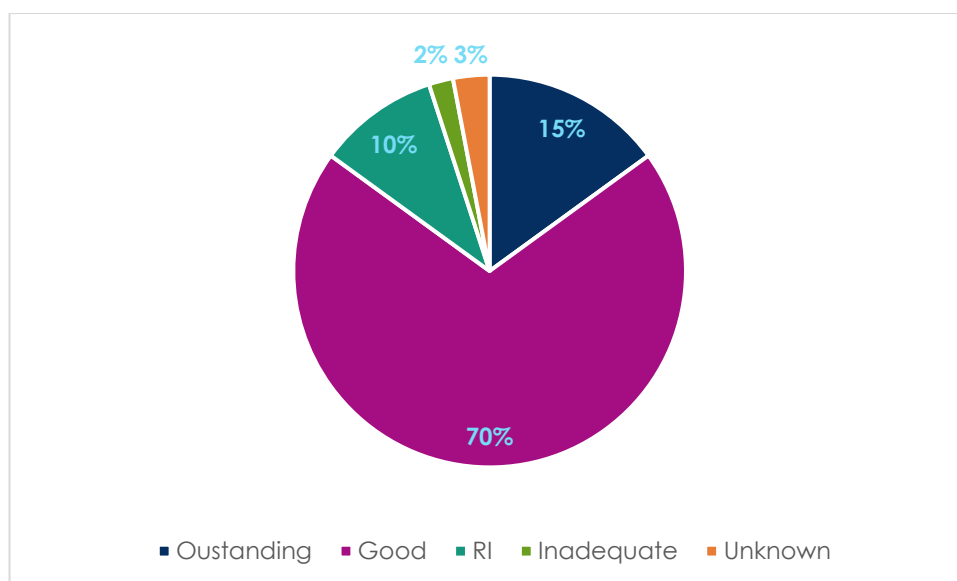
This year, our numbers have increased with 28 discharged and 60 children entering care.

Ofsted Ratings

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after children' states that schools judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' should be prioritised for children in care in need of a new school and that, unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, children in care should never be placed in a school judged to be 'Inadequate'.

From September 2024, Ofsted inspections of state-funded schools will no longer include an overall effectiveness judgement. The new scorecard is due in Autumn 2025, therefore, for the purposes of this report, we have included the current Ofsted information that we hold. We will not be reporting on this for the 2025-26 Annual Report.

At the end of the academic year, 85% of Halton's looked after children in Reception to Year 11 attended 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools which have a rating. This is in comparison to 74% at the end of 2024-25. The 3% 'unknown' are schools which have not yet received an Ofsted rating, such as schools who have recently opened or have converted to an academy. The majority of children who attend Requires Improvement or Inadequate schools were already attending these schools prior to entering care or before the school moved into this category and upon review it was deemed in the child's best interests to remain at the school.



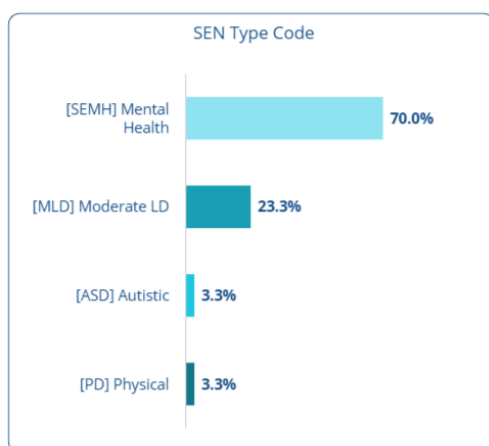
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

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, and in line with the 'Belonging Regulations', Halton SEND services and the Virtual School have agreed that when a child moves out of borough, the EHCP document will transfer to that authority and will be financially responsibility for our children in care who are living outside of Halton. In these circumstances, the Virtual School team will continue to be the main point of contact for Social Care and will ensure that the authority where the child is placed continues to prioritise our children. The DfE are currently reviewing the 'Belonging Regulations' as nationwide, it has become a risk for vulnerable children.

For children that are not in a stable placement, Halton SEN will continue to manage the EHCP. 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.

All EHCPs are reflected within the termly Personal Education Plans, with 70% of current plans having Social, Emotional and Mental Health as the primary category of need this is reflected in the training offered to individual schools and through our training calendar (and use of EP time) to support schools in enabling our children to flourish and thrive.



Academic Outcomes in 2024-2025

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 cohort numbers and the fluctuation in children coming into (and leaving) care, 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 as they are very specific to the needs to the individual children and young people.

Instead, through the PEP process we analyse the progress of each individual child and young person based upon their starting points and the targets set for their academic outcomes.

Early Years Foundation Stage

There were 9 young people in the EYFS cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more at the time of assessment.

Of these, 44% achieved a 'good level of development' (GLD).

Our Reception cohort data has significantly improved from last year. This year group has been a focus for support from the Virtual School with increased transition support, including learning at home.

GLD	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	29%	60%	30%	27%	44%

Year 1 Phonics

Year 1 Phonics	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	62.5%	33%	57%	50%	62%

Key Stage 1 Outcomes

The KS1 assessments continue to not be statutory, therefore we cannot report on this data.

