



# Durham Virtual School

## Annual Report 2021-2022



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.
- 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 years annual report reflects the way in which we work together with Social Care, Health colleagues and SEND and Inclusion to ensure this offer to our children and young people continues.

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## The Virtual School September 21 to July 22

This year the virtual school has seen a sense of normality return to education settings following the disruptions caused by Covid over the last two years. Children looked After (CLA), in some instances have developed anxieties during their time away from a regular routine and structure of the school day. Social skills have been a key factor and the realisation that Year 6 and 11 would sit formal exams has impacted on their behaviours in school. 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 buy into. The following information summarises how we have supported Children Looked After during this time:

- All schools were given the Recovery Grant Premium and School Led Tutoring funding and an additional Pupil Premium payment at the end of the Spring term for tutoring or reading.
- Key Stage 1 and 2 tests took place. GCSEs and A Levels returned to formal examinations for the first time since 2019, this created increased anxiety for CLA. To support this, we encouraged schools to make use of their “Catch Up funding” to support the gaps that had emerged during Covid 19. 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.
- The virtual school prepared a transition workbook for children in year 6 who were moving to secondary school in September 2021. A copy was sent out by post to every year 6 child.
- 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. We have developed this to provide training focused on Attachment and Trauma for all Designated Teachers who have a Durham CLA on roll in their school.
- Staff from the virtual school liaised with various local authorities to secure education for several of our children who are placed out of area.
- 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.

- Caseworkers have supported year 11 students and have worked with DurhamWorks to provide a smooth transition onto Post 16 pathways
- Every child who has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) also has 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 were 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. Their contribution to Designated Teacher network meetings and to the Durham CLA Policy for schools has broadened their student voice in education. 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

## Executive Summary Children in Care 2021-22

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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022 – 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 strong progress from entry to care this year as we return to 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 26 pupils in the reporting cohort all but 1 attended a mainstream school, with 1 child with an EHCP attending an Independent Special School best equipped to meet their needs. 92% of this cohort attended a school rated good or better by OFSTED. Although only 1 child was in a Special School, 38% of the children had some SEN, with the most common primary need being SEMH. These children will be closely monitored to ensure their needs can continue to be met, 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.

Despite the disrupted learning experience these children have had due to Covid, outcomes for this year in all areas are above those from 2019 for Durham CLA. Girls have 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 2022 assessments.

### Key Stage 2

Of the 38 pupils in the reporting cohort, 36 attended mainstream secondary schools and only 2 attended a maintained special school. The majority (92%) of children attend primary schools in Durham, with the others placed close by in neighbouring local authorities.

86% of children attended schools rated Good or better, and only 1 child was in a school graded Requires Improvement. The remaining 4 pupils were in schools without Ofsted judgements, as they were Academy Converters who have yet to be inspected.

Although only 2 children attended a special school, 53% of the reporting cohort had SEN, with 8 of those having an EHCP. The majority of children had a primary need related to cognition and learning, though all of these were managed in a mainstream setting. Boys are heavily represented in SEN with 80% of this cohort being male.

Outcomes this year are below those achieved in 2019 for Durham CLA, which we expect is in part due to the disrupted learning experience of this cohort. Reading is above the National CLA outcomes from 2019; this area is supported by the Virtual School by our commitment to provide all children in KS1 with regular access to high quality reading materials and packs. Girls outperform boys in all areas, although comparison is difficult due to the discrepancy in cohort size, with boys accounting for 63% of the cohort.

## Key Stage 4

Of the 59 pupils in the reporting cohort, 32 attended mainstream secondary schools, 10 attended maintained or academy special schools, 3 attended an independent special school, 3 were in secure provision, 2 were at the local authority PRU and 2 attended a bespoke curriculum due to difficulty finding appropriate SEND provision. A further 7 young people attended an Ofsted registered Alternative Provision appropriate to their needs, with all pupils being offered a GCSE curriculum.

