



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 26 January 2024**
Time **9.30 am**
Venue **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

Business

Part A

Items which are open to the press and public

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2023
(Pages 3 - 10)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Children in Our Care and Care Leavers
- Verbal update from Deputy Director of Children and Young People's Services
6. Ofsted Updates - Verbal update from Deputy Director of Children and Young People's Services
 - a) Outcome of Focused Ofsted Visit: Care Leavers Service - Report of Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services (Pages 11 - 20)
7. Proud Moments - Verbal update by Strategic Leads
8. Children in Care Council Update - Presentation of young people from the Children in Care Council (Pages 21 - 22)
9. Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP) Update
- Report of Strategic Manager, Children in Our Care (Pages 23 - 30)
10. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Update
- Report of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 31 - 42)
11. Virtual School Annual Report 2022-23 - Report of Virtual School Head (Pages 43 - 130)
12. Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment or Training Update - Report of Strategic Lead, Progression and Learning (Pages 131 - 148)

13. Bi-Annual Adoption Service Report - Report of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 149 - 166)
14. Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) Update - FOR INFORMATION (Pages 167 - 194)
15. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.
16. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

Part B

Items during which it is considered the meeting will not be open to the public (consideration of exempt or confidential information)

17. Regulation 44 Visits - Aycliffe Secure Centre - Report of Deputy Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services (Pages 195 - 224)
18. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Helen Bradley

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
18 January 2024

To: **The Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)
Councillor M Walton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, J Charlton, S Deinali, J Griffiths, T Henderson, C Hunt, B Kellett, M McGaun, L Mavin, S Quinn, A Reed, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Savory, P Sexton, S Townsend, C Varty and M Wilson

Co-opted Members

J Bell, C Brown, J Gamble, E Reed, W Taylor, F Tweddle and R Woods
Young persons representative of the Children in Care Council

Contact: Jill Hogg

Tel: 03000 269 711

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 15 December 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Panel:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, S Deinali, J Griffiths, B Kellett, L Mavin, J Nicholson (substitute for J Charlton), S Quinn, A Reed, K Rooney, A Savory, S Townsend and C Varty

Co-opted Members:

Billie-Leigh, J Gamble, Luke and W Taylor

Also Present:

L Baldry – Service Manager

L Dodds – Team Manager

K Dudding - Safeguarding Nurse

R Farnham - Head of Children's Social Care

R Harris – Service Improvement Manager

James, Demi and Zoe (foster family)

T Lovell – Solicitor, Children, Adults and Health

C Murray – Operations Manager

L Peacock - Participation and Engagement Officer

P Rudd – Strategic Manager, Children's Homes

Sarah Jane (care leaver)

T Shaw – Team Manager

M Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School

S Tracey – Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager

J Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

D Wilson – Senior Commissioning Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors J Charlton, T Henderson, C Hunt, Co-opted Members J Bell and C Brown and from officer M Stenton.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Nicholson was in attendance for Councillor J Charlton.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

With regard to matters arising, the Head of Children's Social Care updated the Panel on the proposal for care experience to be made a protected characteristic and she explained that since the Children in Care Council had brought the issue to attention, a survey of the broader group of children and young people looked after had been carried out which found overwhelming support to take the matter forward. An update is expected to be brought to the March meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel, to outline the next steps.

4 Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

5 Number of Children in Our Care and Care Leavers

The Head of Children's Social Care reported that the current number of children looked after had increased slightly on the previous month and stood at 1,202 which included 28 young people placed for adoption, 306 care leavers and 81 unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people (UASC).

6 Ofsted Updates

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to the Ofsted visit to Durham on 14 and 15 November 2023 which focused on the Care Leavers' Service. The initial feedback was positive and the letter from Ofsted will be published on 12 January 2024. The Head of Children's Social Care thanked all those involved in hosting and participating in the visit.

The Panel noted that an assurance visit had taken place at Aycliffe Secure Centre, which also resulted in positive feedback and further information will be provided to the Panel, on the findings, in due course.

7 Proud Moments

The Head of Children's Social Care introduced this month's proud moments by reminding the Panel that Luke is an ambassador for the Children's Commissioner for England. As part of his role, Luke took part in a podcast in which he gave a candid interview about being a care leaver and he shared his thoughts on initiatives to support and nurture young people.

Members were encouraged to view the full interview which is available on the Children's Commissioner's website. The Head of Children's Social Care commented that the podcast illustrated why Luke is such an excellent ambassador and she added that Durham is proud that Luke is engaged in the national agenda. The link to the podcast was circulated to Panel members:

[The IMO Podcast: open and honest conversations with care leavers - IMO \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/podcast/open-and-honest-conversations-with-care-leavers-imo)

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel had established a regional Corporate Parenting Chairs' and Vice-Chairs' network, to share good practice between local authorities in the north east. At the most recent meeting, a film was shown of Billie-Leigh presenting her 'Megaphone' poem at the Council meeting. Those in attendance at the meeting had been so impressed by the beauty of the poem that they had asked that their thanks be conveyed to Billie-Leigh.

Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager, concluded the proud moments by thanking the young people for the positive comments they made at the recent Ofsted visit. The Service Improvement Manager informed the Panel that the inspectors met with a group of young people and the young people agreed that staff could observe the meeting. A particularly proud moment came for the staff when the inspectors asked the young people whether they had heard of, or, were involved in, the Corporate Parenting Panel. The positivity and enthusiasm displayed by the young people when answering the question was overwhelming for the staff to hear and the Service Improvement Manager thanked the young people for their kind words.

8 Use of Language for Children in Care

Kelly Dudding, Safeguarding Nurse, delivered a presentation on the work of the NHS trust in relation to the use of language for children in our care (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that an audit was carried out on 10 health assessments chosen at random, in order to assess the language used. Overall, the findings were positive, the voice of the child was clear in assessments and the assessments acknowledged young people as individuals. However, there were some areas for improvement including adding the full description when using acronyms / abbreviations, and that phrases such as 'contact' and 'decline' should be replaced with 'family time' and 'choose not to accept.' In one assessment, text had been copied and pasted from one assessment to another, in error.

In response to a comment from the Vice-Chair who sought assurance that the issues were being addressed, the Safeguarding Nurse confirmed that following the audit, the 'cut and paste' error had been brought to the attention of the staff member and regular deep-dive audits of health assessments are carried out, with inaccuracies being followed-up with the staff members concerned.

9 Children in Care Council Update

The Panel welcomed foster carer James and his foster daughter Demi and daughter Zoe, to the meeting. The young people explained that they regularly attend the Art Café and they had received money from the Education Fun Fund to buy a sewing machine, to set up their own business embroidering cards. They had completed an order of cards for Investing in Children and at the meeting, they presented the Chair of the Panel and the Head of Children's Social Care with Christmas cards they had made.

Members commended the work and Councillor Quinn suggested that Demi and Zoe could consider taking orders from the Panel members for Christmas cards for 2024 which they could work on throughout the year. The Senior Partnerships Officer offered to link with James to discuss if Demi and Zoe, would like to take-up the project.

Luke and Billie-Leigh then presented highlights of the work of the Children in Care Council over the past month (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes). They updated the Panel that the Education Fun Fund has received over 150 applications to date, of which over 100 were from care experienced young people. The presentation included examples of the application forms completed by the young people themselves and case studies on how the young people have used the money which demonstrated that the fund is making a difference to the young people.

Rob Johnson, Project Manager for Investing in Children, commented on the benefits of the Education Fun Fund which was a grass roots idea by the young people and its success was helped by the support of practitioners. Melanie Stubbs, Head of the Virtual School, commented that practitioners had listened to the young people and one of the recurring themes had been their concern at their lack of input into how pupil premium plus is spent. The practitioners explained to the young people that pupil premium plus funding is required to be used to address the wider needs of pupils rather than being ring-fenced for individual young people. For this reason, the Head of the Virtual School built on the idea to develop the Education Fun Fund so that young people could apply for funding to help to fulfil their ambitions. The application process is important for the young people for empowerment and to develop life skills such as money management and decision making.

Members were heartened that the young people were asking for the amount of funding that they felt they needed, rather than the full amount and in some instances, young people were using the funding to support others less fortunate than themselves.

Billie-Leigh reminded Panel members that they are welcome to attend all Children in Care Council meetings, not only the joint CPP/CiCC meetings, to join the conversations.

10 Care Leavers Service Positivitree

Tracy Shaw and Lindsey Dodds, Team Managers, provided an overview of the Positivitree initiative which is part of the national leaving care benchmarking forum Positivitree campaign (for copy of report and presentation see file).

The Panel heard that Durham is part of the forum which provides benchmarking standards for services to care leavers throughout the country. The Positivitree signifies growing the local offer for care leavers and part of this work is concerned with raising awareness. Durham Care Leavers' Service management team met to consider how to put the work into action in Durham by improving the local offer through actions such as creating more training and employment opportunities and increasing the offer in Care Leavers' Hubs. A 'touring' Positivitree will be used when practitioners visit businesses, employers and leisure facilities to encourage agencies to think about what they can pledge to care experienced young people. Ideas from the pledges will be taken to the regional board to consider whether they can be taken up regionally.

Members spent time at the meeting making their own pledges and If Members had any additional pledges, following the meeting, they were asked to forward them to the Senior Partnerships Officer.

Resolved:

That members of the Corporate Parenting Panel note the Care Leavers' Service work with the Positivitree and made pledges of their own.

11 Performance Report Quarter 2

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager, Stephen Tracey, delivered a report and presentation on performance (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Panel noted a net increase in the number of children and young people in our care as the number of children entering care has increased and the number of young people leaving care has remained steady. The age cohorts of 5-10 years and 10-15 years had seen increases in those entering care and starts for the pre-school age group had seen a slight reduction.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager updated the Panel that analysis of data indicated that the number of UASC referred through the national transfer scheme attributed to approximately 70% of the increase in those entering care.

There is evidence of pressures on performance with a reduction in the timeliness of initial health assessments and review health assessments although this may be partly due to delays in receiving the necessary paperwork.

Comparisons with statistical neighbours show that Durham has more young people in foster care and utilises its own provision more frequently than neighbouring authorities. The Panel noted that short term placement stability had improved and the number of children living with friends and family had increased.

Missing episodes continued to increase and the issue was being closely monitored.

With respect to care leavers, it was reported that the vast majority are in suitable accommodation.

Councillor Reed expressed concern at the high number of UASC and she asked for further information on funding and support offered to UASC young people. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that, under the national transfer scheme, every local authority receives an allocation of UASC, which is based on the percentage of young people in the population. The majority of UASC that Durham cares for enter through the national transfer scheme, however, there are some spontaneous arrivals. As Durham is the largest local authority in the north east, it receives a large allocation. Funding is allocated by the Home Office which is used to provide accommodation, which in most cases for those under 16 will be either foster or residential placement and those over the age of 16 will be supported into accommodation. In Durham, resources have been used to set up a dedicated UASC team. Where possible, the service aims to match children and young people with communities where they have connections. The Panel noted that UASC are provided with the same services and support as all looked after children and young people.

The Head of Children's Social Care suggested that the Panel may wish to consider an update on the work of the UASC team, in the new year. This was agreed and the topic will be added to a future agenda.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

12 Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service

Carmel Murray, Operations Manager, presented the annual report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service, covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The manager explained that IROs have a dual role and work as Independent Reviewing Officers for children looked after and they also chair Child Protection Conferences. The annual report covered the work undertaken in relation to both roles.

The report highlighted what is working well, areas for improvement and it identified priorities for 2023/24. During 2022/23, a high level of performance was maintained, including 85% of initial child protection conferences and 95% of review child protection conferences being held within timescales. Over 90% of young people participated in their reviews by attending themselves or through their social worker or carer.

One of the primary roles of the IRO is to scrutinise care planning for young people, with regular meetings being held with social workers and young people to ensure that permanent plans are reached as soon as possible and that the plans are in the best interest of the young person. The IROs visit young people before their reviews to ensure the young person's wishes are given appropriate weight in the care planning process. IROs are required to provide oversight and quality assurance and challenge the service, when it is appropriate to do so.

In the future the service will aim to increase pre-conference visits to young people and continue to promote the voice of each young person in their care experience. IROs have arranged to meet with a group of young people on a quarterly basis to ensure ongoing consultation, including discussions on how young people would like to contribute to their reviews. The IRO service will work with partners regionally and nationally in response to recommendations from the care review, to align with regional models.

The Vice-Chair referred to the reference in the report to an increasing volume of rearranged meeting requests and she asked the reason for this.

The Operations Manager explained various reasons for rearrangements which may be at the request of the young people or practitioners and it was noted that some meetings are rearranged for reasons of good practice. The Head of Children's Social Care added that whilst flexibility is required, the work is ongoing to reduce rearrangement of meetings, when avoidable.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

13 Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

14 Regulation 44 Visits - Independent Children's Residential Homes

The Senior Commissioning Officer, Dawn Wilson, presented the Regulation 44 Visits report which provided information on monitoring activity undertaken by the Integrated Commissioning service in relation to Independent Children's Residential homes where Durham young people are placed (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 January 2024

**Outcome of Focused Ofsted Visit:
Care Leavers Service****Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Service, Durham County Council****Electoral division(s) affected:**

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Corporate Parenting Panel with the outcome of the Ofsted focused visit to the Care Leavers Service on 14 and 15 November 2023.
- 2 To provide Corporate Parenting Panel a copy of the full letter, attached as appendix B, for their consideration.

Executive summary

- 3 A focused visit took place by His Majesty's Inspectorate Ofsted on 14 and 15 November 2023. The focus of the visit was to inspect Durham County Council's arrangements for care-experienced young people, specifically the quality of preparation for adulthood, the quality and suitability of accommodation, and care leavers with specific needs. The impact of leaders on practice was also considered as part of this visit.
- 4 Overall, the report presented significant strengths identified within Durham County Council's Leaving Care service and wider systems. Leadership throughout the council was seen to be robust, ambitious, and tenacious. Leaders were seen to have a detailed knowledge of the service and responded at pace to changing needs. This includes the develop of the Local Offer, the development of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Team and the Care Leavers Hubs.
- 5 The quality of support offered by Young People's Advisors (YPA's) was positively highlighted throughout the report, including young people in specific circumstances.
- 6 Service quality and grip from councillors and senior leaders through to front line managers was found to be a strength.

- 7 Ofsted made one recommendation in respect of the written report for supervision to ensure it is reflective of the feedback given by the Young People's Advisors. This is currently an area for improvement identified by the service.

Recommendations

- 8 Members of Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
 - (a) review the content of the report and appended full Ofsted inspection letter attached as appendix B.

Background

- 9 A focused visit took place by His Majesty's Inspectorate Ofsted on 14 and 15 November 2023. The focus of the visit was to inspect Durham County Council's arrangements for care-experienced young people, specifically the quality of preparation for adulthood, the quality and suitability of accommodation, and care leavers with specific needs. The impact of leaders on practice was also considered as part of this visit.

Leadership

- 10 During the visit, Ofsted found strong and effective leadership throughout the system. Ofsted identified:

'Leaders have a detailed understanding of the strengths of this area of service and where further improvements can be made. Senior leaders have further developed and improved services for care-experienced young people. This includes the local offer to care-experienced young people and establishing a specialist service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. A second care leavers hub has opened which is offering a greater range of support and activities for care-experienced young people across the county.'

- 11 Ofsted went on to describe:

'As a corporate parent, the local authority is diligent in its efforts to ensure that care-experienced young people are given the opportunity to achieve their goals and they are ambitious for their futures. The corporate parenting strategy has been developed in collaboration with care-experienced young people. This collaboration is meaningful, and the voice of care-experienced young people is central to decision-making.'

Relationships and responsiveness to needs for Care Experienced Young People

- 12 Young People's Advisors responses to the need of Care Experienced Young people was highlighted positively by Ofsted and in almost all children's records reviewed this was consistently achieved. They were described as committed and clear on how to support young people with most achieving their goals and support to young people in university was highlighted as a key area of strength.
- 13 Ofsted reflected the more recent practice change of allocating a Young People's Advisor as soon as possible post 16 as a key area to allow the relationship between the children and worker develop.
- 14 Ofsted found most Care Experienced Young People had Pathway Plans which understood and reflected their needs and that they were living in

appropriate accommodation. Prompt responses were noted for those children not in appropriate accommodation and YPA's linked in with housing providers to address this promptly.

- 15 Ofsted highlighted that for Care Experienced Young People with specific needs, young parents had access to a large range of support with a responsive relationship with their YPA. For those young people in custody, most were in need of having an ongoing relationship with the YPA who supported to prepare them for a return to the community. A minority had less obvious support, which is an area of focus for the service in the expansion of the prison project which proactively reaches out to young people in custody.
- 16 For Care Experienced Young People who came to Durham as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), Ofsted commended the leadership and development of the UASC Team. This was praised for the expert knowledge of the specific circumstances of these young people and the commitment to maintain relationships to support them.

Staffing, Support and Training

- 17 Ofsted recognised the stability of staffing in the Care Leavers Services, the management and training offer to staff, and the clear leadership grip on the quality of the service offered, which extended from councillors and senior leaders to frontline managers.
- 18 Ofsted did identify that whilst YPAs described positive and reflective supervision experiences, this was not always reflected in the written record. This has been identified as an area of development.
- 19 The Care Leavers offer was described by Ofsted as clear and accessible and throughout the visit, it was highlighted that collaboration and co-production was evident.

Quality Assurance

- 20 Ofsted described Political and senior leaders have a detailed oversight of practice within the care leaving service. The local authority's quality assurance framework provides leaders with a thorough overview of practice and the impact of services and interventions. Audits are used effectively to further enhance practice. This reflects the service knowing itself well and the areas to focus on to further improve.

Care Leavers Offer

- 21 Ofsted found the offer to Care Experienced Young People to be easy to access and clear. It was highlighted the offer had been co-produced with Care Experienced Young People and the council were commended

for their commitment to review this regularly to ensure the offer was responsive to young people in County Durham.

Conclusion

- 22 Corporate Parenting Panel will note the findings of the Ofsted inspection and the significantly positive service delivered by Durham County Council for Care Experienced Young People.
- 23 The area of recommendation identified by Ofsted, in respect of the written supervision for staff, is an area the service has as a priority for improvement and will be reviewed with audit activity.

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None in the context of this update report

Finance

None

Consultation and Engagement

The range of consultation and engagement was demonstrated as part of the Ofsted inspection

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None in the context of this update report

Accommodation

None in the context of this update report

Risk

None

Procurement

None

12 January 2024

John Pearce
Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UJ

Dear Mr Pearce

Focused visit to Durham County Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Durham County Council children's services on 14 and 15 November 2023. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Ceri Evans and Lisa Walsh.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care-experienced young people, specifically the quality of preparation for adulthood, the quality and suitability of accommodation and care leavers with specific needs. The impact of leaders on practice was also considered as part of this visit.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. This visit was carried out entirely on site. Inspectors considered a broad range of evidence, including care-experienced young people's records, and undertook case discussions with personal assistants, social workers and managers. Inspectors spoke with a number of care-experienced young people. Inspectors also reviewed relevant local authority performance and quality assurance information.

Headline findings

This is the first focused visit since the last inspection in May 2022, when children's services were judged to be good overall. Leaders have a detailed understanding of the strengths of this area of service and where further improvements can be made. Senior leaders have further developed and improved services for care-experienced young people. This includes the local offer to care-experienced young people and establishing a specialist service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. A second care leavers hub has opened which is offering a greater range of support and activities for care-experienced young people across the county.

Most care-experienced young people's cases looked at during this visit show that they benefit from long-standing relationships with workers whom they trust. They are prepared well for adulthood and most live in suitable accommodation. Staff feel

well supported and receive regular and reflective supervision, but the records do not reflect the quality of the discussion which staff articulate.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- The recording of reflective supervision discussions.

Main findings

Personal advisers (PAs) are introduced and allocated to care-experienced young people well in advance of their 18th birthday. This early involvement of a PA supports the opportunity for effective relationships to develop and helps to ensure that planning for adulthood starts early.

Young people told inspectors that they have strong and caring relationships with PAs whom they trust. Many young people spoken to during the visit view their PAs as extended family members and say that they value the relationships they have with them.

PAs undertake thoughtful and effective work to help young people to develop the necessary skills for independence. This includes a programme of courses at the care leavers hubs on cooking, budgeting, life skills and how to enhance their emotional well-being. Care-experienced young people told inspectors that the support on offer at the care leaving hubs has been instrumental in helping them to develop the skills they need for life and provided them with a space where they can make friends and share experiences.

Most pathway plans are completed alongside care-experienced young people but not all plans are of a consistent quality. While most identify needs and risk and have actions focused on improving outcomes for young people, a small minority did not clearly highlight the young person's current situation and the support they need to meet their goals.

The vast majority of care-experienced young people live in suitable accommodation that supports their transition to independence. This includes remaining with foster carers on 'staying put' arrangements, supported accommodation or gaining their own tenancy. When care-experienced young people are living in unsuitable accommodation, PAs maintain close contact and liaise effectively with other professionals, such as housing, to ensure that the young person's circumstances improve promptly.

Support to care-experienced young people who are at university is a key strength. Currently, 36 care-experienced young people are attending university and five have successfully graduated this year. Inspectors spoke with a group of these young people, who spoke openly about the excellent support they received from their PAs.

This support was described as a 'lifeline' for some, especially during the initial transition to a new environment.

When care-experienced young people become parents, there is a wide range of support available for them. PAs are quick to respond to young parents with effective practical and emotional support which enables many young people to parent their child successfully.

Most care-experienced young people in custody have regular contact with their PAs through visiting and video calls. Most benefit from strong and long-lasting relationships with their PAs and as such they continue to feel well supported. However, for a small minority of care-experienced young people in custody, the support was less evident. In these instances, infrequent contact has left a small minority of care-experienced young people without the support they require for a successful transition back to the community.

There is an increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who are care leavers in Durham. In order to provide a more effective response for these young people, leaders have established a specialist service with workers who have a comprehensive understanding of unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers, and the challenges they face. PAs work hard to ensure that this group of young people are fully aware of their legal rights. Visits are regular, and matters relating to their culture and identity are well understood and responded to appropriately.

PAs are aspirational for their care-experienced young people and celebrate their successes. They spoke about sticking with them through challenging times, being dependable and reliable. Clearly, for those care-experienced young people that inspectors saw during the visit this approach is helping them to achieve positive outcomes.

PAs take great pride in what they do and morale among the team is high. Those spoken to described a highly supportive environment. While reflective supervision takes place regularly, not all supervision records show how managers are providing workers with professional challenge to progress plans.

PAs benefit from a wide-ranging programme of continuous professional development. PAs presented as well informed and confident, and this is having a positive impact on the service they provide to care-experienced young people.

Political and senior leaders have a detailed oversight of practice within the care leaving service. The local authority's quality assurance framework provides leaders with a thorough overview of practice and the impact of services and interventions. Audits are used effectively to further enhance practice.

The local authority's offer to care-experienced young people is clear and accessible. Care-experienced young people contributed to the development of the offer and fully

understand what support is available to them. Leaders have a commitment to revisiting the offer regularly to ensure that all care leavers have access to the support they need regardless of their personal circumstances.

As a corporate parent, the local authority is diligent in its efforts to ensure that care-experienced young people are given the opportunity to achieve their goals and they are ambitious for their futures. The corporate parenting strategy has been developed in collaboration with care-experienced young people. This collaboration is meaningful, and the voice of care-experienced young people is central to decision-making.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Evans
His Majesty's Inspector

Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC)

December 2023/January 2024 Update

Presentation by:

Bille-Leigh and Luke from the CiCC and Robert Johnson from Investing in Children.

- Four CiCC members met with DCCs CEO John Hewitt in December. This is a quarterly meeting, allowing CiCC members to share ideas and opinions with John about ways DCC and partners are meeting their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- The Know, What, When Guide has been finalised and will be used as a resource for children and young people to better understand their rights when coming into care.
- CiCC members supported and planned a Christmas Quiz for CiCC members and carers to attend. 32 CiCC members attended alongside their carers will lots of prizes given away. It was a great evening!!



Promoting the Rights of Children and Young People



CICC December 2023 / January 2024

- Members of both CICC groups have continued to plan Care Day.
- One CICC member is developing a short film to premier at care day on 17 February 2024 called #MorethanCare .
- We hope members can attend and share within their networks, the details are below:

Promoting the Rights of Children and Young People



JOIN US Investing in Children/Children in Care Care Day
Sat Feb 17th 2024

 **Cornerstones**
Chester-le-Street Methodist Church
North Burns
Chester-le-Street
DH3 3TF

 **2pm until 5pm**

 **The whole day will be planned and led by young people to celebrate #morethancare**

 **Film Showcase - by Alex from Inside a Media Mind**

 **Canvas' Care Corner - arts and crafts**

 **FOOD AVAILABLE**

 **SCAN**
To register your place

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 January 2024

Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP) Update



Report of Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager Children in our Care, Children’s Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To advised the Corporate Parenting Panel that a slide set will be presented at the meeting to provide a summary of the activity of the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP), since the last report which was presented in October 2023.

Executive summary

- 2 The Children Looked After Strategic Partnership was developed to improve the partnership working between services at a strategic level to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers.
- 3 The group meets bi monthly and consists of representatives from Children’s Social Care, partner health authorities, youth offending, police, education, housing, children services specialist county wide services and the project manager for Investing in Children.
- 4 To increase the influence of the group and to improve the connectivity of work with children in care and care leavers it has been agreed that the CLASP will provide update reports into the Corporate Parenting Panel on a six-monthly basis.
- 5 The chair and/or vice chair of the CLASP meet with the Children in Care Council twice yearly to ensure that strategic priorities are developed with children and young people and their feedback is taken directly back to the partnership meeting.

Recommendation

- 6 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) Note the content of this report, receive the presentation at the meeting and provide comment as necessary.

Background

- 7 The CLASP will have high aspirations for all children in our care and care leavers in Durham and will work to support them to achieve excellent outcomes in their childhood and as they move into adulthood through the delivery of the highest quality services across the partnership.
- 8 The CLASP will work to ensure that there is a shared understanding across the Local Authority and its partners about the needs of its Children In our Care and Care Leavers to provide the strategic direction for the development and improvement of services in line with the views and feedback from children and young people.
- 9 To achieve this vision the CLASP has 8 Priority Actions as follows:

Priority 1) Ensure good multi-agency partnership work and integrated governance to meet the needs of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

Priority 2) We will develop services which are focused on providing high quality support to enable children and young people to remain at home with their families, or return to their families, where it is safe to do so.

Priority 3) Sufficiency of Placements and Placement Stability is important for our children and young people. We want to ensure there are enough high-quality placements to meet their diverse needs and to ensure that young people have a choice where this is appropriate.

Priority 4) Promoting Early Permanence is a key priority for us, we want to ensure that children are moved into their permanent placement or adoptive placement as quickly as possible once this has been agreed as the appropriate plan.

Priority 5) Durham County Council and its partners will develop a 'local offer' for our care leavers and provide them with advice and support from a personal advisor until they are 25 years old.

Priority 6) We will work to ensure the right services are in place to meet the health and wellbeing needs of our children and young people.

Priority 7) We will continue to work with our children and young people to ensure they have opportunities to access good education, employment and training to achieve their full potential.

Priority 8) The engagement and influence of children and young people is a key priority across Durham County Council.

Conclusion

- 10 The work of the CLASP continues forge good working relationships and promote services work together to identify and meet the needs of children in care and care leavers.
- 11 The CLASP operates as the link into understanding practice between the frontline practitioners, subgroups and systems allow for a direct line of sight for Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 12 The CLASP is hoped to be the golden thread of the partnership and report back as a corporate parent.

Author

Sharon Davey

Tel: 03000 266214

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

There are no financial implications linked to this report.

Consultation

The work of the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP) is co-produced with children and young people although no additional consultation has taken place in the preparation of this report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

The risk of failing to develop productive working relationships and practices to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers would pose a risk of failure to meet statutory responsibilities to these groups.

Procurement

None.

Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP) Update

Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager CICC, Care Leavers,
Fostering and Adoption



What we have achieved

- Priority 1)** Ensure good multi-agency partnership work and integrated governance to meet the needs of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers.
- We have reviewed the language in the governance documents of each working group and ensured a common language is applied.
 - The partnership reshared the Philomena protocol and training guide. This will be the subject of further audit work in 2024 to understand the impact.
- Priority 2)** We will develop services which are focused on providing high quality support to enable children and young people to remain at home with their families, or return to their families, where it is safe to do so.
- Development of Edge of Care Provision to prevent children entering into care and improve on placement stability.
 - Introduced a model of working to track and achieve permanence. Permanence Monitoring Group (PMG) has been operational since December 2023.
 - Share with the partnership the Care Leavers Inspection Framework. Inspection completed and feedback letter received 12th January
 - Emotional Mental Health Audit completed. Actions set and triangulation from Health, Education and Social Care required to ensure these have impact. These will inform the 2024 workplan.
- Priority 3)** Sufficiency of Placements and Placement Stability is important for our children and young people. We want to ensure there are enough high-quality placements to meet their diverse needs and to ensure that young people have a choice where this is appropriate.
- Launch of the Sufficiency Board has supported CLASP to have a clear area of focus moving in to 2024.
 - Performance and data is shared with the partnership and reviewed bi-monthly.
 - Audit findings on “New Chapter meetings” (Placement Disruption Meeting) will be shared January 2024.
 - Continued work with the Regional Fostering Pathfinder Project. This has been very successful. Impact to be reviewed in March 2024.
- Priority 4)** Promoting Early Permanence is a key priority for us, we want to ensure that children are moved into their permanent placement or adoptive placement as quickly as possible once this has been agreed as the appropriate plan.
- Regional Adoption Agency working group has been set up and will report into CLASP findings and areas for development moving into 2024.

What we have achieved

- Priority 5)** Durham County Council and its partners will develop a 'local offer' for our care leavers and provide them with advice and support from a personal advisor until they are 25 years old.
- The Local Offer priority has been achieved. We offer support to young people to 25+. This priority will be reviewed for in 2024 workplan to look at areas we can further develop and strengthen.
- Priority 6)** We will work to ensure the right services are in place to meet the health and wellbeing needs of our children and young people.
- Focus on the completion of Health Passports. This has been an increase in referrals and tracking of the timeliness.
 - Focus on the completion of Health Assessment. We continue to see this area of focus improvement and part of the workplan for 2024.
- Priority 7)** We will continue to work with our children and young people to ensure they have opportunities to access good education, employment and training to achieve their full potential.
- Education Subgroup established. This has been set up by the virtual school and Durham Works. As we move into 2024, impact will be shared in CLASP and Corporate Parenting from the Virtual Head as chair.
 - NEET clinics established as a focus from the Practice Lead, in Childrens Social Care to track our young people's educations attainment. Performance is shared in CLASP bi-monthly.
- Priority 8)** The engagement and influence of children and young people is a key priority across Durham County Council.
- Opening of the 2nd Care Leavers Hub.
 - Launch of the Know What When Book.
 - The Experts by Experience group is established, and first area of enquiry has commenced.
 - Launched the Prison support pilot and will expand on this further in 2024.

Next Steps for 2024



- Review of the governance documents and priority actions and workplan for 2024.
- Feedback on Care Leavers Inspection.
- Evaluate the newly formed education subgroups and measure the impact for children and young people.
- Expand the membership of CLASP to include Regional Adoption Agency Strategic Manager to focus on early permanence.
- Placement Stability Audit work to feed into the 2024 next steps Priority Actions Plan.
- Undertake a development session with CLASP members to establish an Impact Framework to measure success.

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 January 2024

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Team



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update on the progress of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) team.

Including:

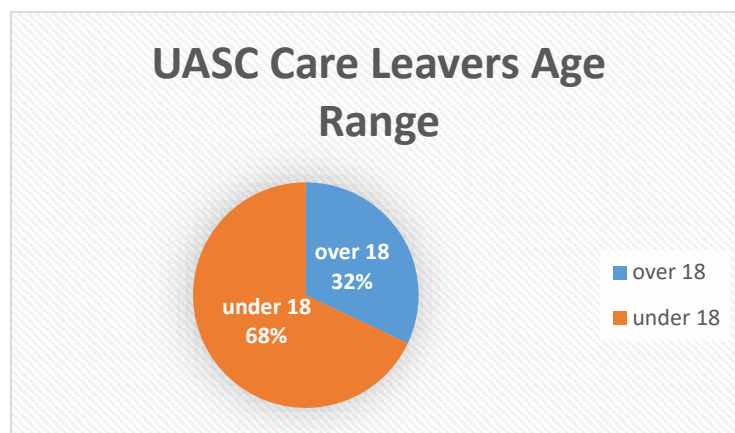
- The Home Office Transfer Scheme;
- The structure of the team;
- Young people's involvement in service development;
- Multi agency development;
- Events.

Recommendation(s)

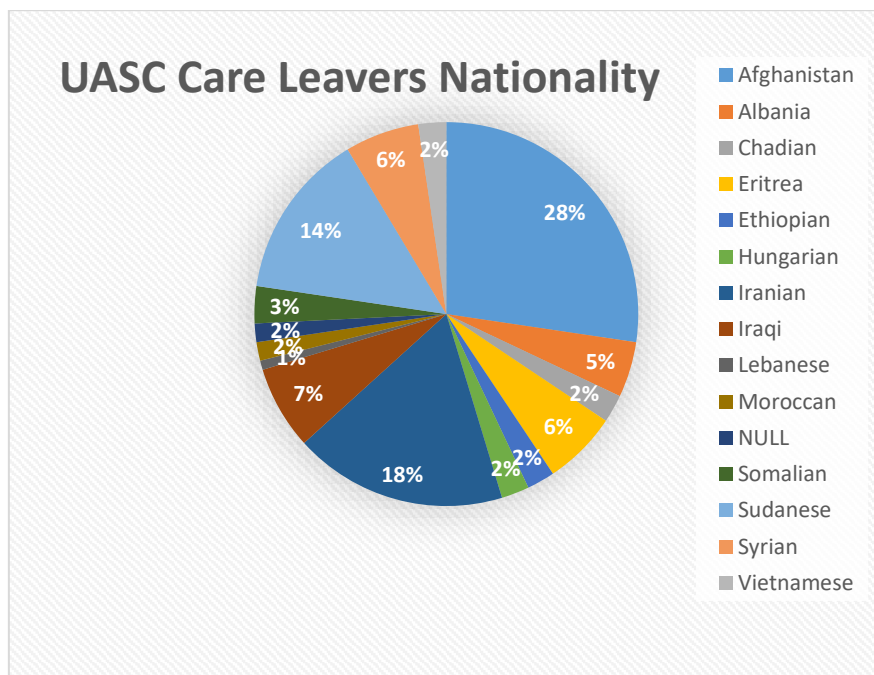
- 2 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this report.

Background

- 3 The UASC Team was established in February 2022 due to the increased demand for social work capacity and caring provisions for UASC referred to Durham by the Home Office Asylum Scheme. Until this point UASC had been allocated social workers throughout the Children Looked After Service.
- 4 Team Manager Nathan Head was appointed in February 2022 and the team was set up as part of the Care Leaver Service.
- 5 There are currently 87 UASC in our care and 41 Care Leavers.



- 6 We are working with young people across 14 Nationalities, the most predominant being Afghanistan, Iranian and Sudanese.



Structure of the team

- 7 The team consists of: One team manager, three and half social workers and four young people's advisors.

Developments

- 8 Having a focussed team allows training and development to take place, some areas this has been achieved in are:
- Age Assessment Training;
 - UASC/Care Leavers, care planning training;
 - Development session on the voice of the UASC and what support they would like;
 - Improving practise and assessments for UASC;
 - Refugee Family Reunion;
 - Legal Frameworks with regards to UASC.
- 9 We receive developmental and training opportunities from the North East Migration Partnership.
- 10 We have focussed on trauma informed training.
- 11 Nathan Head is the team manager, he attends the regional group where we learn from the experience of other authorities, including Redcar and Cleveland who also have a UASC focussed team.
- 12 Sharon Davey, strategic manager attends the refugee and resettlement meeting to support in partnership working to provide support and services for our young people.
- 13 The UASC multi agency group meets monthly. This allows multi agency information to be shared and consideration to be given to how we work together, including health, education and the voluntary sector to meet this group of young people's needs and support both physical and mental health recovery.
- 14 We have opened a new Care Leavers Hub in Stanley with a focus on UASC and an area for solicitor appointments with our young people. Two UASC young people have helped us with the development of this Hub from the beginning of the project.

- 15 We have welcome packs established and are thankful of the support from Corporate Parenting to make this possible.
- 16 We have young people represented on the Children in Care Council.
- 17 Community and celebration events continue including for Ede, Cricket days and weekly football sessions.



Challenges

- 18 It is difficult to find a foster home for young people under 16 in the North East of England. We have young people in foster homes in the South of England and employ an agency social worker in London to be accessible for these young people.
- 19 Durham continues to take a high percentage of UASC young people in comparison to our regional neighbours. We are seeking to build capacity within the team and continue to work with local supported housing providers to develop provisions.
- 20 There has been a delay in the Home Office processing Asylum claims which means that we continue to fund young people's accommodation and daily living costs beyond being 18.

Conclusion

- 21 The team has had a positive quarter with good community links form and stable homes for our young people.
- 22 There are developments for the future for our UASC team such as building on our placement options for our young people.

Authors

Lesley Baldry, Service Manager
 Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

We are working within the National Transfer Scheme.

Finance

This is regularly tracked within Finance clinic.

Consultation

This report is for update and celebration of successes. Therefore, there are no implications within this report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The team and service have a direct focus on supporting and enabling our young people to champion their cultural and diversity needs.

Climate Change

This report is for update and celebration of successes. Therefore, there are no implications within this report.

Human Rights

This report is for update and celebration of successes. Therefore, there are no implications within this report.

Crime and Disorder

This report is for update and celebration of successes. Therefore, there are no implications within this report.

Staffing

This is reviewed within Sufficiency Board.

Accommodation

This is reviewed within Sufficiency Board.