Key Stage 2 Outcomes

Key Stage 2 Outcomes	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number in Cohort	11	29	18	18	11
Reading	33%	28%	55%	39%	55%
Writing	40%	31%	55%	33%	36%
GPS	54%	24%	72%	28%	45%
Maths	33%	36%	55%	39%	55%
Science	54%	28%	61%	44%	45%
Combined in RWM	33%	28%	44%	28%	45%

Primary Outcomes Analysis

The Primary Outcomes identifies that our children's results at Key Stage 2 have increased compared to previous years, particularly with Reading, GPS, Maths and the Combined. 91% of this year group have an EHCP or an identified area of SEND. 82% of the cohort were educated in borough. Individual pupil progress continues to be measured through PEPS and to ensure even earlier identification of support through targeted plans. This year, the Virtual School have provided additional scrutiny and challenge to settings, ensuring that for these year groups, Pupil Premium + is used with high aspirations. The Primary PEP Lead has ensured attendance at all PEP meetings and care planning meetings for Year 6 children. Three of this cohort have received direct work through the Virtual School focussing on social, emotional and mental health support.

Key Stage 4 Outcomes

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
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Number in Cohort	12	33	20	27	21
9 - 4 English	8%	42%	15%	15%	29%
9 – 4 Maths	33%	30%	15%	4%	19%
9 – 4 English & Maths	8%	24%	0%	4%	14%
9-5 English	0%	27%	5%	4%	5%
9-5 Maths	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%
9 – 5 English & Maths	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%

KS4 Analysis

This year has seen significant improvements in the KS4 outcomes for both English and Maths for those that have followed the GCSE curriculum. Contributing factors include targeted use of PP+ funding alongside SMART targets to support subject specific interventions such as 1:1 tuition (in-person and online) and small group interventions within school. The Virtual School have also encouraged and supported independent learning by providing laptops for revision and coursework. PP+ funding has been utilised to support extra-curricular activities, which offer benefits beyond the academic curriculum and personal development. A key focus this year has been on attendance and highlighting in PEP meetings the negative impact that absence can have on potential educational outcomes. A Virtual School representative has attended all Year 11 PEP meetings and ensured that Post-16 pathway planning is central in discussions.

- 4% of the cohort entered care during KS4.
- 39% of the cohort are also in receipt of an EHCP.
- 78% of the cohort had at least 1 social worker change in the last 12 months.
- 22% of the cohort had at least one placement change during Year 11.
- 0% of the cohort are UASC.
- 30% of the cohort attended out of borough settings.

There are a number of individual success stories which reflect the work of the schools and Virtual School colleagues in supporting the academic progress of our young people. We are continuing to strengthen the work in supporting our 16+ cohort in progressing into education, employment or training from September alongside colleagues within the Local Authorities 14-19 team and supporting with the completion of exam results in the new academic year.

Progress of all Pupils

As well as outcomes, we closely monitor the progress made through the PEP process. Where progress slows or is not on-track based upon their starting points, we work with schools, carers and social workers to use Pupil Premium + in order to provide additional support.

Summer Term 2024-25			
Year	Total No	Number with Expected Progress	% Expected Progress
R	15	9	60%
1	17	10	59%
2	20	17	85%
3	21	14	67%
4	15	10	67%
5	19	16	84%
6	14	14	100%

R	15	9	60%
KS1	37	27	73%
KS2	69	54	78%
TOT	121	90	74%
KS1&2	106	81	76%

Summer Term 2024-25			
Year	Total No	No Ex Pr	% Ex Pr
7	21	14	71%
8	23	19	83%
9	28	21	75%
10	33	14	42%
11	31	17	55%

KS3	72	55	76%
KS4	64	31	48%
TOT	136	86	63%

This data identifies that our cohort have made good or better progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2 but this dips in Key Stage 4, with our youngest and oldest cohorts. We will therefore feed this into our improvement plan for 2025-26 to further improve the scrutiny and challenge for these year groups to ensure that progress increases in these year groups.

Attendance and Exclusions

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, in line with 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024'.

Halton's 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 2024-25

Average % attendance	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	95%	96%	96%
Secondary	88%	87%	87%
Overall	92%	91%	91%

Attendance of all children in care over the past 8 years

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21 COVID	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Primary	97.1%	96.2%	87.5%	93.3%	95.3%	97%	97%	96%
Secondary	88.7%	88.6%	77.9%	90%	84.6	79%	77%	87%
Overall	92.9%	92.4%	81.9%	90.5%	90%	88%	86%	91%

Where attendance is below 95%, this will need to be explored within the PEP and where a concern is raised (for example if there are unauthorised absences, or a deterioration in school attendance), then this should be reflected in the PEP targets and actions as an area of priority.

Exclusions

This academic year has seen the Virtual School have one permanent exclusion. This was for a significant one-off incident. Education provision was sought immediately and the young person attended the 6th day provision. The young person continues to attend and is engaging with his education. National and regional colleagues have also seen an increase of permanent exclusions for Children in Care.

The Virtual School work closely with school leaders and offer training to all schools in Halton (as part of the expansion of our duties) to remind them of the additional anxieties and challenges that our cohort often face. This will be expanded further at our Autumn conference in September 2025 and throughout the next academic year as we offer additional trauma informed practice training.

Percentage of children in care receiving 1 or more suspension in 2024-25:

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	0%	1%	1%
Secondary	13%	20%	22%
Overall	3%	11%	12%

2 Primary pupils had 1 or more periods of fixed term suspension:

- 1 was educated out of borough.
- 1 was SEN Support.
- Total days lost learning for Primary children was 8.5 days.

32 Secondary pupils had 1 or more periods of fixed term suspension:

- 59% were educated out of borough.
- 47% were in residential provision.
- 41% had an EHCP.
- Total days lost learning for Secondary age young people was 318.5 days.

In comparison to previous years, there has been a reduction in the number of children in care experiencing suspensions and particularly repeated exclusions. The Virtual School has focussed on 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. Targeted school level support will continue to be provided in the next academic year, along with further training on attachment and trauma.