50% of children attended schools rated Good or better. 15% were in schools graded Requires Improvement, with 1 pupil being in a school rated as Special Measures before being taken over by an Academy Trust. A further 20 pupils were in schools without Ofsted judgements, either because they were Independent Special Schools/Alternative Provisions or Academy Converters who have yet to be inspected.

Despite a significant number of the young people in this cohort attending Special Schools and not following a GCSE curriculum, results remained above the National level for CLA in 2019; the last cohort to have sat formal GCSE examinations. English grades were roughly in line with those achieved by the Durham CLA cohort in 2019, with Maths remaining above both National and Durham CLA in the same year. English results from this year are only slightly below those achieved last year when the cohort were awarded Centre Assessed grades.

## Attendance and Exclusions

We are disappointed to report that there have been two permanent exclusions of Durham children 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. Suspensions had reduced for Durham children in care in the autumn term 2019/20, a positive trend was emerging prior to lockdown, however academic year 2020/21 has seen fixed term exclusions increasing. Twenty-two CLA experienced at least one FTE, 5.6% of the CLA cohort. This has increased to Thirty-Four this academic year, 5.3% 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 2021 and July 2022. The local overall attendance for the whole CLA cohort was 92%. This shows an improvement of almost 3% against last year.

## Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus

2019/20 saw the introduction of the Welfare Call electronic PEP system. Development of the document and the process 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 progress data. The PEP also allows monitoring and oversight of 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 2021/2022 (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 Key Stage 1 and 2 SATs and GCSE and A Level formal examinations for Year 11 and 13. The KS2 and 4 data presented in this report will not have comparisons to national or regional data and will reflect the performance of Durham CLA.

## 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.

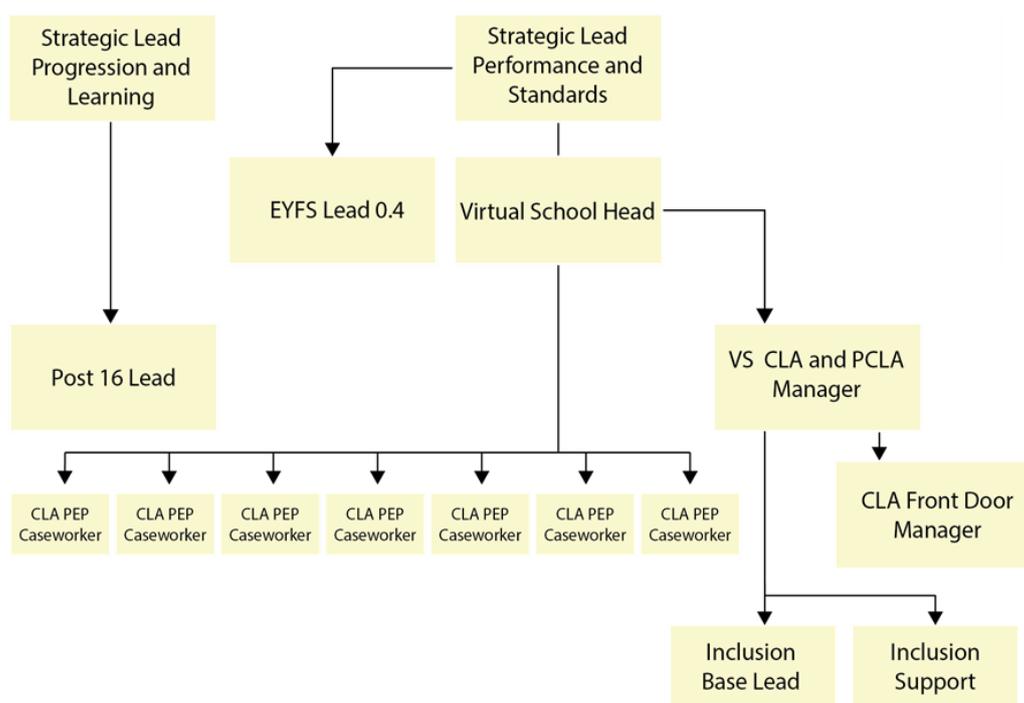
The casework team of seven have been able to maintain the high level of support for our young people and challenge for schools. The team have continued to attend meetings virtually. The agreement by Durham County Council to increase capacity of the virtual school from September 2020 has improved our offer to schools and allowed a more targeted response to our children. 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. Following a realignment of roles in September 2021 the Virtual School no longer has a Deputy Virtual School Head. 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, and Chairs the Virtual School Operational Group This group has become a strategic group to monitor and develop the changes within the VS structure through the work of task and finish working groups.