Risk

This report is for update and celebration of successes. Therefore, there are no implications within this report.

Procurement

This report is for update and celebration of successes. Therefore, there are no implications within this report.

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UASC Update

Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager CIC, Care Leavers, Fostering & Adoption

January 2024



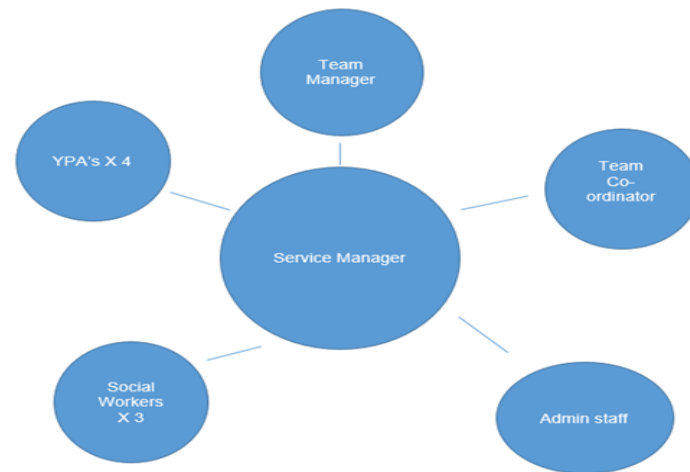
UASC Terminology & meet the team

UASC Definition- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers. While their claim is processed, they are cared for by a local authority.

Spontaneous Arrivals – This is where the child/young person arrives in the UK by their own means and are presented to the local authority in an unplanned way. They are usually encountered by police/social services in the first instance. The local authority in which the child first presents is then responsible for their care.

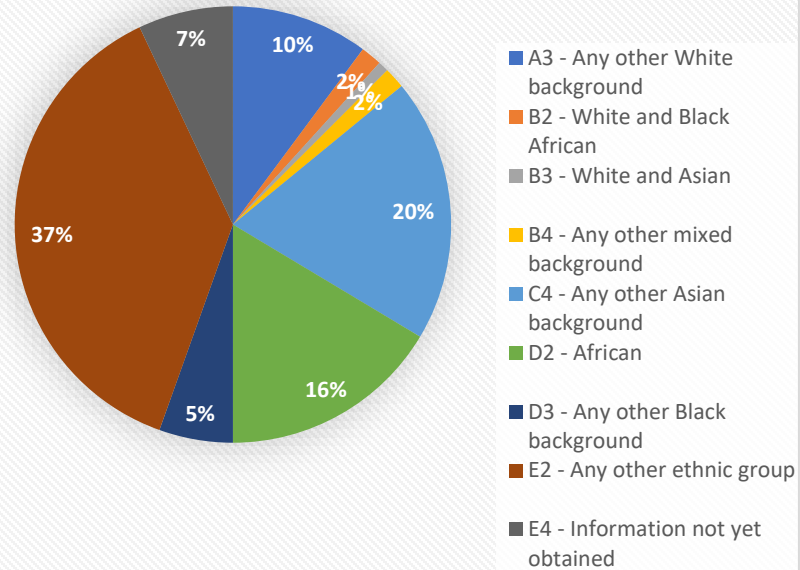
National Transfer Scheme - The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has been established to enable the safe transfer of unaccompanied children in the UK from one local authority (the entry authority from which the unaccompanied child transfers) to another local authority (the receiving authority). The transfers are usually from both Kent and Croydon Home Office intake Units where young people are often placed in temporary accommodation by the Home Office.

UASC Team make up-

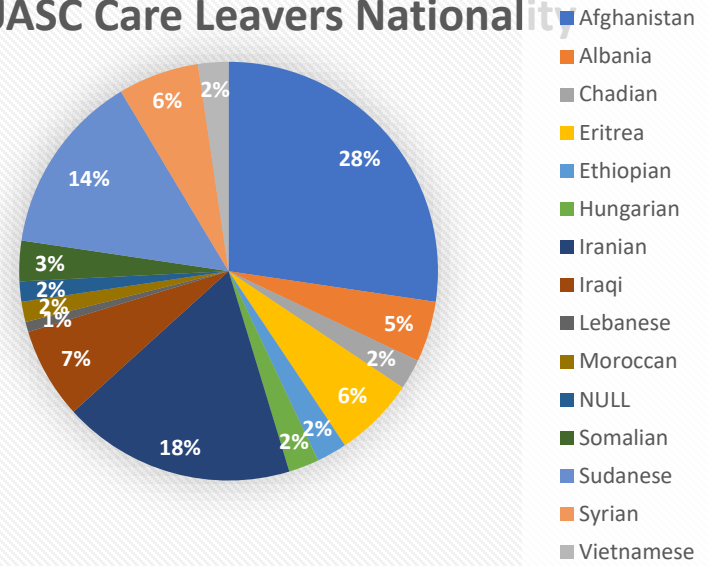


UASC Profile

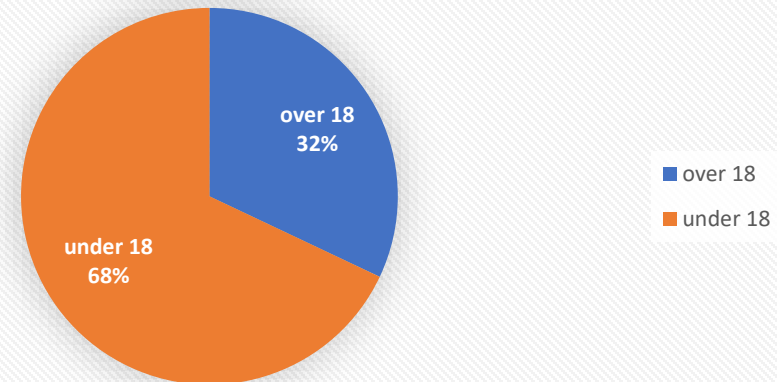
UASC Care Leavers Ethnicity



UASC Care Leavers Nationality



UASC Care Leavers Age Range





What's Working Well

- We are developing social inclusion opportunities for your UASC young people such as a monthly football club, access to Independent Visitors and the use of the VCS Alliance Team to find community based activities/groups for young people based on their interests.
- We are promoting advocacy services such as NYAS and the Refugee Council to provide independent advice/guidance for UASC young people.
- We ensure that UASC young people are supported to access an asylum solicitor.
- We have procured the use of two Translating Services to allow easy access to translators.
- We are quick to support UASC young people into education where they have the opportunity to socialise and meet others. The Virtual School have a designated case worker who solely focuses on UASC young people.
- We have promoted celebration events such as Eid which was attended by 28 young people. Halal food was supplied and gift bags.
- Some of the UASC young people that we have supported have gone on to progress through college, learn to drive, attend university, and gain their own tenancies and employment.
- We have a young person who wants to be involved in CICC.
- We have a been involved in setting up the Care Leavers Hub at Stanley.
- A young person has cooked a meal for their YPA.



Forming Community Links

A common theme that we often find among our young people is that of accessing the wider community is very important to them.

- We have been able to form some positive links within the community such as becoming a partner agency with Recyke y'bike who can provide free refurbished bikes for our young people and Durham Cricket who have kindly provided us with several free tickets for an upcoming match which a lot of our young people from Afghanistan, where cricket is the national sport are really looking forward to.
- We also continue to run a monthly football session held at one of Durham Councils Leisure Centers which continues to be well attended!



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Corporate Parent Panel**26 January 2024****Virtual School Annual Report Summary****Report of Melanie Stubbs, Virtual School Head, Durham County Council****Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide an outline summary of the full virtual school annual report for 2022-2023 (Attached at Appendix 2). This summary focuses on children and young people of statutory school age.

Executive summary

- 2 In line with DfE reporting, the data reported in this document is based on those children and young people who have been continuously looked after for a minimum of 12 months from 1 April 2022, to 31 March 2023 – hereafter referred to as the reporting cohort. This executive summary covers statutory school age, whilst the body of the report also includes Early Years and Post 16.
- 3 At Durham Virtual School we believe we are making a difference to the education of children and young people in care. This report can evidence educational outcomes and progress from entry to care this year through formal examinations for all Key Stages. Good attendance, few suspensions, high aspirations, strong vocational and academic pathways, and effective preparation for adulthood continue to be evident for children in our care. This is all brought about by a virtual school team which advocates strongly and loudly for our young people through collaborative working. Over the last three years we have insisted on an increasing focus on the education of children in care within schools and with our partners and raised the profile of the work of the virtual school, developing very close working relationships with headteachers and Designated Teachers. The strengthening of the virtual school has allowed us to have increased capacity to attend PEP meetings and work more directly with social workers and schools to achieve the best outcomes for the children on our care.

Recommendations

- 4 It is recommended that members of the Corporate Parent Panel note the contents of the full annual report.
- 5 The virtual school head should ensure that children and young people in our care and remain a priority focus within the wider team since the extension of the role to all children with a Social Worker.
- 6 The virtual school head should ensure that the identified priorities are actioned to further improve the educational achievement of children in our care, and these children are placed in schools and settings which are appropriate to their needs.
- 7 That the report be read with an understanding that the return to formal examinations has affected all measures this academic year. Outcomes are available for Key Stage 1 and 2 children and Year 11 students.

Background

- 8 As of July 2023, there were 766 Durham children looked after of statutory school age (SSA). This is an increase of 13.3% from the same time 2022 and 136 Post 16 in care. 48.04% were of primary age and 51.96% were of secondary age. The gender split across SSA and Post 16 is 40.13% girls and 59.87% boys. The more marked difference, however, is in P16, where 72.06% are male and 27.96% are female.
- 9 22.34% of children and young people (R - yr. 11) attend out of county schools; this is an increase of 2.67% from last year. 77.66% are educated in schools based in County Durham. The increase in children attending provisions may in part be a reflection on the difficulty in placing children in Special Schools appropriate to their need. The remaining children are placed across 47 other local authorities, although a significant number of these are placed in our neighbouring local authorities.
- 10 As of July 2023, 76% of the cohort attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better and 11.6% attended a school with a grade of Requires Improvement or below. To avoid additional trauma, we do not routinely remove a child from a school which becomes inadequate unless there was an exceptional reason, but we do provide additional scrutiny and academic support if required. 92 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion. Any maintained school in Durham that is not judged to be Good or better will receive extra scrutiny and the Local Authority will work closely with these schools to improve provision. As a virtual school we provide additional tuition and scrutiny to all schools, as required. Any maintained school in Durham that is not judged to be Good or better will receive extra scrutiny and the Local Authority will work closely with these schools to improve provision. As a virtual school we provide additional tuition and scrutiny to all schools, as required. Any maintained school in Durham that is not judged to be Good or better will receive extra scrutiny and the Local Authority will work closely with these schools to improve provision. As a virtual school we provide additional tuition and scrutiny to all schools, as required.
- 11 At the end of July there were 29 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) of statutory school age on the roll of the Virtual School, 23 of whom were placed out of county for care reasons. This brings additional challenges when seeking a school placement. 20 were in Year 11, all of whom had a Post 16 destination organised. In addition to this there were 39 Post 16 UASC.

- 12 In 2022-2023 there were 52 school moves during the academic year. We aim to ensure moves take place at the end of an academic year, but there are occasions where a move mid-year is beneficial. More rigorous monitoring took place of school move planning and there was a clear message that school moves would only be considered as a last resort for our young people to promote stability of education. *A further 54 were suggested, but challenged by the Virtual School and therefore did not take place.* 33% of school moves were to support moving to a permanent placement or due to distance, while 9% were due to a child leaving care on an Adoption Order or Special Guardianship Order. 6% were due to a care placement breakdown, and 25 % because of a care led decision. School moves due to permanent places remain the most significant factors in requesting a school move. However, in all cases the PEP Caseworker oversees the move, including agreeing the chosen school. The Virtual School Head has the final say in agreeing school moves and the PEP Caseworker ensures they are consulted fully in the process.
- 13 166 (22%) of the school age cohort were educated out of the boundaries of County Durham in 2022-23. This is a slight increase of 2% from 2021-2022
- 14 According to the Spring Census 2023, there are currently 999 previously looked after children on roll in Durham schools (maintained). This reflects an increase of 11 children from January 2022. This is a rise of 1.1% from 2022, compared to a rise of 13.4% from 2021. The Virtual School offers support and advice to guardians and schools for this cohort of children.
- 15 Children in care (12 months on 31 March) are over three and a half times as likely to have an identified special educational need (SEN) and eight times more likely to have an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) than all children. Nationally in 2022, 56.3% of children in care had a special educational need compared to 15.6% of all children. In Durham 2022-23, 53% of children and young people (R-Y11) had identified special educational needs; 22.2% were supported by an EHCP whilst 30.8% had school SEN support plans (K code). There is less than 1% decrease in all areas from the figures for the same time last year. The percentage of Durham children looked after with an EHCP nearly doubles from primary to secondary school, although the percentage of children with an SEN Support Plan is higher in Primary than secondary. A challenge for Durham Virtual School is to ensure the needs of children with a SEN Support Plan are known and strategies put in place at transition points. When a child has an EHCP there is the additional challenge of securing the correct education provision at a time when many Special Schools are oversubscribed. It is important that our Caseworkers monitor the child's progress closely to ensure the

child's SEN needs are being adequately addressed and supported by the plans that are in place. Wherever possible the Designated Teacher/SEN Coordinator (SENCO) from the secondary school will attend the Summer PEP.

- 16 The primary SEN need of children in our care of statutory school age is social, emotional & mental health (SEMH). 44% of the children in our care SEND cohort are identified as having SEMH, with 26% having a moderate learning difficulty and 8% a speech, language, and communication need. This influences the way in which the virtual school directs the top slice pupil premium plus (PP+) money into the support we offer our schools through the service level agreements made available at no cost to schools.

Headline Outcomes 2023

- 17 The reporting cohort in Year 2 was 32. There was roughly an equal split of 15 girls and 17 boys. 75% of the cohort attended schools in Durham. 17 (53%) children had SEN, and increase of 15% from last year, with 6 having an EHCP and 11 with an SEN Support Plan. The most common Primary need in SEND was Cognition and Learning. Although outcomes were below expected, our girls have performed better than the boys across all areas, with quite significant differences in maths and in matching the reading, writing and maths expected, where girls were 3 times more girls achieved expected standards. However, only 4 children achieved Greater Depth in Reading, 1 in Writing and 1 in Maths.
- 18 The reporting cohort in Year 6 was 55; there were 29 boys and 26 girls in the reporting cohort. 48 of the reporting cohort attended schools in Durham, with the other 7 attending schools outside of the local authority. 26 (47%) had SEN, with 12 having an EHCP and 14 with an SEN support plan. Nearly 4 times more boys than girls had an SEN Support plan. The cohort have improved in all areas from 2022 other than GPS where we have maintained 53%. Outcomes are more in line with those from 2019, prior to the pandemic, although with changing cohorts and numbers it is difficult to make comparisons. Our girls have performed better or in line with the boys across all areas apart from Maths, where 69% of boys achieved the expected standard compared to only 62% of girls. However, it is also worth noting that the boys account for 69% of the children with SEN. 13.8% of boys achieved Maths at Greater Depth (110+ Scaled Score), no girls achieved this measure. Although achieving roughly in line across all other measures, we will continue to monitor this year's cohort as we need to improve the numbers achieving greater depth across all areas to ensure our young people have the best chance of achieving their potential.

- 19 There were 68 young people in the Year 11 reporting cohort, which consisted of 50% boys and 50% girls. 37 had identified SEN, 54% of the group. 20 had an EHCP, 29% of the reporting cohort, 68% were on the roll of a mainstream Secondary, 14% more than 2022. 12% of young people attended a Maintained/Academy Special School, with a further 10% placed in an Independent Special School. The percentage in independent special school has doubled from last year. 15 young people followed a curriculum that did not include GCSEs in Maths and English. Of these, all but 2 had SEN, with 8 having an EHCP. All followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs including teaching in literacy and numeracy. 3 young people (4%) attended an Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision.
- 20 Unfortunately, this year we have seen a drop in all areas, though this is most noticeable in English grades. Despite a significant amount of support offered by schools, this cohort of young people, we believe, remain impacted by covid. We have had a significant number disengaged from education and a continued number of persistent absentees, which we believe have impacted on grades. One area which has remained consistent is our young people achieving Maths and English at grade 9-5. In this area, 9% of our cohort achieved this, which is only 1% less than last year.
- 21 Results indicate that unlike in previous years, where our girls outperformed boys significantly in English, this year performance at both 9-5 and 9-4 was equal in English. However, boys significantly outperformed girls in Maths, with only 3% of girls achieving the higher measure compared to 10% of boys. Additional monitoring and intervention will be considered this year to ensure appropriate support and intervention is available to all the Year 11 cohort, with a particular emphasis on matching the higher grades in the Basics.
- 22 Early indication shows that 2 Care Leavers achieved A Levels and others achieved BTEC equivalents in August 2023. Intended destinations show that 8 have secured a university place.

Attendance and Exclusions

- 23 Attendance continues to be a strength of the virtual school. The slight increase in absence and persistent absence is in line with the national and local trend. It also reflects the anxieties demonstrated by some young people when realising the return to normality and formal exams post Covid
- 24 Since returning to school in September attendance of children looked after has mostly been good. Data collected in July provides a picture for this academic year. Attendance was 91.04%, almost -0.6% lower than in 21/22

- 25 Primary aged children looked after show a positive attendance at 95.5%, whilst the attendance of the Secondary children looked after cohort, 86.2% has raised an area for concern.
- 26 58 children looked after achieved 100% attendance across the academic year 2022/2023, while 343 children looked after sat within the group who achieved between 94% and 99% attendance. Strategies have been put in place to address concerns when a young person drops below 95%
- 27 There have been forty Suspensions during the academic year 2022/2023 for children looked after. Twenty One children/young people experienced more than one period of Suspension. Twenty Seven children attended the secondary sector, ten were primary aged children and three children attended Specialist Provision.
- 28 There has been one permanent exclusion. The casework team work closely with schools to prevent any issues reaching crisis point and explore appropriate alternative pathways better suited to meeting the need of the young person. We challenge any schools which consider permanent exclusion, and then implement appropriate support, using PP+ funding to avoid this.
- 29 During 2022-2023 all young people had a PEP on the Welfare Call system completed. 2,193 PEPs have been completed for 834 young people of statutory school age. These have taken place across 51 Local Authorities. Introducing the electronic PEP has improved and streamlined many processes including tracking PEP completion; monitoring involvement; tracking and analysing PP+ use and the quality assurance process.
- 30 During 2022-2023 the Autumn ePEP quality was rated as 79.9% Green (High Quality) and 20.1% Amber (did not meet expected standard to achieve high quality). This reflected the challenge to schools to sign the document off within 10 days of the PEP meeting. At the end of the academic year 86.7% were rated Green and 13.3% Amber. Challenge continues to schools.

Pupil Premium Plus Funding

- 31 In 2022-23 (Financial Year) our total PP+ budget was £1,896,670. Schools were allocated £1,800 of the government allocation of £2,530), in 3 instalments. In total, approximately £1,4 million was provided directly to schools during the 2022-23 academic year to support their work with children in care. Recovery Grant Premium for eligible pupils was given directly to schools and usage was monitored in the PEP. The School Led Tutoring Grant was used to fund packages of support

delivered to some of our most vulnerable learners, including those not attending school, in our children's homes, leaving secure and those at risk of permanent exclusion. Additional funding was also sent directly to schools to fund multiple packages of support.

- 32 A significant amount of the PP+ funding given to schools is spent on academic achievement and progress. 56% of PP+ funding given to schools is used to support individuals with academic progress and achievement. 22% is used by schools to support emotional health and wellbeing.
- 33 The top sliced PP+ is used to buy a variety of Service Level Agreements to support children looked after and allow schools to act in a timely manner when a need is identified. In 2022-23 (Financial Year) Durham Virtual School retained approx. £500,000. The full report gives a detailed account of how this was used.

Durham Virtual School Team

- 34 The casework team of eight has been able to maintain the high level of support for our young people and challenge for schools. The agreement by Durham County Council to increase capacity of the virtual school from September 2020 has improved our offer to schools and allowed a more targeted response to our children. This has also led to improved communications with Social Workers and Carers. The increasing numbers of children coming into care and the inclusion of Post 16 has led to caseloads more than 130 in some cases. This has influenced the decision to appoint a bespoke Post 16 Caseworker
- 35 We have continued to provide advice to parents of PCLA and those on SGO, thus meeting our duties as a Virtual School.
- 36 The report alludes to the extended role of the VSH for Ever6 Children with a Social Worker (CWSW).

Virtual School Areas for Development

- 37 The key priorities for 2023-24 have been identified through consultation, data analysis, response to the gaps COVID19 has created, the return of formal examinations and the inclusion of EYFS and Post 16 in the ePEP system. Some of our priorities will roll over from 22/23 due to the needs of children looked after which are ongoing.

Continuing Priorities

- 38 We will continue to support more children to achieve higher levels / greater depth in KS2 and KS4 through early intervention and release

catch up funding during the Autumn term. Close the gaps emerging in KS1.

- 39 Continue to increase the focus on attendance for children looked after. Working in partnership with the Attendance Improvement Team (AIT) and Social Care to promote a positive ethos around attendance.
- 40 Continue to support Post 16 to reduce NEET data through a collaborative approach and by drawing upon the expertise within the Progression and Learning Team.
- 41 Further strengthen links with CICC, working towards the Investing in Children Award.
- 42 Continue to contribute to an increasingly integrated and joined-up process with health and social care teams to provide a holistic and cohesive approach to support readiness to learn whilst ensuring children looked after have stability in their education setting. Ensure a robust system is in place to increase school stability through monitoring and challenge.
- 43 Further embed the work for Ever6 CWSW through extended role of the VSH having a strategic lead with this cohort of children.

New Priorities for 23/24

- 44 Develop work with Children's Homes to support school anxiety and other barriers to education. Drawing on the expertise of the therapeutic services we make available to schools.
- 45 Appoint a Previously Child Looked After Officer to strengthen the Virtual Schools offer.
- 46 Develop ways of working with the UASC cohort to offer a package to support earlier access into education.
- 47 Develop a cohesive system for children looked after who require Statutory Assessment and require an EHCP. Produce a process that everyone can work towards to ensure needs are met in a timely manner.

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that top priority is given to creating a culture of high educational aspirations and strives for accelerated progress and age-related attainment or better for children looked after.

Finance

De-Delegated funding from Maintained Primary Schools is no longer available to the Virtual School to provide additional behaviour support in school through the Behaviour Intervention Team. Additional burdens grant determination funding of £78,068 has been allocated to Durham to support the work of the Virtual School head with previously looked after children for 2022/23. Additional catch-up funding and National Tutoring Funding to support gaps in learning for some children looked after to be distributed to schools in addition to Pupil Premium Plus.

Consultation

Ongoing consultation with schools through briefings and a designated teacher network meeting. Consultation with young people through the CiCC.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

As a public body, the Council must consider the Equality Act 2010, a consolidating Act which brings together previous Acts dealing with discrimination. Decisions must be reviewed for potential impact on persons with "protected characteristics".

Climate Change

We adhere to the Council Policies on climate change.

Human Rights

It is the right of the child to a high-quality PEP that identifies their needs, sets targets, and uses PP+ appropriately to support their educational outcomes. It is their right to have their voice heard and contribute to matters that affect them in education. We acknowledge the Children Promise and have highlighted this in the Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Policy we have shared with schools and settings.

Crime and Disorder

Young people who do not access full-time education are more at risk of criminality, CSE or criminal exploitation across county lines. The VS supports

all children looked after to find the right setting to support their needs and promotes high attendance in school.

Staffing

The seconded post for developing the offer for previously looked after children has become a permanent post of children looked after and PCLA Manager. The increase of 4 children looked after PEP caseworkers to 7. A children looked after Front Door Manager to strengthen the offer to schools and children looked after. Due to the increase in the numbers of children coming into Care and the pressure this places on the number of cases the existing Caseworkers manage it has been necessary to use the top sliced PP+ to appoint a new children looked after PEP Caseworker. Due to our duties to the Post 16 cohort, we have also used this funding to appoint a bespoke Post16 Caseworker This will have implications upon the wider offer to schools as we review our existing Service Level Agreements.

Due to the additional responsibilities given to Virtual Heads from September 2021 both the children looked after /PCLA Manager and Front Door Manager have taken on extra responsibilities to allow the VSH to meet the requirements of the role and accountability for children in need / child protection. They now have an upgrade in salary funded through Grant 31.

Accommodation

The Virtual School Team is based at the Education Development Centre, Spennymoor. The Inclusion Base is placed at Lanchester and is accommodated within the building known as The Bridge.

Risk

The extended offer to schools and settings relies upon Pupil Premium Plus. Staff costs are funded through the corporate budget; however this does not apply to the three members of staff at the Inclusion Base. The Base is an asset and supports children looked after in times of crisis and helps to avoid permanent exclusions. Currently these staff are funded through Pupil Premium Plus.

Procurement

The contract with Welfare Call was renewed in March 2022. It would not have been wise to change the provider for the ePEP system due to the system we have established with schools and Social Care.

Appendix 2: Virtual School Annual Report 2022/2023

Attached as a separate document.



Durham Virtual School

Annual Report 2022-2023

Durham Virtual School champions care-experienced children and young people. We support parents, corporate parents, carers, schools, and educational settings to support looked after and previously children in care so that they:

- attend a school or setting which best meets their needs.
- have their needs identified and supported through multi agency working
- feel safe, happy and settled.
- attend regularly.
- make progress and achieve.
- have a voice that positively impacts on the services they receive.
- have stability in home, care, and education placement.
- receive good advice and guidance to progress into further education, employment, and training and, where appropriate, university.
- are well-prepared for adulthood.
- receive recognition for their achievement and have their successes celebrated.

In May 2022 Durham were visited by OFSTED, the Virtual School was part of the ILACS. We were proud to be part of the inspection and were given the opportunity to share the work we do with the HMI for Education.

The outcome was that Durham is Good with Outstanding Leadership and Management. The report said “The virtual school is championing the educational needs of children in care. Personal education plans are used effectively in order to identify and support their educational needs. Children’s aspirations are being recognised and supported. When required, additional support is given to ensure that children meet their full potential”.

This year the annual report reflects the way in which we have continued to work together with Social Care, Health colleagues and SEND and Inclusion to ensure this offer to our children and young people continues and improves to ensure they are supported to better outcomes and a brighter future.

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The Virtual School September 2022 to July 2023

This year the virtual school has continued to support schools and settings to achieve the best outcomes for Children looked After (CLA). In most cases the children have adjusted back into a regular routine and structure of the school day. The Virtual School has worked with carers, social workers, and schools to ensure that children were able to access the best possible education available supported by some of the therapeutic interventions we are able to offer through our connections with colleagues within the Local Authority (LA). The following information summarises how we have supported Children Looked After during this time:

- All schools have had access to the Recovery Grant Premium and School Led Tutoring funding.
- We encouraged schools to make use of their “Catch Up funding” to support the gaps that had emerged during Covid 19 and to support formal examinations. We also liaised with Durham Works to ensure all Year 11 had an exit Personal Education Plan, (PEP) which reflected future aspirations and Year 13 knew what their next steps were.
- A range of learning materials were issued to children including Curious Kids and Story Time packs. Children in Year 2 to Year 8 were given access to Fiction Express to support their reading and comprehension. Every child received a log in for the Anspear Learning App
- The virtual school provided a transition workbook for children in year 6 who were moving to secondary school in September 2023. A copy was sent out by post to every year 6 child and their Carer.
- The virtual school has worked with the Behaviour and Inclusion Panels to support transition for CLA in Year 6 and to identify the correct Alternative Provision (AP) when a child is in crisis and struggles to access their usual school.
- The virtual school has developed a therapeutic offer for schools to help support children who have experienced trauma in their lives to support them with their educational experiences. This provides training focused on Attachment and Trauma for all Designated Teachers who have a Durham CLA on roll in their school. Delivered via Teams this allows schools outside of the LA to attend.
- Staff from the virtual school liaised with various local authorities to secure education for several of our children who are placed out of area. This often brings additional challenges when a child has an EHCP.
- The Caseworkers continue to attend PEP meetings. This has helped to identify any extra interventions a child may need to prevent further gaps in learning developing, to support emotional wellbeing and to identify enrichment opportunities for CLA. Increasing caseloads bring additional challenge to this offer to schools.
- Caseworkers have supported year 11 students and have worked with the bespoke CLA PEP Caseworker and DurhamWorks to provide a smooth transition onto Post 16 pathways.

- Every child who has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) also had a SEND Caseworker
- Year 11, 12 and 13 received support from a Specialist Senior Progression Adviser, who is seconded to the Virtual School. This has developed relationships with Social Care, the Young Peoples Service (YPS) and Post 16 providers.
- Post 16 CLA and Care Leavers attending College continued to be part of the Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Pilot Project which led to an improvement in attendance and engagement.
- Relationships with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) developed further. We have allocated them a small amount of funding to enable CLA to apply directly to the CiCC for small grants when they have an interest they wish to pursue. They have called this The Education Fun Fund. They have had ninety –seven applications for this grant.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are a focus for the Virtual School (VS) and require a bespoke package to meet their educational needs. Securing appropriate education has at times, been a challenge this year with limited resources and access to ESOL places in colleges.

Executive Summary Children in Care 2022-23

In line with DfE reporting, the examination data reported in this document is based on those children and young people who have been continuously looked after for a minimum of 12 months from April 1st, 2022, to March 31st, 2023 – hereafter referred to as the reporting cohort. This executive summary covers statutory school age, whilst the body of the report also includes Early Years and Post 16.

Summary statement

At Durham Virtual School we believe we are making a difference to the education of children and young people in care. This report can evidence educational outcomes and progress from entry to care this year evidenced through formal examinations for all Key Stages. Good attendance, few suspensions, high aspirations, strong vocational and academic pathways, and effective preparation for adulthood continue to be evident for CLA. This is all brought about by a virtual school team which advocates strongly and loudly for our young people through collaborative working. Over the last three years we have insisted on an increasing focus on the education of children in care within schools and with our partners and raised the profile of the work of the virtual school, developing very close working relationships with headteachers and Designated Teachers. The strengthening of the virtual school has allowed us to have increased capacity to attend PEP meetings and work more directly with social workers and schools to achieve the best outcomes for CLA.

Headlines

Progress

Key Stage 1

Of the 32 pupils in the reporting cohort all but 2 attended a mainstream school, with 2 children with an EHCP attending Local Authority Special Schools. 91% of this cohort attended a school rated good or better by OFSTED. Although only 2 children were in a Special School, 53% of the children had some SEN, with the most common primary need being Cognition and Learning. These children will be closely monitored to ensure their needs can continue to be met within their setting, and our PEP Caseworkers will work closely with Schools and SEND Caseworkers to ensure children and schools have access to the funding and support they need.

This cohort of children have been impacted by covid and this will have affected outcomes. However, girls have again outperformed boys in all areas and closer analysis will be required to establish where we can continue to support this cohort to make progress in line with their peers. An area for development in KS1 will need to be ensuring children make expected progress and that adequate support is in place to ensure the children can achieve greater depth across all areas, as only a small number of children achieved this grade in the 2023 assessments.

Key Stage 2

There were 58 children in Year 6 who would have been in the reporting cohort due to length of time in care. However, of these 1 was not on a school roll and 2 were educated in Scotland so therefore the cohort was readjusted. Of the 55 pupils remaining in the reporting cohort, 50 attended mainstream primary schools with 4 attending a special school and 1 in an Independent Special School. The majority (87%) attend primary schools in Durham with 7 being placed outside of the area.

85% of children attended schools rated Good or better, and only 2 children were in a school graded Requires Improvement. The remaining 6 pupils were in schools without Ofsted judgements, as they were Academy Converters who have yet to be inspected.

Although only 5 children attended a special school, 47% of the reporting cohort had SEN, with 12 of those having an EHCP. Of those with an SEN Support Plan or EHCP, most children had a primary need related to Social, Emotional and Mental Health, though all of these were managed in a mainstream setting. Boys in this cohort are more likely to have SEN, with 69% of those with SEN being male.

Outcomes this year are above both the Durham and National figures from 2022 and more in line with those from 2019, although we are still slightly below in Reading and in matching R/W/M. We expect this to be an impact of the disruption caused by Covid. Reading continues to be supported by the Virtual School across KS1 and KS2 by our commitment to provide all children in the primary phases with regular access to high quality reading materials and packs.

Key Stage 4

There were 96 children in Year 11 who would have been in the reporting cohort due to length of time in care, however only 68 were counted in the outcome measures. The remaining young people were not counted for a variety of reasons, including a high number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, some not on a school roll at the time of census, being educated out of their year group or in a school outside of England. The reporting cohort was therefore adjusted accordingly. However, of these 24 were not on a school roll and 2 were educated in Scotland so therefore the cohort was readjusted.

Of the 68 pupils remaining in the reporting cohort, only 46 attended mainstream secondary schools, 8 attended maintained or academy special schools, 6 attended an independent special school, 3 were in a Pupil Referral Unit, 1 was in Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision and 1 had no school. Those in the Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision had access to a GCSE curriculum.

76% of children attended schools rated Good or better. Only 7% were in schools graded Requires Improvement. A further 11 pupils were in schools without Ofsted judgements, as they were in Academy Converters who have yet to be inspected.

32% of young people were not in Mainstream Schools, and although all followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs, 21% of children did not access GCSEs in Maths and English, therefore impacting on the outcome measures. Although roughly in line with 9-5 in basics grades last year, we saw a drop in the 9-4 EM basics measure. This was impacted by those not accessing GCSE curriculum due to their SEN, but improving this will remain a focus for next year. Continued monitoring and targeted use of support will be used to ensure our young people can access the help they need to achieve their potential.

Attendance and Suspensions/Permanent Exclusions

We are disappointed to report that there has been one permanent exclusion of a Durham child in care during this academic year. We have sought alternatives to permanent exclusions and caseworkers have been successful in working with social workers to engage young people in appropriate education settings and schools. Working with the four secondary Behaviour Panels we are usually able to avoid a permanent exclusion before a crisis point is reached. Thirty-Four CLA received at least one suspension 2021/22 which represented 5.3% of the CLA cohort. This academic year Forty CLA experienced at least one FTE, 5.2% of the CLA cohort. The overall attendance for children in care has remained consistently high since 2014. Local data for CLA has been obtained from schools and providers between September 2022 and July 2023. The local overall attendance for the whole CLA cohort was 91.4%. This shows a dip of 0.6% against last year.

Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus

2019/20 saw the introduction of the Welfare Call electronic PEP system, and since that date we have undertaken a yearly review of the document and process. A cycle of constant reviewing has led to an efficient process, allowing easy access for the Caseworker to monitor the quality of the PEP and the progress of our young people. During the last year we have been using the enhanced Welfare Call Analytics system to ensure quick and easy access to key data. The PEP also allows monitoring and oversight of progress and Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) use. Schools were encouraged to use Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) to support CLA as individuals but also as a Durham cohort. Progress and attainment data suggest that this is having a positive impact across the key stages. We have encouraged schools to use the funding effectively to meet emotional and social needs as well as focusing on the academic outcomes. We have challenged schools where we considered the spending of PP+ was not having an impact, or where it was unclear how a cohort spend was being used.

1. Introduction

As Virtual School Head for Durham County Council, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for Durham Virtual School 2022/2023 (Academic Year), which details our work, alongside our partners and the wider local authority to improve progress, outcomes and ultimately the life-chances of the children in our care.

The body of the report will outline successes, areas still to develop and priorities from Early Years to Post 16 and up to 25 where appropriate.

The report this year will reflect the achievements of our children in Early Years, Key Stage 1 and 2 SATs and GCSE and A Level examinations for Year 11 and 13.

2. Durham Virtual School

2.1 What is the role of the Virtual School?

The role of the Virtual School Head and the Durham Virtual School team is to take the lead in promoting the educational achievement of looked after children, and from September 2018, that of previously children looked after (PCLA), both are included in the scope of this report. We set aspirational targets and then work closely with schools, the wider local authority, and other partners to deliver the best experience possible so that children in care and young people can achieve success, thereby improving their life chances.

From September 2021 the role of the Virtual school Head was extended to cover all children who had a Social Worker, thus Children in Need and those on a Child Protection Plan. This has involved the VSH raising the profile of this group of children with the Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools and working with the Attendance Improvement Team, and the Behaviour and Inclusion Lead Officer to raise the profile of this cohort in school through the lens of visibility. Multi Agency working has also been a large part of the scope.

We want our children in care to attend, engage with and enjoy school so that they can achieve. We are working hard to ensure their voice is heard and has impact, this is an area for further development as we encourage children to become more active in the PEP (Personal

Education Plan) process. Children are often reluctant to attend the PEP meeting, this is a focus for development.

Our priorities feed directly into, and support:

- Corporate Parenting Strategy and Key Lines of Enquiry
- The Children and Young People's Strategy for Durham
- Durham Promise

As a virtual school we strive to build on the very strong provision in place for all children in care. This year we have continued to build on our strengths, using accurate and detailed data gathered at PEP meetings along with knowledge of the children and young people to target support more effectively. We have streamlined our allocation of the PP+ grant to schools to enable forward planning and we have focused on supporting schools to be more attachment and trauma aware. We intend to continue with our focus on reading and supporting schools to address our priorities for reading. This is a focus area for OFSTED and of high importance for the Virtual School. We will support schools to help CLA to catch up as we move forward into the next academic year.