Virtual School Actions and Impact on Exclusions

- Provided support and advice to schools who were experiencing difficulties managing challenging behaviour.
- Continue to attend multi-agency, weekly 'Team Around the School' meetings in all secondary schools for children and young people at risk of suspension. This year has seen the rollout to some primary schools, which the Virtual School have also attended.
- Provided tailored packages of support to high-risk pupils, including mentoring through Insight Mentoring Service.
- 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.
- Worked with SEND colleagues to support identification of appropriate education placements.

Accessing Alternative provision

Whilst our overarching goal remains to ensure that all children receive a full-time offer within their registered school, we recognise that Alternative Provision (AP) can play a vital role in supporting those at risk of exclusion or disengagement.

Alternative Provision is strategically incorporated into timetables to:

- Prevent exclusions and promote positive behaviour
- Re-engage learners and improve attendance
- Support transitions into education, employment or training (EET)
- Enable sustained placements in mainstream settings

This academic year has seen a 25% decrease in the number of secondary aged pupils attending Alternative Provision, compared to 2023-24. This reduction reflects:

- Improved early intervention and support within mainstream schools
- Enhanced collaboration between schools and Alternative Provision providers
- A stronger focus on inclusive practices and tailored support

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.

If the provision is via the Engagement Programme the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator liaises with The Bridge School to ascertain quality assurance outcomes.

Number of CYP who accessed AP during 24/25	Part Time	Full Time Partial Year	Full Time Whole Year
Primary	1	0	0
Secondary	5	1	0
Overall	6	1	1

Post 16 Access to Education, Employment and Training-

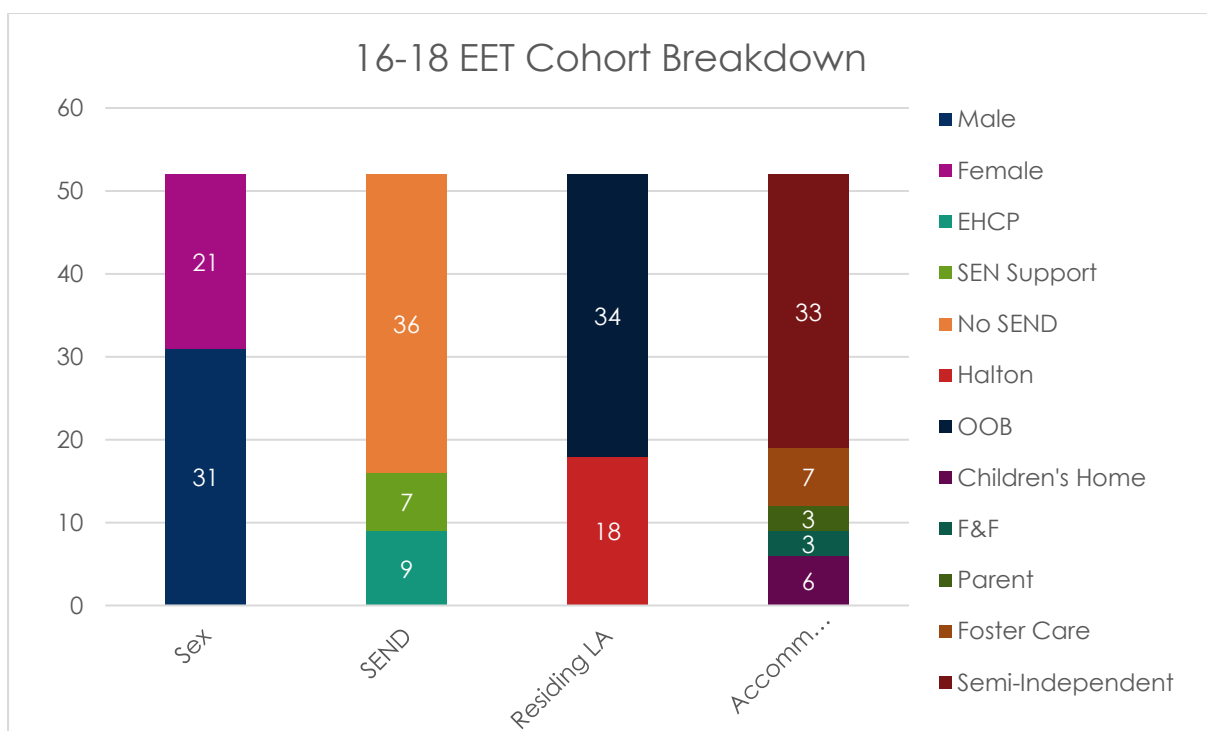
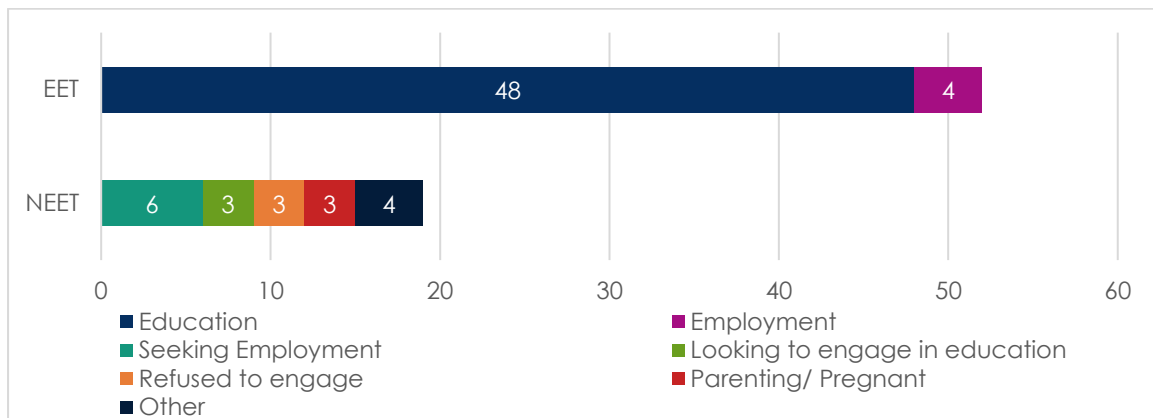
The Virtual School provide support and guidance for all young people in care or care leavers up to the age of 25 around access to Education, Employment and Training (EET), and provide advice and guidance for their social workers or PAs as appropriate.

