



Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2016-17



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A note about the data

The official cohorts reviewed in this report are small and the individual pupils comprising the cohorts change during the course of each phase. In some of the DfE's validated tables therefore the Northumberland data is suppressed because the statistical samples are too small. Percentages can vary considerably so that comparisons with other groups of pupils or establishing trends in performance over time are not always meaningful.

Since the academic year 2016-17 the NCER CLA (National Consortium of Examination Results Children Looked After) Project has made data relating to looked after children available through Nexus, a web-based education portal which has created a consistent, national evidence-based system for monitoring educational outcomes of children in care. The ADCS and NAVSH were able to influence its development.

Using the portal has given the Virtual School a better holistic understanding of the attainment and progress of children in care and the key vulnerabilities, and local outcomes can be analysed alongside the national context so that we know how our pupils are doing in comparison to similar pupils. The NCER CLA Analysis also provides an evidence base for Ofsted. Essentially more data is now available to Virtual Schools to support effective self-evaluation and subsequent plans for improvement.

The official cohort does not comprise all pupils in a year group at the time of the assessment, but all those of statutory school age who have been in care for 12 months or more from 31st March of 2016 (which is 178) and of those how many match to the school census (which is 137). The Virtual School captures data for whole cohorts, so where local data and not validated DfE data is quoted then it refers to all pupils in one year group at one time regardless of the length of time they have been in care or the school census.

Figure 1: Profile of the learners in Northumberland's Virtual School (at 31.08.17)



Northumberland's Virtual School Headteacher: Jane Walker

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The education of looked after children and previously looked after children is everyone's responsibility. Virtual School Heads may have an overarching responsibility, but we are reliant on schools playing their part too, and education outcomes for 2016-17 would suggest that we are working together well to drive improvement.

Standards can only truly be considered high, if they are high in every part of the county and for all pupils regardless of their background or ability.

Report of the Director of Education and Skills 2016-17, paragraph 13

2. This year we have new, different and better data sets available to work from. If we take the approach that the data tells us something but not everything, then there are many interesting questions to ask about the journeys of our looked after children and the impact this has on their education outcomes.

3. There is good news for looked after children in the early years stage of their education. For the second consecutive year there has been an increase in the number of looked after children with a good level of development (GLD) in **Early Years**, from 40% to 43%.

4. It is very encouraging that achievement in the **phonics test** in Year 1 for age 6 pupils has risen sharply from 20% to 80% of pupils assessed as working at the expected standard. As the average for all non-looked after children is 81%, the gap has closed to just 1%. This score gives us insight into the language development of pupils and indicates that these pupils are on track to achieve the best that they are capable of at the end of Key Stage 1.

5. Outcomes at **Key Stage 1** show a big dip in achievement since last year and are now below the achievement of looked after children nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. This outcome was in line with expectations however as 80% of this cohort have SEND compared to only 56% regionally and 51% nationally, and a very high average score of 20 for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) indicating that the poor emotional health and wellbeing of this cohort of pupils had an impact on education outcomes.

6. Even though national expectations at age 11 are very challenging, the success rate of age 11 pupils at **Key Stage 2** meeting national expectations in the combined measure of reading, writing and maths has more than doubled since last year from 13.3% to 29.4% and now compares well with the national standard. Achievement in mathematics is particularly good where pupils out-performed their looked after peers in the region and in England.

7. 17.2% of Year 11 pupils achieved at least grade 4 in **GCSE** English and mathematics combined (the Basics) which is a dip from 29.2% in 2016 but is the same as the national average for all looked after children in 2017. At 30 pupils the 2017 cohort was much bigger than in previous years with an over-representation of pupils with SEND - 9 pupils have EHCPlans and 6 pupils were not entered for GCSE courses. In this context the outcome was pleasing although we are of course working to improve the proportion of pupils achieving the Basics for 2018.

8. For the third consecutive year the proportion of pupils progressing to further education and sixth forms has remained high at 80% or above which is a positive trend and much better than the national average. Almost 100% (28 out of 29) of pupils who completed accredited courses in Year 11 were engaged in **further education, training or employment** in September 2017.

9. **Progress** from the starting point of entering care is good at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 at around 80%, with progress in English being better than in mathematics. The number of children making better than expected progress still needs to improve so that they can catch up with their non-looked after peers.

10. The average progress scores for Northumberland's looked after pupils from **Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2** in reading and writing show under-achievement in line with national averages and corresponding overall with achievement at Key Stage 2. This reinforces our self-evaluation that reading and particularly writing need to be a focus for 2018. The trend reverses by Key Stage 4 however, with performance in GCSE English much better than GCSE mathematics and girls outperforming the boys in both subjects.

11. Careful commissioning of alternative provision by the Virtual School and effective challenge to schools and academies has sustained our record of **no permanent exclusion** of a Northumberland looked after child since 2008.

12. Reducing **fixed term exclusions** continues to be a priority. Despite the relentless efforts of the Virtual School, social workers and IROs (independent reviewing officers), fixed term exclusions increased significantly in 2016 to 19.7% which is well above national and regional averages. Virtual School data for 2017 however indicates that the interventions are having a longer term and hopefully more sustainable impact, with exclusions for pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 starting to reduce.

13. The percentage of looked after children classed as **persistent absentees** (attendance of 90% or below) followed the regional and national trend and increased slightly to 11% in 2017. At 4% the **overall absence** of looked after children in Northumberland, the region and nationally remained constant.

AMBITION

14. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 was passed by parliament in April and has expanded the role of the Virtual School Headteacher and Designated Teachers. We now have a role to promote the education achievement of previously looked after pupils ie those learners who achieve permanence from care including those who are adopted and subject to placement orders and special guardianship orders (SGOs). A local offer for care leavers and an extension of the role of the Personal Advisor up to the age of 25 for all care leavers are also on the national agenda.

15. There are over 300 pupils in this group of previously looked after children, which is larger than the group who are currently of statutory school age and in care. All previously looked after children are already eligible for Pupil Premium Plus, and the DfE has pledged in principle to support local authorities with the additional cost of resourcing the expansion of Virtual Schools up to 2020.

16. Growth and diversity have characterised the development of the Virtual School this year. We responded with flexibility to meet the needs of the unaccompanied asylum seekers who for the first time were placed in Northumberland by the Home Office, and to the general increase in numbers of pupils from early years to post-16 who remained in education.

17. This diversity was matched in our workforce as well. Changes were made to posts, roles and responsibilities so that our priorities could be achieved through delivery of the Virtual School Improvement Plan. I am proud that an apprenticeship in general business and administration for one of our care leavers was created, and an internship for a Northumberland learner with an EHCP which developed from a work experience placement from Percy Hedley special school. A closer relationship was developed with the Careers Information and Guidance team which part funds the dedicated Virtual School Careers Advisor working with young people from adolescence to adulthood. For the first time an Education Psychologist was commissioned from the Northumberland team and during the year we strengthened that offer to children and schools with an independent provider of psychological services.

18. The implementation of a local SEND strategy with refreshed leadership arrangements enabled progress to be made with improving outcomes for looked after pupils with SEND. The nomination of an 'SEND champion' in the SEND team increased our influence on further aligning EHCPs with Care Plans and therefore PEPs. Better integrated working is being achieved to benefit individual pupils and the impact of this should be evident in outcomes during the next few years.

19. A different strategic approach to corporate parenting from a new Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Service Director for Children's Social Care has had a positive impact on the Virtual School by providing context, raising its profile and providing clear direction. The revised Corporate Parenting Strategy (2017-2020) is monitored through the Corporate Parenting Panel of which the Virtual School Headteacher is now a permanent member.

20. Alongside the strategy the MALAP (multi-agency looked after partnership) accepted revised Terms of Reference as the governing body of the Virtual School in September 2016, providing a stronger framework for accountability to the Virtual School Headteacher. The Virtual School Headteacher's role as a sub-group chair on the Northumberland Safeguarding

Children Board and wider senior management responsibilities for inclusion support and safeguarding standards in schools mean that the Virtual School has a crucial part to play in promoting and achieving social mobility.

21. The National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH) continues to unite Virtual Schools around common priorities and to develop momentum for change and improvement. This year a peer challenge framework for Virtual Schools was developed with the Local Government Association. Training is underway with plans to start the reviews in 2017-18.

22. 2016 was the end of an era for the Education Support for Looked After Children (ESLAC) team, when the introduction of flexible and agile ways of working meant a move from the infamous Edzone building to a new location in Blyth. Although sad to close the doors in Ashington, the opportunity to re-brand the Virtual School was taken and a new logo and colour scheme were introduced thanks to the Participation Team in Northumberland Adolescent Services. The similarity with the logo of The Promise is deliberate, letting all of our young people know about our commitment to listening to their voices and delivering on our pledges to them.

23. The ethos of Northumberland's Virtual School is captured in our LEARN, ACHIEVE, CELEBRATE headline. Our mission continues to be to relentlessly provide support to our learners so that we can define with them clear academic and vocational pathways into education, employment and training. We want to enjoy that journey with them and minimise the disruptions along the way.

ACHIEVEMENT

24. There is good news about achievement for our looked after children. There were improvements in attainment in most phases and performance at least in line with national averages. Successes in the Early Years Stage, Phonics test, and Key Stage 2, combined with very encouraging progress figures for pupils of all ages have reduced the difference in achievement with non-looked after children. Our pupils are aspirational and share our ambition for them, with a consistently high number continuing into further education at 16 at a rate well above the national average. This gives us confidence that we can further improve achievement in all measures next year.

Early Years

25. For the second consecutive year there has been an increase in the number of looked after children with a good level of development (GLD) in Early Years. The proportion has increased to 43% whilst the achievement of non-looked after pupils has remained constant, therefore closing the gap with non-looked after children to 26%.