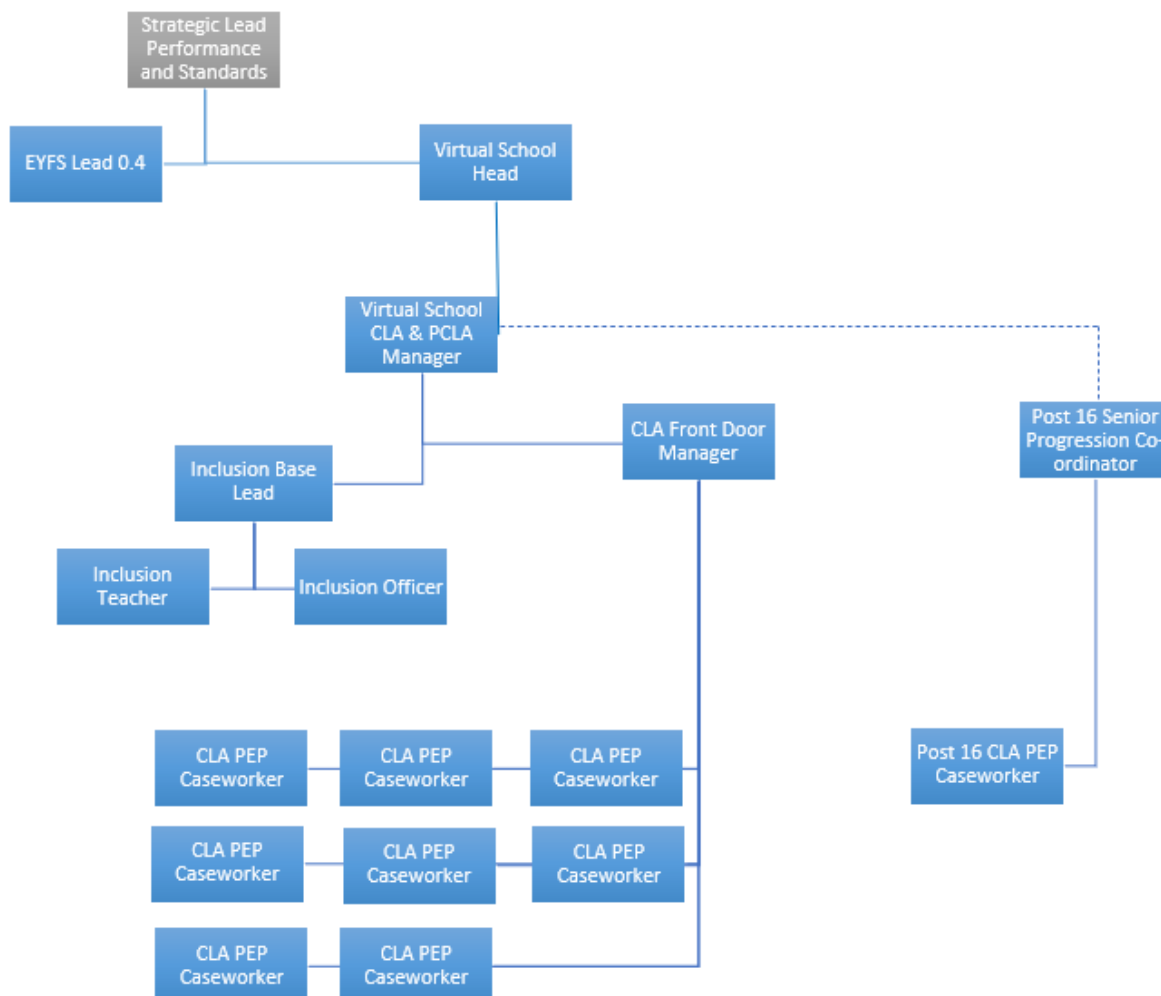
The casework team of eight have been able to maintain the high level of support for our young people and challenge for schools. The team have continued to attend meetings virtually. The agreement by Durham County Council to increase capacity of the virtual school from September 2020 has improved our offer to schools and allowed a more targeted response to our children, however increasing numbers of children coming into care have resulted in increased case numbers. This has led to improved communications with Social Workers and Carers.

2.2 Who are we?

The Virtual School Head (VSH) is an experienced school leader who sits within the Education Service and works in partnership across teams. Durham is a member of NAVSH and the VSH attends the local and national networks. The whole Virtual School team sit in Education. The Virtual School Head is supported by a CLA and PCLA Manager who has taken on additional responsibilities.

We work in close partnership with teams in Social Care, Health, Early Years, Progression and Learning and the wider Inclusion Team. The VSH attends a wide number of strategic meetings. The direction of the Virtual School Operational Group has changed during this academic year developing into a group who identify and look for solutions to the different challenges the virtual school is facing. The focus this year has been upon the processes involved when a child is identified with SEN.

2.3 Structure Diagram



2.4 Who do we report to and how are we held accountable?

The virtual school contributes to Education Durhams Operational plan. In addition to this there is a bespoke development plan for the VS. We use this to carry out regular self-evaluation against the priorities in the plan. The VSH reports to the Head of Service for Education and Skills through Education SMT and meets with the Head of Social Care. The VSH also attends the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) and presents the annual report and education outcomes. Line management and reporting for the wider team sits within Education. The virtual school reports to a subgroup of the CPP which is chaired by the vice-chair of the CPP and comprises elected members, local school leaders and representatives from care. We attend the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership group and report into this group three times a year.

3. Profile of learners and numbers on roll at the virtual school

3.1 How many learners are on roll?

As of the start of term in September 2023, there were 717 learners (R – yr. 11) on roll of the virtual school. This is an increase of 9% on the same time last year. There were a further 227 post 16 (an increase of 35% from 2022) and 91 pre-school (Nursery 1 and Nursery 2). In total there were 916 children and young people on the roll of the Durham Virtual School.

Table 1: Number of CLA by Year Group 21 July 2023

Please note this is a different date to the section above.

	Male	Female	Total	% Total	Male2	Female3
R	29	16	45	4.99%	64.44%	35.56%
1	26	19	45	4.99%	57.78%	42.22%
2	24	17	41	4.55%	58.54%	41.46%
3	30	20	50	5.54%	60.00%	40.00%
4	40	25	65	7.21%	61.54%	38.46%
5	29	30	59	6.54%	49.15%	50.85%
6	33	30	63	6.98%	52.38%	47.62%
7	42	22	64	7.10%	65.63%	34.38%
8	34	25	59	6.54%	57.63%	42.37%
9	40	36	76	8.43%	52.63%	47.37%
10	51	45	96	10.64%	53.13%	46.88%
11	64	39	103	11.42%	62.14%	37.86%
12	85	31	116	12.86%	73.28%	26.72%
13	13	7	20	2.22%	65.00%	35.00%
TOTAL	540	362	902		59.87%	40.13%

3.2 What is the profile of the statutory school age cohort?

At the end of July 2023, there were 766 children of statutory school age (SSA) in care. This is an increase of 13.3% from the same time at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year. There is roughly an equal primary / secondary split. 48.04% in primary and 51.96% in secondary. The gender split across SSA and Post 16 is 40.13% female and 59.87% male. Although there are consistently more boys of this age in care, this number has increased slightly from last year. The more marked difference, however, is in P16, where 72.06% are male and 27.96% are female.

22.34% of children and young people (R - yr. 11) attend out of county schools; this is an increase of 2.67% from last year. 77.66% are educated in schools based in County Durham. The increase in children attending provisions may in part be a reflection on the difficulty in placing children in Special Schools appropriate to their need. The remaining children are placed across 47 other local authorities, although a significant number of these are placed in our neighbouring local authorities.

As of July 2023, 76% of the cohort attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better and 11.6% attended a school with a grade of Requires Improvement or below. To avoid additional trauma, we do not routinely remove a child from a school which becomes inadequate unless there was an exceptional reason, but we do provide additional scrutiny and academic support if required. 92 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion.

At the end of July there were 29 UASC children of statutory school age on the roll of the VS. 23 of whom were placed out of county for care reasons. This brings additional challenges when seeking a school placement. 20 were in Year 11, all of whom had a Post 16 destination organised.

Any maintained school in Durham that is not judged to be Good or better will receive extra scrutiny and the LA will work closely with these schools to improve provision. As a virtual school we provide additional tuition and scrutiny to all schools, as required.

3.3 How well do we promote placement and school stability?

School and placement stability are crucial to provide the security children in care need in order to learn. We operate in line with the Childrens Commissioners vision for CLA and the vision that every child should be on the roll of a school and attending*. The report issued in May 2023 stated that 2.7% of looked after children are not in school. In Durham 1.6% of children are not on a school roll. This does not include the UASC cohort. This brings additional oversight from the VSH and managers within the VS.

We advise social care teams to maintain stability in the education setting. Where change is unavoidable or is advisable, the casework team ensure there is enhanced transition, and that all key information is shared. For an emergency placement, caseworkers work closely with the school to support integration. Those children who need to move schools during an academic year are supported by additional planning and, if required, funding to meet their needs. The VSH should be consulted on any potential school move.

*[Looked after children who are not in school | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/reports-and-publications/looked-after-children-who-are-not-in-school/)

3.4 How many of the cohort have Special Educational Needs (SEND)?

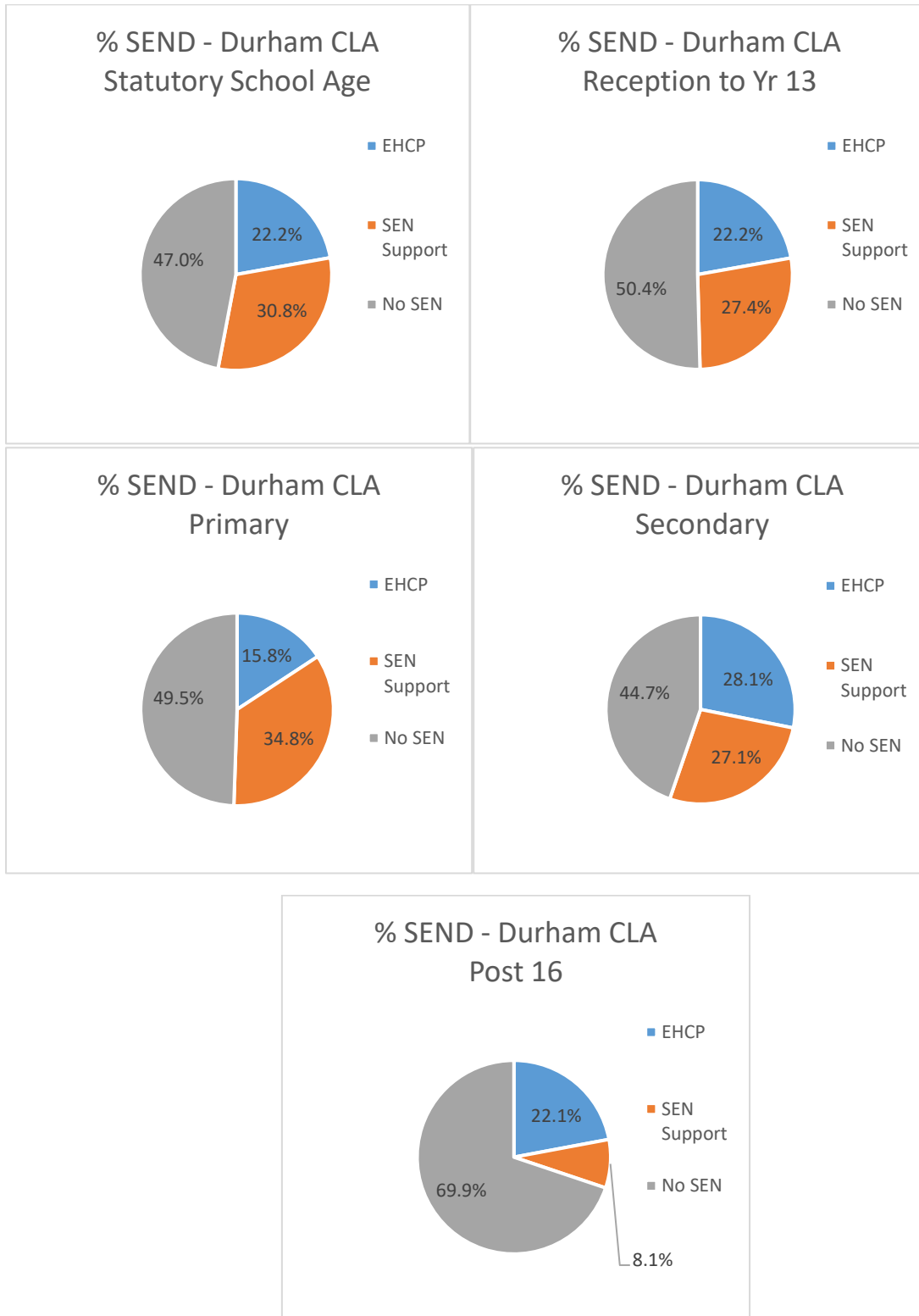
Children in care (12 months at 31 March) are over three and a half times as likely to have an identified SEN and eight times more likely to have an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) than all children. Nationally in 2022, 56.3% of children in care had a special educational need compared to 15.6% of all children. In Durham 2022-23, 53% of children and young people (R-Y11) had identified special educational needs; 22.2% were supported by an EHCP whilst 30.8% had school SEN support plans (K code). There is less than 1% decrease in all areas from the figures for the same time last year.

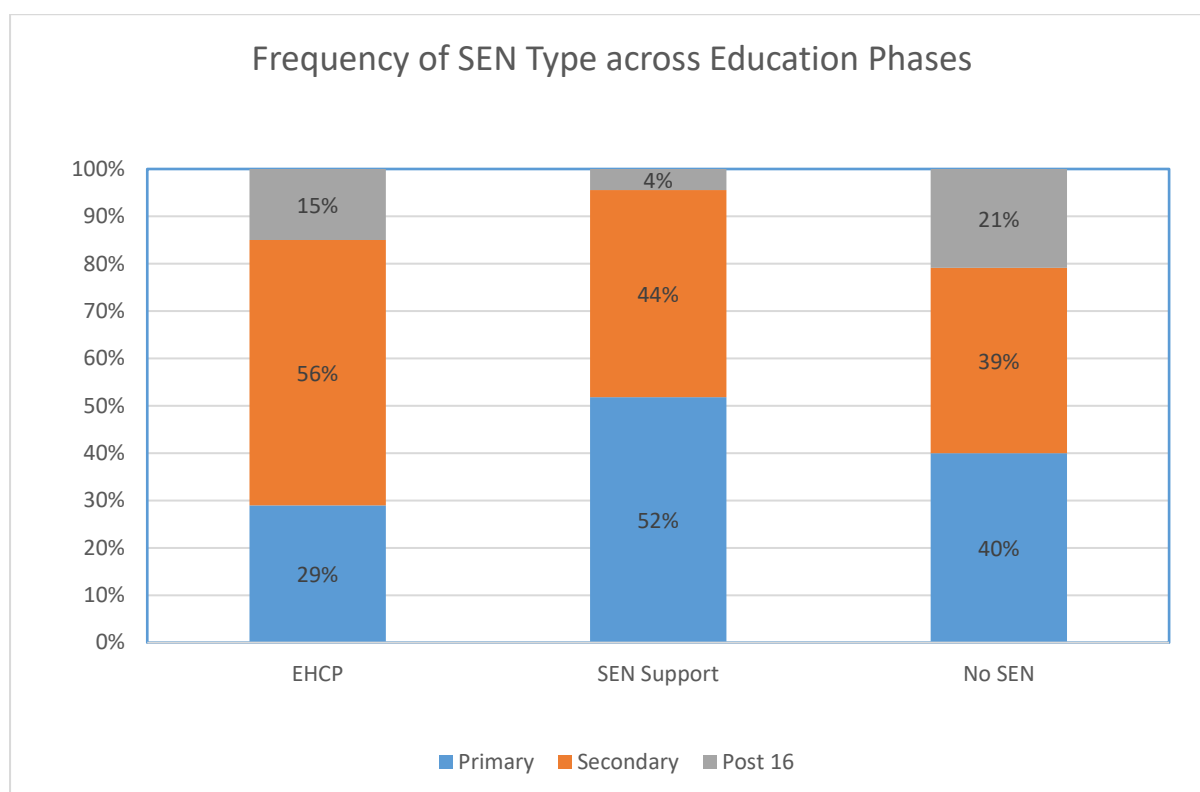
Table 2: Number of CLA with SEND by year group July 2023 (for academic year 2022-23)

Year	EHCP (E)	SEN Support (K)	No SEN	Total
R	6	9	30	45
1	4	17	24	45
2	7	16	18	41
3	4	18	28	50
4	13	26	26	65
5	10	27	22	59
6	14	15	34	63
7	15	21	28	64
8	17	16	26	59
9	27	20	29	76
10	29	28	39	96
11	24	23	56	103
Total SSA	170	236	360	766
12	25	9	82	116
13	5	2	13	20
Total P16	30	11	95	136
Grand Total	200	247	455	902

The percentage of Durham children looked after with an EHCP nearly doubles from primary to secondary school, although the percentage of children with an SEN Support Plan is higher in Primary than secondary. A challenge for Durham Virtual School is to ensure that the needs of children with a SEN Support plan are known and strategies put in place on their transition to secondary school. It is important that our Caseworkers monitor the child's progress closely to ensure the child's SEN needs are being adequately addressed and supported by the plans that are in place. Wherever possible the DT/SENCO from the secondary school will attend the Summer PEP.

Table 3: Charts to show the rates of SEN across different phases.





3.5 What are the primary needs of our cohort with an EHCP?

Nationally children in care are 3 times more likely to have social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) as their primary need than their peers. This is reflected in Durham where 46% of all of our young people with SEND (R-Yr11) have SEMH identified as their primary need. SEMH needs across the Durham children looked after cohort has decreased over the past 3 years from 54% in 2019. However, there remains a significant difference of 20% in the levels of SEMH needs between secondary and primary aged Durham CLA. The level of SEMH need amongst Secondary age young people is 55%. In Primary, SEMH is the primary need for 35% of children, an increase of 4% from last year.

It is important that schools work effectively with Durham Virtual School to ensure that the needs of children looked after are fully recognised and that a child presenting with attachment-based behaviours, for example, is provided with the correct level of therapeutic support. The Virtual School are developing the offer it has for Durham schools to include a higher level of therapeutic support for children and young people having difficulty in engaging in learning due to the impact of the trauma and challenge and uncertainty that they have faced prior to and after entering care including:

- Additional support for KS1 and KS2 children at risk of exclusion from their school
- An enhanced support agreement with the Local Authority EWEL Team
- Increased School counsellor support for Durham children looked after.

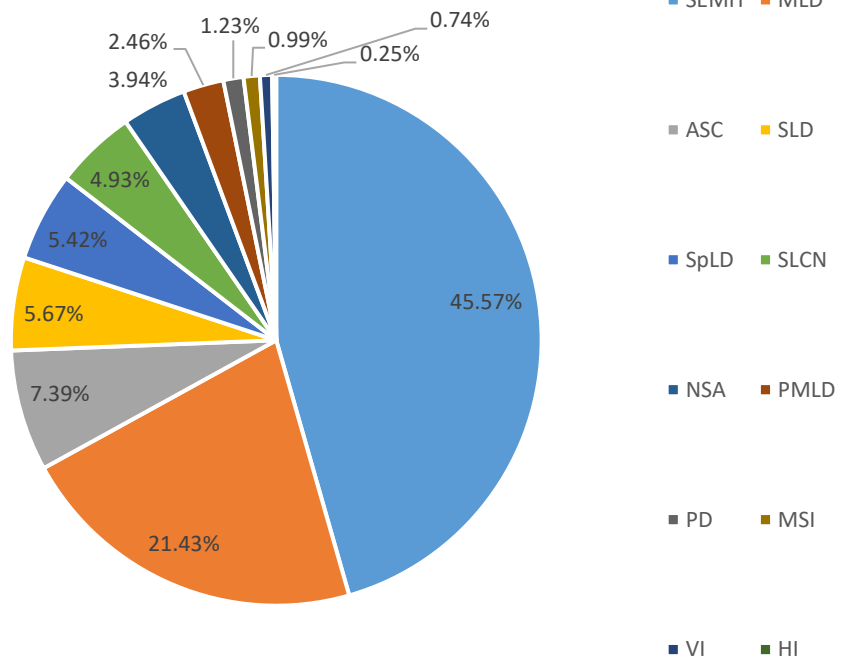
- Enhanced support from a Senior Educational Psychologist
- Additional training for Designated Teachers delivered by the Full Circle Team

Our casework team has expertise in SEND and offers strong advice and support in all areas of SEND. To meet increased need we have continued to use the PP+ grant to maintain our counselling offer and continue to work with Full Circle to ensure schools have access to advice and support through a dedicated helpline. We also provided dedicated Occupational Therapy assessment to help to support our children in care with SEND.

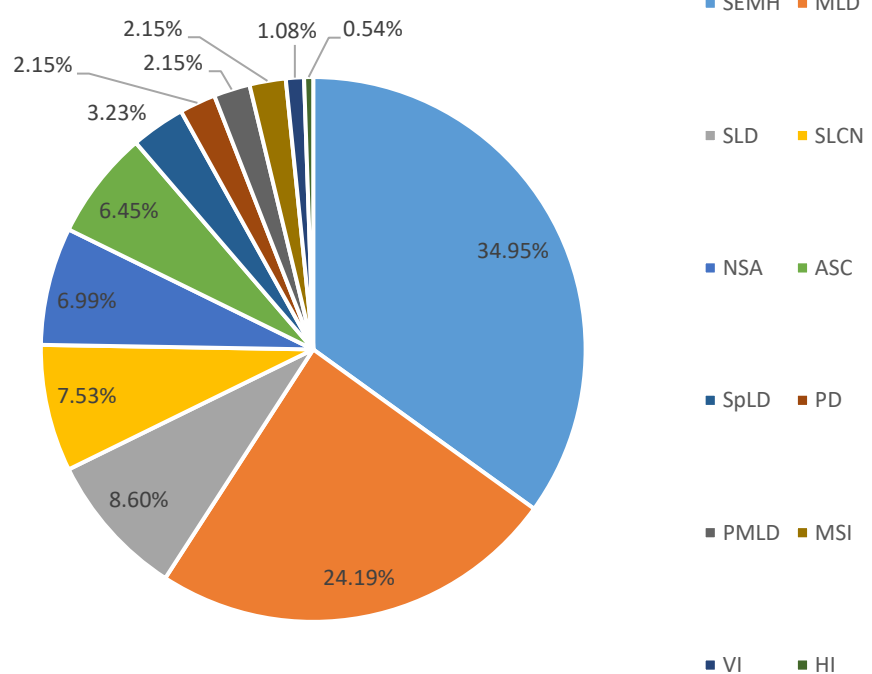
Table 4: Charts to show primary need of CLA with EHCP

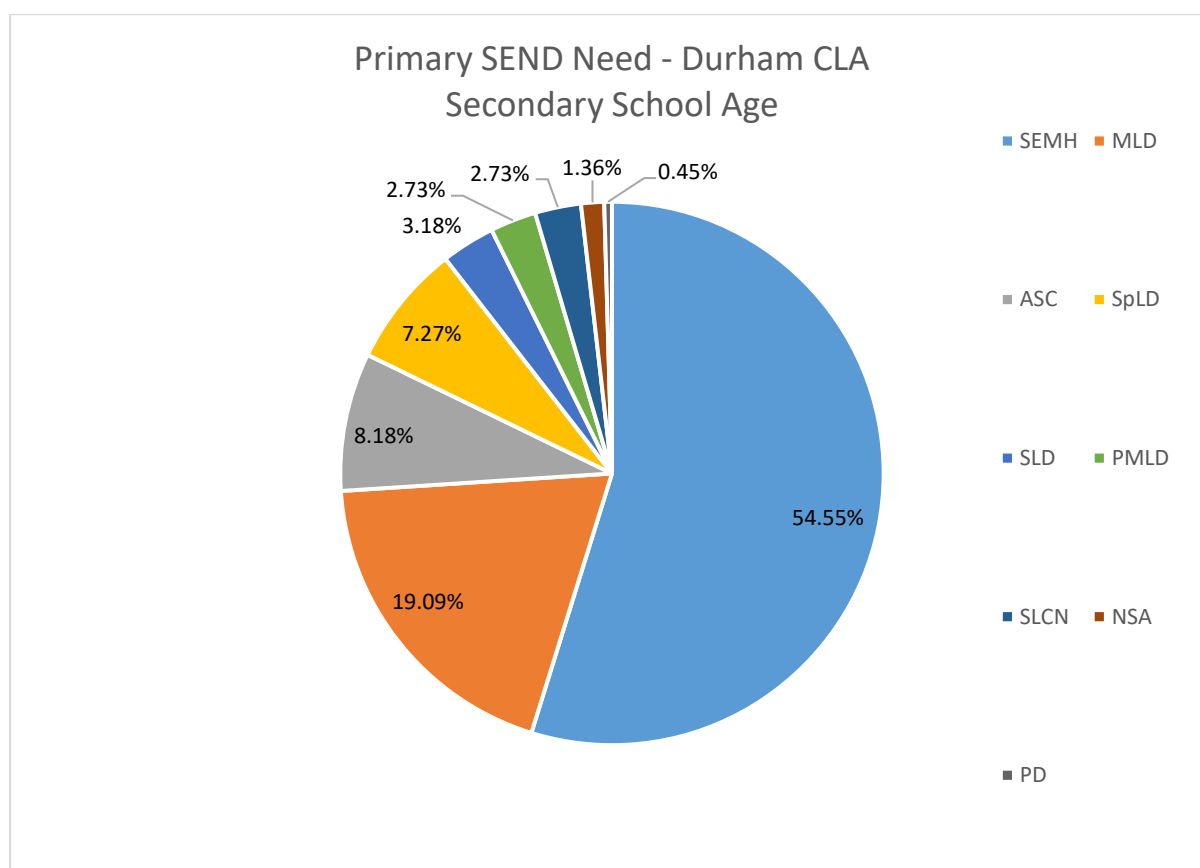
Cognition and Learning - Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)
Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
Communication and Interaction - Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
Cognition and Learning - Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)
Communication and Interaction - Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need (NSA)
Cognition and Learning - Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)
Sensory and/or Physical Disability - Physical Difficulties (PD)
Cognition and Learning - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)
Sensory and/or Physical Disability - Multisensory Impairment (MSI)
Sensory and/or Physical Disability - Visual Impairment (VI)
Sensory and/or Physical Disability - Hearing Impairment (HI)

Primary SEND Need - Durham CLA Statutory School Age



Primary SEND Need - Durham CLA Primary School Age





3.6 How do virtual school caseworkers support children in care with identified special educational needs?

Virtual School Caseworkers advise schools to make sure that the SEN graduated approach is followed. This includes:

- considering the needs of the looked after child and exploring with the school how they can be supported at the PEP meeting.
- ensuring the SENCO is involved in discussions round SEND needs and provision.
- working with the Designated Teacher to ensure an SEN Support Plan is put in place if required.
- supporting the school in requesting additional top up funding through the High Needs Budget if required to meet need. In these cases, it is important to scrutinise the child's needs and identify if this is better support than an EHCP, being mindful to the fact that TUF does not transfer with the child if their care placement breaks down and they are moved outside of Durham.
- being part of key discussions to identify if a child requires specialist provision to meet their needs.

- working closely with the SEND Caseworker to identify the correct provision for a CLA with an EHCP
- Where there are difficulties requesting statutory assessment through schools, working closely with the social worker to complete a professional/parental request for statutory assessment.

3.7 How do we collaborate to support children in care with identified SEN?

The virtual school caseworkers liaise closely with the SEND Casework Team who are responsible for the statutory processes to assess and review the EHCPs for each child. We work closely with social workers and increasingly closely with health teams within this process. The Local Authority makes available additional financial support to Durham schools for children and young people supported by a SEN Support Plan. The Virtual School Caseworkers are aware of the process of request and work with schools to ensure Durham children looked after are offered the best possible support. This year we have developed our working relationship with the SEND Team and now hold regular meetings with senior managers to ensure key issues and concerns are addressed. This work has meant we have been able to establish a process for requesting assessment and keeping the EHCPs of our more complex young people in the control of Durham Local Authority. We have also established improved working processes and all our Durham CLA who have a Durham Plan now have a named SEND Caseworker.

4. Duties to previously looked after children

4.1 How do we meet our duty towards previously looked after children?

We adhere to the statutory guidance from 2018 which arose from the Children and Social Care Act 2017 to provide information and advice to parents, kinship carers, and educators or to signpost this. We have promoted this with schools, provided advice and training for designated teachers and governors. From April 2019, we allocated the DfE additional funding provided to local authorities to a temporary specialist manager post so that there is some dedicated time within the team to support the education of previously looked after children. The remit of this post is to develop a sustainable offer for previously looked after children through building links with agencies and teams and raising the profile of this cohort in schools. The post was extended in March 2020 and then incorporated into the new virtual school team as a permanent post in September 2020. We have ensured that other teams within the authority are aware of the priority admission for these children and have briefed social care managers about effective use of PP+.

Support for schools has ranged from advising on staff training to supporting with the effective use of PP+ and how to report it. Support for parents and kinship carers has been on an individual basis to respond to queries and requests for support to ensure their child is accessing the right support for their needs. We have had a significant amount of contact from families and schools seeking advice around the use of PP+ funding, access to support and

mental health services, the use of adoption support funding, academic support and becoming attachment and trauma aware. The Virtual School Management team work together to ensure queries are answered quickly and that parents, carers and school are signposted to appropriate guidance and support. The Virtual School Head attends Local Authority SGO Panel meetings to ensure appropriate advice is offered on educational matters.

We have worked closely with the Kinship Care team, to support guardians to understand the child's entitlement to PP+ and how to inform schools of the child's situation. This must be recorded on the October census each year for a child to be entitled to the premium. We have produced a frequently asked question sheet to make the process simpler when contacting school. The relevant information is on the virtual school website, and we continue to provide advice and support. All Designated Teachers are regularly reminded of their duty of care for previously looked after children at DT Network Meetings and training events. We also ensure they receive reminders about identifying potential students and informing Parents/Guardians of the benefits of identifying their children to the school. The Virtual School ensure new DT's are informed about their duties to support PCLA at the New to Role training.

4.2 How many previously looked after children of statutory school age are there?

According to the Spring Census 2023, there are currently 999 previously looked after children on roll in Durham schools. This reflects an increase of 11 children from January 2022.

The breakdown is:

Category	Number of pupils
Adoption	433 (444 Spring 2022)
Child arrangement order	88 (70 Spring 2022)
Special guardianship order	445 (442 Spring 2022)
Residence order	33 (32 Spring 2022)

Not all adoptive parents want schools to record the status of their children, so these figures reflect those who have shared the information in the October Census. The data is from the census for all schools (maintained and academy) in January 2023. This shows an increase of 11 children, based upon the joint figure of 988 last year. This is a rise of 1.1% from 2022, compared to a rise of 13.4% from 2021.

Whilst these children are not on the roll of Durham Virtual School and we do not monitor the progress of individual children through the PEP system, this extends the reach and remit of our support and advice for those of statutory school age to over 2023 children and young people.

5. Achievement and Progress

As our cohorts are small and vary in terms of their profile from year to year it is difficult to measure trends over time. The PEP's are used as a tool to monitor progress for CLA, whilst key year groups have management oversight through monitoring meetings with the CLA PEP Caseworker.

5.1 Early Years Update

Provisional EYFS Profile data for 2023 notes that 47% of Durham's children who were looked after achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD) compared to 30% regionally and 40% nationally. Due to the changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) and the break in reporting during the pandemic this figure should not be compared with Durham's performance in previous years. These findings are based upon 19 of the 20 Children in the reporting cohort for 2022/23 with 9 children achieved a GLD. Of the remaining 10 children - 4 had SEND, including 2 children with EHCPs.

The findings differed significantly depending upon gender. Of the 19 children, there were 9 girls and 10 boys. 3 of the 10 boys (30%) achieved a Good Level of Development compared to 6 of the 9 girls (66%)

When reflecting upon EYFSP outcomes for our children looked after these three aspects of the statutory guidance should be fully considered

The cohort size is statistically small.

It is important to note that The Early Years Foundation Stage progress is a measure of a child's attainment at the end of the reception year and that the Early Learning Goals are based upon typical child development at the age of 5. It does not demonstrate a child's progress or learning journey from their starting points.

It is a description of the child's level of development at that point in time and does not mean that the child has 'failed'.

For those children who are 'emerging' in one or more of the Early Learning Goals additional information will be needed and any barriers to learning recognised, which will subsequently aid planning, identify appropriate support strategies and interventions for the child, as they transition through into year 1.

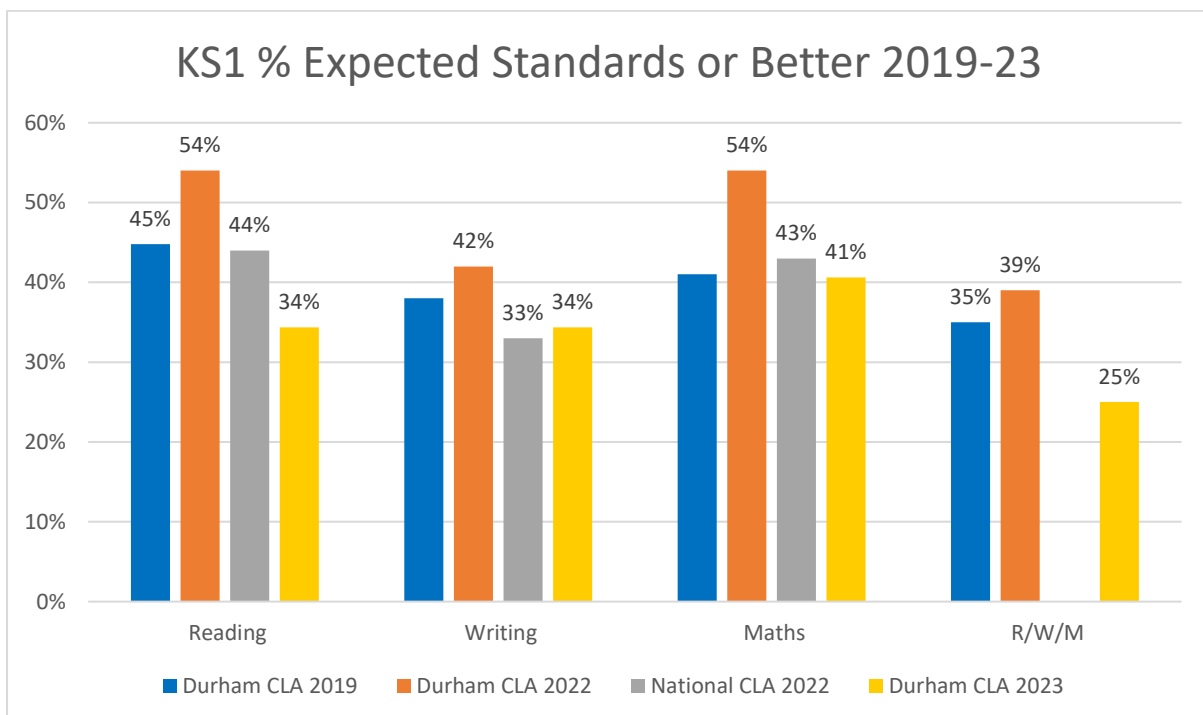
Further to this, it is important that any adverse childhood experiences are acknowledged as well as the negative impact of the pandemic for this cohort of children in terms of limited social experiences and opportunities for therapeutic involvement and recovery.

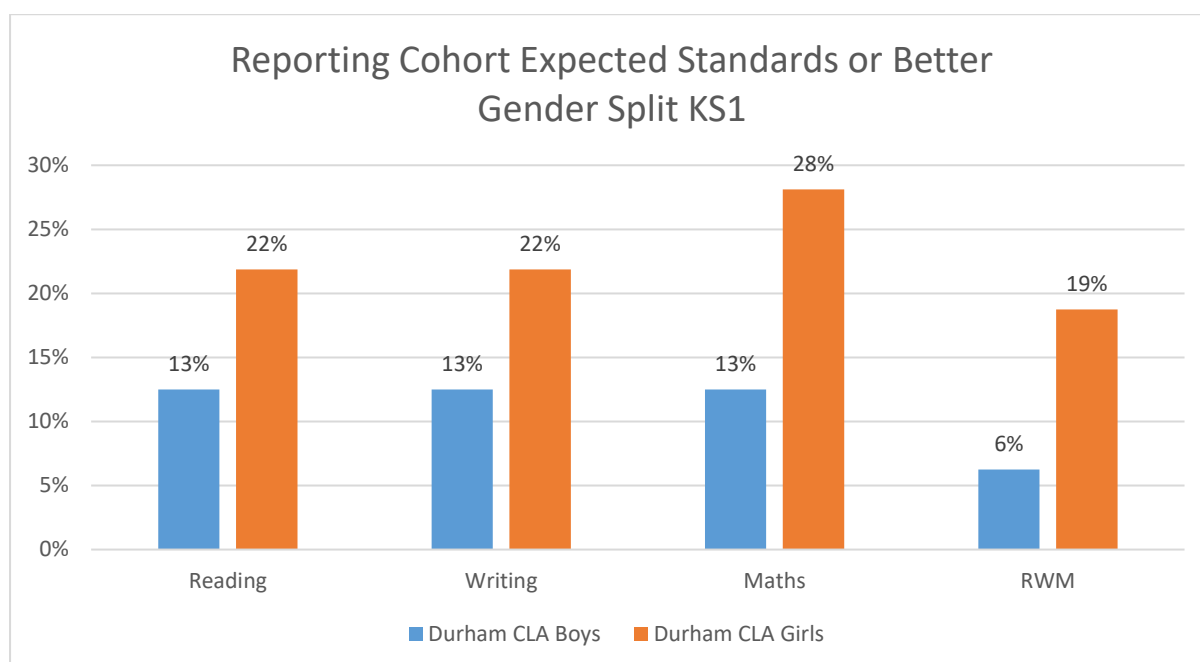
5.2 How well do our children do at KS1?

The reporting cohort in Year 2 was 32.