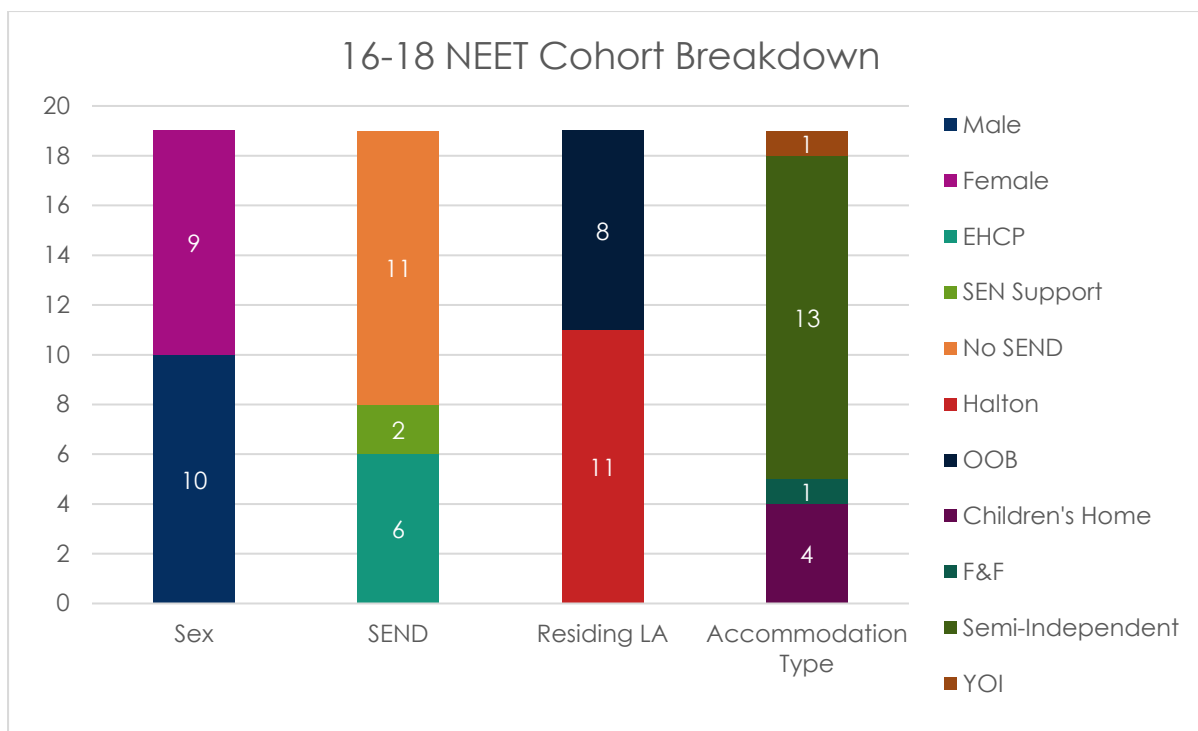
Halton's ILACS inspection in May 2024 highlighted that the Virtual School required more capacity to further develop its good work, in particular around support for our Post 16 cohort. As a result, our KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer works to improve the engagement of Post 16 young people in care 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. This is through the use of our Post 16 PEP and NEET PEP (Not in Education, Employment or Training) process. The Virtual School has also part funded a Young People Caseworker who sits in the Education to Employment Team, prioritising the Virtual School cohort. We are also in the process of re-structing the Virtual School to embed a 'college' offer, alongside ensuring sustained capacity within the team.

Six weekly tracking is undertaken with the Education to Employment Team 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. This process is monitored though the NEET Panel, attended by relevant stakeholders.

Halton Virtual School liaise closely with the newly appointed Halton Apprenticeship Officer within the Authority to share best practice and ensure that Children in Care and Care Leavers have access to high quality information regarding apprenticeships and also support in the application and recruitment process.

Outcomes for our 16–18-year-old young people in care





OOB = Out of Borough

UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child

EHCP = Education, Health and Care Plan

YOS = Youth Offending Service Involvement

FC = In Foster Care

The overall cohort is 71 young people of which 73% are in education, employment or training, an increase from 64% this time last year.