## 2.3 Structure Diagram



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

The virtual school develops an operational plan and carries out regular self-evaluation against this. 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. Operational governance is now through the Operational Group (VSOG). As a virtual school we report 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 2022, there were 658 learners (R – yr. 11) on roll of the virtual school. This is an increase of 10% on the same time last year. There were a further 168 post 16 and 90 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 July 2022**

Please note this is a different date to the section above

	Male	Female	Total	% Total	Male	Female
R	26	12	38	4.92%	68.42%	31.58%
1	20	16	36	4.66%	55.56%	44.44%
2	25	16	41	5.30%	60.98%	39.02%
3	36	19	55	7.12%	65.45%	34.55%
4	23	24	47	6.08%	48.94%	51.06%
5	30	26	56	7.24%	53.57%	46.43%
6	31	17	48	6.21%	64.58%	35.42%
7	29	17	46	5.95%	63.04%	36.96%
8	39	28	67	8.67%	58.21%	41.79%
9	41	41	82	10.61%	50.00%	50.00%
10	44	39	83	10.74%	53.01%	46.99%
11	46	31	77	9.96%	59.74%	40.26%
12	51	30	81	10.48%	62.96%	37.04%
13	6	10	16	2.07%	37.50%	62.50%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>773</b>		<b>57.83%</b>	<b>42.17%</b>

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

At the end of July 2022, there were 676 children of statutory school age (SSA) in care. There is a roughly equal primary / secondary split. 47.49% in primary and 52.51% in secondary. The gender split across SSA and Post 16 is 42.17% girls and 57.83% boys. Although there are consistently more boys of this age in care, this number has increased slightly from last year. 19.67% of children and young people (R - yr 11) attend out of county schools; this is an increase of 0.67% from last year. 80.33% are educated in schools based in County Durham. The remaining children are placed across 33 other local authorities, although a further 95 (14.05%) of these are placed in our neighbouring local authorities.

As of July 2022, 71.6% of the cohort attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better and 11.2% 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. 116 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion.

Any 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.

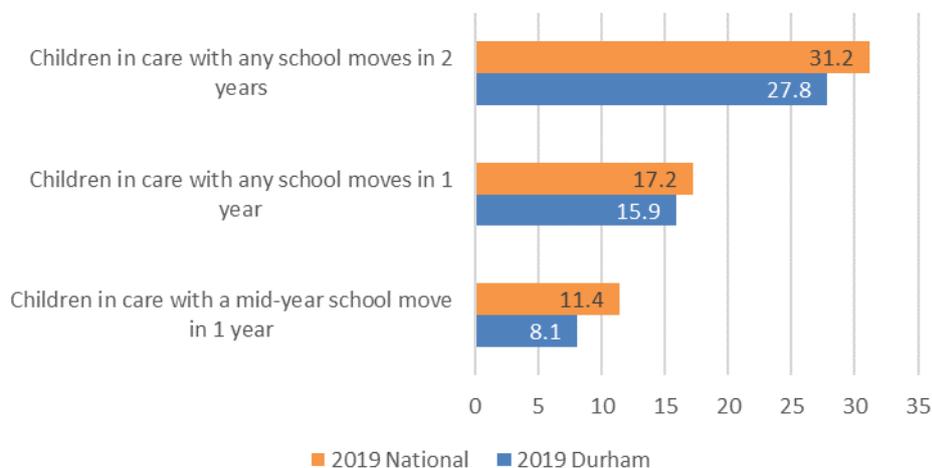
## 3.3 How well do we promote placement and school stability?