- There was a roughly equal split of 15 girls and 17 boys.
- 75% of the cohort attended schools in Durham.
- 17 (53%) children had SEN, and increase of 15% from last year, with 6 having an EHCP and 11 with an SEN Support Plan
- The most common Primary need in SEND was Cognition and Learning

Table 5 KS1 Expected Standards or above





This cohort have had a disrupted education since prior to starting school. Although schools have been trying to close the gaps in knowledge due to missed schooling, a lack of opportunity to learn through play and to socialise with peers during the pandemic will have affected this cohort. Unfortunately, this cohort has not performed as well as expected and are compared to both Durham and National figures from 2022, are below in all areas, apart from in writing where children performed slightly better than National CLA from 2022. Compared to other year groups however, this is a reasonably small cohort and comparisons are difficult, particularly as 3 young people were not entered for SATS due to their SEN needs. There is also a significant number of children in this cohort with SEN, with a high proportion of cognition and learning needs, which will have impacted on outcomes.

Although outcomes were below expected, our girls have performed better than the boys across all areas, with quite significant differences in maths and in matching the reading, writing and maths expected, where girls were 3 times more girls achieved expected standards. However, only 4 children achieved Greater Depth in Reading, 1 in Writing and 1 in Maths; this is an area that will require further analysis. We will continue to monitor this cohort closely to ensure continued efforts are made to catch up on missed learning. The Virtual School continues to provide high quality reading materials across KS1 & KS2, and these children will also have access to learning Apps purchased through the top sliced Pupil Premium Plus.

5.3 How well do our children do at KS2?

The reporting cohort in Year 6 was 55; there were a further 3 pupils who would have been in the cohort but 1 was not on the roll of a school and a further 2 were educated in Scotland at the time of the tests so the cohort was adjusted accordingly. There were 29 boys and 26 girls in the reporting cohort.

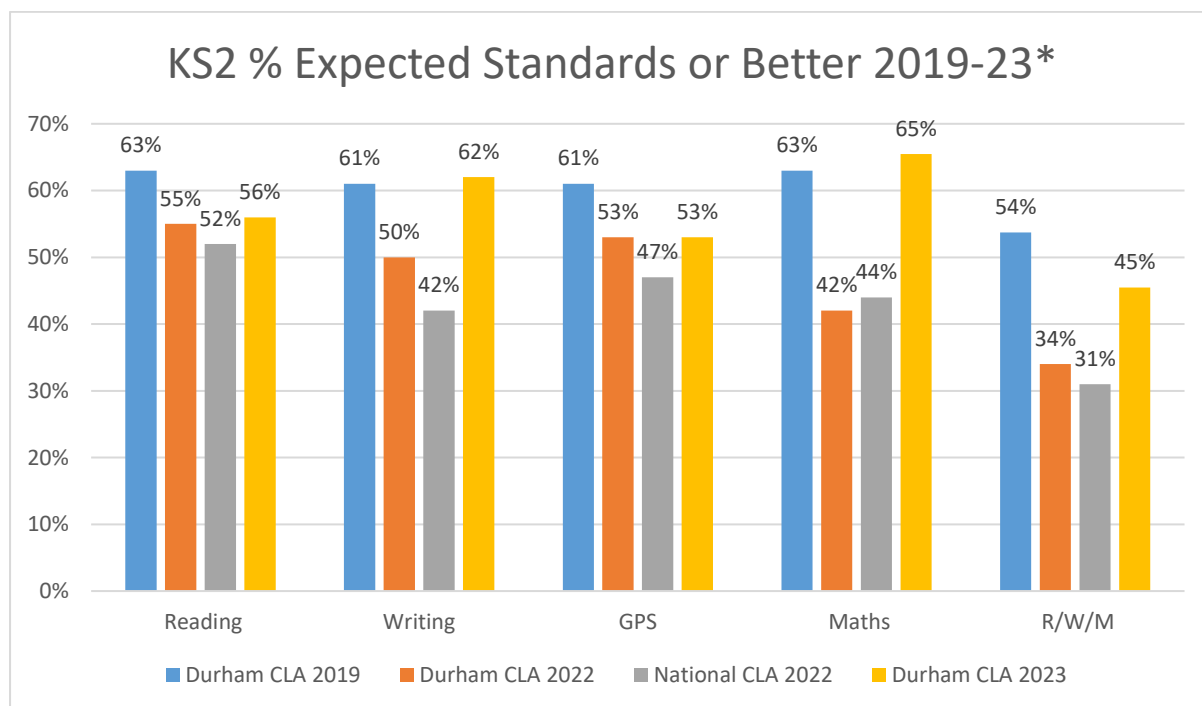
- 48 of the reporting cohort attended schools in Durham, with the other 7 attending schools outside of the local authority.

- 26 (47%) children had SEN, with 12 having an EHCP and 14 with an SEN Support Plan
- Nearly 4 times more boys than girls had an SEN Support plan.

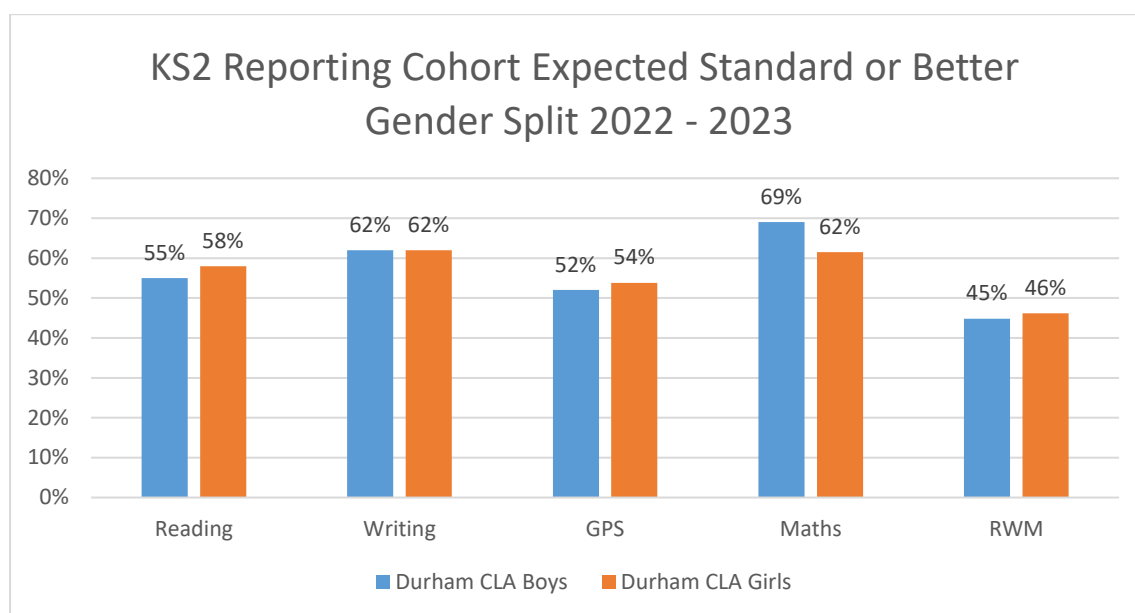
We expect CLA will need additional support to help close any emerging gaps created through the Pandemic. This is a focus for every PEP meeting. To support reading we continue to provide reading packages through Fiction Express.

This is the second year of formal testing since 2019 due to the pandemic. The children in this cohort have had a disrupted KS2 education and many have missed a significant amount of formal learning. The cohort have improved in all areas from 2022 other than GPS where we have maintained 53%. Outcomes are more in line with those from 2019, prior to the pandemic, although with changing cohorts and numbers it is difficult to make comparisons. Although we remain above National CLA figures from 2022, there are still improvements to be made for those achieving RWM at expected standards or above.

Table 6: KS2 Expected Standards or above.



*SATS outcomes are not available for 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 due to Covid measures.



Our girls have performed better or in line with the boys across all areas apart from Maths, where 69% of boys achieved the expected standard compared to only 62% of girls. However, it is also worth noting that the boys account for 69% of the children with SEN. For those children not entered for SATS, their PEPs have shown that they are following an appropriate curriculum in line with their academic and SEN needs. Children are monitored closely to ensure they are making expected progress in line with their ability.

Maths is an area for development as not only did boys outperform girls, but where 13.8% of boys achieved Maths at Greater Depth (110+ Scaled Score), no girls achieved this measure. Although achieving roughly in line across all other measures, we will continue to monitor this year's cohort as we need to improve the numbers achieving greater depth across all areas to ensure our young people have the best chance of achieving their potential.

Although we had hoped for more young people achieving greater depth and matching across Reading, Writing and Maths, given the disrupted education they have experienced and through increased monitoring, we highlighted there may be issues. However, PEP Caseworkers remain focused in PEP meetings to ensure gaps in learning are being addressed through appropriate support funded through catch up funding and Pupil Premium Plus. There is also an increased focus on getting children ready to learn through provision of additional social and emotional support and help to close the gaps in learning due to Covid with increased monitoring in Year 6 along with additional 1:1 support being offered to this cohort. We also continue to support reading through the provision of the Curious Kids Reading packs and access to Fiction Express for Years 1 through to Year 8. Additional learning Apps have now been implemented, and we will identify how we can further support development in Maths.

5.4 How well do our young people achieve in English and Maths KS4?

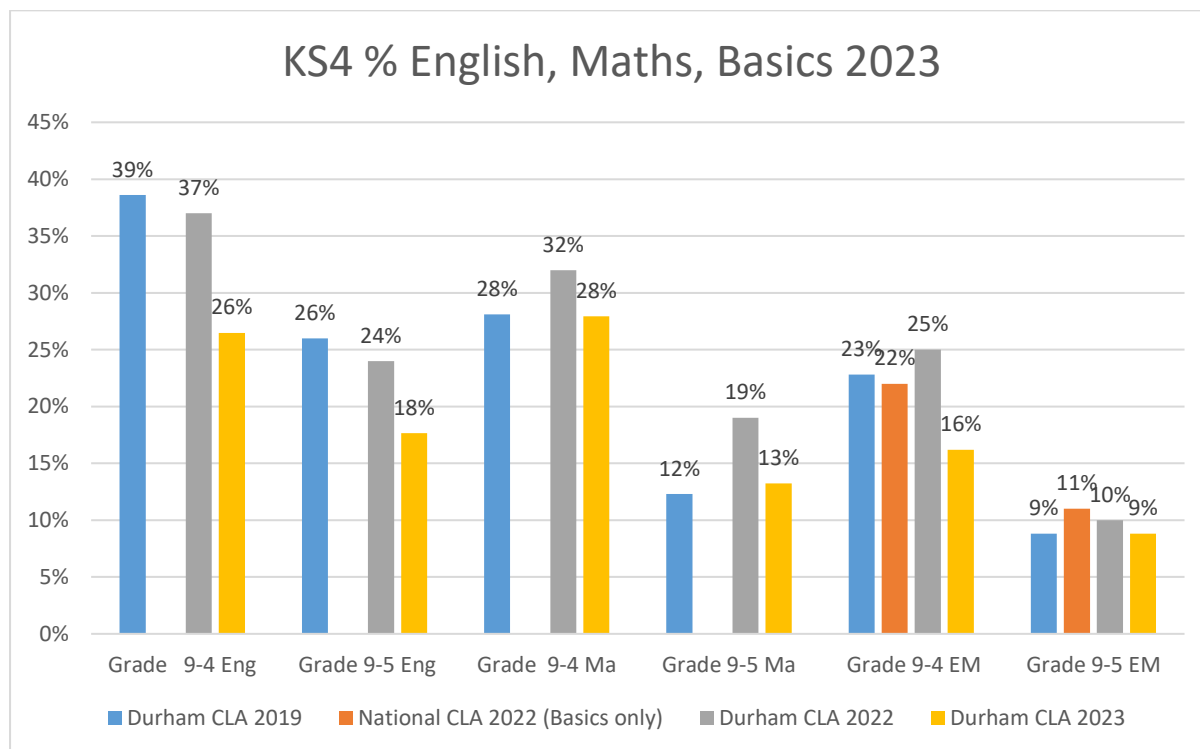
There were 68 young people in the reporting cohort with a full cohort of 79. There were 30 young people who were not reported on for outcome measures as they met certain criteria, including:-

- Not being on school roll at time of census
- Educated outside of England.
- Entered care after 30th April.
- UASC

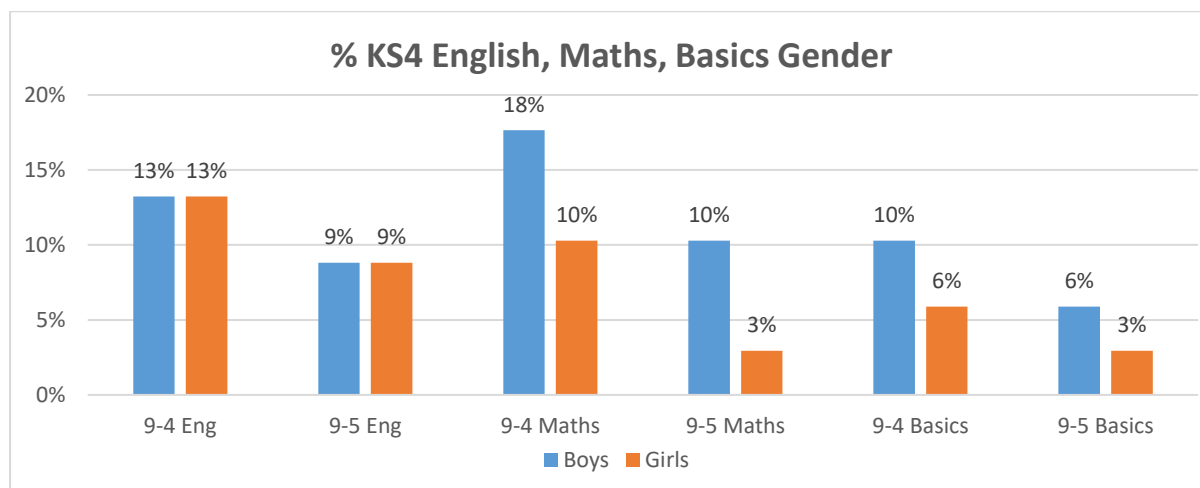
Of the 68 young people in the reporting cohort:-

- 50% girls and 50% boys
- 37 pupils had identified SEN, which is 54% of the reporting cohort
- 20 of these had an EHCP, which is 29% of the cohort
- Only 68% were in a mainstream school, although this is 14% more than in the previous year.
- 12% of young people attended a Maintained/Academy Special School, with a further 10% placed in an Independent Special School. The percentage in independent special school has doubled from last year.
- 15 young people followed a curriculum that did not include GCSEs in Maths and English. Of these, all but 2 had SEN, with 8 having an EHCP. All followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs including teaching in literacy and numeracy.
- 3 young people (4%) attended an Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision.

Table 7: KS4 English, Maths and Basics Outcomes



*Figures from 2020 and 2021 are not included as these were based on Teacher/Centre assessed grades due to Covid measures.



Although there was a drop in the basics grades across all areas over the last two years, it is important to note that the 2020-2021 results were based on Centre Assessed Grades. The disruption caused by Covid affected several areas including having a significant impact on young people’s gaps in learning and social and emotional mental health. Schools worked

hard to prepare pupils academically and emotionally for exams and utilised catch up funding, including Recovery Grant Premium, School Led Tutoring and Pupil Premium Plus to support their young people. Unfortunately, this year we have seen a drop in all areas, though this is most noticeable in English grades. Despite a significant amount of support offered by schools, this cohort of young people, we believe, remain impacted by covid. We have had a significant number disengaged from education and a continued number of persistent absentees, which we believe have impacted on grades. One area which has remained consistent is our young people achieving Maths and English at grade 9-5. In this area, 9% of our cohort achieved this, which is only 1% less than last year.

A significant number of young people had SEN and 29% had an EHCP, with most of these young people attending special schools. 13 young people with SEN did not follow a curriculum that included GCSE qualifications in Maths and English, therefore impacting the results of this cohort. However, all education pathways for our young people are carefully monitored by the Caseworkers at the PEPs so we are confident they are following appropriate an appropriate curriculum matched to their needs and ability.

Results indicate that unlike in previous years, where our girls outperformed boys significantly in English, this year performance at both 9-5 and 9-4 was equal in English. However, boys significantly outperformed girls in Maths, with only 3% of girls achieving the higher measure compared to 10% of boys. Additional monitoring and intervention will be considered this year to ensure appropriate support and intervention is available to all the Year 11 cohort, with a particular emphasis on matching the higher grades in the Basics.

5.5 How well do our young people achieve and participate at KS5 / post 16?

The tables below are a breakdown of the destinations and academic levels being studied by our Care Leavers, taken as a snapshot each year in February as this is usually considered to be a settled period for post 16 destinations:

Table 8: 16-17 CLA and CL –Qualifications (CCIS data)

Destinations (of Cohort Participating)	February 2023	February 2022	February 2021	February 2020
Overall	99	92	113	110
Working Towards <L2	43%	36%	43%	44%
Working at L2	29%	23%	22%	17%
Working at L3	23%	36%	27%	36%
Unconfirmed	4%	5%	7%	3%

There has been an increase in the numbers of Care Leavers working below level 2 compared to 2022 figures with 2023 now showing a similar picture to 2020-21 proportions.

Conversely, this year fewer of the cohort are working at level 3. It can be deduced that the return post COVID to GCSE exams as opposed to predicted grades could be in some way linked to this, however further analysis over the coming years will be required to evidence this.

There has been a sustained rise in the % of those working at level 2 over the past 4 years, which is a positive and steadier trend to show increased attainment levels for our CLA and CL cohort in post 16 education.

Further action has been undertaken to enhance the measures that are in place to support Care Leavers into apprenticeships and for Durham to ensure its responsibilities as a Corporate Parent are being met. Activities include, working with HR and teams to ringfence opportunities and better preparing Care Leavers to apply through individual tailored support by DurhamWorks.

DCC is committed to growing its own workforce and supporting Care Leavers to gain DCC apprenticeship opportunities. During 2022, 10 Care Experienced Young People were supported to apply for vacancies, including 3 ringfenced opportunities. 4 were successful, 3 of whom started in September 2022 with 1 YP deciding to go to college instead of taking up an apprenticeship offer. In 2023, 5 Care Experienced YP are continuing with their apprenticeships with an extra 2 starting in September. We also support our young people into apprenticeships in the private sector, with another 6 Care Experienced young people in non DCC apprenticeships. We continue to promote the bursary available which was increased to £3000 in August 2023.

5.6 What were the destinations for our young people?

We will receive the data for 2023 leavers in November. Please see below destinations for 2022 leavers:

Table 9: Destinations Post 16 2022

Destination	No of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL	% of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL
Total Participation in Learning (including custodial sentence)	5120	92.9	46	76.7
Re-engagement	18	0.3	0	0.0
Temporary Break in Learning	35	0.6	0	0.0
Employment without training	105	1.9	4	6.7

NEET Total	171	3.1	10	16.7
Other including destination not known	62	1.1	0	0.0

Table 10: Destinations Post 16 2021.

Destination	No of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL	% of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL
Total Participation in Learning (including custodial sentence)	5246	93.3	42	75
Re-engagement	17	0.3	0	0.0
Temporary Break in Learning	28	0.5	3	5.4
Employment without training	90	1.6	0	0.0
NEET Total	162	2.9	11	19.6
Other including destination not known	76	1.4	0	0.0

Table 11: Destinations Post 16 2020

Destination	No of 2020 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2020 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2020 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL	% of 2020 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL
Total Participation in Learning (including custodial sentence)	4907	93.9	48	76.2
Re-engagement	34	0.7	2	3.3
Temporary Break in Learning	19	0.4	4	6.3

Employment without training	49	0.9	0	0.0
NEET Total	169	3.2	11	17.5
Other including destination not known	53	1.0	0	0.0

The tables above demonstrate the numbers entering and maintaining post 16 placements as of 1st November for the past 3 years. The trends are continuing to show a drop in the % of young people entering EET for the whole population, however the CLA cohort is bucking this trend with a positive rise in the % entering EET for 2023. The drop in wider EET and the continued rise in “Employment without Training” can be seen because of the changing nature of the Labour Market and the “cost of living” crisis. Post Covid there is increased access to shorter term, lower paid, less skilled jobs, and the need to gain paid employment from young people can be both attractive and encouraged by a household needing the income.

For the first time we have seen a rise in the “Employment without Training” destination for the Care Leaver cohort in year 12, previously this wasn’t changing in line with the wider cohort which could have been down to several factors inc. lack of confidence and the tendency to be dealing with more complex issues often making it more difficult to gain and maintain employment at this age. However, with increased support from DurhamWorks those who have wanted “employment only” have been enabled to do so through new initiatives such as DurhamWorks Futures, without these the young people would not be working and would likely be NEET or Temp Break in Learning.

5.7 How do we support our young people to ensure they participate in EET?

Table 14 shows the proportion of Children Looked After and Care Leavers aged 16+ who are: Participating in Learning, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), and whose current destination is Not Known.

Table 15 data is based on the destinations of young people (CLA/CL) who are academic age 16 and 17. The keeping in touch and confirmation of destinations of all 16- and 17-year-olds is a key statutory duty placed on each Local Authority by the Department for Education. The three-month average (December-February) is used annually as a key performance measure by the Department for Education and is included in national scorecards available on the Explore Education Statistics (EES) portal.

Both data sets are based on the March snapshot over the last three-year period. March is considered a representative and stable snapshot, by the Department for Education, and used widely for monitoring participation rates.

It is worth noting that the cohort size for certain groups of identified young people e.g., Children Looked After, Care Leavers etc. are small, which can have a disproportionate impact on percentage.

Table 12: 2020 –23 Participation in EET of Children Looked After / Care Leavers aged 16 +

	March 2020 %	March 2021 %	March 2022 %	March 2023 %
Education	46.8	47.5	44.3	37.3
Employment	10.2	10.9	15.8	17.8
Training	5.7	3.5	4.7	4.9
Re-engagement Activities	10.2	3.1	3.6	11.1
Total EET	72.8	65.0	68.4	71.1
NEET	23.4	30.7	27.3	27.9
Not Known	3.4	2.3	2.8	0.0
Combined NEET and Not Known	26.8	33.1	30.0	27.9

Table 13: Time Series: Participation in EET of Children Looked After / Care Leavers aged 16-17

	2019/20 %	2020/21 %	2021/22 %	2022/23
Education	61.2	62.8	52.3	51.3
Employment	4.8	6.8	13.5	14.1
Training	4.6	6.6	5.3	5.1
Re-engagement Activities	12.3	3.3	4.1	12.6
Total EET	82.9	79.5	75.2	83.1
NEET	16.7	20.5	24.6	16.9
Not Known	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.0
Combined NEET and NK	17.1	20.5	24.8	16.9

Participation in EET was much improved in 2019/2020, this was just prior to the onset of COVID-19 in which a lot of practical support and provision described was in place with high levels of engagement from young people. The biggest change was the higher numbers on re-engagement activities offered through DurhamWorks, all very bespoke and tailored to the young person's needs. This resulted in a reduction in NEET and increase in EET.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 then happened which led to several factors affecting the progression of our Care Leavers. There was a reduction in the availability of re-engagement and training provision owing to lockdowns, the detrimental impact caused by the ongoing changes to their education settings during this time, a reduction in face-to-face support from DurhamWorks

despite the continuation of contact in a virtual manner and the overall rise in levels of anxiety and Mental Health difficulties making it more difficult to access provision. A rise in the numbers of those NEET was a direct result with this being mirrored across other vulnerable groups and the generic wider population.

2022/23 data is showing extremely positive signs with an increase in EET rates, which exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The NEET and Not Known rate has also reduced to below pre-pandemic levels.

There has been a noticeable change in the destinations of those in EET. A significant increase in “Employment” with and without Training; this trend is reflected both across the region and nationally. Following much consultation with neighbouring and other national Local Authorities the “Employment without training” appears to be a result of the change in Labour Market trends and issues with the “cost of living” crisis as described above.

DurhamWorks ensures Care Leavers receive additional support to enable them to progress into education, employment or training. This is a European funded, Durham County Council led partnership programme to support young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). All Care Leavers have access to a named adviser who provides on-going information, advice, guidance, and support. There are also bespoke activities available to motivate young people and to develop their skills for employment.

DurhamWorks and Social Care teams hold monthly EET surgeries where internal staff to DCC can work closely in partnership to discuss Care Leavers, their educational status and future employment/progression opportunities. EET quarterly meetings are also held with wider external partners, including providers in attendance to ensure a strong focus on support and the ability to ensure opportunities are maximised for our Looked After and Care Leavers in terms of their progression.

Across phases 1 and 2 of our DurhamWorks Programme (2016-2021), 689 young people who have been supported have identified themselves as being Looked After or a Care Leaver. Of these, 618 young people have completed the Programme (89.7%). Of those completions, 70% progressed to education, employment or training with the largest proportion progressing to employment (56% of all progressions) followed by 32% into education or training, 10% gaining an accredited qualification and 1.2% awaiting a finalised start date for their entry to EET.

Since the start of 2022, a further 192 participants have identified themselves as either Child Looked After or a Care Leaver. 108 have exited their supported intervention with 60 progressing to education, employment, or training on leaving (55.6%). A further 84 are continuing their support on DurhamWorks currently and their exit destination remains pending. The overall progression data for 2022 – 2023 as above will be evidenced in next years Virtual School report.

DurhamWorks also has a specific focus on engaging with employers to develop a range of opportunities for young people, including Care Leavers, from work experience placements through to paid employment. As part of the offer to employers, there is the opportunity to take part in ILM’s through GroundWork North East a delivery partner and a DurhamWorks Grant, both provide financial support to small and medium sized enterprises to enable them to employ young people.

County Durham Adult Learning and Skills Service (DurhamLearn) delivers a range of programmes which support young people, including Care Leavers, to develop skills and gain qualifications to progress into employment. Programmes include Apprenticeships as well as

Traineeship and Supported Internship programmes specially designed to meet the needs of those who have Special Educational Needs, including Care Leavers.

The Sessional Employment Programme (SEP) is another example of an initiative to improve opportunities and support for Care Leavers Post 16 which offers the opportunity of paid work experience in DCC. The focus is very much on the young person with opportunities being identified which meet the talents, interests, and aspirations of individual Care Leavers on a bespoke basis. A Sessional Employment Co-ordinator (0.5 FTE) facilitates the programme and is currently actively working with Care Leavers, YPAs, HR and DCC Service Managers to deliver the programme.

Progress includes the development of joint recruitment processes with HR, the design and delivery of a programme of support to all young people on the programme; briefing sessions delivered to senior managers across DCC by senior managers within Social Care and Progression and Learning to enhance the role of DCC as a corporate parent and promote opportunity creation; the agreement for a “Benefits Calculator” to be completed by Welfare Rights for all on the programme.

21 Care Experienced Young People have completed the Sessional Employment Programme in a variety of placements across DCC. Examples of placements being, HR Department, Farming in Protected Landscapes, The Gala Theatre, UASC Team, Peterlee Pavillion, Meadowfield Stores. The variety of service areas highlights the commitment across DCC to corporate parenting responsibilities. Young People can be in EET and NEET to access SEP. YP in education are accessing this programme to complement their studies and enhance their CV's. Recruitment is ongoing.

The implementation of “any time” travel bus passes - was something our Children in our Care have told DCC that they would prefer to have rather than the limited travel passes with restricted times for those in full time education. Progression and Learning worked together with partners and local FE Colleges to implement the ‘top up’ bus passes for Children in our Care. This was initially for those in Years 12 and 13 attending the four County Durham based FE Colleges. In 2022-2023 Academic year we extended this to include all Academic Year groups, therefore, older Care Leavers attending a Durham college benefited too.

Young people are now better off financially and able to travel with no restrictions – allowing better access to services, the community and leisure activities. Some examples include more young people able to gain part time employment as the cost of travel was initially seen as a barrier and increased confidence of independent travel through accessing more bus services and alternative routes, not just the ‘known’ college route.

DurhamWorks Programme for Schools - provides extra support to aid progression. Its aim is to better prepare and support young people on leaving school. It is an ESF funded provision (commenced Sept 2020) targeted to support those at risk of becoming NEET of which those Looked After and Care Leavers are a key priority group. Support includes access to groupwork within an educational setting to better prepare them for leaving school; individual careers guidance with a Progression Adviser; attendance at PEP and EHCP reviews to ensure partnership working; intensive mentoring support to help transition into their chosen post 16 placement; and support to ensure the post 16 placement is maintained.

For the academic year 2021/22 a total of 1,204 year 11 school leavers identified as being at risk of NEET (not in education, employment, or training) were supported. Out of the 72 in year 11 with Looked After or Care Leaver status 49 (68.1%) were supported, out of the remaining 23 (31.9%), 5 of these were not initially referred but are being supported by the

DurhamWorks post 16 team and the remaining are in contact with our other support services including Durham County Council's Sessional Employment Programme. 85.7% of those who received support from DWPfs progressed into a place in education, employment, or training (1st November 2022).

For the academic year 22/23 we have engaged 1,419 year 11s who we are still supporting, further data on the outcomes for these will become available over the autumn term 2023 and will be evidenced in next year's Virtual School report. .

Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Pilot (PPP+) - DCC were 1 of 30 LAs across 9 regions of England that were successful following a bid to take part in an initial 6-month pilot from October 2021-March 2022. The pilot was successful and was extended to the 2022-2023 Academic Year. The focus is Year 12 and 13 Care Experienced Young People who were attending a college setting with the aim to support sustainment in EET by providing Pupil Premium Plus funding similarly to the way extra funding is provided to school age children who are in our Care. The aim was to strengthen links between Virtual Schools, YPS, Progression & Learning and Colleges providing support to students to prevent disengagement. NEET Young People can become part of the pilot.

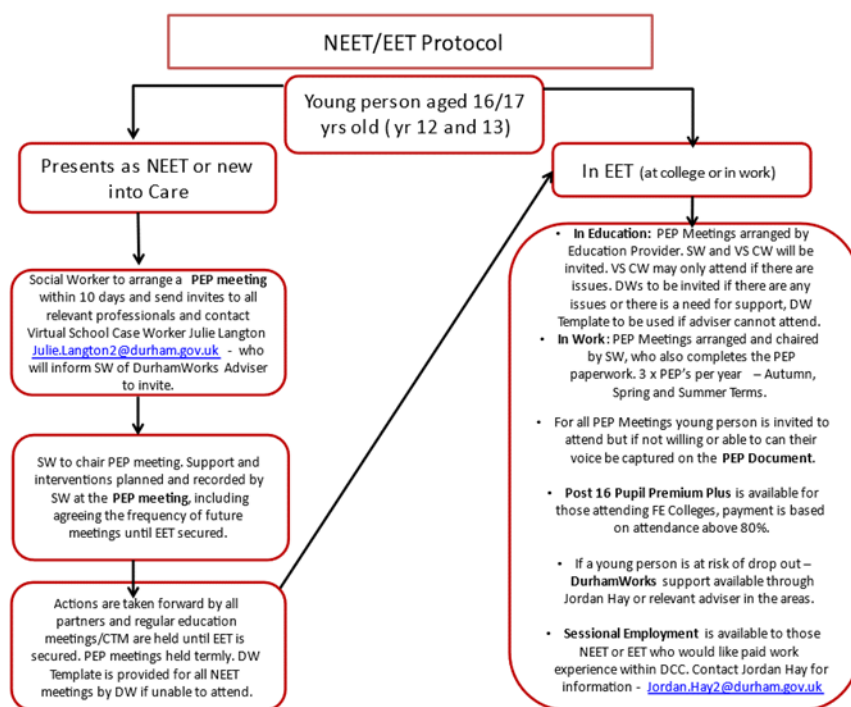
Following consultation with local FE providers DCC decided to use the available funding as follows: A dedicated adviser (0.5 FTE) to oversee those young people currently enrolled in FE, by providing support to young people and professionals both in college and in the community; A 'Keep In College' weekly cash incentive of £20 per week to the young people for over 80% authorised attendance and as a further incentive to NEET young people to encourage them to sign up to FE; Fund the post of a part time Admin Assistant to facilitate the payments of the weekly incentives.

In 2022-2023 we had 81 Young People access PPP+.

The PPP+ has since been awarded again to DCC for the full academic year 2023-2024, the offer has since been revised due to changes in funding and cohort size to now include more education and training settings such as Sixth Form and Training provision rather than only FE colleges. It will still follow an attendance incentivised model of cash payments and includes the support of a dedicated adviser to ensure payment and maintenance of EET placements.

Post 16 PEP Caseworker - In December 2022 a dedicated post was developed to work across both Progression and Learning and the Virtual School to support and strengthen the PEP process for the Post 16 cohort of CIOC. The role currently promotes a robust transition from CIOC to Care Leaver regarding EET and ensures all relevant professionals are involved and accountable for support to our CIOC cohort. The role includes delivering training and support to Social Workers and Designated Teachers on PEP's and Welfare Call.

EET/NEET Protocol - In January 2023 we launched an EET\NEET Protocol with the Children Looked After teams to demonstrate the process to be followed for all young people who are in post 16 education and in particular what to do should a young person they are supporting drop into NEET. This reinforces the PEP process, and ensures a meeting is held within 10 working days to review and plan with the young person and dedicated professionals, ensuring DurhamWorks is invited to all NEET PEP's. A briefing session was held with the CLA TEAMS to launch and gather feedback on the protocol.



5.8 How well do our young people achieve and participate in Higher Education?

Young people have excelled again in Higher Education with 36 attending University during the academic year 22/23, 5 have graduated with good grades. Progressions include Teaching in a Durham primary school, Civil Service Internship in London, Masters, A&E Nurse. 1 Young Person has moved into a DCC Degree Apprenticeship starting September 2023.

20 Year 12/13 young people have been identified as having an interest in attending University in the future. Information and support sessions are happening to ensure CIOC understand the support available to them.

6. Attendance and Exclusion

6.1 How well do our young people attend school?

Attendance continues to be a strength of the virtual school. The slight increase in absence and persistent absence is in line with the national and local trend. It also reflects the anxieties demonstrated by some CLA when realising the return to normality and formal exams post Covid.

Since returning to school in September attendance of children looked after has mostly been good. Attendance of Primary aged children is strong, the attendance of Secondary aged

children is an area to focus on. The Attendance Improvement Team have collected attendance data in July to provide a picture for the academic year.

Attendance was 91.4%, almost 0.6% lower than this point last year. Attendance was broken down as follows:

- Attendance of primary school age CLA (including reception, Y1-Y6) = **95.3%** which is in line with last year.
- Attendance of secondary school age CLA = **86.2%**, a **1.8%** dip against last year.
- Attendance of CLA in County Durham schools and settings = **89.9%**
- Attendance of CLA in out of County schools and settings = **90.6%**

Attendance of our young people is testament to the work of the DVS casework team who maintain regular contact with both schools and carers and to our schools who recognise the importance of attendance for children in care and young people and seek to engage them and meet their needs.

We work closely with the Attendance Improvement Team to ensure CLA are monitored closely and any concerns with attendance can be addressed swiftly.

Table 14: Attendance over three years for CLA

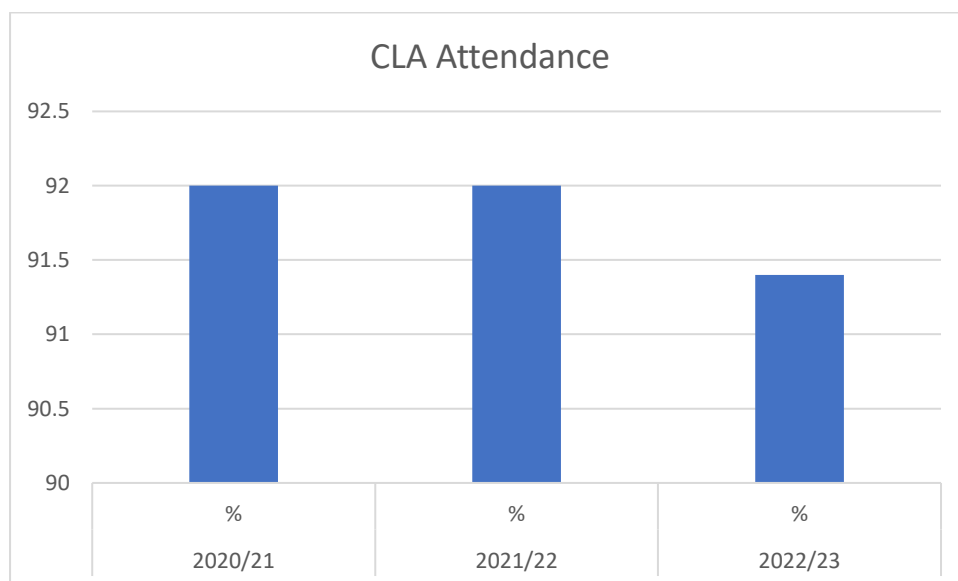
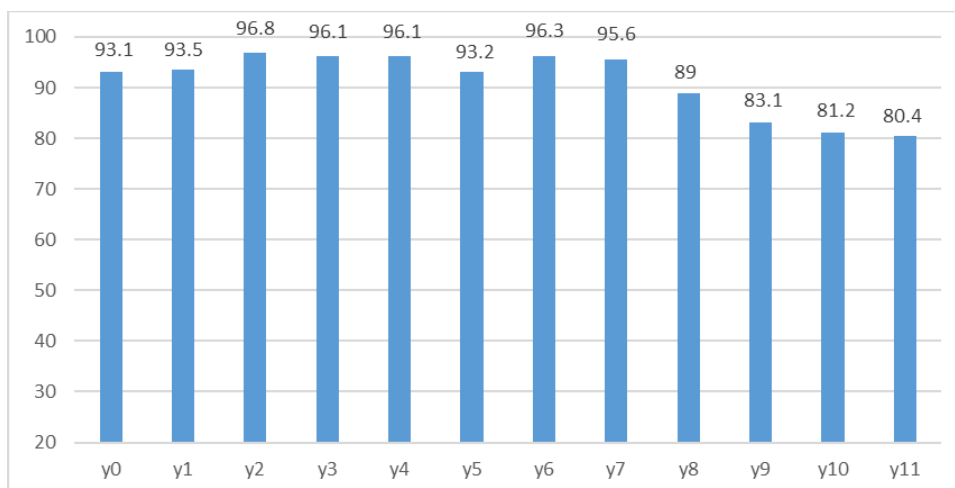
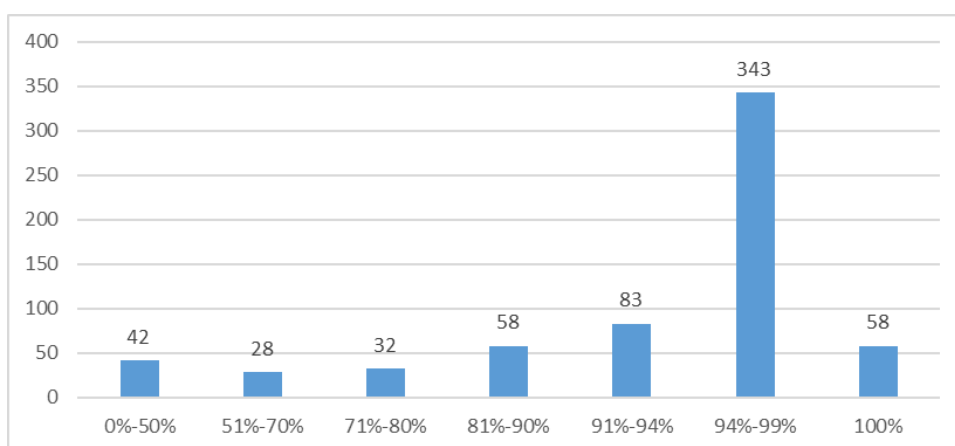


Table 15: Attendance of CLA by year group

This highlights the need for closer monitoring of CLA in Years 8, 9, 10 and 11. CLA PEP Caseworkers target attendance during ePEP meetings.