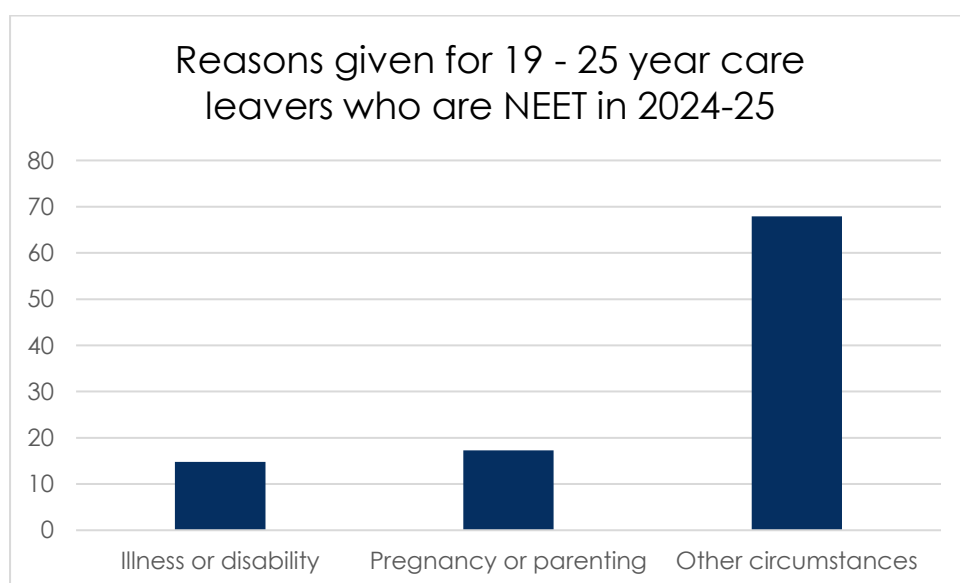
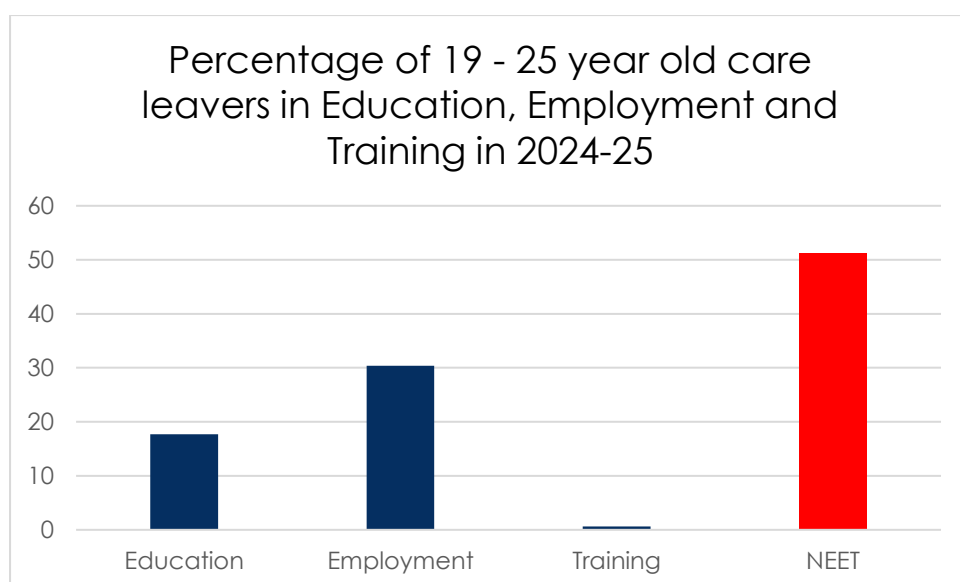
There are 19 young people who are not in education, employment or training within this cohort, down from 31 this time last year.

Halton Virtual School liaise with the Education to Employment Team, referring to Career Connect for bespoke support back into EET via, 1:1 Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), job search, applications and CV support. For the more vulnerable of the cohort, support and referrals can be tailored to include Disability Employment Advisers, Princes Trust Volunteers, Talent Match, Housing and Complex Youths.

Of the three young people who refused to engage in education, employment or training, all live in Halton. There continues to be a cohort of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who have very limited English and would therefore struggle accessing mainstream Further Education. For each of these young people, they have an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support package in place, with a view to then enrolling them at college once their career aspirations are more fully understood.

The NEET PEP alongside a NEET panel with our Social Care and Personal Advisor colleagues to provide further support, actions and accountability for engaging this group of Young People is now embedded in the Virtual School. These are completed by the KS4 & Post 16 Employability Officer for the Virtual School.

Outcomes for our 19- 22-year-old care leavers



Of these 158 young people, 49% are currently accessing education, employment or training (EET) however, there are 51% young people in this cohort who are not in education, employment or training. (NEET).

As a Virtual School, for our Care Leaver NEET cohort, we offer signposting to local services such as Halton People into Jobs, Households into Work and Halton Adult Education Service as well as advice and guidance in supporting our Leaving Care cohort alongside our Personal Advisor colleagues. All data for this cohort is obtained through Eclipse on the Care Leaver report, the context of this cohort is not provided.

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 (aspirational goal of within 10) 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.

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 in our termly performance reports to our Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Leadership Team.

Statutory Compliance and Quality Assurance

The PEP completion rate has remained consistently high, with a 2% increase compared to last year. The Virtual School is now tracking PEP completion by Social Care Team so any incomplete PEPs can be escalated to Team Managers. All children had a termly PEP meeting, however, the table below highlights those that did not have a completed document on Eclipse. The Virtual School prioritise these children each term and support the setting and Social Worker to ensure there is a quality PEP on the system in the following term.

	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	100%	94%	96%	97%
Primary	98%	99%	99%	99%
Secondary	89%	97%	96%	94%
Post 16	94%	95%	88%	92%
Combined	96%	96%	95%	96%
New into Care in Timescale	70%	71%	86%	76%

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. For EYFS and school age PEPs, the quality of adults working with the child is lacking.

However, the overall percentage of PEPs that are rated as Good or better is increasing each year.