26. There were 7 pupils in the official cohort (those in care for 12 months from 1st April 2016), 2 of whom have SEND and 1 of whom was placed in a setting in a different local authority.

Figure 2: Proportion of pupils achieving good level of development in Early Years

Academic year	2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
	All non-LAC National	LAC NCC	All non-LAC National	LAC NCC	All non-LAC National	LAC NCC
% at Good Level of Development (GLD)	66	38	69	40	69	43

Phonics

27. Achievement in the phonics test in Year 1 for age 6 pupils has risen sharply. 80% of our looked after pupils who took the phonics test were assessed as working at the expected standard, compared to only 20% in 2016.

28. At only 5 pupils the official cohort was very small (in care for 12 months from 1st April 2016), 1 of whom has SEND.

Figure 3: Proportion of Year 1 pupils working at expected standard of 32/40

	All Northumberland pupils	LAC NCC	Re-test in Year 2	No in official LAC cohort
	%	%	%	
2016	81	20	80	5
2017	68.2	80	June 2018	5

Key Stage 1

29. Achievement at Key Stage 1 has dipped compared with the previous year and is well below regional and national averages. Although disappointing, this year's cohort is very small at only 10 pupils, and 80% have SEND compared to only 56% regionally and 51% nationally.

30. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the combined measure of reading, writing and mathematics has dipped from 44% in 2016 to 20% in 2017. It is pleasing that the proportion achieving the expected standard in reading has almost doubled, however achievement in mathematics has halved and addressing this dip will be a priority for next year.

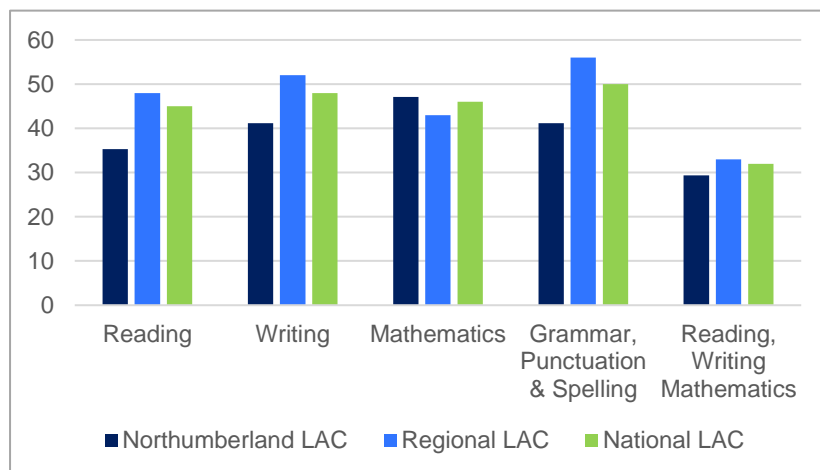
31. At an average of 20 the SDQ score for Northumberland pupils is very high (compared to regional and national averages of 14) and indicates that work needs to be done with these pupils during Key Stage 2 to improve their emotional health and wellbeing.

Key Stage 2

32. Well done to our looked after pupils, our dedicated Designated Teachers and ESLAC team workers – attainment at Key Stage 2 more than doubled since last year from 13.3% achieving the expected standard in the combined measure of reading, writing and mathematics to 29.4% this year.

33. In mathematics almost 6% of pupils performed at a greater depth of learning which is much better than the expected standard. Next year we aim to repeat that performance and accelerate pupils to that level in reading and writing as well.

Figure 4: Percentage achieving the expected standard at Key Stage 2 2017



34. The factors which we know have a positive impact on achievement are all evident for our 2017 cohort. 16 of the 18 pupils attend schools which are judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and attendance was outstanding for Year 6 with an average of 99.6% and 12 pupils achieving 100%

attendance. Disruptions to learning were minimised, with excellent school placement stability (only 1 pupil had 1 school move during the year) and only 3 pupils experienced 1 placement move during the year. There were no permanent exclusions, and only 1 pupil experienced at least 1 fixed term exclusion.

35. Significantly, the average SDQ score at 14.4 was close to the 'normal' score of 13 and in line with the regional and national averages, indicating that our pupils were better prepared emotionally for the Key Stage 2 SATs than last year and that the levels of anxiety associated with the tests is starting to fall.

36. At 17 pupils the Key Stage 2 cohort of Looked After Children in 2017 was unusually large with a higher proportion of pupils with SEND than regionally and nationally. At the time of the end of year assessments 1 pupil was on a placement at the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

"This is a real team effort between the hard-working pupils, the committed Designated Teachers, the determined Virtual School, the supportive social workers and brilliant foster carers."

Councillor Wayne Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

37. All the pupils have worked hard and there are impressive stories of individual success. When one child joined her school 12 months ago she was working at a level more than a year below most pupils of her age. The effective use of the Pupil Premium Plus by the school to provide classroom support and interventions from the Virtual School for maths meant that despite this initial gap she met national expectations by the end of Year 6.

38. Bearing in mind that the cohorts from both phases are not actually the same children, there is definitely cause to celebrate as pupils have exceeded expectations based on their average point score at the end of Key Stage 1. In other words, the quality of teaching and support of the Virtual School have had a positive impact on progress which has raised achievement at the end of Key Stage 2.

39. For mathematics progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 is very good and much better than the rate of progress for all non-looked after pupils in Northumberland.

40. The average progress scores for Northumberland’s looked after pupils from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in reading and writing show under-achievement in line with national averages and corresponding overall with achievement at Key Stage 2. This reinforces our self-evaluation that reading and particularly writing need to be a focus for 2018. The trend reverses by Key Stage 4 however, with performance in GCSE English much better than GCSE mathematics.

Key Stage 4

41. There were pleasing stories of individual success for our Year 11 looked after pupils, but outcomes at GCSE were disappointing overall. 17% of Year 11 pupils achieved at least grade 4 in GCSE English and mathematics combined (the Basics) which is in line with the national average but a dip since 2016 from 29.2%. Many of the pupils who achieved the Basics gained strong passes of grade 5 or above in English and mathematics.

42. The number of pupils with SEND is high – of the 29 pupils in the cohort 5 attended non-mainstream schools for the duration of Key Stage 4 and 6 did not access GCSE courses, 2 pupils attend residential special schools and 9 have EHCPlans. 1 pupil was in secure accommodation. The girls performed significantly better than the boys in English and in mathematics.

43. Despite the dip in performance there are stories of great achievements in challenging circumstances and the impact which professionals have had on improving outcomes for these young people is evident. 70% of Year 11 pupils attended Good or Outstanding schools and there were no permanent exclusions. During the last 3 years only 1 pupil experienced at least 1 fixed term exclusion and placement stability was good - 7 pupils had a change of school placement and only 6 pupils had a change of home placement.

Figure 5: Difference between Northumberland looked after children and all non-looked after children nationally in key accountability measures 2016-17

	2016			2017			2016	2017
	LAC NCC	LAC National	non-LAC National	LAC NCC	LAC National	non-LAC National	LAC (NCC): national non-LAC difference	
Progress 8	-1.59	-1.14	0.08	-1.41	-1.18	-0.17	-1.64	-1.24
Attainment 8	22.9	22.8	49.34	20.1	19.3	44.4	26.79	24.3
Basics	29.2	18.0	62	17.2	16.0	55.7	-34.7	-38.5
English Baccalaureate	4.2	8.0	24	0	5	56	-24	-56

44. We want our looked after children to fulfil their potential and achieve at least as well as their non-looked after peers. Depending on the characteristics of the cohort each year this can vary but for 2017 there is evidence, as shown in Figure 9, that the difference has diminished in the key accountability measures of Progress 8 and Attainment 8. It is disappointing that the difference in the Basics measure has increased even though it is only the second year of the new GCSE curriculum which is more demanding and has no coursework element which often used to benefit looked after pupils.

45. The Progress 8 measure gives a helpful insight into the challenges which looked after pupils face once they reach Key Stage 4. In 2017 our looked after pupils achieved -1.44 which is approximately 1.5 grades less than pupils with the same starting point nationally. It aligns with the regional average but is below the national average of -1.18. To give context, the Northumberland average Progress 8 score for all non-looked after children is -0.16.

46. Attainment 8 is the average achievement across 8 subjects. The average Attainment 8 score for looked after pupils in Northumberland is 20.1 compared with 19.3 for looked after children nationally. The national Attainment 8 figure for all non-looked after children nationally is 44.4, meaning that less than half of our looked after children achieve as well as their peers.

Progress from starting point in care

47. We know that being in care and the Virtual School have a positive impact on education outcomes because we measure progress from the point that a child first enters care. We collect progress information for reading/writing/English and mathematics every half term from all schools where looked after children are on roll. Around 80% of pupils make expected progress in reading and writing and mathematics, and a fifth of those pupils are making better than expected progress. At Key Stage 4 performance is also impressive for English and mathematics, although we would like more pupils to be achieving better than expected progress in both subjects so that they catch up with their peers and achieve the best that they are capable of at GCSE.

Northumberland pupils placed in out of authority schools

48. Well-informed and careful placement planning in Northumberland ensures that in comparison to other local authorities low numbers of looked after children are placed in schools outside of the County. This means that the Virtual School can continue to provide face to face support to individual looked after children. The PEP, Pupil Premium Plus accountability and social and emotional support continue and ESLAC workers have good relationships with schools whichever local authority they might be in.

49. Only 3 pupils at Key Stage 1 were placed in out of authority schools and none of them achieved the expected standard in the separate measures of reading, writing or mathematics. 2 of the pupils have EHCPlans and the other pupil receives SEND support. These pupils were not expected to meet the standard expected for their age, but significantly the average SDQ score is 19.5, well above the accepted norm of 13.