Table 16: Attendance bands for CLA

The distribution of attendance can also be broken down into attendance bands as seen in this graph. This shows that most children had attendance at 94 - 99% or above.

6.2 How many of our young people have been suspended?

There has been one permanent exclusion 22/23. The casework team work closely with schools to prevent any issues reaching crisis point and explore appropriate alternative pathways better suited to meeting the need of the young person. We challenge any schools which consider permanent exclusion, and then implement appropriate support, using Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding to avoid this.

There have been forty Suspensions during the academic year 2022/2023 for CLA. Twenty One children/young people experienced more than one period of Suspension. Twenty Seven

children attended the secondary sector, ten were primary aged children and three children attended Specialist Provision.

We are working closely with schools to address this. We ask schools to contact the virtual school team before implementing a Suspension to discuss alternative approaches.

The VSH works closely with the Behaviour and Inclusion Panels (BIPs). To provide additional support and act as the corporate parent for children who are displaying challenging behaviour, the VSH will attend behaviour panel meetings to support the case for a CLA not to be excluded.

We continue to provide a support package at our Inclusion Base for those young people where a Suspension is unavoidable and where it could put pressure on the home placement. We also offer this to some schools to relieve some pressure, before a crisis point is reached, to give them time to plan more appropriately for a young person's needs.

Table 17: Suspensions over three years for CLA

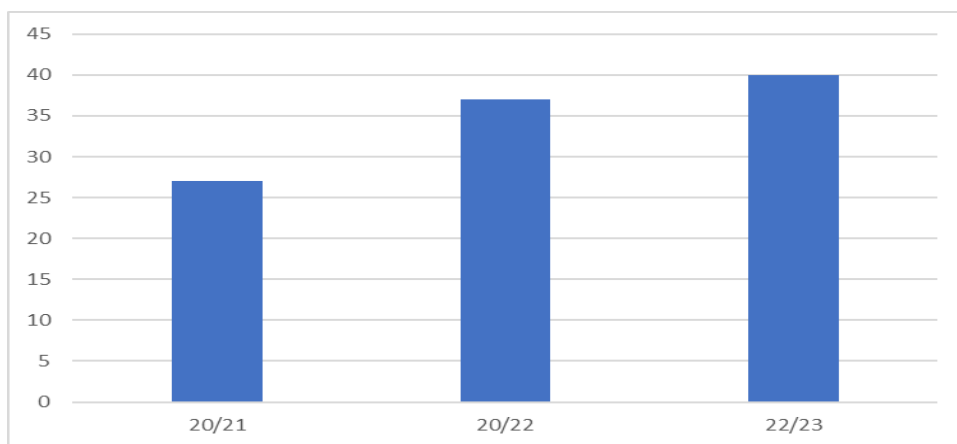
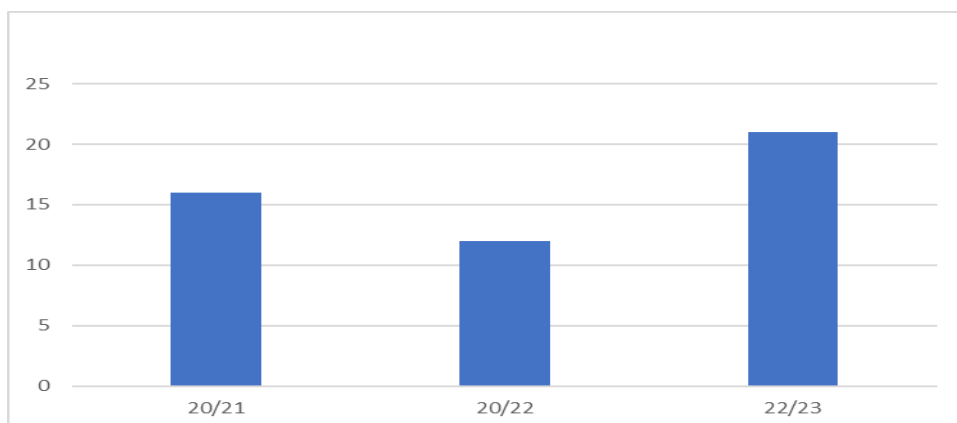


Table 18: Number of CLA with 2+ Suspensions over three years.



7. Admissions, transitions, managed moves and OOC placements

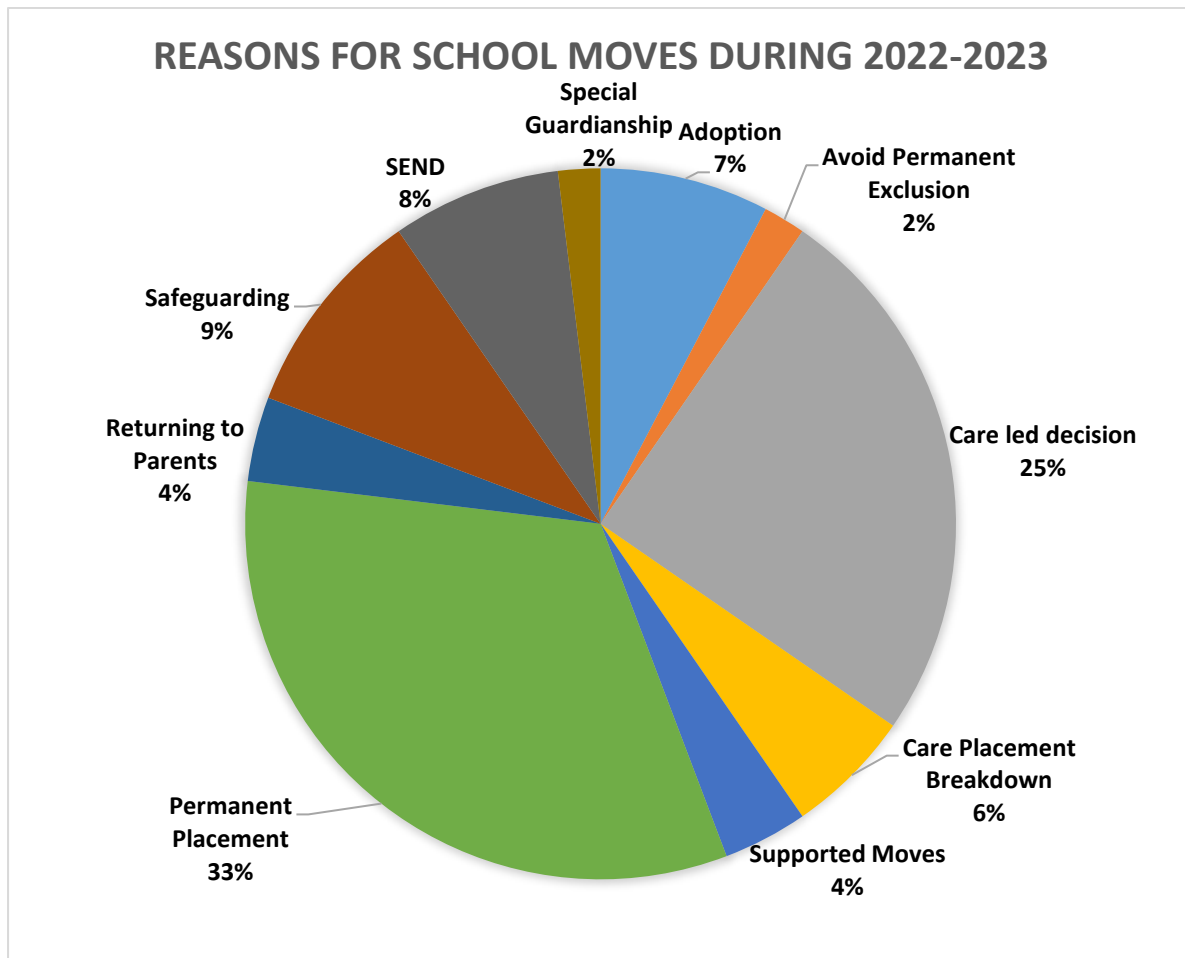
We work hard to meet our statutory duty to avoid any 'drift and delay'¹ in securing full-time education which meets the needs of the child. It remains a challenge to secure mid-year admissions, particularly to secondary schools. We consult closely with headteachers to ensure the best provision. We do place children and young people in schools which are judged to require improvement, where the provision offered meets the need of the child and we believe that it offers them the best chance of a settled education where they can make good progress. The casework team provide enhanced transition for the most vulnerable children and young people at key points. This will be enhanced following the restructure with the focus of the new team on seamless transition from 0-18.

7.1 How many children moved school mid-year?

In 2022-2023 there were 52 school moves that took place during the academic year. A further 54 were suggested, but challenged by the Virtual School and therefore did not take place. We aim to ensure moves take place at the end of an academic year, but there are occasions where a move mid-year is beneficial. Working with the care teams, we have supported moves which:

- were as a result of statutory assessment.
- supported the long-term care pathway for permanence.
- for safeguarding reasons
- enhanced the experience of the child within the family unit – attending school with others from the family.
- enabled them to feel part of the local community – developing relationships with peers in their locality.
- avoided trauma which could have resulted from attending a school with siblings still with birth parents or near birth parents.
- provided an opportunity to develop friendships prior to KS2/3 transition.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

Table 19: School Moves 2022-23

Due to the increasing numbers of school moves in previous years, we developed more robust systems this year to monitor the number of moves requested, reasons for moves and completed moves. More rigorous monitoring took place of school move planning and there was a clear message that school moves would only be considered as a last resort for our young people to promote stability of education.

The main reason for moving school during the academic year was to support a permanent placement with 33% of school moves completed for this purpose. These only take place once consideration has been given to the stability of the care placement and whether there may be a benefit to maintaining the place at their current school. Wherever possible, the education placement should remain stable, but often the distance travelled and opportunities to develop peer groups in their local area need to be considered.

A significant number of school moves took place because of care led decisions, but this also included those who had to move out of the area, so a school move was the only option. 9% of school moves were due to a child leaving care on an Adoption Order or SGO. SEND reasons factored in 8% of in year school moves, although a proportion of these will have been a move to a school more suited to the child's needs and therefore supported by the Virtual School. However, in all cases the PEP Caseworker oversees the move, including agreeing

the chosen school. The Virtual School Head has the final say in agreeing school moves and the PEP Caseworker ensures they are consulted fully in the process.

7.2 How many of our children experienced managed moves?

We do not support Managed Moves. The VS has shared the view with headteachers that a CLA needs to have a sense of belonging. Schools who belong to Academy Trusts have in the past placed a child on a different site within the trust to avoid a Suspension and to give the child time to reflect. When this happens familiar staff from the school where they are on roll continue to support them. Short term moves to The Bridge, Willows and Beeches is acceptable for an interim period and requires an entry and exit strategy.

7.3 How many of our children are placed in out of county education settings?

166 (22%) of the school age cohort were educated out of the boundaries of County Durham in 2022-23. This is a slight increase of 2% from 2021-2022.

8. Personal Education Plans (PEP), (PP+) and Academic Progress

8.1 How does the virtual school ensure the quality of the PEPS?

Responsibility for completion of the PEP was passed to schools in 2016 as it was decided to move greater responsibility for ensuring the completion of the PEP to schools, which are best placed to have an in-depth knowledge of the young person alongside the social worker.

In September 2019 the virtual school implemented an online system for PEPs through Welfare Call. We were confident this would enable swifter quality assurance and, consequently, faster and more robust challenge to schools and settings where needed. This system has now been embedded for statutory school age children, early years and Post 16.

During 2018-2019 we identified early years and post 16 PEPs as an area for improvement, and we worked closely with these teams to streamline practice and embed quality assurance. Our Early Years Team produced a PEP which better matches the phase, and they now lead on the quality assurance. This ensures a level of expertise appropriate to these schools and settings. The emphasis last year was taking this good practice and embedding it into the new online PEP system. Both early years and Post 16 colleagues have been involved in the development of the new PEPs and will be responsible for training settings and social workers. Our Early Years colleagues are responsible for the QA of Nursery PEPS, whilst the PEP Caseworkers complete QA for the Statutory School Age PEPs. During 2022 – 2023 the Virtual School appointed a dedicated Post 16 PEP Caseworker to lead on co-ordination and completion of the documents. There is a robust system in place to 'handover' responsibility to the Post 16 Caseworker as all young people have a 'profile' completed by their SSA

Caseworker. The Post 16 PEP Caseworker is employed jointly by the Virtual School and the Progression and Learning team. The services work closely together to ensure young people have a high quality PEP in place and that they receive effective advice and guidance. All PEPS have a QA document embedded in them which allows communication between the Caseworkers and settings.

8.2 What information does the PEP record?

The PEP is a live, working document which provides a record of the young person's journey through education. In developing the new PEP, we reviewed the effectiveness of the document and asked for the views of young people through the Children in Care Council (CiCC), who contributed their ideas to the new e-pep document. We stress with schools that the PEP document is a snapshot; it is the implementation of the actions which make a difference. Our document is developed to show the strategies in place to support our children and young people and to measure the impact of interventions. Central to this are the views and experiences of our children and young people, and numerous opportunities are given for them to contribute to their PEP meeting. We have worked with the CiCC to develop a fact sheet for CLA to help them to understand how the PEP process works.

8.3 What is the quality of the PEPs?

Since adopting the electronic PEP document, all young people have at least 1 PEP on the Welfare Call system. This was an improvement of 5% from 2018-2019, when compliance was 95%. Using the electronic PEP has improved and streamlined many processes including tracking PEP completion; monitoring involvement; tracking and analysing Pupil Premium Plus use and quality assurance.

Since the ePEP was introduced in September 2019 there have been a series of training sessions to introduce the new system and familiarise both designated teachers and social workers with the document. Welfare Call were initially responsible for training staff, but this responsibility is now with the Virtual School, and we have a full programme of training for both Designated Teachers and Social Workers. Ongoing support is provided to schools through caseworker involvement, business admin and manager support from the Virtual School and the Welfare Call support helpline. PEP quality and feedback on issues and developments are provided to Designated Teachers regularly either through sharing emails or at DT network/training sessions.

During 2022-2023, 2,193 PEPs have been completed for 834 young people of statutory school age. They have taken place across 51 Local Authorities. PEPs ordinarily take place virtually, which allows our PEP Caseworkers to attend more regularly, and we aim to have Virtual School representation at at least 2 out of 3 PEPs held for the child. The focus has been on providing ongoing support on completion of PEPs for Designated Teachers through increased PEP Caseworker participation in PEP meetings. Where a child has no education provision, one of our Caseworkers leads the PEP and ensures there is a robust plan in place to secure a placement, that is then recorded in the PEP document.

The PEP Caseworkers work very closely with the DTs and provide advice and guidance on high quality PEP completion. They also work closely on ensuring PEP completion within timescales. Late submission and completion of the document affects quality as we are unable to share outcomes and interventions with the wider school staff and carers. Therefore, this

year we have revised our policy to grade any PEP as not High Quality if it is not signed off by DTs within 30 days of the meeting. Unfortunately, this has had an impact on the number of PEPs graded as High Quality. In addition to the support given to DTs PEP Caseworkers also work closely with colleagues in Social Care to offer the same support and guidance. This year we have focussed on providing additional support to Social Workers and during the year Virtual School Managers have provided: -

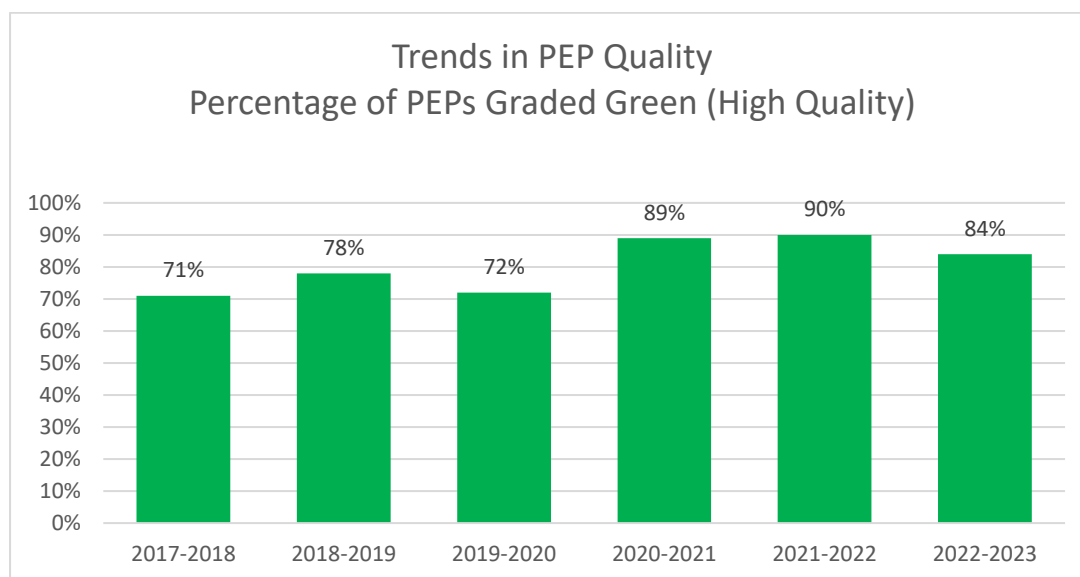
- Regular communication with senior Social Care managers to ensure key messages are disseminated throughout teams.
- IROs have access to the PEP documents.
- Specific written guidance on Welfare Call and the EPEP shared with Social Workers
- Additional support offered to social workers of Post 16 cohort.

A quality assurance document was introduced and embedded in the ePEP document and process. This increased transparency and gave schools and social workers feedback on how the quality can be improved. During 2022-2023 the Summer ePEP quality was rated as 86.7% Green (High Quality) and 13.3% Amber (did not meet expected standard to achieve high quality). This is a fall of 3.4% High Quality PEPs from the same time last year. The fall in PEPs graded as High Quality is due to the increased level of scrutiny placed on completion times. The quality of the documents has remained high, but there has been an impact on the grading as any not signed off by DTs within a month, results in an automatic Amber. The PEP Caseworker continues to Quality Assure the document, making suggestions for improvements, but the document will ultimately be graded as Amber to reflect the need to have a document that is current. Over the year we have seen some improvement in sign-off time and will continue to strive for timeliness sign off to drive up quality.

Table 20: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2022-23

Term	Green High Quality	Amber Below expected quality
Autumn	79.9%	20.1%
Spring	85.3%	14.7%
Summer	86.7%	13.3%
Grand Total	84%	16%

The numbers indicate that the quality of educational provision for our children and young people is strong. However, although increasing the numbers of PEP Caseworkers has no doubt improved our capacity to support DTs and Social Workers with the process, resulting in an increase in High Quality ratings, we also understand this may impact on standardisation of judgements. Therefore, the focus next year will be on standardising quality judgements and improving awareness of the features of a High-Quality PEP. Quality Assurance training for CLA PEP Caseworkers has taken place and a moderation exercise was carried out.

Table 21: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2017-2023

During the year we have continued to challenge schools who submitted PEPs late or below our expectations. We continue to support colleagues in Social Care to understand and navigate the system, with specific support from the Durham Virtual School Team to support Social Care Teams where absence is an issue. Although sign-off times have, this year, impacted on the number of PEPs graded High Quality, there continue to be improvements in this area.

- Of the 783 PEPs completed during the Summer Term:
 - 68% were signed off by Social Worker within the 10 day deadline.
(Average sign-off time 9.02 days)
 - 77% were signed off by Designated Teacher within the 10 day deadline.
(Average sign-off time 7.69 days)
 - The average sign-off time for the PEP Caseworker was 2.69 days.
(Virtual School to QA and sign off PEP within 5 days of the last sign off by SW/DT)

There are several issues that contribute to delays in completing and signing off documents. These include staffing issues within the Virtual School, a Social Care restructure and increased staff absence and an increased number of children entering care. As a Virtual School we are aware of the issues and will continue to put measures in this year to improve the sign off rate for all. These include, but are not limited to, increased monitoring of sign off by managers, additional training for DTs and Social Workers, increasing capacity within the Virtual School staff structure. Therefore, we expect to see sign off rates improve over the next academic year and will be monitoring these closely to ensure our strategies have the expected impact.

Both Early Years and Post 16 PEPs are incorporated into the Welfare Call system and their completion is overseen by the Early Years Team and Post 16 Co-ordinator and PEP CW. Additional training is being developed for settings and social workers to ensure they are confident with the documents and the system. This will hopefully ensure a similar improvement in quality of PEPs in both early years and Post 16. As a Virtual School we have invested in the Welfare Call Analytics System, which this year will be used to full effect to provide our colleagues with regular updates regarding quality of PEPs.

8.4 How do we distribute pupil premium plus funding?

In 2018-19 we adjusted our distribution so that the funding is available without undue bureaucracy when a child enters care and to aid forward planning for schools. We have allocated £600 each term. In line with the DfE guidance of Feb 2018², we have encouraged schools to look at evidenced practice and to consider how the funding can support the cohort of looked after children in care as well as provide individual intervention. Schools account for this in the PEP where we ask whether funding has been used to support the cohort. This process will be strengthened this year with the introduction of a yearly funding resource plan.

8.5 What is the centrally held budget spent on?

In 2022-23 (Financial Year) Durham Virtual School retained approx. £570,000. This funding was used to provide the following centrally managed provision for Durham children in care:

- Additional senior EP capacity for children in care
- Occupational Therapy Assessment
- School Counsellor support for children in care – additional capacity to 8 days per week equivalent
- Supporting the development of the designated teacher role
- Curious Kids reading packages for years 2 – 6.
- Storytime magazine subscription to promote a love of stories for reception and year 1 children.
- Fiction Express for year 2-8
- Learning APPs for young people and Designated Teachers
- Continued to provide additional resources to the 5 location-based inclusion panels (previously behaviour support panels) to encourage locality and school-based solutions to avoid exclusion or school moves. This also provides additional access to the EWEL (Emotional Wellbeing and Effective Learning Team)

2

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

- Help line provision from Full Circle to provide therapeutic advice and training to the virtual school and the schools for our CLA.
- Targeted resources / materials for identified children.
- EWEL Credits for Schools to access emotional Wellbeing support for CLA.
- Alternative provision / curriculum for children in care at risk of disengaging from learning.
- 1:1 curriculum support for year 6 and 11, using PP+ to part fund National Tutor Programme/ School Led Tutoring to Schools. This was widened to all pupils in Years 1 to 11.
- Providing UASC pupils with access to Chrome Books and learning APPs to support engagement in education while finding a school place.
- Turnaround / outreach places secured with The Bridge (secondary) and The Beeches / Willows (primary) teams to provide short term placements or outreach work during a period of crisis at school.

The importance of schools recognising and understanding the impact of insecure attachment and early trauma on the behaviour and progress of young people is well documented. Children and young people who experience toxic stress, emotional turmoil and insecurity will not be ready to learn and are more likely to be excluded from school. This has continued to be a driver in 2022-23 as we increased the allocation of retained funding to inclusion and therapeutic support. This is an area discussed in PEP meetings to highlight the support available. This has been further developed through our offer from Full Circle and our EWEL interventions.

8.6 What academic support and intervention do we provide from central funding?

As in previous years, children in year 6 and 11 were offered up to 6 sessions of tutoring at no cost to the school. This was to be funded through Pupil Premium Plus. However, the team of Tutors we used to support experienced capacity issues which meant the support we could directly offer was limited. Instead, additional funding was given to schools in order to provide that direct support. That included giving additional PP+ payments to schools as well as direct payments of Recovery Grant and School Led Tutoring funding.

We also commission six places at The Bridge turnaround base, which is part of The Woodlands. The number of placements has doubled from last year as we recognise the important work this provision does to re-engage our young people and support them back into school. 17 pupils accessed this during 2022-2023. Several pupils attended for short term placements, but often the pupil would remain with The Bridge for a whole term before transitioning back to their school or next education provision. Often, the Bridge will support the young person whilst they were going through statutory assessment, with the next provision being a new SEND school that meets their identified needs.

As in other years, the Bridge continued to offer outreach support in schools for those young people struggling to maintain placements. Support is also offered to our primary children through the Willows/Beeches linked to the Pupil Referral Unit. Support has been offered both in school and as a temporary off-site placement to avoid exclusion. Whilst in both provisions the young people continue to follow a full curriculum.

In addition to the centrally funded provision, we have an Inclusion Base, which for several years up until 2020-2021 was funded through de-delegated school funds. However, this meant it was only available for those attending mainstream secondary schools, unless schools agreed to fund the place. In 2021-2022, following the change of funding, we made the decision to continue to fund this provision using top-sliced PP+. In doing this we could open the support to all Durham secondary schools, and to our Durham children based in neighbouring local authorities (dependent on distance). 58 young people accessed our Inclusion Base over the academic year, an increase of 32% from last year. Reasons for referral to the Inclusion Base include to avoid an exclusion, to give some space in a more nurturing environment during times of crisis or to offer support for emotional wellbeing. In total there were 105 separate interventions delivered. Over the year 1095 (attendance 76%) sessions (1/2 day = 1 session) were offered over a variety of packages, including inclusion support to prevent exclusion, bridging packages before transition and a 6-week part-time programme looking at communication skills. We also have a teacher on site who offers Maths and English lessons. Several young people made a successful reintegration back to their schools or alternative provision, although 31 attended for more than one intervention. However, this number included those who originally attended to avoid exclusion, who subsequently went on to attend the Programme as a proactive intervention to avoid further exclusion and improve engagement in school.

What difference does our support make? Case study

Background

- ✓ X was displaying negative and disruptive behaviours in school, impacting on both his learning and that of his peers
- ✓ X was continuously making poor choices that resulted in consequences in school
- ✓ X often displayed low level disruptive behaviours and playfighting. He would sometimes copy the behaviours of other children in the classroom.
- ✓ X would make inappropriate comments towards children and staff and was talkative, interrupting his and others learning.
- ✓ X displayed a very negative attitude towards learning and school.
- ✓ X had been looked after for several years and had good relationships with DVS staff.

Action

- ✓ X was referred to attend the Programme at our Inclusion Base
- ✓ X's programme included lessons with the teacher on English and Maths and he was supported in catching up with work he had missed.

- ✓ The Programme included sessions on self-esteem, confidence and making appropriate choices with the expectation that this would improve relationships with staff.
- ✓ Time was allocated to support X to think about his communication and to equip him with the tools to engage in class, to understand the rules and boundaries and take responsibility for actions.
- ✓ X was given the chance to work with others in the group and develop communication skills and make positive friendships
- ✓ Time was taken to talk through X's concerns and worries and to understand why he had such a negative attitude towards learning.
- ✓ Meetings were held at the beginning, middle and end of the intervention. This ensured X's school and Care Team remained fully engaged and able to consider strategies to support him in his education placement.

Outcomes

- ✓ A structure of regular meetings and feedback to School, Carer, Social Worker, and X meant that progress was tracked, and everyone understood the next steps. This also allowed for careful planning for X to return to school full time.
- ✓ X engaged in lessons, completing work and began to have a positive outlook on education and his future.
- ✓ X became more confident in building positive relationships with staff and pupils, and this was reflected on the days he attended school.
- ✓ Through reflection on communication by both X and DT, they were able to build a good relationship, resulting in regular catch ups in school, meaning X felt supported and listened to.

Comments from members of X's Care Team

- ✓ X is happy to go to The Link and he is up and ready and waiting to leave – Carer
- ✓ It has been positive for X to have a place on the programme. He is putting skills into practice which he has learned and is more thoughtful from having this experience – Social Worker
- ✓ There is a noticeable difference when X is receiving support from the Link Inclusion Base. He really enjoys attending – DT.
- ✓ I love it here. It's so nice and relaxed and you listen to me – Young person.

8.7 What therapeutic support do we provide from central funding?

For all our children looked after we offer access to Occupational Therapy assessment, Counselling, Cognition and Learning assessments and additional Educational Psychology time. This is funded through the retained PP+ funding and is open to all our young people.

We also work closely with Full Circle to ensure a joined-up approach to the emotional and mental wellbeing of our children and young people. Full Circle now offer a therapist staffed helpline for our Schools with Durham CLA as well as delivering training in schools where they are struggling to meet a child's needs due to trauma and attachment.

During 2020-2021 the Virtual School established a task and finish group working with colleagues in Full Circle, the Emotional Wellbeing and Effective Learning (EWEL) Service and the CLA EP to establish a more robust emotional and therapeutic offer for our children. Through this group we developed a training package for our schools to improve DT's understanding of attachment and trauma informed approaches in school.

This year Full Circle have delivered 9 training sessions to Designated Teacher through the Virtual School offer.

In addition to this We also identified that our children would benefit from increased support from the EWEL team and purchased a further 100 credits with them to be able to offer assessment and intervention to be more proactive in addressing issues. Over 48 young people were supported through this SLA and several of them received multiple packages included assessment and support. We continue to invest in the EWEL credits to provide access to tailored support and intervention in the next academic year.

8.8 How do schools spend their allocation?

In 2022-23 (Financial Year) our total PP+ budget was £1,896,670. Schools were allocated £1,800 of the government allocation of £2,530), in 3 instalments. In total, approximately £1,4 million was provided directly to schools during the 2022-23 academic year to support their work with children in care. Recovery Grant Premium for eligible pupils was given directly to schools and usage was monitored in the PEP. The School Led Tutoring Grant was used to fund packages of support delivered to some of our most vulnerable learners, including those not attending school, in our children's homes, leaving secure and those at risk of permanent exclusion. Additional funding was also sent directly to schools to fund multiple packages of support.

One to one support is used effectively by schools to help to close the gaps in knowledge caused by school moves and poor attendance prior to entering care. Pastoral support for the looked after cohort includes additional staffing to provide mentoring and advocacy, a safe space, someone to check readiness to learn etc. A significant amount of the PP+ funding given to schools is spent on one to one tuition. 56% of PP+ funding given to schools was used to support individuals with academic progress and achievement. This has proved effective in improving basic skills and basic building blocks that our children need to progress, particularly important after the disruption caused by Covid. For our cohort, additional one to one and small group tutoring is found to be effective especially for those children who have moved schools several times prior to entering care. As was the case last year, the next highest expenditure is on emotional health and wellbeing, as ensuring our children's emotional needs are met is

crucial to their readiness to learn; this again will have been impacted due to Covid and is also an important factor to consider when working with children who have experienced trauma. When considering the outcomes, the majority are either fully or partly achieved. However, there are a significant number of outcomes that are partially achieved.

Training has been provided this year from the CLA Educational Psychologist on developing SMART outcomes. However, we aim to build on this area over the next academic year to hopefully improve the number of outcomes achieved. Our Caseworkers continue to have a presence at PEP meetings and complete quality assurance on all documents to ensure outcomes that are set are SMART and that feedback is given to schools where this is not the case. The number of outcomes set for attendance that were not achieved is disappointing, but persistent non-attenders are overrepresented in these outcomes. We continue to expect excellent attendance from our children and have made this a focus of the autumn PEP. In all cases where attendance outcomes are not achieved the Virtual School are aware of the issues and are supporting schools, carers, and social workers to re-engage young people in their learning and improve attendance.

Table 22: How schools spent their PP+ budget on individual pupils

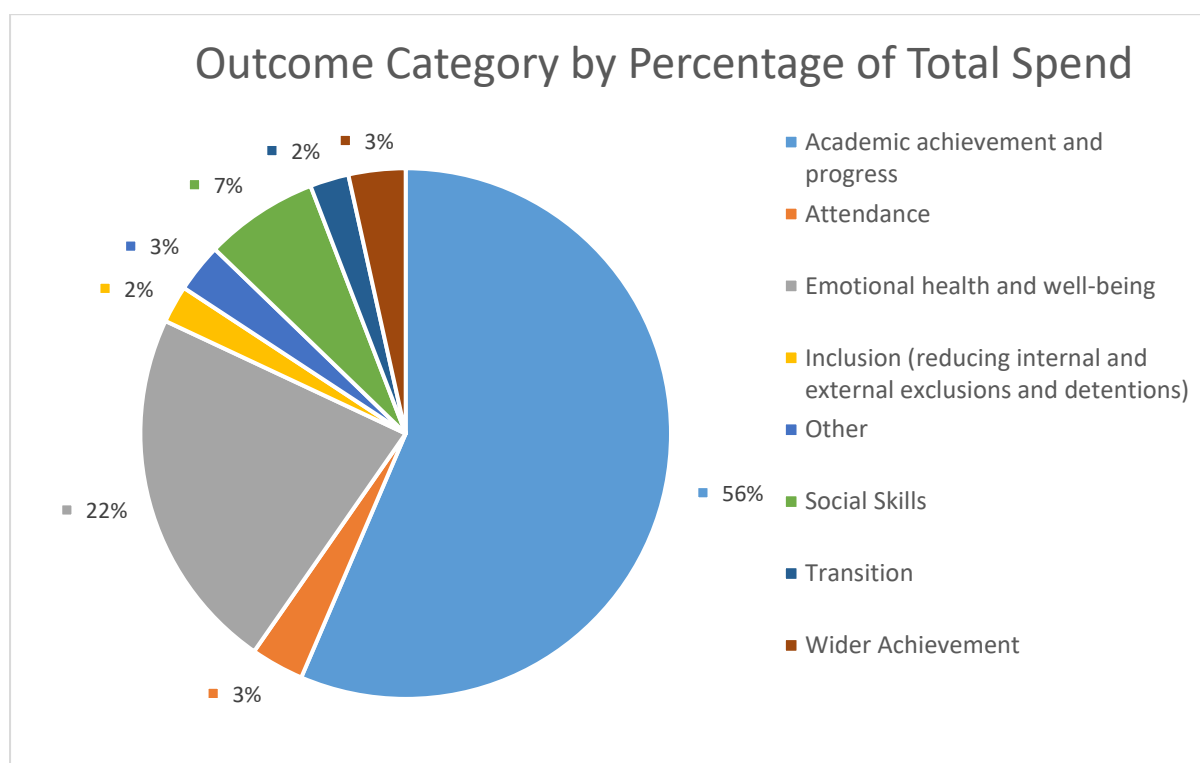


Table 23: Total spend linked to outcomes and EEF Intervention category of spend

Outcomes Achieved in Each Category	Achieved	Partial	Not Achieved
Academic achievement and progress	40%	49%	11%
Emotional health and well-being	37%	52%	11%
Social Skills	49%	41%	10%
Wider Achievement	54%	35%	11%
Transition	47%	35%	17%
Other	41%	46%	13%
Attendance	25%	32%	43%
Inclusion (reducing internal and external exclusions and detentions)	33%	27%	40%
Grand Total	41%	47%	13%

EEF Category of Spend	Amount
Small group tuition	17.23%
One to one tuition	15.04%
Social and emotional learning	15.03%
Other	12.10%
Individualised instruction	6.71%
Behaviour Interventions	3.96%
Metacognition and self-regulation	3.75%
Phonics	3.54%
Early years interventions	3.35%
Outdoor adventure learning	2.78%
Homework	2.22%
Mastery learning	2.20%
Reading comprehension strategy	2.05%
Digital technology	1.99%
Mentoring	1.92%
Oral language interventions	1.63%
Arts participation	1.49%
Within-class attainment grouping	0.98%
Sports participation	0.87%
Collaborative learning	0.76%
Feedback	0.26%
Parental engagement	0.09%
Peer tutoring	0.06%

9. Training Provision

Training is one of our core duties and one which we believe can make a real difference to the lives of looked after young people. We provide (without charge) training for social workers, IROs, foster carers, designated teachers, and governors as well as for the full education improvement team. Our governor training encourages governors to review policies with designated teachers and equips them to provide appropriate challenge around outcomes for children in care.

We also run designated teacher network meetings every term. The training is well attended and well-received. We contribute to the Head of Education's briefings for schools, service days for the education team and team business days. Updates and other information are disseminated through briefing papers, and we provide bespoke support and advice for schools. At the request of designated teachers, we now seek to bring an external speaker to network events.

Full Circle delivered 9 training virtual training sessions across the year, providing vital support for all schools and staff who support our young people. Training has included Trauma Informed Approaches in Education and PACE sessions for adults supporting our young people. In addition to this we offered a session for DTs who wanted to deliver basic training for staff in school on Trauma and Attachment which included a Power Point developed to aid delivery. One of the aims of this training is to allow DTs to help their schools become more trauma informed and attachment aware. There are plans next year to expand this offer and offer another package of training, building on discussions with Designated Teachers regarding what would support them to carry out their role. To further support our schools and young people the Full Circle team offered bespoke training packages to schools, often delivered on site and to a wider range of staff. Over 200 hours of training were offered to more than 60 provisions.