In 2024-25, we continued our internal moderation process that was implemented the previous year. This ensures consistency across schools, PEP co-ordinators and age ranges. This year we have seen a reduction in the number of 'Red' PEPs, reflecting the improvement in the quality of the PEP document. We continue to provide statutory training to settings, social care and foster carers on their roles and responsibilities on completing a quality PEP document. Following on from our successful internal moderation process, we now moderate as a North West regional team. This ensures that we are in line with our neighbouring authorities and sets a benchmark for the quality assurance process.

Green or Gold PEPS	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	68%	70%	56%	65%
Primary	82%	71%	71%	75%
Secondary	57%	52%	54%	54%
Post 16	84%	91%	83%	86%
Combined	72%	67%	64%	67%

Our PEP policy and supporting documents expand upon what 'makes an effective (green or gold) PEP.

Pupil Premium Plus and Wider Funding

This year, the total grant allocated for Halton was £838,567.

65% (£576,164) was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes through distributed payments to schools and education provision, an increase from 51% in 2023-24.

	2021 - 22	2022- 23	2023-24	2024-25
PEP Allocation	27%	33%	44%	49%
Direct YP Support	19%	14%	7%	16%
Training	5%	2%	2%	2%
Centrally Retained	49%	51%	47%	33%

The centrally retained portion is for the attendance service the Virtual School commission, dedicated Education Psychology time (and the training they deliver), speech and language support (from 24/25), 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.

During the 24/25 academic year, we have benchmarked the spending of PP+ in comparison to other LAs and Virtual Schools and developed a greater measurement of impact of spending. This has informed the next steps regarding the Virtual School team restructure and ensured that settings are improving pupil outcomes.

Schools use the funding allocated through the PEPs to commission support themselves (including tuition, nurture and emotional literacy support, and access to additional interventions), to enhance the curriculum, offer opportunities to nurture talents, or support them in their talents and academic interests.

Post Looked After Children

For children who were previously looked-after but left care via a formal route such as adoption or a Special Guardianship Order, the Virtual School's duty is to provide advice and information to professionals and parents. We do not have corporate parenting responsibility for these children so do not complete direct work with them or case hold, we offer advice and guidance on all aspects of education and specific training for schools on supporting the needs of these children.

330 school age pupils known to be previously looked after are currently attending Halton schools.

Children and young people who have experienced early life trauma can continue to experience a range of challenges in school. We understand the long-term impact of trauma, and this informs the support and guidance we give to parents, carers and professionals who live and work with previously looked after children.

Additionally, Halton works very closely within a sub region of other Virtual Schools, to upskill staff and share good practice and resources. The quality of Halton Virtual School resources has been recognised

and distributed to all schools in the borough, as well as representing a constant presence on the Virtual Schools website with its very own dedicated 'Children Who Were Previously Looked After' page.

Halton Virtual School has worked hard at developing much stronger departmental links across Children's Services and particularly with Social Care. This has taken the form of training sessions, 'drop-ins' and support at school exclusion meetings.

Areas of Celebration

- Strengthening support for all vulnerable cohorts such as Children with a Social Worker and Kinship Carers.
- Working in collaboration with Together for Adoption (TfA).
- Providing advice and support to parents and schools on suspensions and exclusions, SEND and the EHCP process, including model template letters and communications for schools and settings to communicate effectively with parents.
- Delivery of educational support 'coffee morning' surgeries for adoptive parents and SGO carers (as well as Kinship carers) connected to Halton.
- Further development of strong interpersonal relationships with DTs throughout the borough ensuring excellent collaboration in multi-agency responses to areas of need in both school and the home as well as in areas such as admissions and transitions.
- Improved website containing an updated directory of services and offer for parents / carers of previously looked after children.
- Presence at designated teacher meetings (in and out of borough) providing updates regarding national changes to the provision for previously looked after children and specific guidance concerning support and funding available for schools.
- Attendance and offers of support at multi agency meetings.
- Increased number of enquiries and requests for support, information and advice from parents/carers, schools and social work colleagues.
- Initial consultations with the Leaving Care Team ensuring training links, local services and third party layers of support are smoothly communicated.
- A directory of services for previously looked after children signposting local authority and independent providers' services.
- Proposed training programme beginning with 'teenagers and the adoption journey' session provided by Louise Bomber in cooperation with four other local authority partners.
- Development of training resources for social workers pertaining to both previously looked after children and the remit of the Virtual School.
- Membership of the North west regional network for children with a social worker providing inter-local authority support.

Areas of Development and Targets for 2025 – 2026

- Use of census data to challenge schools on their use of pupil premium plus for previously looked after.
- Closer work with Fostering department (and other organisations) to develop joint training and support for kinship carers.
- Extension of Training: Further Previously Looked after Training for adoptive parents, SGO and Kinship carers in the Spring and Summer Terms (2026) following Louise Bomber in Autumn 2025 focussing upon 'Understanding SEND', 'Post 16 Options', and 'Supporting Reading in the Early Years'.
- In 2025 – 26 academic year we will be further developing this offer to include Kinship carers in line with statutory guidance.
- Delivery of workshops to social care teams regarding the remit of the Virtual School and support and funding criteria for children previously looked after.
- Deployment of survey and collation of data from school regarding what further areas of support they require for their cohort of previously looked after children.
- Development of an offer with the Leaving Care Team.

Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

Over the past academic year, significant progress has been made in strengthening relationships and raising the profile of education for children with a social worker. This has been achieved through close collaboration with education settings, Social Workers, and other Local Authority teams. Monthly reporting mechanisms have been established to monitor the attendance status for this cohort, providing valuable data that informs planning and supervision by both education and social care managers.