50. Only 5 pupils at Key Stage 2 were placed in out of authority schools and we were pleased that 2 of them achieved the expectations in the combined measure of reading,

writing and mathematics, even though 2 pupils receive SEND support and 2 have EHCPlans. The average SDQ score for this small group of pupils is low at 9.7, suggesting that good emotional health and wellbeing has had a positive impact and contributed to their success as a small group. The pattern of achievement is similar to that of 11 year olds in Northumberland schools, with mathematics being the stronger subject.

51. Only 8 pupils at Key Stage 4 were placed in out of authority schools and 2 of them achieved the Basics, that is a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and mathematics. 1 pupil has an EHCPlan and 3 pupils receive SEND support. Similar to the achievement of looked after pupils in Northumberland schools, performance in English was much better than in mathematics.

Special educational needs and disabilities

52. 100% of the transitions from statements of special educational need to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for our looked after children were fast tracked and completed within timescale for 2017. 54% of our looked after learners have a recognised special educational need or disability compared to 14.4% of all non-looked after children. 18% of looked after children in Northumberland have an EHCPlan.

53. There is considerable expertise within the ESLAC team to support pupils with special and complex needs, and the Senior Education Support Worker has a remit to work closely with special schools and the Disabled Children's Team. There is now a named officer in the SEND Monitoring team with responsibility for looked after children and this has helped to prioritise their needs and accelerate them through services when necessary. Once the role is fully embedded we expect this positive impact to show in admissions, PEPs and achievement.

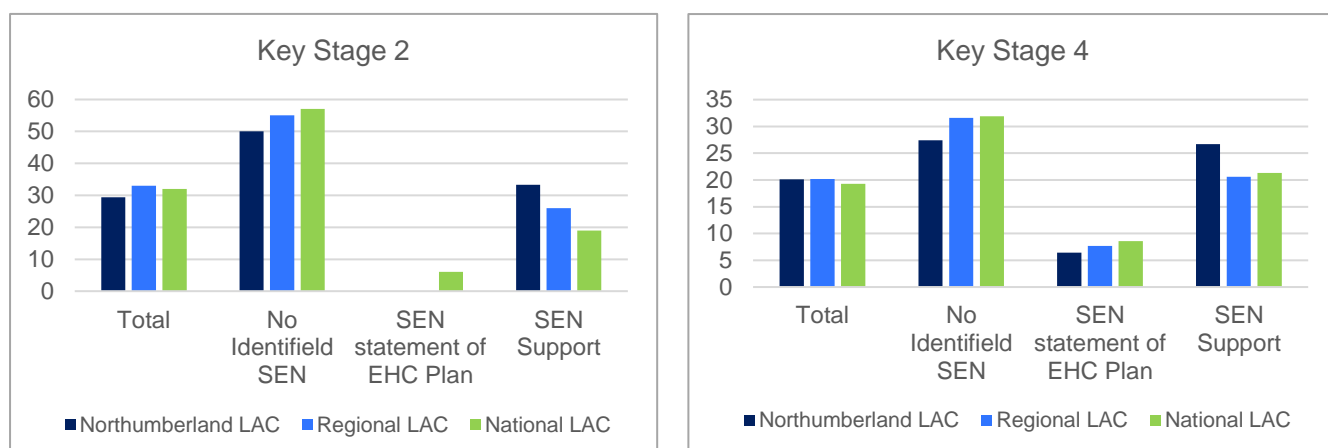
54. Looked after children are four times more likely to have a special educational need than all children and are almost 10 times as likely to have a statement or EHCP. Achievement for this group of pupils in Northumberland in this context is that:

- 8 pupils or 64% of the official Key Stage 2 cohort have SEND, 1 achieved national age-related expectations although 3 were not entered for the tests;
- 14 pupils or 48% of the official Key Stage 4 cohort have SEND, 7 achieved the equivalent of 5 A*-G GCSEs (any combination) and 6 were not entered for any.

55. The proportion of looked after children achieving age-related expectations is much less than for Northumberland's non-looked after children. However, the difference is reduced when the proportion of children in the cohort with a special educational need is considered.

56. The number of looked after pupils who have special educational needs affects placement stability. In Northumberland, as nationally, there is a pattern emerging that those pupils with behavioural difficulties are more likely to have more placements than those with physical disabilities. Further consideration is therefore being given to how we might best achieve placement stability for particularly vulnerable children, for example looked after with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH).

Figure 6: Looked after children attainment in Northumberland at Key Stages 2 and 4 across SEND groups 2017



Looked after children from other local authorities

57. Northumberland's Virtual School is not responsible for providing support to looked after children from other local authorities who are placed in Northumberland schools. We do provide training and support for the Designated Teachers in those schools and expect this to have an impact on progress and outcomes for all the pupils they work with. No data is available to evaluate the achievement of this group of pupils.

POST-16 PROGRESSION

58. The number of individual looked after pupils choosing a pathway into further education, employment and training has continued to improve year after year as individuals have raised their aspirations in response to the high expectations of professionals and carers.

59. 28 of the 29 pupils in the school leaving cohort engaged in education, training or employment in September 2017. 19 enrolled at college, 2 progressed into sixth forms at school, 1 started an apprenticeship and 1 is following a vocational further education course. 1 pupil is receiving education in a secure setting, 4 are still in special schools and 1 young person was receiving support from the Virtual School's Careers Advisor to secure a destination as soon as possible.

Figure 7: School leavers' destinations at 16, 2013 to 2017

Age 16 – 18	Sept -13	Sept -14	Sept-15	Sept-16	Sept-17
Number of LAC	62	57	23	22	48
Number in EET	53 (85%)	48 (84%)	19 (83%)	21 (95%)	43 (90%)
Number in FE	25 (40%)	17 (30%)	14 (61%)	13 (59%)	25 (52%)
Number in 6 th form	20 (32%)	19 (33%)	5 (22%)	5 (23%)	13 (27%)

60. There is also encouraging evidence that engagement in education, training and employment is sustained for 16 and 17 year olds. Measures for looked after children and care leavers by birthday show that in October 2017:

- 40 x 16 year olds and 22 x 17 year olds were in further education;
- 2 x 16 year olds and 7 x 17 year olds were in full time training or employment;
- 1 x 17 year old was in part time training and employment;

constituting 77.4% of that group of young people.

61. The percentage of care leavers who are regarded as being in employment, education or training (EET) is a nationally reported indicator for every local authority. In order to qualify the young person's social worker or personal adviser must be in touch with them within a 4 month window – between 3 months before and 1 month after their birthday.

62. At the end of the academic year 2016-17 in Northumberland of 115 young people in the cohort aged between 17 and 21 as many as 77%, or 89 individuals, were eligible and had their EET status recorded:

- 24 were recorded as being in education (27%);
- 19 were in training (21%);
- 6 were in employment (7%),
- and 40 (45%) were recorded as NEET.

63. In the same period, there were 83 care leavers aged between 19 and 21 of whom 71 had their EET status recorded as:

- 17 in education (24%);
- 16 in training (23%);
- 6 in employment (8%);
- 32 recorded as NEET (45%).

Therefore 55% are EET which is well above the national average of 49%.

64. Our dedicated Careers' Officer has improved integrated working with the 14+ leaving care team by attending 'stop the clock' days which focus entirely on auditing case files to ensure that record keeping is accurate, the EET status of individual from 16+ is known, and that contact is made at an appropriate level.

65. Recruitment into further education is a priority for the Virtual School and strategies are implemented to raise the aspirations of looked after children from an early age. *Choices Together* is a 6 week programme for Year 10 and 11 looked after learners and gives young people the opportunity to learn more about the five universities in the North East Raising Aspirations Partnership (Sunderland, Northumbria, Newcastle, Teesside and Durham) by taking part in fun, interactive activities designed to broaden their horizons and introduce them to the concept of higher education.

66. Northumberland has been participating in *Choices Together* since it started in 2006. This year 12 local authorities were invited to participate and 6 young people from Northumberland attended. As in previous years, the students rated highly the sessions that gave them the opportunity to engage with very hands on and practical tasks. The highest 'Very Good' score

was the group session at the University of Sunderland where students were able to visit the National Glass Centre for a glass and ceramics workshop and take part in a society-based drama session with *Curious Monkey*, an international award-winning theatre company which 'listens to people whose stories are rarely told'.

67. I am delighted that the Virtual School has created an apprenticeship and recruited a care leaver into the post. Our new recruit settled in well to her new admin and business support role at the team base in Blyth where she is providing support for 4 inclusion support teams – ESLAC, Education Welfare, Inclusion and Schools' Safeguarding and Wellbeing. She has also contributed very helpfully to the development of our new ePEP.

CREATING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

68. **Education Support for Looked After Children** (ESLAC) is a high performing team and alongside the Designated Teachers for Looked After Children in each of our schools constitutes the workforce of the Virtual School. Highly rated by our looked after learners, the team's core contribution to improving education outcomes for children in care is in creating the right conditions for learning.

69. Achieving stability is key. If disruptions to learning are not minimised for looked after children then we know they will not learn, make progress and achieve what they are capable of. Every ESLAC team member is therefore committed to preparing pupils well for phase changes, avoiding whenever possible changes of school mid-year, improving attendance, reducing exclusions, and working with multi-agency partners to manage risk. ESLAC enjoyed continued success in 2017.

70. School organisation in Northumberland is still mixed, with several partnerships now having moved from our traditional three tier structure to the commonly accepted two tier structure of primary and secondary phases. A large number of pupils therefore changed schools for September 2016 which was prepared for carefully by ESLAC and social workers, using the PEP process to achieve **smooth phase-change transitions** for looked after pupils and increasing the likelihood of stability in the receiving school.

Quotes from Choices Together evaluations

From Choices Together students:

"That there are other people going through what I am going through"

"University is awesome"

"Work hard and you can do anything!"