School and placement stability are crucial to provide the security children in care need in order to learn. We advise social care teams to help them 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.

## 3.4 School Stability from 2020 CCO Stability Index Underlying Data

Durham had a lower proportion of children in care with any school moves in 1 or 2 years or a mid-year school move in 1 year than national

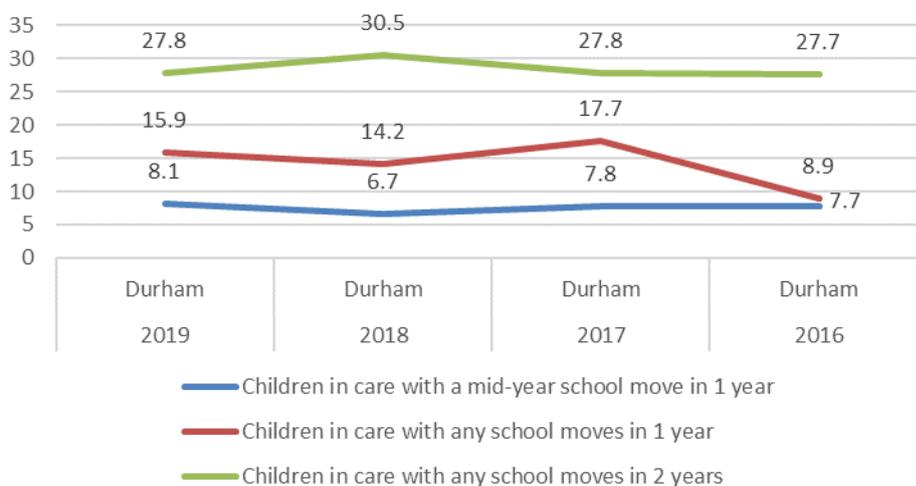
### Children's Commissioner Stability Index 2020



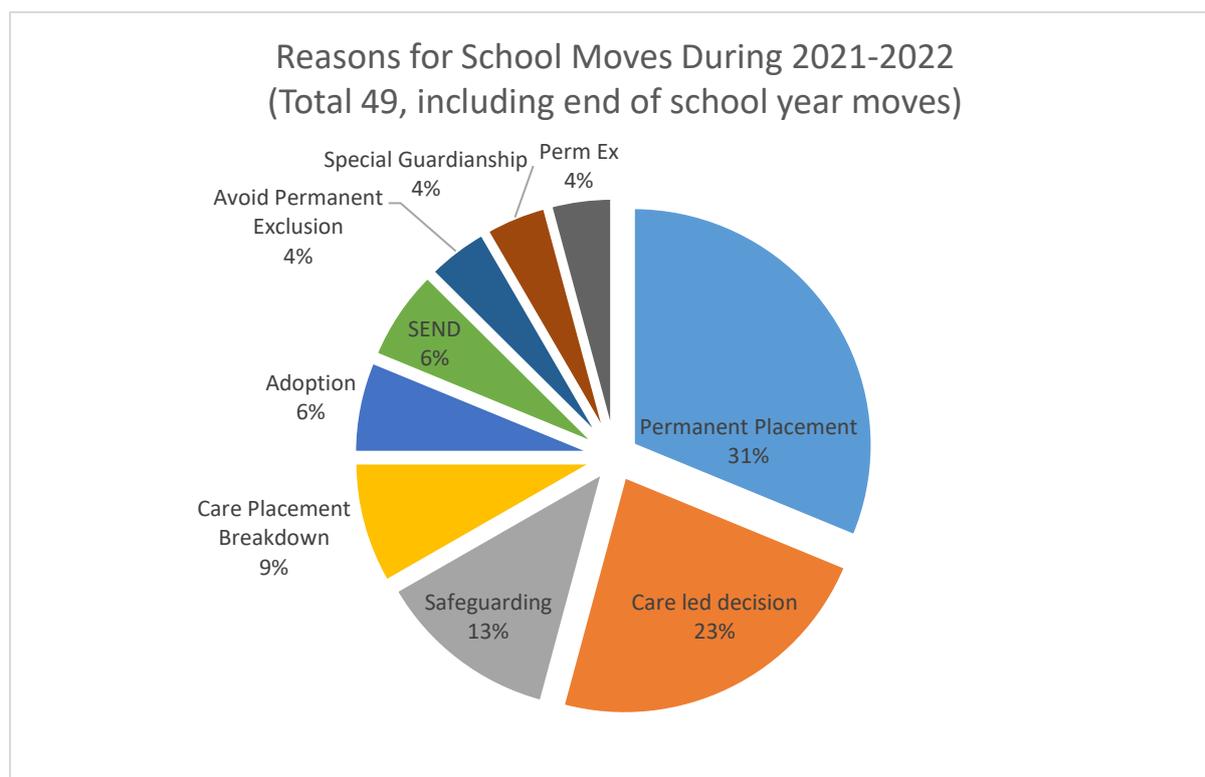
### Children's Commissioner Stability Index Trend over time