Advice and guidance has been provided in relation to many children across all phases of education who are supported under Child in Need or Child Protection plans. Through active participation in panels and professional networks, barriers to education for individual young people have been identified and resolved. This has contributed to an enhanced focus on promoting education and attendance within statutory plans. Child in Need and Child Protection plans now contain specific mandatory fields to record specific education information, covering areas such as attendance, NEET status, transitions, and SEND, ensuring that education remains a central consideration in multi-agency planning.

In 2025-26, we will focus on further enhancing the strategic oversight and operational delivery of education for children with a social worker. This includes working collaboratively with other Local Authority teams to expand the scope and depth of reporting, ensuring that data is both comprehensive and actionable. Continued engagement with education and social care service managers will be essential to embed education and attendance considerations into all aspects of service planning and supervision. Additionally, a further dip sampling exercise will be undertaken, specifically examining how education is reflected within Child in Need and Child Protection plans. This will help identify areas of good practice and opportunities for improvement, ensuring that education remains a central focus in multi-agency safeguarding efforts.

We have continued to play an active role in the 'Team Around the School' model for children at risk of exclusion within 100% of our secondary schools. We have also enhanced our presence on key multi-agency groups to support those at risk of exploitation.

Our Safeguarding Children in Education Officer also provides active support to schools relating to escalations, case support and training for DSLs.

Training and Development

During 2024-25, the Virtual School delivered training and hosted network meetings to 301 delegates from across 249 Schools. This year, we continued to invite all social care and fostering colleagues to all of our training sessions.

Training and support were provided in relation to four key aims this year, to ensure we get our core business to the highest standard possible, especially following the increased expectations around what constitutes a 'good' PEP:

- New to the Role of Designated Teacher
- Multi-agency working
- Inclusive environments
- Termly DT Network Meetings

Our next Virtual School Conference for Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers, Headteacher and Social Care takes place on 22nd October 2025 with over 150 delegates expected to join us for what is sure to be a fantastic day's professional development!

Virtual School Team Training

This year, the Virtual School team have accessed CPD focussing on attachment and trauma. The team have attended seven sessions throughout the academic year to become qualified to deliver training to settings, Social Workers and colleagues across the authority on how to support our children who have had adverse childhood experiences. The Early Years Support Worker is now trained to deliver PEEP Training and 'Tots Talking' Speech and Language Programme. One of our PEP Leads has begun training in 'Thrive' to bring the Virtual School in line with our colleagues in school settings. This will mean that all of our Children in Care, regardless of where they live, will be supported with a Thrive approach. The Headteacher completed Peer Reviewer training in November 2024 and is now qualified to undertake Peer Reviews of Virtual Schools. The Headteacher of the Virtual School has also completed the NPQH qualification in April 2025.

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.

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 pupil voice and moved to provide online tuition where preferred.

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.

The Virtual School also has a yearly subscription to Storytime Magazine which is sent out each month to identified children in Key Stage 1 and when appropriate to some Key Stage 2 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. 42 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.

This year, we have commissioned mentoring support for an identified cohort of young people through Insight Mentoring. In addition to this, we are working in partnership with Together Trust to deliver further commissioned services aimed at enhancing the support available to children in care, whilst signposting settings to wider services that are available to improve educational outcomes and engagement. These services are designed to provide consistent, targeted interventions that address individual needs and promote positive outcomes for the cohort.

2024 – 2025 Virtual School Action Plan

A summary of our Action Plan for the previous academic year

Objective	Action to reach objective	Progress	Strengths, Risks & RAG Rating
To develop a Halton Virtual School Reading Strategy.	Develop a Virtual School reading survey to identify themes and trends in our schools, placements and to understand the views of our children. Develop a training plan to raise educational outcomes in reading. Strengthen our Reading support offer. Develop the analysis of the data we collect around reading age and assessments. Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care peers through termly progress support and challenge meetings.	Data collection from Welfare Call to give baseline figures for reading ability (ages Y1-Y11) Meeting with 'happy home learning' on 'Reading Champions' project supporting CP and CIN children 'Reading Heroes' – pilot programme application made. Development of speech and language 'progress and action' cards for 0-5 year olds. To be used by Social Workers and other professionals to identify early concerns and be proactive in accessing support for children and families, and opening up communication between professionals. This is being developed with Speech and Language UK and will impact on future reading abilities/skills. Primary settings approached for example reading policies	Reading Programme of Support created. Funding for additional reading resources has been successful. New training offer for Foster Carers and parents. Chronological reading age data from Welfare Call captured on spreadsheet

		Secondary settings approached for example reading policies Meeting with The Literacy Company 25th Nov 2025 Reading Fluency training via English Hub – SR to attend. Book parcels continue to be sent to reception age children and a targeted cohort. Story time magazine to an identified cohort in primary Meeting with Catch-up Literacy	
Develop the Virtual School College	Ensure all marketing materials and website outlines the clear offer of the Virtual School and College Strengthen and develop the NEET Panel to ensure Social Care colleagues have the skills to support our young people into education, training, or employment. Halton to adopt Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic. Increase capacity within The Virtual School to widen our current offer.	Virtual School College is currently being developed with the authorities design team: Development of care leaver aspiration form to support NEET panel. Shared with leaving care team. Training programme developed for the academic year including VS conference that took place on 18th Sept 2024.	Development of aspiration form has been created; more oversight of need and aspiration to formulate targeted provisions for care leavers. Regular attendance at HEP meeting is garnering further opportunities for care leavers to engage in EET. Appointment of Halton Apprenticeship Officer. LCR Youth Guarantee Trailblazer (YGT) Programme:

	Continue to improve the completion and quality of Post 16 PEPs and NEET PEPs. Embed the formalised Virtual School offer of support for all Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entering Halton's care.	Development session delivered to Halton's fostering panel and fostering team on 10th Sept 2024. September 2024 Discussions between Halton VS and DCS around developing an Apprenticeship and Work Experience Placement offer from Halton BC for our Care Experienced cohort. HBC agree to ring fence apprenticeship opportunity for Care Experienced YP Post 18 NEET panel held Information and signposting shared with CL managers who will cascade this to PAs.	Support for care experienced young people including development of best practice. Virtual school currently undertaking a restructure to provide further capacity and oversight in this area. PEP completion and quality have increased. Offer has now been created to support USAC children who are not accessing education.
Raise attendance and reduce the number of exclusions for all Children in Care	Strengthen training offer for all adults working with vulnerable children Develop the use of data to ensure that our analysis is robust and identifies trends early. Provide thorough weekly analysis of attendance of all school aged looked after children.	Team around the school meetings: Primary – monthly by invitation (drop-ins). Secondary – Settings to book a preferred date in. Programme continuing academic year 2024-2025. EBSNA – discussed at team around the school meetings for advice and support.	Weekly attendance tracking and RAG rating Effective TAS meetings reducing exclusions Attendance and inclusion training delivered

	Relaunch Halton Virtual School attendance policy. Upskill social care colleagues in understanding and improving school attendance. Complete a Peer review of PP+ Develop commissioned services offer to meet need.	TAS has proved highly successful in reducing potential permanent exclusions for those marked as 'at risk' of Permanent Exclusion. Comprehensive data list of numbers of 'previously looked after children / Young People' collected for all schools within Halton and OOB. Early Years attendance is tracked on PEP data document each term. Any concerns are highlighted, discussed and actions put into place through a multi-agency arrangement. Request Post-16 data to be RAG rated by Welfare Call. Primary, Secondary attendance report from Welfare Call (WFC2) – Attendance analysis with RAG ratings. Termly meetings – DB/GD to discuss attendance/exclusion concerns. Dates are arranged. Breakdown of permanent exclusions and suspensions for children in care. Weekly data from LA data team.	Multi-agency collaboration
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		Attendance and Inclusion Training has been provided by AC Education. VS attendance policy Social Care support re: attendance : documents and workshop materials to support this. Post 16 attendance reported weekly from welfare call. Half termly analysis from the VS. Post-16 welfare call email weekly attendance document to DB/IW. Figures then RAG rated by Post 16 Team and multi-agency approach to concerns raised.	
Enhance the Virtual School offer for Vulnerable groups, including Kinship, Children with a Social Worker, Post-Looked After & UASC cohort.	Support for those with SEND to get the right support when it is needed including access to our new S&L service and our educational psychologist. New flightpath support package for all children leaving care. Refinement and rolling out to schools of PEP style document for children formerly in care	Kinship and Children with a Social Worker 'educational package' for social workers developed and facilitated (Training and resources completed and ready for delivery). To be facilitated at Social Worker Forum. Kinship and Children with a Social Worker Virtual School Website Page Developed	On-going area for development due to new statutory duties being released in 2025-26 by the DFE, however, all areas for 2024-25 have been completed with progress made in this area. Comprehensive training and resources for social workers Flightpath support package implemented

	Continue to develop the Kinship and Children with a Social Worker offer Strengthen EAL offer. In collaboration with the Social Work Academy, develop an Education Induction and Orientation Programme for all new staff that work with vulnerable children.	Flightpath support package for children and young people leaving care shared with discharge team lead Sarah Darley. (P-lac) New 5 Boroughs Plan revamped for 2024-2025 including bespoke Webinar training from Louise Bomber to be rolled out academic year 2025-26. Monthly Support Group Meetings for adopters and special guardians extended to those offering kinship care. CwSW / Kinship webpage developed with VS remit and resources. Formalised UASC offer in place: website updated to reflect this situation. On entering care, all UASCs will receive a digital laptop to assist in their learning. Those who do not gain a formal educational ESOL place will have access to the online Flash Academy app to develop knowledge and acquisition of the English language. Development of social work academy in developing education orientation to be included as part of induction, this is ready to be launched when academy give the go ahead.	
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Our Plans for 2025-2026

A summary of our plans for this academic year can be found below. These are expanded within our delivery plan for the academic year, including timescales, success measures and identified actions.

To increase the number of children that are school ready and reach GLD by the end of Reception.

- Develop the training offer for Social Workers and Carers of children aged 0-5
- Enhance multiagency working with the Early Years Team and Family Hubs
- Strengthen data collection throughout the academic year
- Review effective use of PP+ for 3-6 year olds and how impact is measured

To reduce the attainment & progress gap for Children in Care compared to their non cared for peers

- Embed Halton Virtual School Attendance policy
- Embed the effective use of attendance and exclusions data and develop targeted support for professionals, including Social Workers, Foster Carers and Residential placements
- Rollout of Halton Virtual School's Reading support programme
- Develop 'Celebration & Recognition' for Children in Care to Halton Virtual School
- Increase the number of good or better PEPs across all age groups

To embed the Virtual School offer for vulnerable groups

- Development of social, emotional and mental health support through the Thrive approach
- Strengthen attendance data analysis for Children with a Social Worker
- Embed Kinship offer
- Strengthen multiagency working across education and social care
- Development of Education Support Practitioners to support early intervention and support

To embed the Virtual College offer and reduce the number of NEET 16-18 year olds

- Strengthen governance of NEET panel
- Develop multiagency approach to NEET PEPs.
- Launch of Virtual School & College logo
- Develop cross authority links for Post 16 education sufficiency