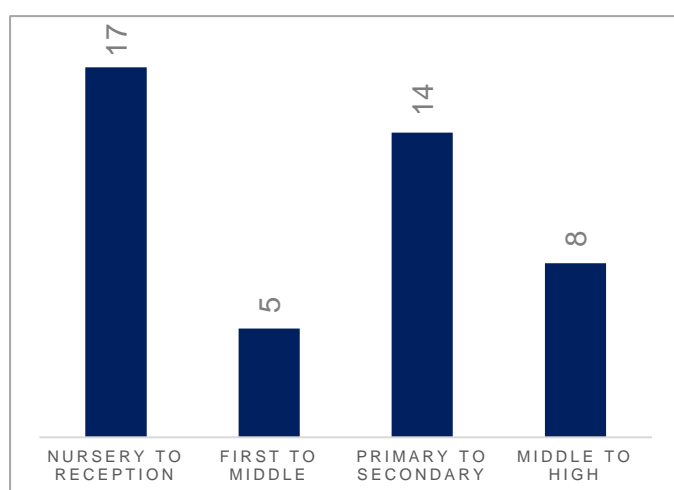
From foster carers:

"So many aspects of this have been positive: building self-esteem, motivational, improving confidence."

"Best thing about Choices Together was seeing at the end of it all, the awards and how well everyone done. Bringing everyone together was good as well"

"Guest speakers were first class and good to hear what they achieved and where they have come from"

Figure 8: Number of phase changes for looked after children 2016-17



71. In the interests of stability the Virtual School generally has a risk averse approach to changes in school placement. **School placement stability** is measured by the number of pupils who experience a mid-year change of school. There are many reasons for these changes, such as the breakdown of a foster placement, the need for a fresh start, the pupil's views, or other factors related to a child's Care Plan. In 2016-17 school placement stability was very good. All

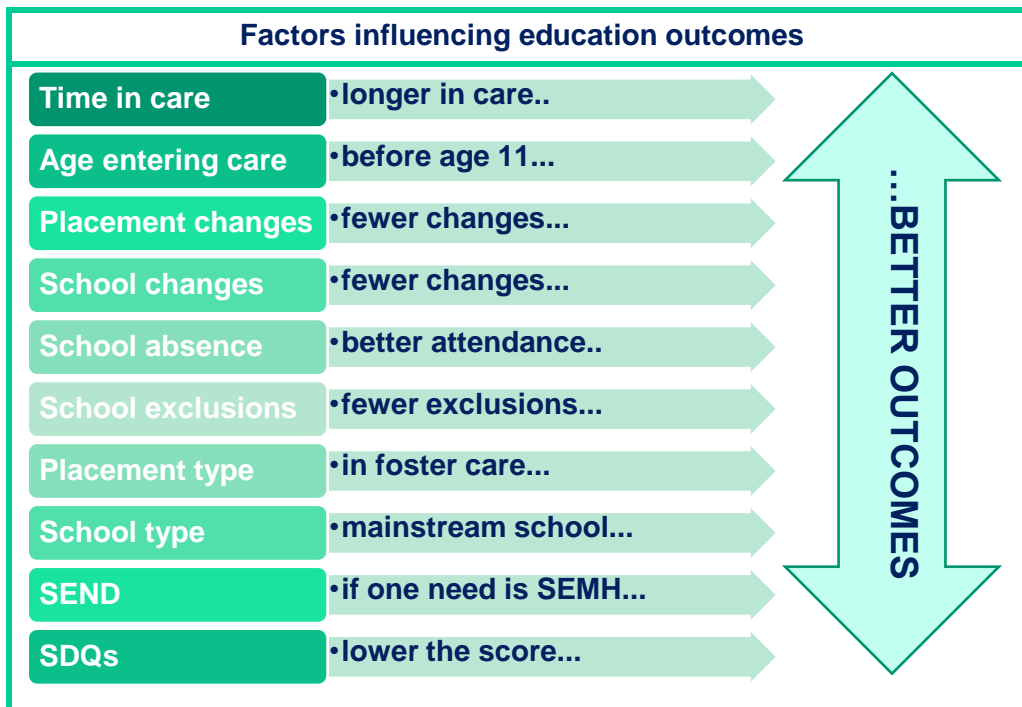
children for whom a place in primary school was requested were allocated a place swiftly. Secondary applications to mainstream are usually slower to process with schools requesting additional information and meetings.

72. Of the 285 school-aged looked after children moves were experienced by 12 pupils during the year: 7 were pupils moving to long term carers and therefore needed to move to their new local school; 3 pupils moved to new schools for a fresh start and to avoid permanent exclusions; 1 pupil moved to a residential school and there was 1 managed move.

73. The Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) led on the implementation of revised fair access arrangements in Northumberland for 2017. Although looked after children are exempt from this arrangement because of their priority status in the school admissions regulations, the introduction of a Pupil Placement Panel provided a good opportunity for the VSH to raise the profile of the needs of looked after children and re-confirm the need to accelerate them through the system. Consequently there was no evidence of drift or delay in schools admissions for looked after children with 10 pupils being admitted within 5 days of the move taking place.

74. For 2 pupils with SEND however there was delay which has caused concern. Both pupils have complex needs and EHCPs, and both were moved to specialist placements outside of Northumberland. The delays were caused mainly by SEND processes in the other local authorities, and this is an area which needs addressing urgently through the NAVSH. The High Level Resource Panel (HLRP) in Northumberland has oversight of such placements and the Virtual School is able to contribute to effective integrated working where home/residential and education placements which can meet complex needs are arranged.

75. The Virtual School works with Headteachers to make sure that any admission is made as swiftly as possible and works with all schools who are admitting a child to offer support, with funding if needed to ensure a smooth integration. Where schools are reluctant to offer places the Virtual School will consider making appeals or directing schools to admit. In 2016-17 there were no appeals made and no directions needed.

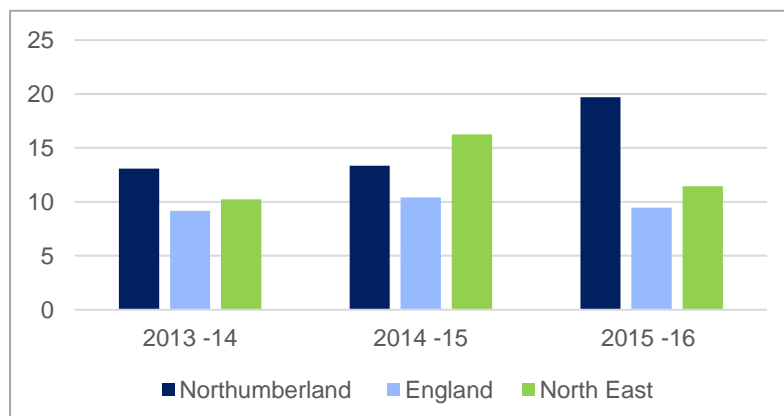


76. Pupils being re-integrated into school after periods of intervention with alternative providers are closely monitored and supported through the PEP to ensure that stability is achieved and the re-integration will last. In 2016-17, of the 285 looked after learners, only 20 engaged in a programme involving alternative provision – 2 from Year 8, 1 from Year 9, 6 from Year 10 and 11 from Year 11. 9 of these learners have SEND. Strategies for re-integration to school were successful with 5 alternative programmes lasting for 6 months, 2 for 3 months and 13 for 12 months.

77. For the pupils in Years 10 and 11 the alternative programmes were long term. This is usual when mainstream schools have, for whatever reason, failed to engage and meet the needs of learners of this age. Hence the higher numbers of learners from Years 10 and 11 on programmes which last for 2 years to school leaving age, giving them the opportunity to achieve in more vocational courses on a pathway into education, training and employment.

78. The rigour with which ESLAC followed local protocols for meant that Northumberland sustained its record of no **permanent exclusions** of a looked after child since 2008.

Figure 9: Fixed term exclusions of looked after children 2013-16



79. **Fixed term exclusions** do not work for looked after children and the disruption they cause to learning can often be irreparable. The DfE tells us that looked after children are more than five times more likely to have a fixed term exclusion than all other children and unfortunately the most recent

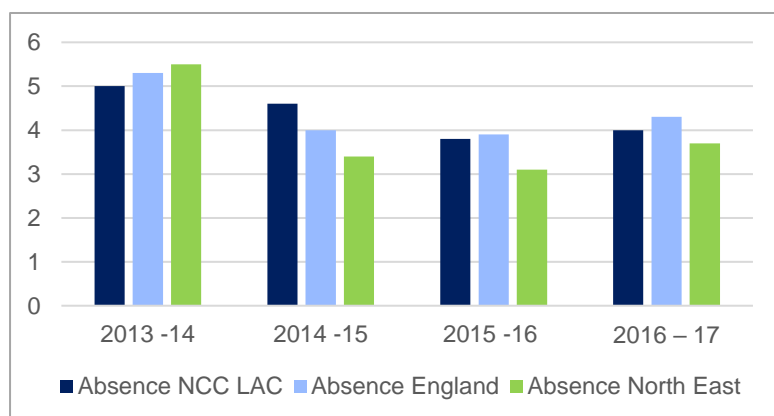
data [for 2015-16] confirms that this is the case in Northumberland.

80. Nationally the trend is rising, from 10.88% in 2015 to 11.44% in 2016, while the trend regionally dropped to 9.45%. In 2016 in Northumberland 19.7% of looked after children had at least one fixed period exclusion, relating to 29 pupils from a virtual school roll of 285. *The DfE has used a pupil enrolment figures of 137 to calculate this figure, however if the full Virtual School roll of 285 was used then performance would be 10.1%.* The rise in fixed term exclusions for looked after children and the impact this has on school placement stability therefore continues to be a priority for the Virtual School.