There was a slight increase in the proportion of children in care with any school moves in one year and those with a mid-year school move in 1 year, however children in care with any school moves in 2 years decreased. All remained below the national average.

### Children's Commissioner Stability Index Trend

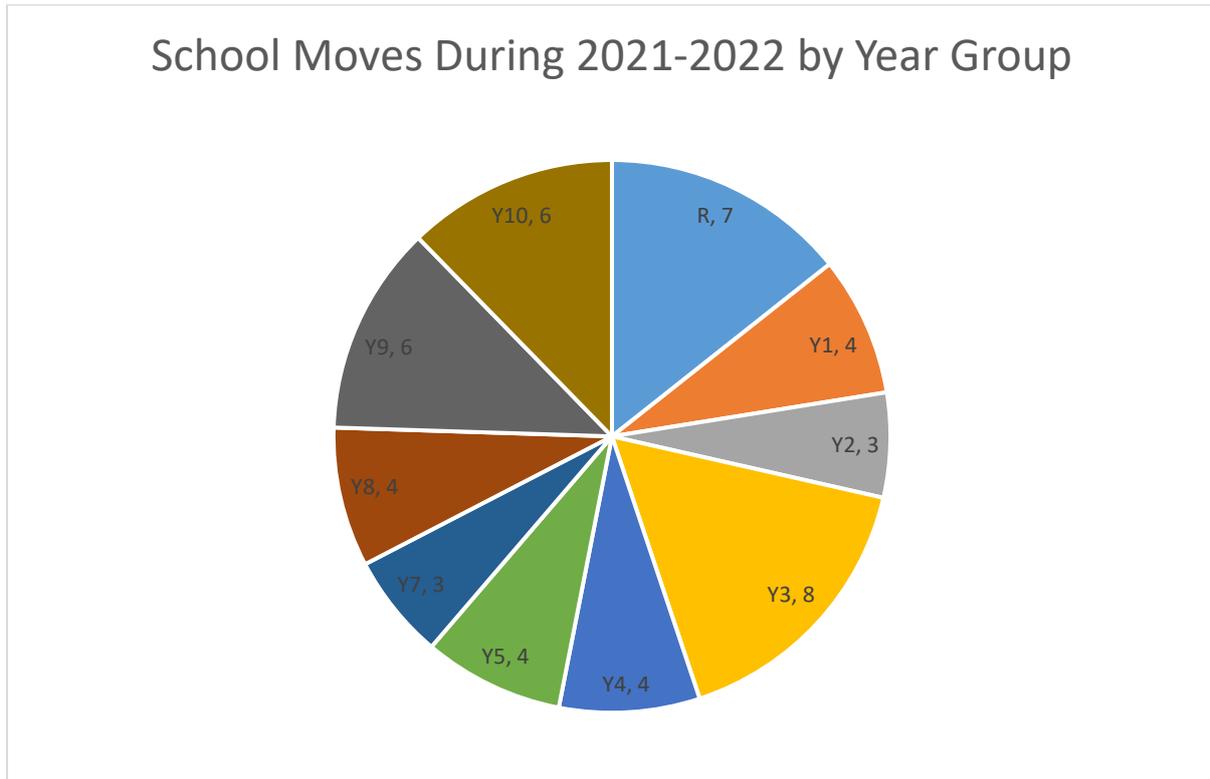


Source: [Stability index 2020 | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/stability-index-2020/)

**Table 2: School Moves 2021-22**

In 2021-2022 there were 49 school moves, of which 33 were completed during the academic year a decrease of 52% from the previous year. 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. In all, 83 school moves were suggested, with the majority of these not agreed by the Virtual School Head.

31% of school moves were to support moving to a permanent placement or due to distance, while 10% were due to a child leaving care on an Adoption Order or SGO. 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. No Year 6 or Year 11 young people moved schools this year.

**Table 3: School Moves 2021-22 by year group**

### 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 2021-22, 53.3% of children and young people (R-Y11) had identified special educational needs; 22.8% were supported by an EHCP whilst 30.5% had school SEN support plans (K code). There is a slight increase in Durham children looked after with an EHCP from 21% the previous year and a greater increase for children supported by a SEN Support Plan from 28% in 2020-21.