Our CLA EP has provided several training sessions and webinars on topics including supporting our CLA who are anxious about school, understanding working memory and writing good outcomes for CLA. We are developing this offer next year to include additional training opportunities both for our Designated Teachers and Children's Homes.

Within the team we share resources, research, and best practice at our development days. Our virtual school team have expertise in supporting children in care and have accessed a wide range of training. Our new member of the team completed a strong induction programme to develop their skills and knowledge of the Virtual School systems.

The social distancing measures put in place as part of the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on how training was and will be delivered into the future. The Virtual School have conducted Designated Teacher Network meetings via a shared multi-media platform (Microsoft Teams). The Virtual School continues to deliver all training via this platform, although there are plans to offer some hybrid meetings next academic year. Feedback from participants has been positive and increased numbers of Designated Teachers have accessed the support including those from out of authority schools where Durham children are placed.

Durham Virtual School are in the process of updating the online offer that it provides, and this will include access to up-to-date resources for schools, Designated Teachers, Carers, children and young people and Social Care and other professionals. The online offer will include access to video guidance and tutorials, examples of good practice and access to support

materials for use with children and young people. This will be shared next academic year via the schools portal.

10. Support for mental and emotional wellbeing

We are very aware that research on attachment and trauma indicates that learning can only happen when a child feels safe, secure, and regulated, with children in care four times more likely to have a mental health disorder than those with their birth families. Many children in care will have experienced several childhood experiences (ACES) and, as corporate parents, we have a duty to alleviate the long-term impact of these on learning, health, life chances, but without this simply becoming another label. Colleagues in education, SEND and Inclusion and Early Help are exploring how to develop this understanding to support schools. Our therapeutic provision described above supports schools to be able to understand the context of our young people and support the children directly to be able to feel safe and succeed.

10.1 What screening takes place?

The VS does not carry out screening. We have several service level agreements we can sign post schools and providers to if there are concerns about a child. We use the PEP meetings as a platform to discuss the SDQ scores, a screening tool used by social workers. Practice guidance has been added to the Welfare Call platform, so it is easily accessible for all practitioners. Caseworkers have been trained in the use of the Clear Cut Tool. This assesses the communication skills of the child from age 10. Any new child coming into care, who does not already have identified SLCN will take part in this assessment 10 to 12 weeks after their initial PEP. This will allow professionals to understand if there is a need for further intervention. This year we have ensured there are early discussions with DTs regarding the identification of SLCN to ensure our children receive support as soon as they enter care.

10.2 How does our Educational Psychologist make a difference?

The Virtual School employs a Senior Educational Psychologist (0.5 time) to offer advice and support to young people and the team. Regular clinics are set up and our PEP Caseworkers complete a triage exercise with Designated Teachers before seeking advice or support at the clinic. The process is monitored, and involvements are tracked to ensure we have good oversight of our young people and emerging issues. Over the last year our EP was involved with 60 young people discussed at the clinics. There has been direct involvement with 37 students in settings and indirect involvement with 23 students as consultation was provided to teaching staff. Liaison with school link EPs was frequent and several cases included planning with the EWEL team and school counsellors. Work has been across all Key Stages including nursery both within mainstream and specialist provision. Most of the work undertaken has been on behalf of Durham CLA, educated in Durham, although there is scope to extend involvement outside of the local authority and the EP provides a valuable resource for many of our children placed outside of the area. Work has been across all Key Stages both within mainstream and specialist provision.

Work was very varied, depending on the needs of the child and the timescales for decision making, but typically included:

Individual assessment with the child sought to clarify the nature of their SEND, strengths and challenges. Consultation included carers, educators and social care so as to ensure an appropriate and thorough understanding of need and inform associated provision. In most cases, holistic assessment of the child in context took place involving observation, and some cognitive and academic assessment. A review of existing provision also took place and future provision was discussed and advised in a written format often within an SEN plan. Advice was sent following a visit.

Consultation with school staff, social workers, caseworkers, and carers took place daily however meetings with caseworkers were offered every month. Consultation with school staff (teachers and support staff) often involved supporting them to understand the challenges and presentation of children and young people within the framework of trauma and attachment. Using a Solution Oriented approach, a collaborative process was employed to consider strengths and exceptions before agreeing upon next steps and provision when meeting the child's needs. Consultation undertaken remotely was followed with a written summary to key people, either as a report or detailed emails with a summary.

Attending PEPs, CTMs, LAR reviews and statutory annual reviews to support good decision making for CLA. Discussion around outcomes and provision was constructive and concerns around contact and home school liaison could be addressed.

Statutory Work Involvement included support for 11 EHCP referrals with SENCOs and Designated teachers. Advice was prepared for 7 EHCPs where the EP also attended reviews and multi -agency meetings for CLA.

Liaison with Carers and other services [e.g. EWEL, Social Care, Full Circle] around needs and strategies to support regulation, routines and skills.

Awareness raising of CLA role and support took place with EPS colleagues and teams. This ensured key messages were supported by EPs in schools. Also attended SENCO forums to support around referral systems.

Cases providing examples of impact include:

- Support throughout the year for a year two student with complex social and emotional needs which involved four school visits, attendance of several review multi agency meetings and culminated in statutory assessment that was urgently completed.
- Support for a year 9 student with learning and emotional regulation and transition to a secondary student following liaison with the Designated Teachers, caseworker, social worker, and student.
- Supported a child transitioning from one school to another. School was supported to identify whether the child needed to defer year one due to gaps in learning and supported a successful transition to his new school. He has settled in well.
- Assessment of a year 6 student with concerns around learning and medical needs and support for transition and SEN plan
- Support for two year 7 students including assessment and clarifying a summary of need and outcomes. Liaison with grandparents, carers and social care including advice about provision.

- Continued support for two brothers' regulation and SEMH in primary schools with visits and teams' meetings to discuss provision, nurture approaches and integration.

Positive change has been reported by school staff, caseworkers and carers and has included:

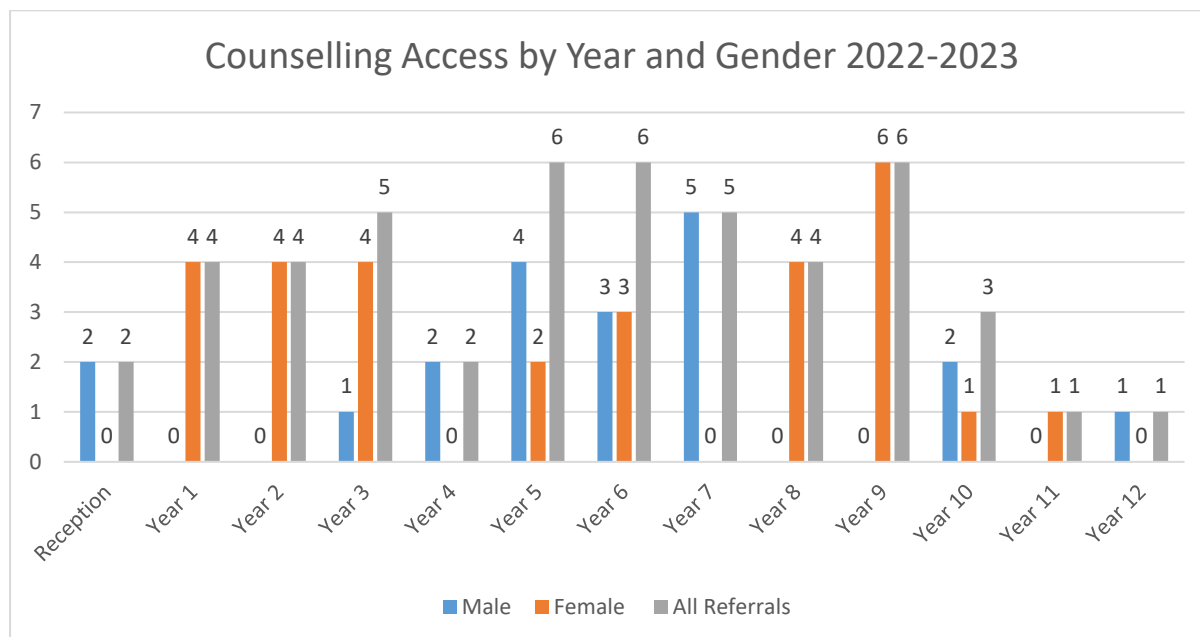
- Special educational needs more fully assessed to inform planning and support (PEP, care team, SEN Support Plan EHCP)
- Teaching staff understanding difficult behaviour in the context of the child's trauma and attachment difficulties and responding to it differently.
- Reduced stress in and increased resilience and feelings of personal efficacy in teachers and support staff so that they are better placed to support the child.
- Support for inclusion for children who might otherwise be excluded or moved into more specialist provision or internal units remaining included in their mainstream school.
- Learning difficulties being identified (where 'behaviour' is the presenting problem) to enable the child's needs to be better understood and met.
- Signposting and facilitating access to other services where there is a gap in assessment or provision identified.
- Ensuring multi-agency liaison and signposting for much needed referrals and future support around specific needs.

10.3 How do our counsellors make a difference?

Mental health and wellbeing for vulnerable groups continues to be an area of priority in County Durham, particularly in the wake of managing the impact of Covid-19 and the global pandemic. Counselling is a specialist intervention that offers a range of interventions that enable pupils to explore their experiences, work through problems and develop effective coping strategies. Counsellors use talking therapy and creative therapies for children and young people to express themselves. Children referred for counselling through the virtual school caseworkers have been significantly impacted by external events and counselling can support them in developing their resilience, while working within a multi-agency system that supports their wellbeing holistically.

School based counselling provides a range of interventions to enable students to explore their issues through talking therapies and creative methods, within a safe and confidential space in school. The service is tailored to each individual student and the difficulties they are experiencing. Through building a therapeutic relationship of trust in which students can safely explore their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, the team can raise their self-awareness and promote wellbeing so that they may achieve their best possible outcomes in their school career and into their future.

The Virtual School SLA with our Schools Counselling Service provides the equivalent of 8 days per week (1.6 FTE) counselling for our CLA. This academic year 44 referrals were made to the counselling service, with a further 5 carried over from the previous academic year. In addition to this, 3 children are on the list for review and can access counselling when timing is right for them. Unlike last year when the children were split evenly across gender, this years have been predominantly female. This year most referrals were of primary age, but with a significant number of referrals coming from KS2 and KS3. A breakdown of the referrals by year group and gender is shown below:

Table 24: Counselling Access by Year and Gender**Table 25: Total Counselling Sessions Attended**

Total number of counselling sessions offered	367
Total number of counselling sessions attended	344
Total number of counselling sessions not attended	23
Meetings with other professionals – includes CTM and LAR*:	30

*Excludes general contact with carers/professionals as required for updates, safeguarding, arranging sessions etc.

Children and young people from 29 primary schools and 20 secondary schools received support. Attendance and engagement in the sessions remains good and 367 direct intervention sessions were offered, with an attendance rate of 94%. We are very pleased with the engagement of our young people and the support offered by schools to facilitate the sessions.

Presenting issues include responses to trauma, domestic abuse, bereavement, transition, separation from siblings/family, impacts of parental mental health and/or substance misuse, as well as low mood and self-esteem. Many of the concerns manifest themselves in school as either behaviours in high arousal states, or withdrawal in low arousal states, emotional regulation difficulties, as well as difficulties building relationships with staff and/or peers.

Most of the children referred are going through transitions or waiting to find out about their future living arrangements and as such prevalent themes in the work have been in supporting these transitions and managing the feelings that surface in times of uncertainty, supporting their resilience and coping strategies, and providing some containment and emotional regulation. Children respond in individual and sometimes unexpected ways to challenging situations, and it can take time before children engage in direct work on trauma so the team deliver interventions that are bespoke to the child and consider their readiness to engage with the issues they may be facing, and the support structures around them. As such, important to their work is regular discussion with staff in school around the impact of trauma and how they can offer a sense of safety and understanding for the child in these difficult times.

Interventions are 10 weeks as standard, with the option of extending to provide more in-depth long-term work where there is clinical need, and it has been agreed by all parties. There has been an increased need to deliver longer interventions this year due to the complexity of needs presenting. This flexibility is essential in providing children and young people with the child-centred support that they need, especially when there are transitions in placements.

Feedback from children, carers and teachers on the counselling:

Carers feedback

"X has really enjoyed their sessions. They share what they've been doing and feel that it has helped them. I've noticed that they're more settled on an evening, and they haven't had any nightmares lately".

"X is a lot calmer; she has settled in the family more and she doesn't show as many controlling behaviours. She developed a routine at home."

"X is a lot more settled now in the foster care placement with us. She is more active and engaged with activities. She enjoyed the sessions and found them useful. Thank you for the help and support."

Child/Young Person Feedback

"I like that you come to see me in school."

"I've enjoyed everything in my sessions. I will miss you a lot".

"Art Therapy is a good place to be! I wish it could be at it all day, so I could be with you".

Feedback from teachers

"X is doing really well since having their counselling sessions. They have less emotional outbursts and are getting on with their work better in class. We've not had to talk to them as much".

"X has come on so much since the sessions. He's started to make friends with the other boys in his class and is joining in with football on the playground at breaktimes. He is more settled and comes and tells me if he wants to talk".

"X was more grounded and happier after the sessions. She has built healthy friendships with other children, and she has been able to fully engage academically and socially. She has really integrated herself in the school's weekly routine."

Case Study

Macy (year 5) was referred for counselling due to concerns following her transition into care. Macy engages well with her academic work in school but presents as quiet and shutdown among peer groups and unstructured time. This is a common presentation with children who have had adverse experiences such as abuse and neglect that result in them being taken into care. School described that when staff talk with Macy she communicates as a much younger child using baby tones, can become emotional, and zones out.*



Weekly counselling sessions with a play therapy approach were facilitated for Macy to have a safe and consistent space alongside an attuned adult. Macy engaged well with creative resources exploring the sensory elements and making mess. This creative play approach enabled Macy to process internal feelings in a non-verbal way, whilst being held by the therapist - having safe limits and boundaries of the session structure, and in-turn developed her ability to regulate her emotions. Additional grounding and calming activities were introduced within her sessions to further support her emotional regulation.



Through her creative play Macy gradually worked through the internal mess of her past experiences and became more present. School noticed that Macy's relations with peers improved, and she presented as happier and more engaged day to day.

11. Voice of the Young Person

All children and young people have an opportunity to have their voice heard through the PEP process. However, young people tell us this is not always child-friendly and is often rushed in the busy school day. Many did not wish to attend so we adjusted our recording to enable them to complete their sections at a different time. We also consulted with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) about the new ePEP. The new ePEP system allows us to collate information from the Young Person's Voice section, which will help us to better understand the issues they are facing.

To further strengthen links with the CiCC the VSH continues to attend meetings and other events they hold. They have been given a small budget which they manage and allows them to award small grants to CLA who have an interest they want to develop. They have developed an application process and a group scrutinise the applications and make decisions on awarding the grants. They have named this "The Education Fun Fund".

12. Enrichment, Unleashing Aspiration and Celebration

12.1 What do we currently offer?

As good corporate parents we want all our care-experienced young people to have the opportunity to experience enrichment activities and resources which will broaden their horizons and show them what might be possible. We support schools through provision of funding or resources to enable this, but we want to extend the provision which currently includes:

- Curious Kids and Storytime for primary children (we also linked this to the summer activity and libraries programme in Co Durham)
- Durham Music Service provides music lessons and instrument hire for looked after young people.
- Working with the Progression and Learning Team to support CLA with sessional employment.
- Encouraging schools to put some of the PP+ towards enrichment activities, to allow them to participate in school residentials and cultural visits.
- Providing books for World Book Day and Good Luck cards before exams take place.
- Providing CiCC with a small budget to help CLA to explore their interests and dreams.

The CiCC also provides a range of opportunities for children and young people and our closer working relationship will enable us to plan some of these in partnership.

12.2 What are we planning for 2023-24 to support CLA and schools?

This is a focus for us for 2023-24:

- We will continue to provide training and network meetings through Teams. The decision to do this is to support the schools out of borough. During the ILACS schools not in Durham expressed how much they valued being able to access network meetings and training. They expressed it helped them to feel part of Durham. It also allows them to access our therapeutic training.
- Continue to work closely with Durham Works to support CLA onto their Post 16 pathway. Making sure that the Year 11 PEP includes the support of the Durham Works Adviser. Track this cohort to identify those who are NEET swiftly and encourage them to have ambitions.
- Work with colleagues in our Special Schools to provide relevant support for CLA in their settings. Identify enrichment opportunities, and effective use of PP+

12.3 How do we celebrate success?

Schools are asked at the PEP meeting how they celebrate success for the child. This ranges from celebration assemblies, achievement points, reward trips, attendance awards, certificates, vouchers, celebration evenings, well done cards posted home, and top student awards.

Children Looked After achievements are recognised at the annual Celebrate Me Awards.

13. Summary

In terms of educational outcomes, KS 1 and 2 data reflects the gaps created through the pandemic, however KS2 data is stronger than KS1. This is an area to address at PEP meetings for Year 2 children. KS4 data has shown a trend in line with that of 2019 in Maths but a dip in English. This will be a focus for the Autumn term PEP meetings which inform us of the progress a child is making through the year and the need for additional tutor hours. We use these meetings to identify where interventions should take place in a timely manner to support CLA to achieve better outcomes. We are working with schools to ensure that gaps in learning which may affect future progress are addressed. Our aim continues to be to close the gap for all CLA. The report notes that for some young people at KS4, high GCSE grades are not within reach yet, but we acknowledge and celebrate the enormous effort they have made to make progress in the face of often huge barriers to enable them to move into education and training. An area of concern has been the attendance of Year 11 at such an important point in their school career. This is an area which we will focus on moving forward and will challenge at every opportunity. The development of monitoring questions as part of the Note of Visit for School Leadership Advisers to discuss with headteachers, along with the CLA PEP caseworker team will ensure that looked after and previously children in care continue to be fully supported to identify and address need and PP+ is spent effectively. We acknowledge and thank those schools who continue to go the extra mile to build confidence and self-esteem, for making a difference and providing strong foundations for next steps for

our young people. Schools have embraced the trauma and attachment approach and hold the CLA cohort high on their list of priorities.

The child is at the centre of everything we do and a strong virtual school team advocate for every child to achieve the best outcomes.

The extension to the role of the VSH to include all children/young people 0 – 18 with a social worker has developed over the year. The Government have decided to continue this into 2023/24 It is important to note that the strategic overview sits with the VSH, who is working in partnership with schools, settings, the wider education team, and social care to develop a model that highlights good attendance and inclusion for this cohort. This is a developing piece of work which focuses on excellent working practice and strong communication of everyone involved with the child and their family to achieve better outcomes through academic intervention and strong pastoral support. The pilot ran in the South of the county this year is now in a position where it can be rolled out across the wider local authority and is the next step for this piece of work.

It is important to note that the offer to the CLA cohort continues to remain strong with a Virtual School team who have not changed their way of working with schools and settings, SEND and Inclusion Team and social care colleagues.

14. Outline Priorities for 2023-24

The key priorities for 2023-24 have been identified through consultation, data analysis, response to the gaps COVID19 has created, the return of formal examinations and the inclusion of EYFS and Post 16 in the ePEP system. Some of our priorities will roll over from 22/23 due to the needs of CLA.

Continuing Priorities from 22/23

We will continue to support more children to achieve higher levels / greater depth in KS2 and KS4 through early intervention and release catch up funding during the Autumn term. Close the gaps emerging in KS1

Continue to increase the focus on attendance for CLA. Working in partnership with the Attendance Improvement Team (AIT) and Social Care to promote a positive ethos around attendance.

Continue to support Post 16 to reduce NEET data through a collaborative approach and by drawing upon the expertise within the Progression and Learning Team.

Further strengthen links with CICC, working towards the Investors in Children Award.

Continue to contribute to an increasingly integrated and joined-up process with health and social care teams to provide a holistic and cohesive approach to support readiness to learn whilst ensuring CLA have stability in their education setting. Ensure a robust system is in place to increase school stability through monitoring and challenge.

Further embed the work for Ever6 CWSW through extended role of the VSH having a strategic lead with this cohort of children.

New Priorities for 23/24

Develop work with Children's Homes to support school anxiety and other barriers to education. Drawing on the expertise of the therapeutic services we make available to schools.

Appoint a Previously Child Looked After Officer to strengthen the Virtual Schools offer for PCLA.

Develop ways of working with the UASC cohort to offer a package to support earlier access into education.

Develop a cohesive system for CLA who require Statutory Assessment and require an EHCP. Produce a process that everyone can work towards to ensure needs are met in a timely manner.

15. Recommendation

That this annual report is noted by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Virtual School Subgroup, Virtual School Operational group, Looked After Children Strategic Partnership Group, Education SMT, Children and Young Peoples Services Management Team and the Corporate Management Team.

Appendix A – Wider Teams

<p>Education Durham Team Primary, Secondary and Special SLA's, EYFS, EDAs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liaison with VSH and VS team for advice, challenge and support to schools and settings to improve outcomes. - Work with Leadership Advisors to make CLA a focus in their offer to schools. - Work with EYFS to embed the ePEP for -1 and -2 children.
<p>Wider SEND and Inclusion Team EPS, Equalities, EWEL teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liaison with VSH and VS team for advice, challenge and support to schools and setting to improve SEN provision. - Provide a named SEND Caseworker for every Durham CLA who has an EHCP. - 0.5 of EP time support for schools, social workers, carers re SEMH and educational advice - Counselling support - Signpost schools to the EWEL assessment as a tool to support CLA.
<p>Social Care, Health, Youth Offending Teams, Adoption, Full Circle, MACC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liaison with VSH and VS to provide enhanced wraparound care with a focus on stability for CLA and swift access to appropriate professional support. - Attend PEP meetings. - Support monitoring of progress and QA of PEPs - Full Circle liaison around support for CLA and carers / parents - Full Circle advice to schools - Attend Multi-agency Collaborative Care Meetings
<p>Attendance, Admissions and Casework Teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support VSH and schools to maintain good attendance of CLA. - Support VSH and schools with inclusion issues around CLA - Support collection and analysis of data re attendance and exclusion
<p>Progression and Learning team / YPS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide Information, Advice, Guidance and Support through Specialist Progression Advisers to enable looked after young people to progress and remain in education, employment, or training. - Provide bespoke activities and interventions to prepare looked after young people for engagement in education, employment, or training through the DurhamWorks Programme. - Implement and manage the Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus Pilot for the second year. - Offer learning opportunities including Traineeships, Supported Internships and Apprenticeships through County Durham Adult Learning and Skills Service. - Provide data and monitor performance in relation to the participation of looked after YP in education, employment, or training, utilising the CCIS Client Caseload Information System. - Seconded Post to VS for 20 months to strengthen work with Post 16 providers as CLA PEP Caseworkers support Post 16 - Embed the Post 16 PEP across providers. - Support CLA to avoid them from becoming NEET
<p>Schools, Colleges, and Educational Settings Designated Teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide, coordinate, and monitor internal school support for CLA and PCLA - Lead on PEPs - Monitor and be accountable for outcomes for LA and PCLA - Advocate for CLA at times when adverse traumas are hindering progress and school stability. - Attend review meetings. - Organise, coordinate, and monitor intervention and support. - Keep up to date with DfE guidance, training etc. - Introduce the Durham CLA Policy

Appendix B - Abbreviations

Name	Abbreviation
Children Looked After	CLA
Previously Children Looked After	PCLA
Virtual School Head	VSH
Personal Education Plan	PEP
Children in Care Council	CiCC
Permanent Exclusion	PEx
Attendance Improvement Team	AIT
Local Authority	LA
Alternative Provision	AP
National Association Virtual School Heads	NAVSH
North East Virtual School Heads	NEVSH
Early Years Foundation Stage	EYFS
Children Looked After Personal Education Plan Caseworker	CLA PEP Caseworker
Virtual School Operational Group	VSOG
Corporate Parent Panel	CPP
Education Health Care Plan	EHCP
Social Emotional Mental Health	SEMH
General Certificate Secondary Education	GCSE
Not in Education, Employment or Training	NEET
Education Employment Training	EET
Out of County	OOC
Looked After Review	LAR
Care Team Meeting	CTM

Independent Reviewing Officer	IRO
National Tutor Programme	NTP
Special Education Needs Disability	SEND
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children	UASC

Headlines- Virtual School Annual Report.

September 2022 – July 2023



Context

- As of July 2023, there were 766 Durham looked after children of statutory school age. Increase of 13.3%
- 48.04% were of primary age and 51.96% were of secondary age.
- 40.13% were female and 59.87% were male. (This includes Post 16)
- 77.6% attended County Durham schools and 22.34% attend out of County schools. An increase of 2.67% from last year.
- 76% attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better. 4.6% higher than last year.
- 11.6% of children and young people attended a school with a grade of Requires Improvement or below. In line with last year.
- 92 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion. 24 less than last year.

The full report highlights how the Virtual School works with education settings, social care and other agencies to support CLA to achieve the best outcomes for them. The body of the report also covers those who are in the Early Years and Post 16 Sector.

SEND and School Moves

- 53% of Durham children looked after had an identified special educational need (SEN) in 2022-23, There is less than 1% decrease in all areas from the figures for the same time last year. This is 3.3% lower than national figures.
- 22.2% of them are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This has decreased by 0.6% over the last year.
- 30.8% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 0.3% since 2021/22.
- SEMH is the primary need for 44% of the CLA SEN cohort. 26% have a moderate learning difficulty and 8% a speech and language need. The VS are proactive in this area and ensure interventions are available for schools to access.
- In 2022-2023 there were 52 school moves during the academic year. Only 3 more than last year.
- A further 54 were suggested, but challenged by the Virtual School and therefore did not take place.
- 33% of school moves were to support moving to a permanent placement or due to distance.

Attendance and Suspensions

The local overall attendance for the whole CLA cohort was 91.04%, almost 0.6% lower than 2021/22 This can be broken down as follows:

- Attendance of primary school age CLA (including reception, Y1-Y6) = **95.5%**.
- Attendance of secondary school age CLA = **86.2%** 1.8% decrease against last year.
- Attendance of CLA in County Durham schools and settings = **89.9%** A decrease of 2.1%
- Attendance of CLA in out of County schools and settings = **90.6%** An increase of 0.6%
- There has been 1 Permanent Exclusion during 2022/23
- There have been forty Suspensions
- Twenty- one children/young people experienced more than one period of Suspension
- Twenty-Seven children attended the secondary sector, ten were primary aged children and three children attended Specialist Provision.

The Full Report

- Reflects the outcomes for EYFS and Post 16
- Gives detail around Post 16 and what is in place to develop future pathways.
- Identifies the challenges experienced by the VS around Care Placement break downs, school moves and SEND
- Identifies how PP+ is used by schools to support better outcomes for CLA
- Identifies how the SLA we source benefit our children.
- Celebrates the commitment by the Virtual School Team as they champion for our children.
- Identifies our priorities for academic year 2023/24, highlighting those we wish to develop further and those which we have identified as new priorities moving forward, through feedback from all stakeholders.
- The subgroup of the Corporate Parent Committee provide Governance for the Virtual School and are well informed throughout the year.

Priorities for 2023 - 2024

Continuing Priorities:

- To support more children to achieve higher levels / greater depth in KS2 and KS4 through early intervention and release catch up funding during the Autumn term. Close the gaps emerging in KS1
- To increase the focus on attendance for CLA. Working in partnership with the Attendance Improvement Team (AIT) and Social Care to promote a positive ethos around attendance.
- To support Post 16 to reduce NEET data through a collaborative approach and by drawing upon the expertise within the Progression and Learning Team.
- Further strengthen links with CICC, working towards the Investors in Children Award.
- to contribute to an increasingly integrated and joined-up process with health and social care teams to provide a holistic and cohesive approach to support readiness to learn whilst ensuring CLA have stability in their education setting. Ensure a robust system is in place to increase school stability through monitoring and challenge.
- Further embed the work for Ever6 CWSW through extended role of the VSH having a strategic lead with this cohort of children.

New Priorities:

- Develop work with Children's Homes to support school anxiety and other barriers to education. Drawing on the expertise of the therapeutic services we make available to schools.
- Appoint a Previously Child Looked After Officer to strengthen the Virtual Schools offer for PCLA.
- Develop ways of working with the UASC cohort to offer a package to support earlier access into education.
- Develop a cohesive system for CLA who require Statutory Assessment and require an EHCP. Produce a process that everyone can work towards to ensure needs are met in a timely manner.

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 January 2024

**Supporting Care Leavers into
Education, Employment or Training****Report of Helen Radcliffe, Strategic Lead: Progression and Learning, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council****Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update members of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the support provided to Care Leavers to enable them to progress into sustained post-16 education, employment or training.

Executive summary

- 2 A number of programmes and schemes have supported Care Leavers to make a sustained progression into post-16 education, employment or training during 2023. These included transition support for Children Looked After through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools and the Workplaces Project, support for Care Leavers through DurhamWorks Programmes, a Sessional Employment Programme, a Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme, as well as support for Care Leavers who are in Higher Education.
- 3 This report contains the latest performance data in relation to the participation of Care Leavers in education, employment or training.

Recommendation

- 4 Members of Durham County Council's Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to:
 - (a) Note the information contained in this report and the presentation that will be given at the meeting.

Background

- 5 A number of programmes and schemes have supported Care Leavers to progress into sustained post-16 education, employment or training, during 2023. These have included:
- (a) Support for Children Looked After to enable them to make a successful progression from Year 11 into post-16 education, employment or training through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools and the Workplaces Project.
 - (b) Support for Care Leavers to maintain their place in post-16 education, employment or training, as well as support for those who become NEET (not in education, employment or training) through DurhamWorks Programmes.
 - (c) A programme to provide employment-based opportunities for Care Leavers within Durham County Council.
 - (d) Continued delivery of the Government's Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme, to support the sustained participation of Care Leavers in Further Education.
 - (e) Support for Care Leavers who are in Higher Education.
 - (f) Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Progression Support

- 6 Children Looked After received support during the 2022-23 academic year through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools. This programme provided support to help them to progress into sustained post-16 education, employment or training. Children Looked After accessed individual careers guidance; participated in group based activities focused on themes such as transition support, motivation, and work related learning; and received one-to-one mentoring support. Attendance at PEP reviews was also a key feature to ensure there was a partnership approach to transition support.
- 7 From September 2020 (when the programme commenced) to December 2023, 3,799 young people were supported by DurhamWorks Programme for Schools, including 217 Children Looked After. Of these, 2,849 young people progressed into a positive education, employment or training destination, including 134 Children Looked After. During the 2022-23 academic year, 1,524 young people were supported by the programme, including 70 Children Looked After. Of these, 1,145 progressed into a positive education, employment or training destination, including 53 Children Looked After. The proportion of

Children Looked After (75%) who progressed into a positive education, employment or training destination was at the same level as the overall cohort of young people who were supported by the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools during the 2022-23 academic year. Those young people who did not make an initial positive progression were supported by DurhamWorks through one of its post-16 re-engagement programmes.

- 8 The Workplaces Project provided opportunities for identified young people in Years 10 and 12, including Children Looked After, to gain a valuable insight into the world of work and find out about the skills and aptitudes that employers value through bespoke visits to employer premises. Young people learned about specific employment sectors, different job roles within those sectors, as well as recruitment processes. They also spent time with employees to find out about their pathways into work, in order to show them that employment is an achievable goal. Since the Workplaces Project commenced in June 2023, 441 young people have participated, including 12 Children Looked After.

DurhamWorks Programmes

- 9 Care Leavers were supported by DurhamWorks post-16 re-engagement programmes to enable them to progress into and remain in education, employment or training. Programmes included: DurhamWorks, DurhamWorks3 and DurhamWorks Futures.
- 10 DurhamWorks supported young people aged 16-24 who were NEET. Young people engaged with DurhamWorks received progression support, the opportunity to obtain English and maths qualifications, as well as access to a range of provision to support their progression into education, employment or training.
- 11 From January 2022 (when the programme commenced) until December 2023, 1,922 young people were supported by the DurhamWorks re-engagement element, including 25 Care Leavers. Of these, 1,381 young people successfully progressed into education, employment or training, including 18 Care Leavers. The proportion of Care Leavers (72%) who successfully progressed into education, employment or training was at the same level as the overall cohort of young people who were supported by DurhamWorks re-engagement element.
- 12 DurhamWorks3 supported vulnerable young people, including: young people who have SEND, Care Leavers, young people who have previously received a social care intervention, young parents, young people who were excluded from education and/or accessed alternative

education, young people who are offenders/at risk of offending, young carers, as well as young people with mental health issues.

- 13 DurhamWorks3 focused on securing employment outcomes for young people within a defined timeframe. Therefore, employer engagement activity was a key feature of the programme, including a DurhamWorks Grant that was available to SME businesses to support the employment of young people engaged by the Programme.
- 14 From January 2022 (when the programme commenced) until December 2023, 1,096 young people were supported by DurhamWorks3, including 77 Care Leavers. Of these, 545 young people successfully progressed into education, employment or training, including 35 Care Leavers.
- 15 DurhamWorks Futures, funded through the Youth Futures Foundation, supported young people in identified vulnerable groups, including: those who had previously received a Social Care intervention, those identified as SEN Support in school, those who had previously been excluded from education, as well as those who had previously attended alternative education. As young people in these specific cohorts are more at risk of experiencing significant labour market disadvantage than their peers, intensive support was provided in order to develop motivation, confidence and work ready skills within a defined timeframe. Since January 2022, 312 young people were supported by DurhamWorks Futures, including 13 Care Leavers. Of these, 172 young people successfully progressed into education, employment or training, including 6 Care Leavers.
- 16 Overall, 332 Children Looked After/Care Leavers were supported by DurhamWorks Programme for Schools and DurhamWorks re-engagement programmes, of which 193 have progressed into education, employment or training.

Future Support

- 17 From 2016 to December 2023, support for young people in County Durham who were NEET/at risk of becoming NEET, including support for young people in priority groups such as Children Looked After/Care Leavers, was greatly enhanced by funding provided through the European Social Fund. From January 2024, the two main sources of funding to support young people are Durham County Council's core budget and the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).
- 18 Although the overall amount of funding to support young people to progress into education, employment or training is at a reduced level compared to what was available through the European Social Fund, it does ensure that support continues to be provided to young people who

are NEET or are at risk of becoming NEET, including Children Looked After/Care Leavers, through DurhamWorks from January 2024 to March 2025. This includes the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools for young people aged 15-16, the Workplaces Project for young people in Years 10 and 12 (funded by County Durham's Poverty Action Steering Group), support for Care Leavers up to the age of 21 through DurhamWorks re-engagement programme, support for young people aged 18-24 who are NEET through DurhamWorks Futures (funded by the Youth Futures Foundation), as well as support for young people aged 16-24 who are economically inactive through DurhamWorks UKSPF funded delivery.

Sessional Employment Programme

- 19 A Sessional Employment Programme continued to offer Care Leavers the opportunity of paid work experience within Durham County Council. Work placements were identified which met the talents, interests, and aspirations of each individual Care Leaver. A Sessional Employment Co-ordinator collaborated with Young People's Advisors from the Children's Social Care Service, colleagues from Human Resources, as well as Durham County Council Service Managers to deliver the programme. Since commencement in October 2021, 26 Care Leavers have accessed paid work experience placements.
- 20 Care Leavers can be in education, employment, training, or NEET to access Sessional Employment and work placements are paid at the rate of the Durham Living Wage. Examples of placements undertaken included Durham County Council's HR Department, farming in protected landscapes, the Gala Theatre, Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Services, Peterlee Pavilion, Meadowfield Depot and Leisure Centres.

Durham County Council Apprenticeships

- 21 Further activities were undertaken during 2023 to enhance the measures in place to support Care Leavers to progress into apprenticeships. This included liaising with Durham County Council HR staff to identify more ringfenced apprenticeship posts, as well as preparing Care Leavers to apply for apprenticeship vacancies through individual tailored support from DurhamWorks. There are currently 7 Care Leavers who are undertaking an apprenticeship with Durham County Council. DurhamWorks also supports Care Leavers to progress into apprenticeships within the private sector. There are currently 6 Care Leavers who are in apprenticeships, employed by a variety of businesses / organisations.

Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme

- 22 Durham County Council continued to deliver the Government's Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme. Funding has been used to appoint a dedicated adviser whose role is to support Care Leavers who are enrolled in Further Education, as well as provide a 'Keep In College' weekly cash incentive of £20 per week to Care Leavers with over 80% authorised attendance.
- 23 During the 2022-2023 academic year, 81 Care Leavers were supported by the scheme, of whom 61 maintained their placement. During the current 2023-2024 academic year, 149 Care Leavers are being supported by the scheme, following the decision to expand it to include Care Leavers attending sixth form colleges and other education and training providers.

Higher Education

- 24 A Young People's Advisor from the Children's Social Care Service is supporting 32 Care Leavers who are studying at a range of Higher Education institutions across the United Kingdom, including Newcastle University, Manchester University, Edinburgh University, Leeds University, Bangor University, University of Bristol, Canterbury Christ Church University, Warwick University, and Sunderland University. Examples of courses being studied include Social Work, Nursing, Law, English Literature, Animal Physiotherapy and Radiography.
- 25 Meetings take place with Care Leavers at their university every 12 weeks. Contact is also made with Care Leaver teams and wellbeing teams at their university. Support is provided to help Care Leavers apply for student finance, secure suitable accommodation, including requests for 'staying put' arrangements during holiday periods, as well as support with their next steps, for Care Leavers who are going into their final year at university. If a Care Leaver is finding university challenging, then meetings may be arranged with their course leader or lecturer, in order to discuss options such as exam re-sits etc.
- 26 Positive links have been established with the five universities that are located in the North East. All have signed up to a Care Leaver Covenant through NERAP (North East Raising Aspirations Partnership), which ensures that Care Leavers studying at any of these universities can access the same level of help and support. NERAP also offers training and support about Higher Education to Children Looked After/Care Leavers and Foster Carers. This includes a Choices Together programme for Children Looked After/Care Leavers aged 11 to 18.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 27 DurhamWorks worked very closely with colleagues in the Children's Social Care Service to provide support to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children. During 2023, dedicated provision was procured through DurhamWorks to support the progression of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children into further learning opportunities. This was delivered by organisations within the VCS sector. 16 young people completed the course with 15 progressing into further learning.