81. It is recognised that a child's care experience has a significant impact on how they perform at school. High levels of anxiety about where and with whom they will be living, contact or lack of contact with birth families or a low sense of self-worth caused by years of abuse will drain the resilience needed to meet the demands of GCSE exams. Despite this, with consistent support and adults who understand them, some children manage and succeed.

82. The Northumberland context for **overall absence and persistent absence** for all pupils is very good. The local authority performs very well against regional local authorities and is consistently better than national averages. The 2016-17 validated data confirms that the overall absence percentage has been sustained and at 4.7% is equal to the regional and slightly better than the national average. Persistent absence is and equally positive picture, with the Northumberland average falling slightly year after year to 10.3% and always below the regional and national average.

Figure 10: Overall absence for looked after children 2013-17



83. Overall absence has remained relatively constant and is just better than the national average. Although still above the average for the North East, the difference has diminished. We share the concerns of our neighbours however that the rise in overall absence for looked after children is gradually rising over

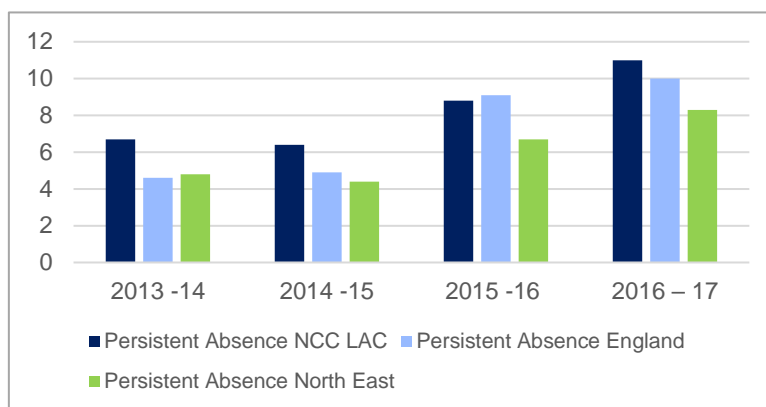
time and are working with the regional network of Virtual School Headteachers to share good practice and develop a local strategy for improvement.

84. At 11% persistent absence is too high. The increase from last year, although the same direction of travel as nationally and regionally, is disappointing.

85. The tenacity and persistence of professionals has had some impact in what has been a challenging 2 years trying to engage a small number of teenagers in appropriate education provision. There is evidence that new interventions introduced to inclusion support services are starting to work and will reduce persistent absence for 2018. The tracking panel, chaired by the Education Welfare Team Manager, has been re-introduced and meets monthly, identifying early pupils with attendance issues so that interventions can be put into place

Figure 11: Persistent absence of looked after children 2013-17

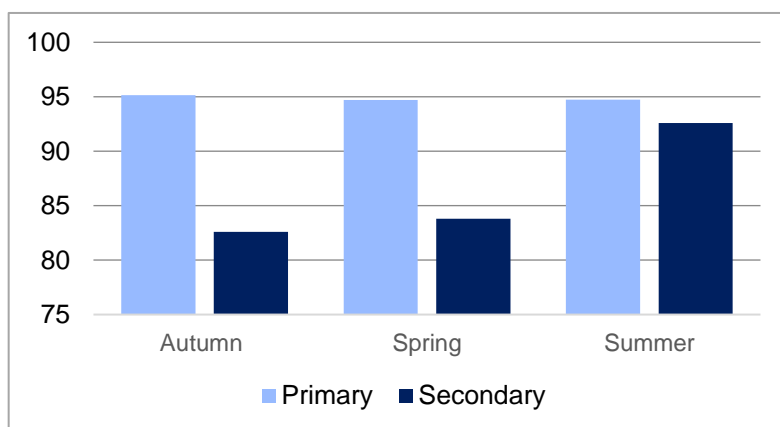
swiftly. Education Welfare colleagues have also provided guidance to schools on completing registers to ensure accuracy when recording events relating to looked after children, such as engagement with alternative providers, health appointments and PEP meetings or contact held during the school day.



86. In 2016 there was no clear correlation between attendance and home placement. Virtual School data recorded 20 persistent absentees of whom 9 were in foster care, 4 in residential homes, 5 with relative carers, 1 in hospital and 1 in a secure setting.

Numbers of looked after children on the Virtual School roll ie of statutory school age, ranged in this time period from 269 to 286. The permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions data for 2016-17 is Virtual School data, the most recent validated data available from the DfE is 2015-16.

Figure 12: Attendance of looked after children in Primary and Secondary phases, 2016-17



87. At 94.22% overall **attendance** for looked after children for the last academic year is good and improving. Since September 2016 we have rewarded 207 looked after pupils for excellent attendance at school, and 17 pupils received our platinum award for 100% attendance all year. This is a drop since last year and is attributed to

the poorer attendance of secondary age pupils in the autumn and spring terms.

88. Good **emotional well-being** is crucial and will reduce disruptions so that sustained learning can take place. The commissioning of education psychology expertise for the Virtual School since September 2016 has had an immediate impact. Following a review of services available to looked after children undertaken by the VSH and ESLAC it was identified that individual looked after children would benefit from the input of an Educational Psychologist when the need arose so that support could be identified quickly and school could put interventions in place mitigate any potential adverse impact on their learning and well-being.

89. Training for Designated Teachers and foster carers focussed on developing a number of programmes such as a half day training session on the theory of attachment and how to

develop attuned relationships with looked after children in school. This training inspired a number of schools to request whole staff training on attachment which was then broadened to how to develop a behaviour management approach in school which addresses the challenging behaviours that some complex looked after children may present.

90. Other training focussed on how school staff can manage the anxiety that is often provoked by SATS and exams in school. Support sessions were delivered for Year 6 and Year 11 teachers for those year groups to help manage the expectations and stress that can be common as the school year progresses. The impact of this training should be evident for pupils completing Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2018.

91. Specific training for foster carers was commissioned from Northumberland Psychological Services. The Educational Psychologist delivered training which introduced the concept of attachment and the effect it has on children in care, giving carers an insight into what it felt like to be looked after. The training also gave the carers strategies to support the education of the children in their care especially those in years 6 and 11 who were preparing for SATs and GCSE examinations. 22 carers came to the initial training and the feedback was very positive - they asked for more!

92. Having a dedicated Educational Psychologist has been a positive experience for the Virtual School. Capacity was added to the education psychology input on a consultancy basis which involved direct therapeutic/assessment work with 3 students between September June 2016 and July 2017. This work was spread between alternative/residential provision (1 pupil), primary school (1 pupil) and secondary school (1 pupil). The outcomes of this work include:

- providing ongoing direct psychological support for a Year 9 student at risk of exclusion and who was unable to engage with school and a number of professionals. The young person cooperated well with the intervention and demonstrated that they were better able to manage their emotional responses in certain contexts;
- providing direct support to teaching staff of a Year 1 child to understand the impact of trauma and attachment on young people's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH);
- providing additional information via a written report on a young person's strengths and difficulties that have informed placement, strategies and intervention for residential staff.

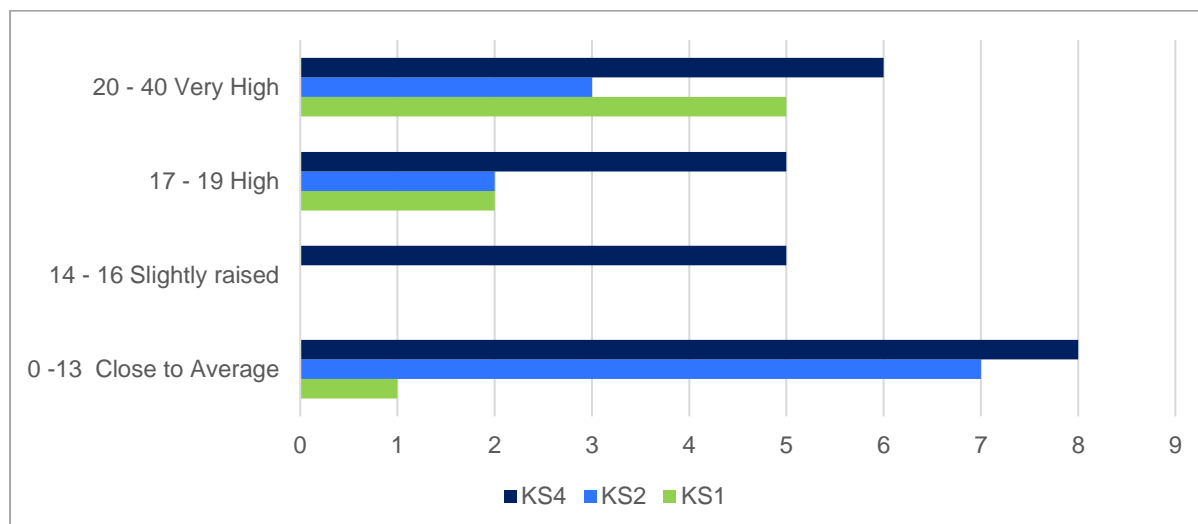
What is an SDQ score?

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a short behavioural screening questionnaire used for 3-16 year olds to identify psycho-social problems. The scores are used by clinicians and educationalists to provide appropriate support and interventions. The scale ranges from 0 to 40, with a score of up to 13 being considered normal/no cause for concern.

93. Over time the Education Psychologist will develop ways of measuring emotional wellbeing and a start has been made with the extensive roll out of the Thrive approach to attachment training. The use of SDQs is also being reviewed so that information can better inform support and programmes for learning for individual pupils. Reference has already been made to SDQ scores and the impact on achievement but a snapshot of scores for the

Virtual School during the year shows the need to prioritise emotional wellbeing to then have a positive impact on education achievement.