Partnership Working

- 28 Activity to support the progression of Care Leavers into sustained post-16 education, employment or training is underpinned by a team which is co-funded by the Virtual School and the Progression and Learning Service. It consists of a Senior Progression Coordinator, a Post-16 PEP (Personal Education Plan) Caseworker and a Sessional Employment Coordinator. The team has established very close working relationships with the Children's Social Care Service, to ensure developments to support Care Leavers are well co-ordinated.
- 29 In terms of partnership working, one of the priorities of the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership's work programme is to 'continue to work with our children and young people to ensure they have opportunities to access good education, employment, and training to achieve their full potential.' In order to facilitate this, a Children Looked After/Care Leaver Strategic Post-16 EET (education, employment and training) Group has been established. This group brings together colleagues within Children and Young People's Services, as well as Health, in order to develop and implement a County Durham EET Strategic Action Plan.
- 30 Working in conjunction with the Children Looked After/Care Leaver Strategic Post-16 EET Group is an operational Post-16 EET group which brings together representatives from FE colleges, DWP Jobcentre Plus, Higher Education institutions, as well as colleagues from Children and Young People's Services on a quarterly basis in order to discuss post-16 and post-18 learning provision and support that is available for Care Leavers.
- 31 In January 2023, a protocol was launched which sets out the process to be followed for Care Leavers who disengage from post-16 education, employment or training and become NEET. This includes a requirement for a PEP review meeting to be held (within ten working days) with a Care Leaver who becomes NEET and dedicated professionals, including a DurhamWorks adviser, in order to review and plan next

steps. This ensures that access to employability support and career decision making are a key part of the process.

Care Leavers Destination Data

32 The Progression and Learning Service collects and reports the destinations of all young people aged 16-17 in County Durham to the Department for Education on a monthly basis. This information includes Care Leavers who reside in County Durham and whose Corporate Parent is Durham County Council, as well as Care Leavers who reside in County Durham and whose Corporate Parent is a different Local Authority.

33 The following table shows the average destination data for young people aged 16-17 during December to February 2022-2023, compared to the same period in 2021-2022 and 2019-2020 respectively. The average for these months has been chosen because it is the period within the academic year when the 16-17 year old cohort is relatively stable. This period is also used by the Department for Education for annual comparative purposes. The data shows that the proportion of all 16-17 year olds in County Durham who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) is higher than the period before the Covid-19 pandemic, 4.8% in 2022/23 compared to 4.0% in 2019/20. The proportion of 16-17 year old Care Leavers who are NEET is marginally higher than the period before the Covid-19 pandemic, 16.9% in 2022/2023 compared to 16.7% in 2019/2020. One of the factors that accounts for this increase is the number of Care Leavers who are NEET as a result of ill health. An increasing number of young people are presenting with mental health and anxiety issues, which is acting as a barrier to their progression into sustained education, employment or training.

	2022/23		2021/22		2019/20	
	16-17 All	16-17 CL	16-17 All	16-17 CL	16-17 All	16-17 CL
Average Cohort Size	11,239	170	11,172	138	10,245	152
Total EET	94.7%	83.1%	94.4%	75.2%	95.2%	82.9%
NEET	4.8%	16.9%	4.9%	24.6%	4.0%	16.7%
Not Known	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.2%	0.9%	0.4%
Combined NEET and Not Known	5.3%	16.9%	5.6%	24.8%	4.9%	17.1%

Department for Education: Local Authority CCIS, December to February average. This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Progression and Learning Service.

34 The Department for Education publishes comparative data annually on the destinations of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21. This data

captures the destinations of Care Leavers at the time of their birthday and is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.

- 35 The following table shows the destinations of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21 for whom Durham County Council is the Corporate Parent in 2023, compared to regional and national averages. The data shows that the proportion of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21 for whom Durham County Council is the Corporate Parent who are NEET is lower compared to the average rates for the North East and the rest of England. However, it is important to note that the proportion of Care Leavers, for whom Durham County Council is Corporate Parent, whose destination is not known is greater compared to the average rates in both the North East and the rest of England.

	County Durham		North East		England	
	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21
Total Cohort	104	228	680	1,540	13,400	34,650
Participating in EET	65% (68)	56% (21)	63% (430)	52% (810)	66% (8,790)	56% (19,380)
NEET	24% (25)	29% (66)	32% (220)	40% (620)	28% (3,800)	38% (13,060)
Information Not Known	11% (11)	15% (35)	5% (30)	8% (120)	6% (66)	6% (2,210)

Department for Education: Children Looked After in England (including Adoption), year ending 31st March 2023. This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.

- 36 The following table shows the destinations of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21, for whom Durham County Council is the Corporate Parent, in 2023, compared to 2022 and 2019 respectively.

	2023		2022		2019	
	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21
Total Cohort	104	228	84	218	79	156
Participating in EET	65% (68)	56% (21)	67% (56)	61% (134)	61% (48)	51% (80)
NEET	24% (25)	29% (66)	26% (22)	29% (64)	34% (27)	38% (60)
Information Not Known	11% (11)	15% (35)	7% (6)	9% (20)	5% (4)	10% (16)

Department for Education: Children Looked After in England (including Adoption), year ending 31st March. This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.

Conclusion

- 37 This report has provided information about the current support that is available to enable more Care Leavers to participate in sustained education, employment or training.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

ESF funding for the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools, DurhamWorks (re-engagement) and the DurhamWorks 3 Programme, as highlighted in this report, ended in December 2023. From January 2024 to March 2025, support for Care Leavers through DurhamWorks will be funded by Durham County Council's core budget and UKSPF.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

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Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment or Training

Helen Radcliffe - Strategic Lead: Progression & Learning

Corporate Parenting Panel

January 26th 2024



DurhamWorks Programmes

Progression Support from School

- DurhamWorks Programme for Schools
 - Careers guidance, groupwork focused on transition support & work-related learning, mentoring support, PEP reviews.
 - 217 CLA supported, of which 134 progressed into EET.
- Workplaces Project
 - Opportunities for Year 10 & 12 CLA to gain an insight into the world of work through visits to employer premises.
 - 441 young people engaged since June 2023, including 12 CLA.

Re-engagement Support

- DurhamWorks, DurhamWorks3 & DurhamWorks Futures
 - 1:1 progression support, English and maths qualifications, activities to motivate and prepare for employment, employer grant (DurhamWorks3), ILMs (DurhamWorks Futures).
 - 115 CL supported, of which 59 progressed into EET.

Support for Care Leavers

Progression Support & Re-engagement Support

- Jan 2024 - March 2025 main sources of funding to support young people will be DCC core budget / UKSPF.
- CLA/CL will access DurhamWorks Programme for Schools, DurhamWorks re-engagement programme, DurhamWorks Futures, DurhamWorks UKSPF delivery.

Sessional Employment Programme

- Sessional Employment Programme offers CL paid work experience placements within DCC.
- Since October 2021, 26 CL have accessed placements.

Apprenticeships

- Activity undertaken included identifying more ringfenced apprenticeship posts & preparing CL to apply for vacancies through tailored support from DurhamWorks.
- 7 CL are undertaking an apprenticeship with DCC.

Support for Care Leavers

Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme

- DCC has used funding from the scheme to appoint a dedicated adviser to support CLs enrolled in FE, plus introduced a 'Keep In College' weekly incentive of £20 for CLs with over 80% authorised attendance.
- 81 CLs supported during 2022-23 academic year & 149 CLs supported during 2023-24 academic year.

Higher Education

- 32 CLs studying at universities across the UK.
- Regular meetings with CLs at their university, help to apply for student finance, find accommodation, staying put arrangements during holidays etc.
- Positive links with NERAP (North-East Raising Aspirations Partnership).

Performance Data: 16-17 Year Olds

	2022/23		2021/22		2019/20	
	16-17 All	16-17 CL	16-17 All	16-17 CL	16-17 All	16-17 CL
Average Cohort Size	11,239	170	11,172	138	10,245	152
Total EET	94.7%	83.1%	94.4%	75.2%	95.2%	82.9%
NEET	4.8%	16.9%	4.9%	24.6%	4.0%	16.7%
Not Known	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.2%	0.9%	0.4%
Combined NEET and Not Known	5.3%	16.9%	5.6%	24.8%	4.9%	17.1%

Department for Education: Local Authority CCIS (December to February average). This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Progression and Learning Service.

Performance Data: 17-18 & 19-21 Year Olds

	County Durham		North-East		England	
	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21
Total Cohort	104	228	680	1,540	13,400	34,650
Participating in EET	65% (68)	56% (21)	63% (430)	52% (810)	66% (8,790)	56% (19,380)
NEET	24% (25)	29% (66)	32% (220)	40% (620)	28% (3,800)	38% (13,060)
Information Not Known	11% (11)	15% (35)	5% (30)	8% (120)	6% (66)	6% (2,210)

Department for Education: Children Looked After in England (including Adoption), year ending 31st March 2023.
This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 January 2024

Bi-annual Adoption Service Report

1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children’s Social Care, Children and Young People’s Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide a six monthly review of the Adoption Service including the updated key priority areas for 2023/24.

Executive summary

- 2 In this period, the adoption team have received 43 initial enquires. This converted to 19 initial visits being completed in this timeframe with a further three to be completed in October. A conversion of 49%
- 3 In this reporting period, nine adoptive families were approved. At the end of this reporting period, nine prospective adopter households were in stage 1, four in stage 2 pending (applicants can choose to have up to 6 months break between stages 1 and 2) and four prospective adopters in stage 2.
- 4 Matches for children with adopters continues to be carried out in a timely manner, with a clear drive to promote early permanence for children. 32 children had an agency decision maker (ADM) decision for a plan of adoption, 27 children have been granted a Placement Order and 25 Adoption Orders have been granted for children within this period.
- 5 The 11 panels have considered and recommended:
 - (a) Approval of six prospective adopters.
 - (b) The plan of adoption for a relinquished baby.
 - (c) 20 children matched with approved adopters.

- 6 The quality of reports presented to panel continues to be of a high standard and this has been validated by panel members and panel chairs. A priority remains the recruitment of new panel members to increase the central list. In this reporting period two potential new panel members have been interviewed and the statutory checks are underway. However, three panel members resigned in the same period due to personal circumstances. Despite best efforts the agency has not yet been able to recruit elected members.
- 7 No applications have been presented to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) within this period.
- 8 77 birth parents have been supported in writing their Post Box letter or understanding the process. A total of 277 letters were received in this period.
- 9 In this period, there were 119 active post adoption support cases in the adoption team and 64 successful applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund.
- 10 In respect of non-agency adoption, the number of referrals and complexities of this area of adoption work are increasing.
- 11 In this reporting period there have been:
 - (a) Five initial visits completed, with three resulting in an assessment commencing.
 - (b) Six Adoption Orders have been granted. It is noticeable that court proceedings are taking longer, often with several hearings before the Order is granted.
 - (c) Three completed assessments are waiting to be finalised at court.
 - (d) Two assessments are completed, with applications about to be submitted to court.
 - (e) Nine assessments are ongoing although not all will result in the families making an application to court.

Recommendations

- 12 Corporate Parenting Panel is requested to:
 - (a) Note the contents
 - (b) Support the Adoption Service in recruiting Elected Members to the Central List

Background

- 12 This bi- annual report sets out the performance and the direction of travel for the Adoption Service as a spoke in the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast.
- 13 Updated key priority areas for 2023/24:
 - (a) To continue to work collaboratively with our partner in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve adopters in a timely manner.
 - (b) To ensure children’s plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay.
 - (c) Early Permanence carers are to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children’s planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children.
 - (d) To continue to recruit new Panel members to the Central List, particularly Elected Members.

Conclusion

- 14 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will receive a timely update, ensuring they are sighted on developments within the adoption service, including oversight of the updated key priority areas for 2023/24.

Other useful documents

- Detailed Bi-annual adoption team report relating to this reporting period. 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023. (See Appendix 2)

Authors

Barbara Arbon

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The work of the adoption service is governed by a legal framework.

Finance

This report as an overview of the practice has no financial implications.

Consultation

The service regularly seeks and considers the feedback from various persons involved in adoption to enhance practice.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The adoption service embraces equality and diversity throughout all of the areas of work carried out.

Climate Change

This report as an overview of the practice has no climate change implications.

Human Rights

Human rights are considered in all areas of adoption.

Crime and Disorder

This report as an overview of the practice has no crime and disorder implications.

Staffing

This report as an overview of the practice has no staffing implications.

Accommodation

This report as an overview of the practice has no accommodation implications.

Risk

This report as an overview of the practice has no risk implications.

Procurement

This report as an overview of the practice has no procurement implications.

**County Durham
Corporate Parenting Panel
Adoption Team
Bi-Annual report**

April 1st 2023 – September 30th 2023

Author: Barbara Arbon

Adoption Team Manager

17/11/2023

Durham County Council Adoption Service

This bi-annual report covers all adoption activity within Durham County Council (DCC), between the 1st April 2023 and the 30th September 2023. The DCC Adoption Team continue to be a 'spoke' within the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast. This is a partnership 'hub and spoke' model between Durham and Together for Children (TFC).

The Statement of Purpose for Durham Adoption Service was updated in October 2023, reviewed by DCC's legal service and agreed by Senior Management. A copy has been provided to OFSTED as per the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated again by April 2024.

Adoption National Minimum Standards 25.6 (2011) states that written reports are provided on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the Agency, every six months. An annual report was submitted in June 2022 covering the period April 1st 2022 to March 31st 2023.

Durham Adoption Team Staffing

- The Head of Children's Services is Rachel Farnham.
- The Head of Adopt Coast to Coast is Paula Gibbons.
- The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence is Sharon Davey.
- DCC have a number of senior staff who act as Agency Decision Makers (ADM) for approval of prospective adopters, approval of children's permanency plans and adoption matches for children.
- The Adoption Team Manager is matrix managed by the Service Manager for the Children and Young Person's Service and the RAA Head of Service.
- Barbara Arbon is the Adoption Team Manager and Adoption Agency Advisor. There are 2 Consultant Social Workers who also undertake the Agency Panel Adviser role. At the end of this reporting period one of the Consultant Social Worker posts was vacant.
- 2 x Consultant Social Workers
- 6 x full time social workers.

- 4x part time social workers.
- 2x 4 day week social workers.
- 1x Adoption support worker.
- The staffing complement has been increased by a full-time agency social worker who has been working with the Adoption Team since May 2022.
- The Adoption Team continue to offer placements for student social workers and 1 completed their placement during the period of this report.

Recruitment

- In this period, DCC have received 43 initial enquires. This converted to 19 initial visits being completed in this timeframe with a further 3 to be completed in October. A conversion of 49%.

There are varying reasons why some enquiries do not progress and it is not uncommon for enquirers to make contact with us as part of information gathering in their very early stages of considering adoption.

This is a significant decrease from the same period in the previous year where we received 116 initial enquiries, of which 17 did not proceed to a home visit.

It should be noted that during March and June 2023 the RAA Communications and Marketing Officer post was vacant leading to a cessation of advertising. The newly appointed person came in to post and by the end of this reporting period, brand awareness was improving and there was an increase in enquiries, however not to the number in the previous period in 2022. This experience is reflected across the North East region and nationally and the financial crisis is thought to be a factor.

- 12 Information sessions have been held via Teams and facilitated equally by DCC and TfC social workers. These are held on a weekday evening and a Saturday morning. Though not mandatory they are an important part of adoption practice and offer enquirers a chance to hear more about the process and listen to the lived experiences of an adoptive parent.

Stage 1

In stage 1 there has been 1 withdrawal by the prospective adopter following a safeguarding concern

Information, counselling, and preparation courses (ICP) have been delivered monthly on a shared basis between Durham and TFC adoption teams. The training takes place over 3 full consecutive days.

In this period 5 ICP training courses were held with 35 attendees. DCC adoption staff facilitated 2 of the 5 courses, with TfC facilitated 3. 1 course due to be facilitated by DCC was cancelled in August due to low numbers.

Stage 2

In this reporting period, 9 adoptive families were approved. At the end of this reporting period, there were 9 prospective adopter households in Stage 1, 4 in stage 2 pending (applicants can choose to have up to 6 months break between stages 1 and 2) and 4 prospective adopters in Stage 2.

During this period 5 prospective adoptive (households) withdrew from stage 2 and the adoption process. This is quite unusual and therefore the circumstances of each case were considered for agency learning.

During Stage 2, prospective adopters were previously invited to attend an optional half day training session providing information about Early Permanence (EP). Following the start of a pan regional project, this training is now 2 days and mandatory for any prospective adopter wishing to consider EP as a route to becoming adoptive parents. The partner agencies all provide the same training which not only provides consistency of expectation of EP carers but also allows for Adopt Coast to Coast prospective adopters to attend the training hosted by a partner agency if their dates are more convenient.

It is positive to note that following recent awareness raising with Families First's Teams there has been a notable increase in requests for an EP carer; this is a key priority for Children's Services. Children moving to live with a family who could become their adoptive family should an adoption plan for permanence be ratified by the Court is in the child's best interests.

As part of the stage 2 assessment process the adoption support worker offers sessions to cover child development on a 1-1 basis in the prospective adopter's home if the assessing social worker identifies this as a development need. This is good practice and not a statutory requirement.

The training offer in stage 2 also includes day 4 of the ICP mandatory training, Therapeutic Parenting Training. This is delivered monthly with TfC and offers

prospective adopters an opportunity to understand the challenges of re-parenting children who have experienced loss and trauma and how therapeutic parenting can help the child with their emotional healing.

Of the 5 training days held within this period, 2 were facilitated by DCC and 3 by TfC staff; August was cancelled due to low numbers.

The training offer has been extended in this period to include Paediatric First Aid (22 attendees) and Theraplay (17 attendees).

Adoption Panel/Independent Reviewing Mechanism

2 Adoption Panel Chairs are independently employed and are supported by a Vice Chair.

Adoption Panel have been held 11 times over this 6-month period. The Panel is held fortnightly and additional panels are arranged when necessary to prevent delays for children. No additional panels were required in this period.

The 11 panels have considered and recommended:

- Approval of 6 prospective adopters.
- The plan of adoption for a relinquished baby.
- 20 children matched with approved adopters.

All panel recommendations for children 's matches were ratified by the ADM within the statutory timescale of 7 days following panel.

5 of the 6 approvals to become adopters were recommended and ratified with 1 deferred for further health information. This related to historic health records not being available for 1 applicant formerly resident in Ireland. At the end of this reporting period, this issue remained ongoing.

The quality of reports continues to be of a high standard and this has been validated by panel members and panel chairs.

The training requirement for panel members was met in this period by the delivery of Initial Referral to Adoption Process (pre-birth) and the CP Processes in August 2023.

Additional development opportunities were provided by the Agency Adviser through the provision of a variety of literature, research, practice updates and information.

All panel member annual appraisals for 2023 have been completed.

A priority remains the recruitment of new panel members to increase the central list. In the last year 2 potential new panel members have been interviewed and the statutory checks are underway. However, 3 panel members resigned in the same period due to personal circumstances. Despite best efforts the agency has not been able to recruit elected members.

Following concerns being raised by the LADO, a previously approved prospective adopter withdrew from the adoption process before being matched.

No applicants have been presented to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) within this period.

The Child's Journey

In this reporting period -

- 32 children had an ADM decision for a plan of adoption, in the previous year this was 26.
- 27 children have become subject to a Placement Order, compared to 23 in the previous year.
- 20 children were matched compared to 31 in the previous year.
- 14 of these children being matched within the RAA; of which 12 matches were with DCC approved adopters, 2 matches were with prospective adopters from our partner spoke. In the previous year for this period 3 children were matched within the RAA but external to DCC.
- 6 matches were with Voluntary Adoption Agencies. In comparison to the same period in the previous year 12 matches were with external agencies from the RAA.
- 1 child has been placed via Early Permanence.
- 25 Adoption Orders have been granted for DCC children within this period.
- 8 DCC children are still living with DCC adopters but not yet adopted.
- There have been no disruptions in this period.

Family Finding

Profiling Events/Activity Days have been held, facilitated, or attended by DCC staff.

1 activity day has been facilitated by DCC staff which was held in September 2023. DCC and TFC children attended with their foster carers. There was good attendance with some interest shown in the children, however none have progressed to matching. The DCC children who attended the activity day were those where matching is not progressing within the RAA. This can be for various reasons such as health, emotional, behavioural issues, older aged children or for children to be adopted with their brothers and/or sisters.

Post Box contact

77 birth parents have been supported in writing their Post Box letter or understanding the process.

A total of 277 letters were received in this period.

Support is also provided by the Adoption Support Worker to birth mothers who are engaging with the PAUSE project. These birth mothers are assisted with their Post Box contact in respect of writing and sending their letters. Also, where needed, contacting other Local Authorities on their behalf to try to ensure they receive their letters in return.

Post Adoption Support Services

There continues to be a significant increase in requests for adoption support services which are a statutory requirement for each Local Authority. This includes access to adoption records by adopted adults and support for children and adopters due to the child's past traumas. This usually results in adoption support fund applications being made following an assessment of need.

In this period, there were 119 active post adoption support cases in the adoption team and 64 successful applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund.

The DCC Adoption Team and the Full Circle team work collaboratively in supporting families in need of post adoption therapeutic support.

Where parents request a referral be made to Full Circle, that Team complete the assessment of need, which is approved by the Adoption Team Manager and business support for Full Circle submit the application on the ASF portal for funding for the therapeutic intervention.

To support new adoptive parents, funding can be sourced from ASF for a place on the Nurturing and Attachments course offered by Full Circle. This is

intended to ensure ongoing support in the earlier stages of the adoption and build on parent's strengths and abilities, hoping to reduce the need for more intense adoption support as the child grows.

Support, advice, and counselling to birth parents and those affected by adoption. 23 birth parents / grandparents have requested and received support regarding their children's/grandchildren's adoption from the Adoption Support Worker in this period.

The adoption support worker offers support to birth family members whose children are in Care Proceedings with a plan of adoption or following the granting of an Adoption Order. The uptake of this is sporadic. Approximately 25 birth family members have sought some form of support with the adoption support worker in his period.

The adoption support worker is also the 'keeping in touch' champion for the team. This involves liaising with other adoption services and attending national webinars relating to the development of openness in adoption. Modernising adoption is a priority for Adopt Coast to Coast.

Access to records for adopted adults wishing to access their adoption records is undertaken by Adoption Social Workers, 16 adopted adults have requested this service in this period.

Life appreciation days were reinstated during is period. They are co-ordinated and facilitated by the family support worker in the Permanence Team and the adoption support worker.

Adopt Coast to Coast continue to host social events and in this period an Easter and a Summer party have been held. These opportunities bring adoptive families together to share experiences, they are a very popular events; feedback is very positive.

Non-Agency Adoption

The number of referrals and complexities of this area of adoption work are increasing.

In this reporting period there have been:

- 5 initial visits completed, with 3 resulting in an assessment commencing.
- 6 Adoption Orders have been granted. It is noticeable that court proceedings are taking longer, often with several hearings before the Order is granted.
- 3 completed assessments are waiting to be finalised at court.

- 2 assessments are completed, with applications about to be submitted to court.
- 9 assessments are ongoing although not all will result in the families making an application to court.

Signs of Safety/Signs of wellbeing/success

The Adoption Team staff continue to attend Signs of Safety training sessions delivered by DCC's Learning and Development Department and this model is now being embedded within day-to-day practice. As this model has been devised primarily as a safeguarding tool, it has been necessary to adapt some wording to ensure it is used to its best advantage within the adoption service.

Updated key priority areas for 2023/24:

- To continue to work collaboratively with our partner in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve adopters in a timely manner.
- To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay.
- Early Permanence carers are to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children's planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children.
- To continue to recruit new Panel members to the Central List, particularly Elected Members.

Barbara Arbon

Adoption Team Manager

November 2023

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Adoption Team Mid Year update 2024



Recruitment and assessment of Adopters

- 43 initial enquiries.
- 19 initial visits carried out.
- 9 Adoptive families approved as adopters.
- At the final day of this reporting period 9 families were in stage 1, 4 in stage 2 pending and 4 in stage 2.
- No applicants have appealed via the Independent Reviewing mechanism (IRM).

Non-Agency Adoptions

- 5 initial visits completed, 3 of which progressed to assessment.
- 6 Adoption Orders granted.
- 3 Annex A reports filed with Court awaiting completion of the proceedings.
- 2 Annex A reports completed awaiting to be filed with Court and proceedings to commence.
- 9 assessments ongoing.

Adoption Panel

Panel continues to sit fortnightly. There are 2 panel chairs who chair panel alternately. During this reporting period panel has recommended:

- 6 prospective adopter (households) approvals;
- 20 matches for DCC children with RAA and external agency adopters;
- 1 plan of adoption for a relinquished baby.

Future Developments

Recruitment of panel members remains a priority, including the ongoing need to recruit elected members.

Post Adoption Support

Post adoption support is an increasing area of work:

- 119 children and their parents were supported in respect of seeking and securing therapeutic intervention relating to their past traumas. For the majority of these children this work will be ongoing for many months, possibly years;
- Adoption Support fund (ASF) applications are made to secure the funding for therapy for these children. 64 applications were made and granted;
- 77 Birth parents were supported to write letters to their adopted children. 277 letters were received and reviewed before forwarding on.

Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/2023





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1 Introduction

As the three statutory partners of the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, we present our report covering the period 2022/2023. The report provides information about the work and effectiveness of our local safeguarding children arrangements during this period. In it we aim to demonstrate how we function and provide assurance that our safeguarding arrangements are effective in keeping children safe.

The last 12 months within the DSCP have seen the launch of a brand-new approach to the way we support children and families in County Durham. We have developed a learning cycle model which will allow us to focus more clearly on the DSCP priorities in order to strengthen partnership working in service delivery. Within the model we've developed our practice to enable us to listen to what children, young people, families, and practitioners have told us and we have been working across the Partnership to coproduce this approach. We're really excited about the vision it offers, where we work towards offering families the help they need, at the earliest opportunity and we build upon the strengths and resources available to practitioners and community networks. Within the DSCP we recognise a well-functioning child safeguarding partnership will have the right support available, at the right time – something we believe passionately we can achieve here in County Durham.

Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership have so much to be proud of in County Durham. This report recognises the progress that the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership has made throughout the year and sets out our commitment to continue to address the challenges that will remain in 2023/24. We want to thank all those colleagues that are working across the Partnership in a variety of roles, to support children, young people, and families every day. We are immensely grateful for all that you, our workforce, do across the county, on a daily basis - thank you!

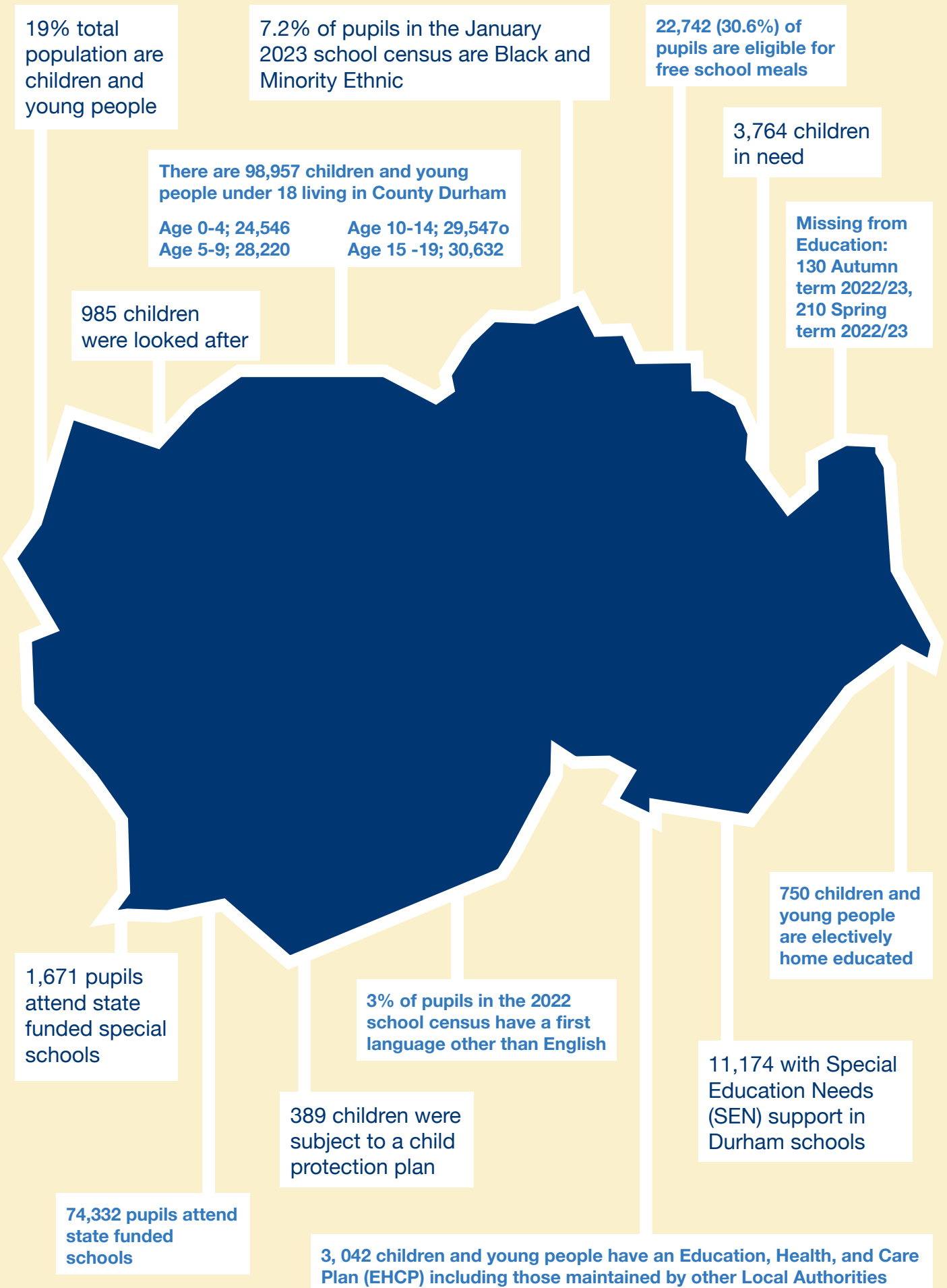
John Pearce
*Director of Children and
Young People's Services,
Durham County Council*

David Ashton
*Detective Chief
Superintendent, Head of
Crime and Safeguarding,
Durham Constabulary*

Annie Topping
*Director of Nursing,
North East and North
Cumbria ICB (Central
locality)*



2 Children and Young People in County Durham





Schools in
County Durham

213 primary
schools

33 secondary
schools

2 pupil
referral
units

10 special
schools

11 nursery
schools

9 independent
schools

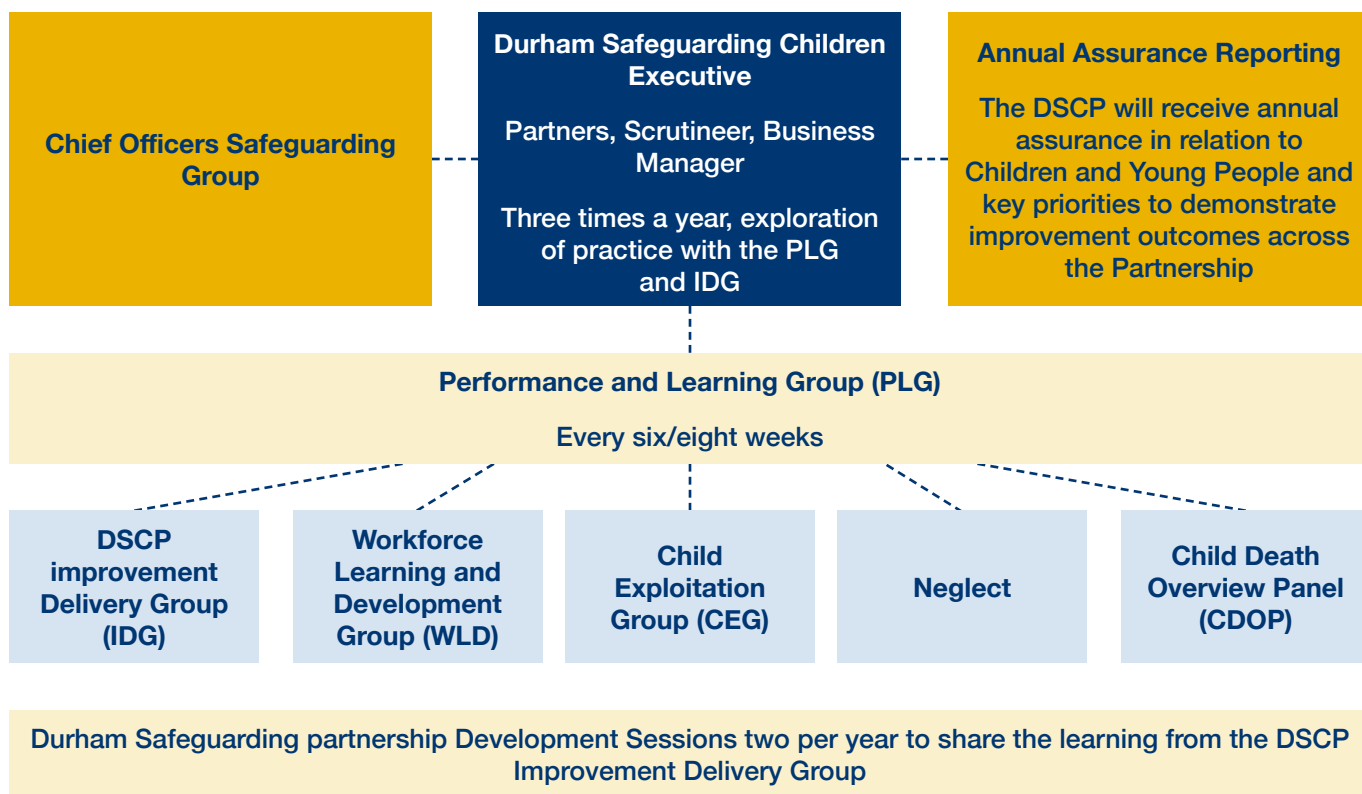
Total
278
schools



3 About Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Durham Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (DSCP) is a statutory, multi-organisation partnership coordinated by a business unit, which oversees and leads children’s safeguarding across the Durham Council area. The main objective of the DSCP is to gain assurance that local safeguarding arrangements, comprised of partner organisations, are working effectively, individually, and together, to support and safeguard children in its area who are at risk of abuse and neglect.

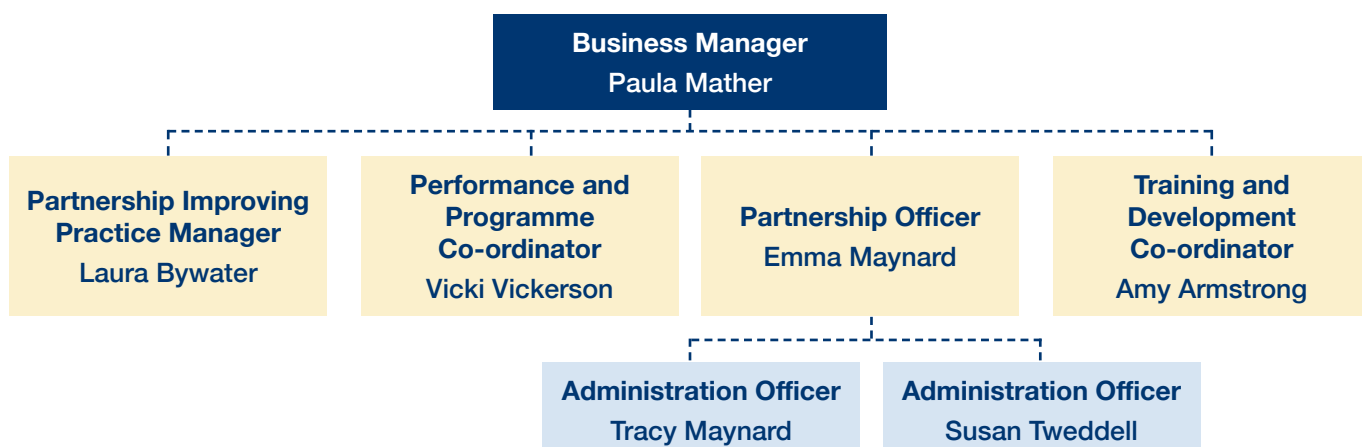
How the DSCP is Structured



The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership has made several changes over the past twelve months to their team and the structure of meetings and subgroups. The changes were made to support improvements to how we collaborate, scrutinise, assure, and drive the coordination of safeguarding activity. Within the partnership each sub-group has a clear term of reference and an annual workplan will align with the strategic priorities for the partnership. Within the updates structure each work plan demonstrates golden threads to priority areas and impact on the lives of children and young people. Agendas and facilitative discussions at all meetings focus on safeguarding practice, impact and improvement.

The Partnership Business Support Unit undertake the management and support function of the partnership, their structure and staffing has also had several changes.

Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Team Structure



Alongside these changes within our partnership, we are grateful for all the efforts across the multi agency arena to continue to drive activity to ensure that we have met or worked towards the key priorities (2022/2023).

The business unit continues to plan and move forward with joint strategic work, making best use of some of the working practices which have now become business as usual.