Figure 13: Average SDQ scores of Northumberland looked after children 2016-17 by key stage



94. A score of 13+ indicates a concern with emotional wellbeing so this overview is very concerning, particularly for pupils at Key Stage 4. A substantive Education Psychologist post has been created in the Virtual School and a holistic assessment on entry to care is now being developed. This work will sit alongside strategies already in place through Northumberland's Transformation Plan (2015-2020) which will see mental health champions trained in schools and integrated working with the Primary Mental Health Team. The VSH also has senior management oversight of these initiatives which will ensure a focus is kept on prioritised and swift access to these services for looked after children.

TO BE AN EXPERT LEARNER YOU HAVE TO:

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

95. It is a privilege for the Virtual School to be able to **reward achievements**, however small and however significant, and to fulfil our mission to learn, achieve then *celebrate*. There has been a huge increase in the number of looked after learners achieving our gold standard Expert Learner award from 6 last year to 15 this year!

96. As part of The Promise the VSH pledged to reward every looked after pupil during 2017-18 for an education achievement. Although this was a pledge for the next academic year, by October 2017 the pledge had been fulfilled from rewards earned in 2016-17.

97. The Virtual School has developed a lead and pivotal role in the **Risk Management Group (RMG)** and this is having a positive impact on our ability to co-ordinate multi-agency resources to ensure that looked after children and care leavers receive their entitlement to education. An assessment tool, the Vulnerability Checklist (VCL), was developed and the assessment covers a range of risk and protective factors and incorporates the signs of safety approach which is a child/family centred, strength based, and scaling approach to risk assessments.

98. The ESLAC team manager has a key role in the RMG. The RMG chair, the police officer responsible for missing children and the ESLAC team manager meet before the main RMG meeting to discuss the cases, identify young people causing concern, share intelligence, and involve other agencies if appropriate. The ESLAC team manager gives feedback to those members of the ESLAC team working with young people to inform their next steps. The VSH and ESLAC manager monitor the progress of those young people. There were approximately 6 looked after children who were monitored through the RMG during the year.

99. The RMG is a well-attended and established meeting and the partnership working is strong, particularly with the Police. The involvement of education inclusion support services also managed by the VSH allow us to share information and check and cross reference those that have had missing episodes with those that are on reduced or part time timetables or who are in alternative education provision. RMG therefore supports the Virtual School to identify and re-engage looked after learners missing from education which then has an impact on attendance and achievement. By safeguarding children we promote stability.

100. The Virtual School has been successfully investing in and promoting the Thrive approach to understanding **attachment** since 2015 and 60 Designated Teachers have now participated in the training, including colleagues from the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). This year we commissioned a Thrive licensed practitioner course which 11 of the 12 Designated Teachers (primary) who participated successfully completed, bringing the total number of trained practitioners to 18.

101. Licensed Practitioner Training (Childhood) course aims to support Designated Teachers to learn to work effectively with all children and especially vulnerable children with disruptive and troubling behaviour to help re-engage them with life and learning. Participants learned why troubled and vulnerable children behave the way they do. Using ThriveOnline they are now able to screen whole classes and assess individual children to identify their underlying emotional needs and select practical activities to help them. By the end of the course the Designated Teachers said they felt more confident to deal with disruptive and troubling behaviour and relationships between staff and children have improved.

102. The course was delivered over 6 months at the Virtual School team base in Blyth. Each delegate received an iPad and 20 Thrive licenses for their school. The feedback from the delegates was very positive and they have all begun to embed the approach in their schools. It is the intention of the Virtual School to roll out more Thrive training for designated teachers each year and to train all ESLAC staff so that they can support schools to embed Thrive in order to improve outcomes for not only the looked after children in their schools but for all children. The impact of the training will be evident when the approach is fully embedded.

103. For the first time a group of young people engaged with animal assisted **equine therapy** which covers a range of treatments involving activities with horses to promote good physical and mental health. 11 children in two groups from Wooler First School, Reston Primary School, St Mary's First School Berwick, Blyth Academy, New Delaval Primary and Horton Grange Primary School engaged with the therapy to address emotional and behavioural issues. The sessions involved a range of activities using horses which focused on learning and self-discovery. The first group became a team very quickly and peer mentored each other. They developed better listening and independent skills and learnt that horses are not much different when it comes to how they feel and respond to others.

104. Both groups had to overcome issues with social dynamics and develop relationships with each other. They achieved this successfully and the progress in self-esteem and confidence was evident. The schools have reported positive changes in behaviour and how the pupils now deal with conflict with their peers. 100% of participants say they feel more confident after engaging with the programme.

PROMOTING INCLUSION

105. There are currently 41 looked after children being taught in **special schools**, either in Northumberland or schools out of county which equates to 15.9% of Northumberland's looked after children of statutory school age. Northumberland currently has 8 LA special schools, 2 in the north, 1 in the west and 5 in the south east corner of the county. Currently there are looked after children in all but 2 of these schools.

106. Northumberland learners are also placed in independent day special schools - Parkside House, Trinity Oakfield, and Talbot House- and a number of looked after children are placed in independent specialist residential provision including Kirby Moor School, High Peak School, North East Autism Society Aycliffe School, Peartree, Underley Gardens, Wilsic Hall and Whinfell School. Residential schools provide 52 week placements and a 24 hours curriculum for those children and young people who have a range of very complex needs and or challenging behaviours.

107. The majority of pupils started their education in mainstream schools, but even with the additional support of a Statement of Special Educational Need or an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) they have not been able to cope effectively in a mainstream setting and have needed more specialist provision.

108. The curriculum in special schools is based on areas of learning from the *SEND Code of Practice* but within that the curriculum can be personalised according to the needs of the individual. The smaller class groups and higher staffing ratios allow for a greater degree of flexibility. On entry to special school pupil performance is often well below age related expectations, children may have poor literacy and numeracy skills, limited concentration and focus, difficulties with social interactions, low self-esteem and confidence or fear of failure. Once children start to feel safe and happy in their education setting they are more ready for learning and can make academic progress.

109. 22 pupils were **missing education** and classed as persistent absentees in 2016-17 which means that their average school attendance was at or below 90%. This figure is unacceptably high and reducing persistent absence remains a priority for the Virtual School.

We continue to provide support to all of these pupils after they have left schools, and work relentlessly with the most hard to reach.

110. Some pupils struggle to engage with the curriculum offered to them at their mainstream school and the Virtual School then arranges **part-time provision** which is a combination of hours at school and hours with an alternative provider each week. This year 11 pupils received 20-23 hours per week outside of school mainly for behaviour (8), 1 medical/mental health and 2 curriculum-related. For Northumberland looked after children in schools in other authorities, part time provision was arranged for 20 pupils who received 20-23 hours per week mainly for behaviour (14), 2 medical/mental health and 4 curriculum-related.

The Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that every child has access to suitable education. Where possible school moves will be avoided as school is regarded as a consistent and stabilising feature of a child's life. If a move is essential then the following principles apply:

- educational provision should mean a full-time place;
- schools judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' should be prioritised for looked after children in need of a new school;
- the choice of education setting should be based on what any good parent would want for their child. It should be based on evidence that the setting can meet the educational needs of the child and help them make the maximum progress;
- the child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit.

111. **Term time holidays** were highlighted in the media this year and focussed professionals on the need to ensure that attendance is good to support continuous learning. For looked after children this is essential, as better than expected progress has to be the aim for this group of children to ever catch up with their peers. One week of holiday during term time reduces a child's attendance by 2.5%. Work has been done this year to raise awareness with social workers. The Headteacher of each school has to be asked permission for the holiday and will authorise, or not authorise, according to their discretion and the current law in England. Like all other children, there will always be cases with exceptional circumstances when a term time holiday is in the best interests of the child. However, the Virtual School expresses a strong and well-informed view from an education perspective and the Executive Director of Children's Services is also involved.

112. Northumberland supported 4 **unaccompanied asylum seekers**, 1 now placed with a foster carer in the north of the county and attending a local high school and 3 who placed in the south east of the county. All were supported with tuition to improve their English and given iPads to enable translation for some of the curriculum, and financial support was given to the school to enable them to make adjustments for curriculum access. 1 pupil achieved the Virtual School Expert Learner award! All of the pupils had support from the ESLAC Careers' Advisor and are now studying ESOL (English as a second language) courses at Newcastle College.

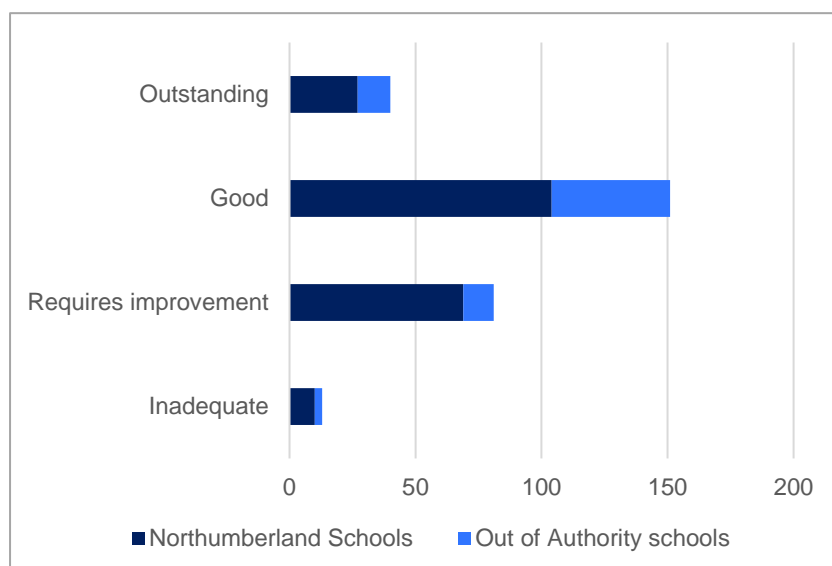
113. The governing body of the Virtual School, MALAP, supports the continuation of historical PEA (Personal Education Allowance) funding for Northumberland’s looked after children from the Pupil Premium Plus. This was re-named the **Enrichment Allowance** this year and is a budget for good corporate parents, funding additional or extra-curricular resources for looked after children such as art equipment and school trips. Thanks to the Enrichment Allowance all pupils new into care received a book bag and pupils in every year group received new books at PEP meetings. We continued to invest in technology so that all Key Stage 4 pupils could access good quality learning at home and many benefited from enrichment activities such as music tuition.