4 Safeguarding Partnership Subgroups

The DSCP has six principal subgroups:

- Performance and Learning Group (PLG)
- Improvement Delivery Group (IDG)
- Neglect Group
- Child Exploitation Group (CEG)
- Workforce Learning and Development (WLD)
- Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP).

Performance and Learning Group

The purpose of the Performance and Learning Group is to monitor the impact and outcomes of partner activity on behalf of the DSCP, as required by Chapter 3 of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. The group considers the performance of all agencies involved in safeguarding children using the vision of the DSCP as a basis from which to assess good practice and concerns, reporting such to the Safeguarding Executive Group, by using data and intelligence. The purpose of the Durham Performance and Learning Group is to take forward key actions and improvements identified by the Safeguarding Partnership Executive. The Durham Performance and Learning Group will plan and coordinate learning activities. This will include learning from Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews and learning from national best practice.

Key Achievements

- Multi agency action plans have been reviewed, the recommendations made at rapid reviews, within multi agency audits and improvement work is then discussed at six months and/or twelve months, looking at the impact this makes to children and young people in County Durham
- Scoped and planned the MASH deep dive, they then managed, agreed and reviewed the learning from this practice improvement piece of work
- They have Identified and ensured the dissemination of good practice, to celebrate and learn (chapter 6)
- They have analysed national learning and considered local learning themes. 7 point briefings or learning briefings have been completed and shared through the partnership from the PLG
- Coordinated and overseen an annual programme of multi agency audits, this has enabled them to provide assurance about improvement and impact, receive findings and ensure that learning is disseminated to front line staff (chapter 5)
- Sought assurance that the subgroups alongside the PLG have a function and clear process of work and terms of reference.

What difference has it made?

- The PLG model has developed to be structured around an active learning approach, making links with a range of activity to support the priority areas of work including performance, local cases, local practice themes, national practice themes assurance visits, work of the scrutiny group and views from practitioners, children, and their families
- The PLG have supported the multi agency team to have a clear model to share and communicate learning and practice across the partnership.

Next Steps

- The PLG have developed a ‘think tank’ approach to the gathering, sharing and evaluating of data, both qualitative and quantitative across the partnership. This will be developed further in 2023-2024
- Embed the new model of practice across the partnership, identifying more positive practice examples and sharing this
- To disseminate the learning from the current Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- To support the completion of the Organisational Safeguarding Assessment pilot.

Neglect Group

The Neglect Group recently revised their plan and partnership vision and key priorities.

Vision

‘To reduce neglect; to reduce the impact of neglect by providing effective help and support at the earliest opportunity’.

Although Neglect continues to be a key challenge in Durham the number of children requiring a child protection plan because of neglect has fallen from 70% to 65%.

Key Achievements

- Revised and developed an updated HEAT tool
- Raised practitioners’ awareness of the Signs of Safety Harm Matrix
- Developed and supported the implementation of the neglect tool kit
- Over the past twelve months the neglect group as implementation and reviewed the use of the Graded Care Profile 2 tool
- Developed and launched training around Dental Neglect.

What difference has this made

To date we have trained two hundred and seventy six practitioners and managers across the partnership to use the Graded Care Profile. Initial evidence of the tools’ impact includes practitioners reporting they are better able to evidence neglect and the harm to the child. Practitioners also report the tool helps to recognise what parents are doing well as well as where change is required. They report the tool also helps to break down priority actions into small achievable tasks for parents, subsequently supporting engagement of the family. A more detailed evaluation of the impact of the tool is planned in 2023.



What next

- The Neglect Group recently revised the 'Neglect Plan on a Page' (2023/24). The plan sets out our partnership vision and key priorities. We aim to do this through three key objectives: -
 - **Understand Neglect:** To understand the prevalence of neglect across County Durham in order to effectively target resources which helps to prevent and mitigate impact of neglect on children and young people
 - **Early Identification:** to improve the recognition and assessment of neglect and
 - **Effective Interventions:** practitioners across County Durham deliver effective interventions that reduce neglect before the need for statutory interventions.



Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)

The County Durham and Darlington Child Death Overview Panel is a joint sub-group of Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership and Darlington Safeguarding Partnership. This allows for sharing of good practice and development of safeguarding opportunities towards improving outcomes for all children and young people across County Durham and Darlington and considers the learning across the county.

Key Achievements

- The Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) is committed to reviewing every child death in order to identify whether there is any learning to influence better outcomes for children and young people at both local and national level
- The CDOP also influence actions that can be taken to reduce the number of child deaths in the future, as well as improving services to families and carers.

What difference has this made

In February 2022, with funding from the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) for North-East and North Cumbria (NENC) the local authority including public health and NHS partners, began working in partnership with Durham University to design and implement a multi agency SUDI (sudden unexpected deaths in infancy)-prevention programme for County Durham to further reduce these tragic deaths in infants. Free online training packages have been developed and piloted for County Durham staff and partner services who encounter vulnerable families. This graded training offer is reflective of the specific roles and responsibilities. We are now working with key partners to firmly embed the multi agency 'Eyes on the Baby' SUDI training programme.

What next

The Child Death Overview Panel held a Development Session in November 2022 to review the current CDOP arrangements and a work plan for 2023-24 has been developed to build on the effectiveness of the Child Death Review process in County Durham and Darlington. Developments include:

- A revised escalation processes
- A new Thematic Review framework in line with the national guidance
- Measuring the impact of the work of the CDOP
- Standardising family engagement in the Child Death Review process.





Workforce Learning and Development

Key Achievements

Over the past year the Workforce Learning and Development has ensured that safeguarding children training needs are identified, training is delivered to a consistently high standard and that there is a process in place for the partnership to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training. The Workforce Learning and Development is accountable to the Performance and Learning Sub-Group (PLG) who has the responsibility to integrate the learning from local and national child safeguarding practice reviews and significant events into training.

What difference has this made

We have developed and embedded three different training options, e Learning, training programme with sessions delivered by an expert in the course subject either on Teams/Zoom or face to face Bespoke training delivered as single agency to individual organisations by the DSCP Training and Development Coordinator.

All training available is multi agency and topics which are the findings in national and local learning reviews. The three training options were developed to meet the increasing demand from a flexible training offer. One where partners can all learn and develop from no matter what barrier or limitations they may have upon time and availability.

We delivered two very successful safeguarding weeks which in April, twenty sessions offered and themed around:

- Safeguarding back to basics
- Report writing
- Neglect
- Child sexual abuse.

Safeguarding week in November was topics from recent reviews such as Arthur and Star Story and recognition of:

- Physical abuse
- Engaging Dads and unseen males
- A wonderful session delivered by young people 'what it means to feel safe to me'.

We have developed a thorough evaluation, feedback and impact process which allows practitioners to reflect on training through our training evaluation and practitioner impact forum. This is an opportunity to explore together how training has impacted on their practice with children, young people and families, whether it meets their needs and how we can develop any future learning. There is no 100% return rate on all training evaluation.

Next Steps

A continuous program of training and learning to be developed, with some key focus on training around:

- Dietary Neglect
- Nourish to Thrive
- Reducing Parental Conflict
- Multi agency child protection conference template
- SUDI Eyes on the Baby training
- Safer Recruitment Training.

Improvement Delivery Group

The Improvement Delivery Group is a new subgroup to the DSCP, it was launched in September 2022, its role is to consider and reflect a range of information from a variety of sources relating to a multi agency practice issue and complete work around the safeguarding partnership's priorities.

The Improvement Delivery Group (IDG) considers these frontline challenges and successes and makes suggestions and recommendations to improve multi agency working which are presented into the Executive Group by the Performance and Learning Group (PLG). The Improvement Delivery Group has been established by Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership to improve the effectiveness of Durham's safeguarding and child protection practice across partnership agencies.

The aim of the Improvement Delivery Group is to ensure a clear line of sight into practice across the landscape of provision for County Durham's most vulnerable children including those in receipt of Early Help services. The Improvement Delivery Group should bring together the views of children, their families, and professionals to inform the continuous development of services and approaches aimed at protecting children from harm and making positive differences to their lives. The Improvement Delivery Group will receive direction from the Safeguarding Executive, Performance and Learning Group to direct the focused areas.

Key Achievements

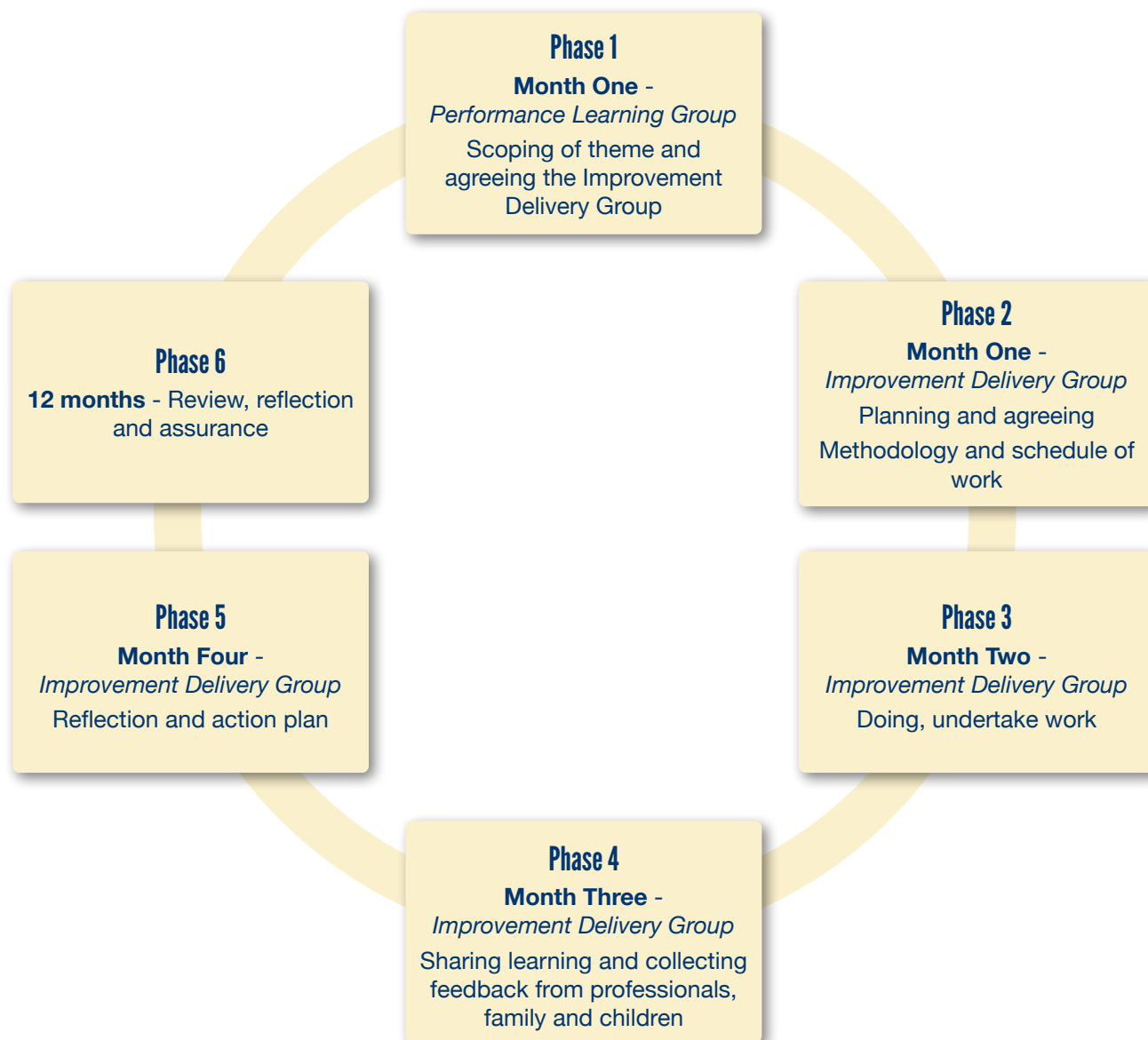
Since the launch of the Improvement Delivery Group, they have completed one piece of work which entailed a Deep Dive into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This entailed an audit of fifteen multi agency cases and a two day assurance visit to the first contact team where the MASH is situated.

What difference has this made

Examination has provided good assurance on the co-located multi agency team of social workers, police, and safeguarding nurses. Good evidence that robust multi agency discussions and decisions around risk were taking place and were well recorded; most partners had a voice in the process and strong evidence a Signs of Safety (SOS) approach was being used. Following this piece of work the IDG offered a number of recommendations to the Performance and Learning group, these involved improving communication with partners around the input and output of work within the MASH and increasing the use of safeguarding leads into discussion around threshold. This has been taken up by the MASH board where an action plan has been developed and delivered.

Next steps

The IDG have aligned themselves to the DSCP priority plan, each priority will be looked at within the next sixteen months. A four month learning cycle will be used when looking at each priority work stream.



Child Exploitation Group

The Child Exploitation group is a group that has a joint governance with Darlington Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The primary purpose of the Child Exploitation Group is to monitor, improve and evaluate the strategic response of partner agencies in tackling children missing from home, care and education and the reduction of child exploitation across Durham and Darlington.

Key Achievements

- A joined-up approach to raising awareness of online harm, child exploitation, risks to missing children, county lines and modern slavery to enable practitioners to spot the signs to prevent further harm.
- Formal strategies and procedures, (including clear thresholds and time frames) are in place for Children Missing from Home, Care and Education and Child Exploitation

- Where issues of concern are not resolved at a local level they are escalated to the Child Exploited Group and if required to the Executive/Statutory Safeguarding Partners
- To understand the local picture of missing children, Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation
- Understand the contextualised safeguarding model
- Understand what the gaps and barriers are to work together through audits and quality assurance processes to identify learning and provide appropriate responses, solutions and tool kits
- To monitor an agree joint partnership performance scorecard relating to missing children, child exploitation, child exploitation vulnerability tracker (CEVT) and education data to gain an understanding of changing trends, needs and risk factors.

What difference has it made

- A key achievement over the past twelve months has been the improvements that have been made in the way data is captured and analysed. A dashboard has been created to better understand the number of missing episodes and the children concerned.
- In terms of impact, the timeliness of Return to Home Interviews despite some challenges with staffing issues, has improved from 29% to 68%. This continues to follow an upward trajectory.
- The scope of the Return to Home Interviews has been extended to review the quality of the Return to Home Interviews completed. The findings received so far are positive in terms of quality and the effectiveness of staff in engaging with young people and gathering information.
- Further work is underway to look at how the performance data can be used to inform planning within the CEG, the aim of which is to identify opportunity to reduce the number of missing episodes and improve the safety of young people. The findings from a review of young people with frequent missing episodes indicated that there was a need to raise awareness regarding the difference between a missing episode and an absent episode and how these are recorded on systems to ensure the accuracy of the performance information, this work is currently being completed and a more detailed evaluation of the impact of the above changes will be completed in 2023.

What next

Durham and Darlington Safeguarding Partners have developed the three objectives when completing any work over the next twelve months.

- **Child/Children or Young Person(s) focus:** partners are committed to the identification, risk assessment and risk management of those children identified as being at risk of missing and child exploitation Children are at the centre of what we do
- **Context focus:** partners are committed to targeting spaces and places and people of concern who pose a risk to exploiting children and young people
- **Early Identification Focused:** Partners are committed and equipped to educate children to recognise the risks of Harm outside the Home. Partners will support parents, carers, and practitioners to understand the signs of harm outside the home.

What we do within Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership

- Pro actively identify and respond to new and emerging safeguarding issues and develop multi agency policies, procedures, and work streams
- Communicate widely to persons and bodies of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, raising their awareness of how this can best be done and encouraging them to do so
- Raise awareness and train the multi agency workforce to promote a common, shared understanding of local need in order to and provide children with the help they need
- Coordinate a response to serious safeguarding incidents, unexpected child deaths and dialogue with the National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- Oversee, evaluate, and seek assurance on the effectiveness single/ multi agency safeguarding practice in order to drive improvement
- Make recommendations in the planning of services for children in County Durham that is driven by analysis of multi-agency data, intelligence, and learning
- Quality assurance remains our key driver across all the subgroups, using frameworks that will measure the impact of subgroup activities and challenge those working in the safeguarding arena. Partners provide either a written or verbal report to the exec and three additional exec meetings are held per year which will seek assurance from partner agencies and relevant agencies in relation to safeguarding children in practice and responsibilities.

How do we achieve it

- Manage the strategic business plan which has four priority areas over three years
- Challenging and learn from practice through the learning cycle process
- Quality assurance framework meetings
- Performance Framework
- Oversee Complex and Organised abuse process
- Support subgroups; Missing and Exploited Group (MEG), Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP), Neglect Group, Workforce Learning and Development Group (WFD), Performance and Learning Group (PLG), Improvement and Delivery Group (IDG)
- Management of serious incident and child death notifications and processes
- Management and oversight of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Learning from – near misses, poor and good practice
- Multi agency website, newsletter and twitter
- Supporting and developing the multi agency procedures
- Multi agency training programme

Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Reporting and Assurance Structure



The Partnership has an Independent Scrutineer and Chair who provides leadership, vision and support and who is responsible for ensuring that all organisations contribute effectively to the work of the DSCP. The Independent Scrutineer and Chair provides accountability for the work undertaken by the DSCP by way of reports to relevant strategic committees and boards. Effective communication between the Business Manager and Independent Scrutineer and Chair ensures that there is a clear link between the subgroups and executive group, enabling risks, themes, and opportunities to be highlighted at an executive level, and challenge, direction and opportunities to be shared into subgroups. This is supported by meetings for subgroup Chairs to provide clarity about the role of each subgroup in the priority areas and to raise any process or participation issues with the Independent Scrutineer and Chair.

Our Vision and Values

Our vision and values are simple, it's about 'Keeping Children Safe' on the premise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. It acts as an umbrella covering all that we do and underpinned through our three Core Values - Tenacity; Curiosity; Openness.

The DSCP has had a number of significant changes over the past twelve months, this has included a number of staffing changes and a change to our structure and how we deliver work. The biggest motivation for this change has been to consider how the partnership can understand practice and make improvements in a timely manner.



5 Achieving against Priorities

The local priorities for the DSCP during the reporting period of 2022/23 were:

- Management Understanding and Decision Making
- Voice and Lived Experience of the Child
- Cumulative Harm
- Harmful Sexual Abuse.

Each priority area was discussed within the Performance and Learning Group where a dedicated subgroup, with membership from across the partnership was identified. The subgroup activity focuses specifically upon what we want to improve for children and young people within each specific themed priority area. Each subgroup has a bespoke work plan, which has clear impact statements and outcome measures, so that we can track progress and evidence the impact of our multi agency activity. Strategic leads are required to submit an annual spotlight report to the partnership, to evidence how their work has contributed to improving outcomes for children and young people. The multi agency subgroups pro actively horizon scan for emerging risks and themes in safeguarding practice, so that we can respond to the needs of children, young people, and their families in a timely manner. This annual report will summarise the key achievements, challenges, and areas of focus for each of our subgroups, linked to our local priorities for 2022/23.

Management Understanding and Decision Making

Key Achievements 2022/2023

- Quarterly multi agency auditing processes have been developed. Within each audit activity there was a focus on Management Understanding and Decision Making. Within these audits there has been a recognition that management oversight, understanding and decision making has been evident on children's files, if it was not evidenced then action plans have been drawn up to support this to take place
- Multi agency training has been delivered throughout the year, Risk Assessment/Cumulative Harm embedded into Safeguarding Managers training
- There are improved systems to monitor Supervision across the partnership
- Capping caseloads for less experienced staff are evidenced in the partnership
- Buddy support is offered to less experienced staff in the partnership
- Early Help offers fortnightly discussions to the partnership on any cases that are stuck or difficult to manage
- Challenge process has been developed within the DSCP to support multi agency challenge on difficult cases
- Awareness/training to professionals has been well attended with positive feedback.

What Difference has it made

- All of the above work has contributed to there being an increase in the level of management oversight and decision making on all cases where children require support from services
- Regular evidence appears of strong supervision and management oversight in a high percentage of cases
- Process have been developed to allow managers to refer multi agency cases to the DSCP for independent oversight and scrutiny
- Practitioners have a pathway and protocol to follow when they are struggling with a case.

Next Steps

- DSCP to support the development of a multi-agency supervision process
- A challenge event will be held in 2024 along with strategic managers to look at what we have done, what we have achieved and further steps to be taken.

Voice and Lived Experience of the Child

Key Achievements 2022/2023

- Quarterly multi agency auditing processes have been developed. Within each audit activity there was a focus on voice and lived experience of the child. The results are presented at the Performance and Learning group to provide assurance to key stakeholders
- Within these audits there has been a recognition that developing practice is becoming more evidence that the child's words, experiences, and voice is evident on children's files
- This is a common theme in all training on the DSCP training programme and great emphasis and information is shared on this
- Safeguarding week topic, within the week there was a session designed, facilitated, and delivered by children
- The DSCP have sought or included the voice and feedback of children within their work and priorities, this has included focus groups, surveys, and appreciative enquiry work
- DSCP have supported and promoted key practice principles across the partnership, language that cares have been shared
- A Professional Pledge has been developed with a commitment that children are central to all we do, and we hold each other to account
- DSCP training offer designed so that lived experience of children is consistent in all courses
- Impact Forums introduced to assess real difference on practice multi agency training has
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities representation is evident within the partnership, to support an understanding of individual needs
- Safeguarding video have been produced by young people to help others understand different service levels and which agencies support families.



What Difference has it made

- The DSCP now has a clear process and vision to include the voice and lived experience of the child within all work and all subgroups. At this stage, impact and outcomes are yet to be determined. This will be a focus of the Performance and Learning Group for the next three years initially focussing on the next twelve months
- Agencies understand the expected standards when considering lived experience/voice of children
- Robust processes are in place in each agency to monitor and report on compliance and impact.

What Next

- Young people will be able to view the work completed within DSCP and have a greater understanding of the changes to the DSCP and the levels and stages of support and which services sit under these at each level
- Young people to contribute to the DSCP Website
- Young people's views inform the strategic direction of the work within the DSCP.

Cumulative Harm

Key Achievements 2022/2023

- Cumulative Harm guidance developed and cascaded across communication channels looking at key areas like Harm Matrix and Chronologies
- Quarterly multi agency auditing processes have been developed. Within each audit activity there was a focus on cumulative harm and the tools practitioners use to understand the history of the child. The results are presented at the Performance and Learning group to provide assurance to key stakeholders. Within these audits there has been a recognition that developing practice is becoming more evidence that the child's world, experiences, and history is evident on children's files.
- Access into Signs of Safety briefings enhanced and woven into all DSCP training provision
- ICPC reports have been developed alongside the SOS structure which supports practitioners to identify cumulative harm.

What Difference has it made

- Through appropriate levels of scrutiny and health check, multi agency meetings are well facilitated to enable the continued assessment of risk and progress for children and families
- There is a robust analysis of family history, capacity to change and the impact on the child
- There has been improvement as to how professionals use plain language that children and families understand.

What Next

- Child Protection assurance visits will be completed by the DSCP in October 2023
- DSCP Banners to be shared with the partnership to support information sharing.

Harmful Sexual Abuse

Key Achievements 2022/2023

- A Sexual Harm Consultation group has been established in Durham which is a multi-agency group that offers oversight and support on cases where sexual harm is assessed
- Cases are now flagged on multi agency systems when Sexual Harm is assessed
- Family network meetings have been promoted and developed across the partnership
- Training now uses the Sexual Harm Framework, Assessment Intervention and Moving on (AIM'S) training and capacity to protect training is offered to social work professionals. Supervising cases of sexual harm training was offered to all team managers and practice leads that supervise social work staff
- Sexual Harm Champions have been trained and developed across the partnership
- Sexual harm tool kits are available to the partnership.

What Difference has it made

- The use of Sexual Harm Champions in the partnership has led to an increased awareness
- Cases are triaged for advice when Sexual Harm is categorised by management and experiences practitioners
- Family network meetings are being utilised within the partnership to help to manage risk
- Safeguarding Children Sexual Abuse, four hundred+ briefing sessions have been offered to the partnership.

What Next

- Review of the Sexual Harm consultation group. Review to include processes, referrals in. Consideration to whether this could it be offered to the wider partnership?
- Data work on the children coming through the sexual harm consultation group, have we got the 'right' children coming through, can do some assurance work with this.



Audits 2022/2023

The DSCP seeks to challenge partners to continuously improve safeguarding for children and young people in County Durham. Multi agency, collaborative and practitioner led auditing have been completed throughout 2022-2023. These audits were identified by partners at Embedded Learning Group (now the Performance and Learning Group) following review of wider service intelligence and learning from LCSPR'S. Four audits were completed focusing on:

- Multi agency assessments and recognition of cumulative harm
- Recognising and responding to risk factors in sexual abuse
- How and when Strategy Meetings are convened, focussing on children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation
- Whole family assessments, considering cumulative harm, frequent house moves and consideration of all adults significant in the life of the child.

Key Achievements

- Within each audit activity the partnership identified areas of positive practice around:
 - Quick application of safeguarding protocols by referring practitioners.
 - Good communication and coordination of safeguarding protocols implementation between partner practitioners
 - Appropriate service responses to referrals and disclosures.
 - Good recording of information within most partner agency systems
 - Evidence of direct work with the child and the child understood risk
 - Evidence of safeguarding supervision taking place and being recorded on the child's files
 - Positive relationships between professionals, family and child seen on the case files.

Auditors found areas for improvement included

- Assuring the sharing of information to inform decision making and risk assessment, between and within agencies
- Communication, both between agencies and with service users
- Wider safeguarding needs, such as cumulative harm, were not always consistently considered
- Maintaining effective communication between partners after initial strategy meeting
- Assuring the sharing of information to inform decision making and risk assessment, between and within agencies
- Consideration for effective support during and after protocol including consideration of Early Help and supported participation in interventions/programmes.

What Difference has it made

Recommendation for learning has been developed from each audit, the audit activity has been cross referenced with wider DSCP learning activity to understand consistent themes and focus improvement activity linked with this. Themes for improvement have included:

- The partnership approach to group supervision
- Maintaining effective communication between partners after initial meetings
- Cross boundary working and information sharing
- The consistent use of tools (Harm Matrix, Heat tool).

6 Learning and Improvement Work

The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to working together to protect children and young people from the risk of serious harm and abuse. The DSCP seek to review and update our local pathways, policies and procedures so that they are responsive to current levels of need and risk in the local area. The DSCP, and its associated subgroups pro actively work together to horizon scan for emerging risks and threats across the partnership to make sure that we are in a position to respond effectively. Within the Performance and Learning Group (PLG) the multi agency group (including all statutory partners) oversees all multi agency review activity. The PLG coordinates the outcomes of all case reviews and thematic audits and provides scrutiny of action plans where learning has identified that frontline practice could be strengthened.

During 2022-23 the PLG developed and launched a new pathway and referral process for cases where learning can be sought from cases, both good practice examples and learning examples. In 2022 one notification for learning was received by the PLG, this resulted in a learning event being conducted and a case review and briefing to be developed.



Case Study

K was 18 years 3 weeks when he was found unresponsive, K sadly died from a cardiac arrest owing to drug and alcohol use. Whilst K was not a child at the time of his death he had been accommodated by children's services and open to a multi agency team from the age of 14 years old. The review completed by the DSCP identified a number of examples of key learning for the partnership. A systems learning approach was taken to the review of K's story, partners were invited to consider how they work together to safeguard children. The following themes were identified:

- Recognising the importance of engaging with families at the earliest opportunity
- Multi agency approach to providing necessary help and support to all family members, particularly at times when children are no longer living with adults who they love and want to protect
- Professionals' curiosity about a child's lived experience and the dynamics within the family and wider support networks
- Professionals have the right resources at the right time and when a young person has very complex needs, we need to ensure that the right things are in place to find a solution that meets these needs
- Utilising tools like multi agency chronologies to help us understand the lived experience of children and young people and the cumulative harm they may have suffered.

What has the impact been

Since the learning event in November 2022 a learning briefing was developed and shared with the partnership. So far, the briefing has been watched by over five hundred and fifty practitioners in the partnership. The PLG also agreed six actions from the review, and they have kept oversight of actions arising from the recommendations.

Feedback

Briefing was rated 4.4 out of 5 stars on Me Learning.

I supported K for two years your delivery of his story was accurate and very sensitive. Thank you I know he would be very grateful (practitioner after watching briefing).

Between April 2022 and March 2023 there has been four children referred to the PLG for consideration of a statutory review. All four hit the criteria for a statutory Rapid Review, three of which warranted deeper exploration to understand learning, via a statutory Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). The case that did not hit the criteria for a deeper exploration, single agency learning was identified within the Rapid Review process. This was shared within the PLG, actions agreed, and the case was reviewed at six months to seek assurance around the learning dissemination and changes made.

We also undertake horizon scanning of regional and national learning to identify what, outside of County Durham, may impact on what we do and the outcomes that we collectively achieve. During 2022-23 a learning briefing was created and distributed in response to the National Review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo- Hughes and Star Hobson. Learning from these cases was also shared in Safeguarding Week (November 2022) where practitioners across the partnership attend a one-hour briefing.

One way we share learning within the DSCP is to create and develop a range of learning briefing or 7 point briefings which are available as part of a repository on the DSCP website to inform practitioners and public.

7 Use of Restraints

Use of Restraint In conjunction with Durham County Council, the DSCP monitors the use of restraint at Aycliffe Secure Services Centre.

The Centre houses a changing population of young people (aged 10-17) with complex needs.

The home regularly reports information regarding the use of restraint to the Youth Custody Service and Ofsted.

Injuries due to restraint are categorised on the level of medical intervention required with one being minor injury (no medical treatment required) and three being serious injury (requiring hospital treatment).

Of the two hundred and forty two incidents of restraint recorded for the year, 83% caused no injury at all, and whilst forty one resulted in injury, it is notable that 96% were at level one, with only one being recorded in the highest level three category.

Scrutiny involves review of the home's CCTV where randomly selected incidents are reviewed with a manager from the home about the use of restraint, the circumstances leading up to the incident and what happened afterwards. This scrutiny provides assurance to the Partnership that the use of restraint is being monitored in terms of legality and proportionality in cooperation with the centre. The Aycliffe Centre has been judged as good in its most recent Ofsted inspection, with children's health being judged as outstanding.

8 Training

Training Delivery Model

- 4 delivery and learning options
- 7172 people accessed training
- 54% increase (4108 people) in 2021/22

Me Learning

15 e Learning Courses
5681 completions

Training Programme

10 virtual multi agency courses
891 completions

Safeguarding Week

40 bitesize courses
509 completions

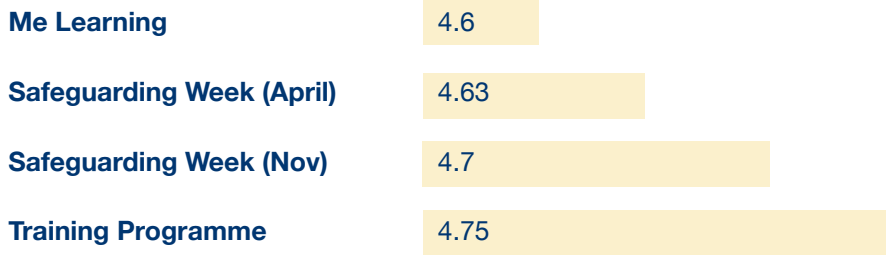
Bespoke

Single Agency Training 90 completions



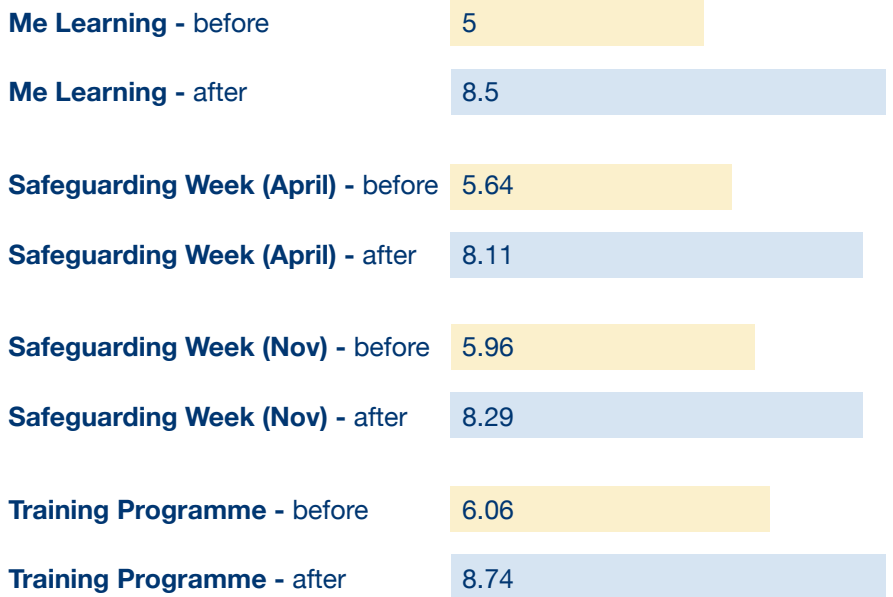
Course Content

Average rating 4.67 out of 5



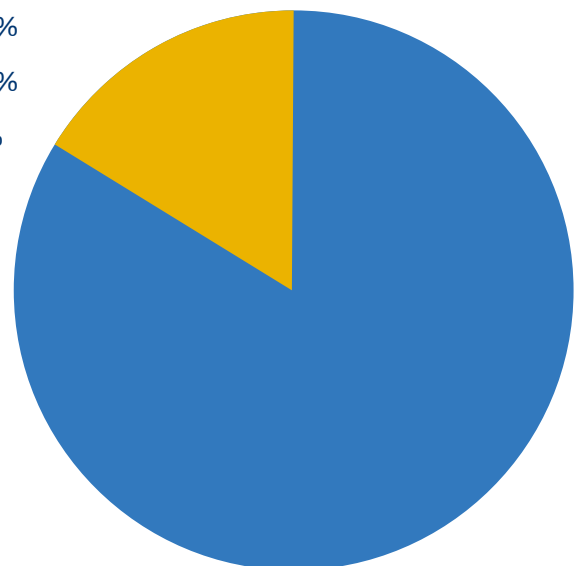
Level of knowledge on this subject prior and on completion to training

(1 being limited knowledge and 10 being in depth knowledge).



Do you think this training will have an impact on your practice with children, young people and families?

Moderately impact 16%
Significantly impact 84%
No impact at all 0%



9 What's Next for the DSCP

Priorities

The DSCP have developed a three year business plan (2023-2026) which outlines a clear set of priority areas and golden threads which will influence the work of the DSCP in the coming months/years.

- **Priority One** - Domestic Abuse
- **Priority Two** - Harm outside the home
- **Priority Three** - First 1001 days
- **Priority Four** - Mental health and wellbeing
- **Golden Threads** - these weave through everything we do:
 - Child's voice and lived experience
 - Working together across partners
 - Whole family approach recognising networks
 - Fathers roles and hidden males
 - Cultural competence
 - Reflective practice
 - Signs of safety.

These priorities will form the work completed within the Performance and Learning Group which meets every six to eight weeks. Within their groups there is a consideration of local and national learning, audit findings, learning cycle activity, good practice and areas for further exploration. Members of this group involved in a focussed area for consideration will meet with the Safeguarding Executive and members of the Improvement Delivery group to scope out the topic for examination for delivery by the Improvement delivery Group based on the four priority areas.

Learning Cycle

Within 2023/24, each priority will be explored within the DSCP Learning Cycle. In summary, the learning cycle is completed within the Improvement Delivery Group (IDG). The IDG is made up of practitioners and managers from each agency within the DSCP, meetings are held on a monthly basis where it is split into six phases, phases one to five are carried out over a four month period, with phase six, review, reflection, and assurance, taking place in month twelve.

Other new developments in the DSCP

DSCP have planned to relaunch their monthly Newsletter and Twitter page to increase their ability to communicate with the wider partnership.

The DSCP website will continue to be built upon and changed to meet the developing needs of the partnership.

Continue to embed the Signs of Safety Practice Framework across partner agencies.

Improve effectiveness of Partnership scrutiny and the assessment of impact Progress the DSCP website.

Maintain the Child Protection procedure updates.

The financial contributions from the strategic partners are as follows.

Partner	Contribution 2022-23 (£)
Durham County Council	191,604
Integrated Care Board (ICB)	105,135
Durham Constabulary	39,285*
Probation	4,873
HDFT	2,680
CDDFT	2,680
Total	347,060

*In addition to the financial contribution Durham Constabulary contribute a Partnership Analyst as a full time resource shared between the Children and Adults Partnership.

Overview by the Independent Chair and Scrutineer of the progress made by the DSCP 2022/2023

I am delighted to respond, as the Independent Chair and scrutineer, to the publication of the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership's (DSCP) 2022-23 Annual Report.

The report clearly sets out what has largely been a transition year, moving from the previous model of working to one more focused on a learning cycle delivering practitioner engagement and learning, resulting in better outcomes for children, young people, their families and carers. This has been supplemented by the introduction of an interactive assurance model and improved performance management framework.

The report clearly details the structural changes that have been undertaken to achieve the new way of working introduced in December 2022 both in working sub-groups and the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Business unit. It has been a credit to all partners and staff across the partnership how they have embraced these changes, recognising the positive impact it will have on practitioner development. This means that agencies in County Durham continue to improve safeguarding of all children in their area and those on out of area placements.

The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership successfully finalised their previous priorities:

- Management Understanding and Decision Making
- Voice and Lived Experience of the Child
- Cumulative Harm
- Harmful Sexual Abuse.

There is detail contained in the report highlighting the key achievements and impact against each of these priorities.

Moving forward the following priorities have been agreed from April 2023:

- Domestic Abuse
- Harm outside of the Home
- First 1001 days
- Mental Health and Well-being.

These priorities will be delivered by utilising the new operating model for example, the learning cycle has completed two areas of examination, the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA). This has allowed the new way of working processes to be tested and refined as well as practitioner learning identified to be delivered by the Performance and Learning Group and overseen by the Executive.

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