114. Feedback from a **survey** co-ordinated by the Participation Team (Northumberland Adolescent Services) provided a useful insight into the views of looked after children and care leavers about their education. Approximately 22 young people completed the survey. It is a testament to the inclusive approach of our Designated Teachers that 98% felt safe at school/college and 98% felt they received enough help at school/college. We are listening however to the 29% who said they are not coping very well at school/college and the 7% who still do not think that they have everything they need for school such as uniform, books and PE kit.

QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

115. Over two thirds of our looked after children are now in schools rated **Good or Outstanding** by Ofsted, which is an improvement on last year. As the majority attend schools in Northumberland then this can be attributed to the impact of longer term strategies for school improvement.

Figure 14: Northumberland looked after children attending good and outstanding schools 2016-17



116. The Director of Education & Skills has highlighted continuing areas in need of improvement which if tackled effectively will benefit our looked after learners. Those areas include improving outcomes at the end of secondary schools and academies, social mobility and the most vulnerable, and improving our response to Special

Educational Needs. In the mean-time the Virtual School continues to monitor the quality of education delivered in each child’s school placement and to apply the principle that no new placements will be made in schools rated less than good by Ofsted.

117. The number of academies continues to grow and we continue to prioritise our relationships with them to ensure that the needs of our looked after learners are understood and met. By the end of 2017 our relationship with the Regional Schools Commissioner was much stronger and we look forward to working with the RSC to develop good inclusive practice across the local authority.

118. Good early years education for disadvantaged children is crucial to longer-term academic success. In 2016-17 for all pupils the gap between the most disadvantaged 5-year-olds and their peers narrowed significantly. The quality of primary schools (including first schools) has remained strong.

119. For a disproportionate number of Northumberland's secondary schools academic outcomes were below average and many were judged by Ofsted to require special measures or to have serious weaknesses. Many of these schools are now sponsored academies where the legacy of underachievement remains although signs of recovery are beginning to emerge.

120. Ofsted has raised concerns at a national level about the quality of education in areas of England like Northumberland which face challenges because they are geographically and economically isolated, many of which are in coastal areas. All of our maintained special schools have been judged to be Good or Outstanding but we still need to improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream settings.

121. £613 700 was allocated to Northumberland's Virtual School this year for looked after pupils eligible for the **Pupil Premium Plus** grant. With the approval of MALAP the Virtual School retained £400 of each grant to create a central fund of £129 200 to benefit all looked after children, a practice which most other local authorities also have in place (although most retain a larger proportion of each grant). The funding is used flexibly as possible so that those pupils who most need it can benefit from it, for example those whose needs escalate suddenly.

122. A condition of agreeing to the dispersal of the grant to each school/academy is that each pupil's PEP must be completed to a high standard, and the Pupil Premium Plus agreement in the PEP must be signed by the school's Headteacher and VSH. In this way the VSH holds schools and academies to account for the impact of the grant.

123. We continue to adopt an outcomes-based approach, allocating the grant to support agreed personal learning targets which is signed off by the school's Headteacher and VSH. In 2017 the majority of outcomes for individual pupils were achieved, with the largest type at 59.5% relating to academic targets then 22% relating to academic/social. 75% of those children achieved or exceeded their PEP targets which is the same rate as 2015 and 2016, although a growing number of schools took some encouragement to complete the PP+ agreement.

124. 74% of the grant was dispersed to schools and academies to reach pupils directly:

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

125. I am confident that the changes we made last year have improved the impact of the funding on the education achievement of our children in care. The benefits of holding some funding centrally include the commissioning of an Education Psychologist for 2 days per week in the Virtual School, increased investment in therapeutic services such as equine and rebound and rolling out our Thrive attachment training programme. We were able to fund intensive one to one tuition for all Year 6 and Year 11 pupils from the beginning of the school year in September, and commissioned software developers Shoo-fly to design an electronic PEP which is now being implemented with Designated Teachers in schools.

126. In summary:

- 74% funded individual interventions, small group work and literacy/numeracy workshops;
- 3% funded resources such as laptops, Nimbl online licences, reading books and stationery;
- 6% funded one to one tuition (70% of which was for Year 11 pupils);
- 3% funded incentive rewards for attendance and achievement;
- 8% funded therapies, the Education Psychologist and the Virtual School apprentice;
- 6% was used flexibly to respond to emerging needs and the development of the ePEP.

127. The proportion of funding allocated to the primary and secondary age pupils was roughly similar, although significantly more was spent on teaching interventions for primary age pupils and one to one tuition for secondary age pupils.

128. Such was the impact of the central Pupil Premium Plus fund that the same arrangements will be carried forward to 2017-18, all with the approval of MALAP and in accordance with the DfE's [Pupil Premium Conditions of Grant](#) and *statutory roles and responsibilities of the Virtual School Headteacher*.

129. After a review of the Virtual School's first year of new assessment arrangements for **tracking pupil progress** in a world without National Curriculum levels the process was revised. Designated Teachers now submit a short half termly report for each child to provide us with better insight into the experience and progress of each child during that 6/7 week period. As well as the usual assessment of progress against age-related expectations - *emerging, developing, secure* or *mastered* – there is now a grade of 1-4 for attitude to learning, with additional but brief information about the curriculum covered and a review of strengths and areas for further development.

130. The report captures key information which is crucial to support and meet the needs of looked after learners, focussing on the core subjects of English and maths/reading and writing, as well as feedback about personal, social and emotional development. It was designed with our School Improvement Partner and is already in use with the providers on Northumberland's alternative provision framework. This feedback aligns with the judgements of ESLAC case workers and is captured more frequently for the PEP.

131. Early indications of the revised arrangements are positive and we were able to use the assessments to support Designated Teachers when setting targets in each PEP and objectives in the Pupil Premium Plus agreement. As a Virtual School we are also able to monitor progress against age-related expectations of individuals and each looked after child cohort, even though the pupils are all in different 'real' schools. The changes are intended to align better with Ofsted

monitoring requirements and will enable us to intervene earlier if progress is not good enough, for whatever reason that might be. Interventions might include giving additional support to a school in the form of Pupil Premium Plus funding, alternative provision, revising objectives for individual pupils or providing inclusion support services.

132. Since September the Virtual School has offered increased and intensive support for pupils in Year 6 and Year 11 to support their readiness for **Key Stage 2 SATs and GCSEs**. Many have benefited from one to one tuition and our Education Psychologist provided training for school teachers on managing anxiety and creating inclusive environments for our pupils to learn and achieve. The impact of this approach will be evaluated once the results of the 2018 tests and GCSEs are known.

133. The **training programme offered to Designated Teachers** for 2016-17 was the most diverse and ambitious so far. As well as recording good attendance for the Thrive attachment training, 67 Designated Teachers (approximately 40%) attended the training delivered by the Education Psychologist. After a year of preparation a new on-line interactive training module went live on the Council's learning platform *Learning Together*. This is the first module developed by the Virtual School and is *Induction training for new Designated Teachers*. The module is also a useful refresher for existing Designated Teachers and for all teachers who work with looked after children. The aim is to promote the development of Designated Teachers in their role. Usage and impact of the module will be evaluated in 2018.

134. Some looked after children engage well and learn better through an alternative curriculum. In all cases the **quality assurance of all alternative providers** is robust, with the oversight of the VSH in a wider strategic role, to provide a safe, supportive environment which is focussed on achievement and progress. All providers used have gone through a procurement process to be included in the Council's framework and half termly contract monitoring visits are carried out by the Children's Commissioning Team. This year the Virtual School commissioned a School Improvement Partner to make annual visits using a format adapted from the school/academy monitoring visits. The rigour of the visit and the subsequent action plan, which is monitored by the VSH, have had a positive impact and providers engage with us well regarding the improvement agenda.

INTEGRATED WORKING

135. The **Personal Education Plan** (PEP) works effectively as a mechanism to co-ordinate integrated working with stakeholders who support and influence the education achievement of looked after children. PEPs for all pupils in schools in other local authorities are in place. At 82% the PEP completion rate for the year was disappointing and a dip since last year's rate of 88%. Staffing changes and a slight increase in caseloads are the reason for this outcome, which now addressed should be closer to the consistent 98-100% of previous years in 2018.

136. To further improve integrated working and communication between professionals and to encourage pupils to contribute to their education planning, a new ePEP was developed in Northumberland during 2016-17. Progress with development is good and we were on target to start implementation of the resource from September 2017. Such a resource will enable wider sharing of live information about learners between professionals and stakeholders,

encourage learners to contribute 'their voice' to the target setting and review process, and allow tracking of learners post 16 into all destinations (education, training and employment). A comprehensive training programme delivered by the provider for all stakeholders including 14+, IROs, social workers, foster carers and Designated Teachers is being planned. The ePep will hold historical information giving a chronology of each pupil's education. The half termly progress report and Pupil Premium Plus agreement are part of the ePEP. It should also be quicker to complete which will allow you and the ESLAC team more time to work directly with pupils.

137. The development of the ePEP created an opportunity to quality assure the current paper PEPs in a different way this year. The format of the current paper PEP was reviewed by all ESLAC team members and the VSH in the process of designing the ePEP, and each ESLAC team member prepared each Designated Teacher they work with to transfer each individual PEP. A significant number of PEPs were therefore reviewed.

138. **Partnership working** is crucial to the effectiveness of the Virtual School and we recognise our role in part of a team with a child at the centre. Our closest working partners are social workers with whom we have much formal and informal contact. Social worker attendance at PEP meetings is an expectation and input at team meetings has helped to increase their awareness of special educational needs and the use of Pupil Premium Plus. The ePEP will allow us to monitor attendance at PEP meetings and contributions to the ePEP document.

139. The ESLAC Key Stage 4 Inclusion Support Worker continues to support the education of children in care who are **young offenders** and in custody. This is achieved through partnership working with Northumberland Adolescent Services (NAS). This year we supported 19 pupils in these circumstances, 1 from Year 8, 3 from Year 9, 3 from Year 10 and 12 from Year 11. For these young people, once placed in the secure estate, the Virtual School can co-ordinate the PEP process and influence the quality of provision and the curriculum offered, including alternative education programmes where practical for a secure setting. Education outcomes for this group of pupils will be evaluated in 2018.

140. The Virtual School continues to work with NAS on priority 5 of the children's social care Quality Improvement Plan to improve services for 16+ looked after children and care leavers, and to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, training or employment (NEET). Success is measured by the consistently high number accessing further education at 16, the collaborative development of a new Pathway Plan and the slowly reducing NEET figure.

141. During the year the Virtual School was invited to become a **strategic partner** of the Dales Teaching School Alliance. This is a network of 14 schools across the region led by The Dales Special School in Blyth and in conjunction with other services such as CYPS and the NHS. The partnership has created a number of professional development opportunities and a better insight into the needs of looked after children with special educational needs. The alliance's underlying principle is *Leading and Inspiring Learning for All* which chimes well with our aspirations for Northumberland's looked after children.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO IN 2017-18

142. I am proud of the achievements of our learners and our Virtual School which are set out in this report. However, this is a self-aware Virtual School and we know that there is still work to be done to further improve education outcomes for our looked after children. Our commitment and ambition is not in question, but there are challenges which we can only overcome with careful planning, partnership working and the right resources.

We will create a culture of excellence where we will strive to ensure that the needs of looked after children are fully met and they enjoy the best childhoods possible.

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-20 para 3.4

143. So what will be different next year? The publication of revised statutory guidance for Virtual Schools and Designated Teachers is pivotal and will set the direction of travel up to 2020. To address the areas for development identified in this report we also need to:

- increase the involvement of School Improvement Partners to provide timely and effective challenge to schools about the quality of teaching and learning for looked after children;
- commission a review of the Virtual School to evaluate how to better influence the quality of teaching and learning in schools;
- continue to quality assure alternative providers so that standards at least equal that of our mainstream and special schools;
- work more closely with Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to have a greater impact on education achievement through challenge to schools, particularly regarding fixed term exclusions;
- commission an external provider (Achievement for All) to prepare and deliver a comprehensive training programme to Designated Teachers and created a Designated Teacher hub in Northumberland;
- make more use of the new data sets available through the Nexus portal to implement strategies to accelerate progress in reading/writing/English and mathematics for children of all ages;
- raise the profile of SDQs with schools;
- with urgency develop the role of mental health champions in schools;
- increase the level of Virtual School careers' guidance available to 1 x full time equivalent;
- fully implement the ePEP;
- research, train, identify and promote the education achievement of post-LAC pupils.

144. Therefore our priorities for 2017-18, as set out in the Virtual School Improvement Plan, are to:

1. ensure that our pupils feel safe to learn and receive their entitlement to full time education;
2. develop a skilled workforce, in the local authority and in schools, to meet the social and emotional needs of our learners which improves their readiness to learn;

3. improve retention in education, training and employment post-16;
4. ensure the full inclusion of our learners by recognising and meeting their increasingly diverse needs including post-LAC, pupils with SEND and unaccompanied asylum seekers;
5. improve education outcomes at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.

145. We know our learners well and have developed data sets which inform the way we deliver our services relating to education achievement and safeguarding. We use feedback from looked after children and foster carers to plan improvements for the future alongside a multi-agency overview of priorities for looked after children gained through MALAP. The NAVSH adds another dimension to this planning and supports our priorities well.

Annex 1: Performance Tables 2016-17

Table 1: Achievement at Key Stage 1 2017

CONTEXT		Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
Item		Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
Cohort		10	130	n/a	1,700	n/a
Gender (Boys)		50.0%	61.0%	-11.0%	56.0%	-6.0%
SEN Support		60.0%	39.0%	+21.0%	37.0%	+23.0%
EHCP/Statement		20.0%	17.0%	+3.0%	14.0%	+6.0%
CLA 1 year+		100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Educated in LA		70.0%	65.0%	+5.0%	67.0%	+3.0%
SDQ average		20.0	14.2	+5.8	14.1	+5.9
ASSESSMENTS						
Subject	Level	Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
		Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
Reading	≥EXS	40.0%	51.0%	-11.0%	51.0%	-11.0%
	GDS	0.0%	10.0%	-10.0%	9.0%	-9.0%
Writing	≥EXS	20.0%	38.0%	-18.0%	39.0%	-19.0%
	GDS	0.0%	5.0%	-5.0%	4.0%	-4.0%
Maths	≥EXS	30.0%	49.0%	-19.0%	46.0%	-16.0%
	GDS	0.0%	6.0%	-6.0%	6.0%	-6.0%

Table 2: Achievement at Key Stage 2 2017

CONTEXT		Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
Item		Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
Cohort		17	200	n/a	3,000	n/a
Gender (Boys)		58.8%	54.0%	+4.8%	55.0%	+3.8%
SEN Support		35.3%	37.0%	-1.7%	37.0%	-1.7%
EHCP/Statement		29.4%	23.0%	+6.4%	22.0%	+7.4%
CLA 1 year+		100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Educated in LA		70.6%	70.0%	+0.6%	66.0%	+4.6%
SDQ average		14.4	13.7	+0.7	14.0	+0.4
ATTAINMENT & ASSESSMENTS						
		Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
Subject	Level	Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
RWM	≥EXS/Exp. Std.	29.4%	33.0%	-3.6%	32.0%	-2.6%
	GDS/High Score	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	-1.0%
Reading (test)	≥Exp. Std.	35.3%	48.0%	-12.7%	45.0%	-9.7%
	High Score	11.8%	9.0%	+2.8%	9.0%	+2.8%
Writing (TA)	≥EXS	41.2%	52.0%	-10.8%	48.0%	-6.8%
	GDS	0.0%	4.0%	-4.0%	6.0%	-6.0%
Maths (test)	≥Exp. Std.	47.1%	43.0%	+4.1%	46.0%	+1.1%
	High Score	5.9%	7.0%	-1.1%	7.0%	-1.1%
PROGRESS						
		Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
Subject	Level	Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
Reading	Avg. Prog. Score	-0.79	-0.20	-0.59	-0.67	-0.12
	Conf. Int.	±2.96 -3.75 to +2.17	±0.89 -1.09 to +0.69	n/a	±0.23 -0.90 to -0.44	n/a
Writing	Avg. Prog. Score	-1.42	+0.21	-1.63	-0.90	-0.52
	Conf. Int.	±2.87 -4.29 to +1.45	±0.86 -0.65 to +1.07	n/a	±0.22 -1.12 to -0.68	n/a
Maths	Avg. Prog. Score	-0.27	-0.55	+0.28	-1.09	+0.82
	Conf. Int.	±2.68 -2.95 to +2.41	±0.80 -1.35 to +0.25	n/a	±0.21 -1.30 to -0.88	n/a

Table 3: Achievement at Key Stage 4 2017

CONTEXT		Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
Item		Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
Cohort		29	330	n/a	5,010	n/a
Gender (Boys)		48.3%	52.0%	-3.7%	55.0%	-6.7%
SEN Support		27.6%	26.0%	+1.6%	23.0%	+4.6%
EHCP/Statement		20.7%	24.0%	-3.3%	20.0%	+0.7%
CLA 1 year+		100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Educated in LA		72.4%	67.0%	+5.4%	63.0%	+9.4%
SDQ average		15.9	14.1	+1.8	13.3	+2.6
ATTAINMENT & PROGRESS						
Subject	Level	Virtual School	DfE Region (CLA)		National (CLA)	
		Value	Value	Gap	Value	Gap
Avg. Att8 Score		20.1	20.2	-0.1	19.3	0.8
Avg. Prog8 Score		-1.41	-1.31	-0.10	-1.18	-0.23
EBacc. Entered		10.3%	6.0%	+4.3%	9.0%	+1.3%
EBacc Achieved	Standard, 9-4 & A*-C	0.0%	-	-	3.0%	-3.0%
	Strong, 9-5 & A*-C	0.0%	-	-	2.0%	-2.0%
EBacc Eng. Achieved	Standard, 9-4	27.6%	26.0%	+1.6%	26.0%	+1.6%
	Strong, 9-5	20.7%	15.0%	+5.7%	16.0%	+4.7%
EBacc Mat. Achieved	Standard, 9-4	17.2%	20.0%	-2.8%	23.0%	-5.8%
	Strong, 9-5	10.3%	9.0%	+1.3%	11.0%	-0.7%
Achieved Basics	Standard, 9-4	17.2%	16.0%	+1.2%	17.0%	+0.2%
	Strong, 9-5	6.9%	6.0%	+0.9%	7.0%	-0.1%
Any Qualification		79.3%	80.0%	-0.7%	74.0%	+5.3%

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Acknowledgements

Toni McGuire, ESLAC team manager
Adele Stevens, Virtual School Data Manager
Peter Green, KS4-5 Personal Education Adviser
Andrea Johnson, Virtual School Careers Advisor
Julie Robson-Grainger, Education Support Worker
Sheila Kirkup, Senior Education Support Worker
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