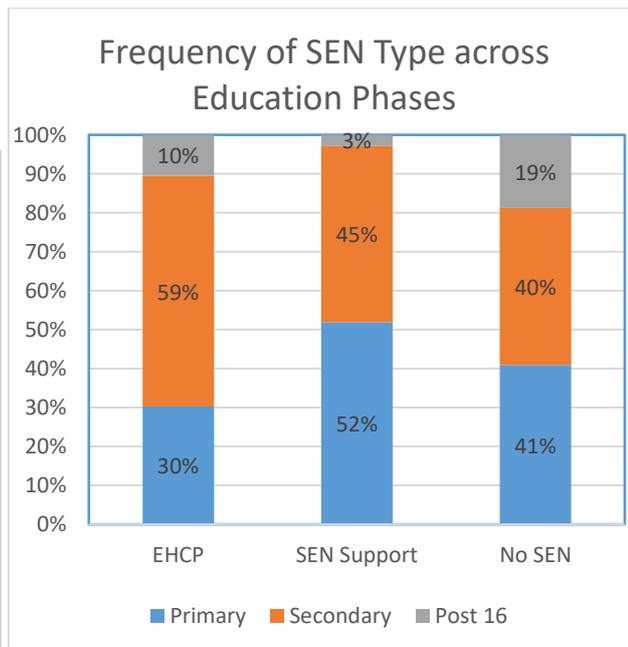
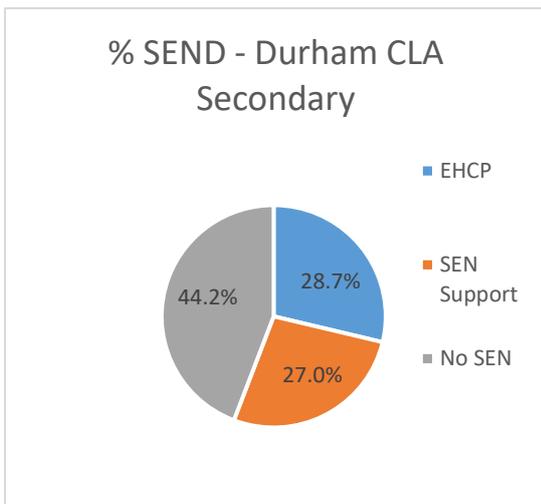
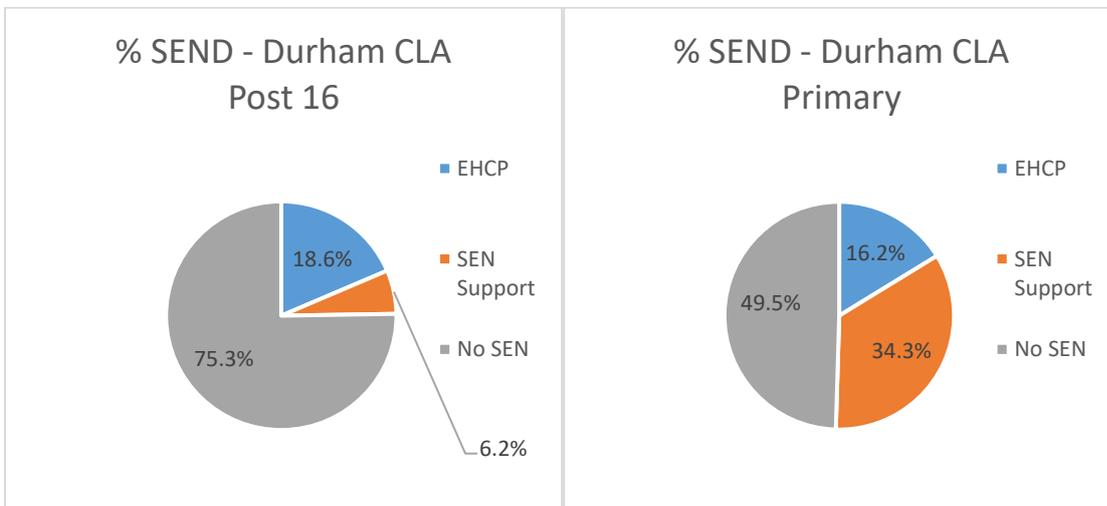
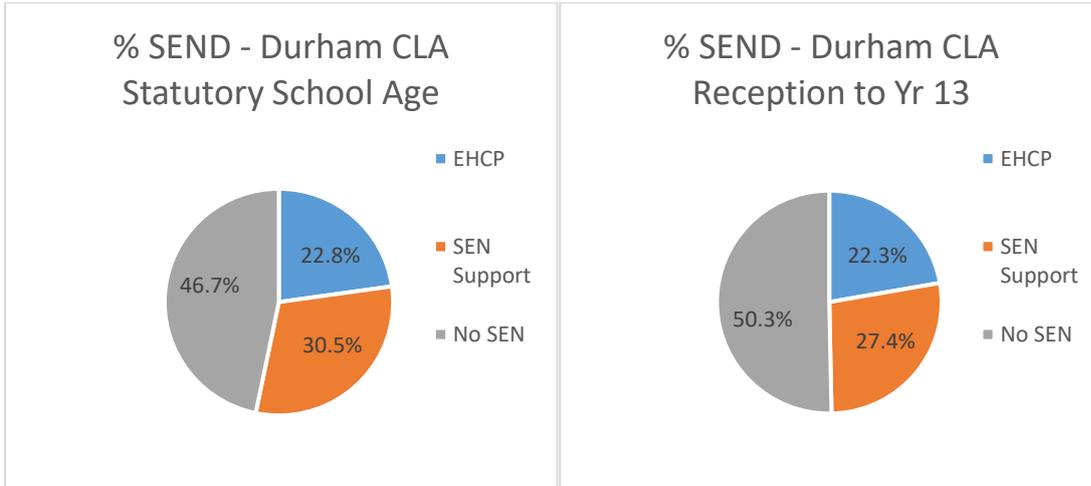
**Table 4: Number of CLA with SEND by year group July 2022 (for academic year 2021-22)**

Year	EHCP (E)	SEN Support (K)	No SEN	Total
R	3	12	23	38
1	5	14	17	36
2	2	9	30	41
3	12	23	20	55
4	7	21	19	47
5	12	16	28	56
6	11	15	22	48
7	11	17	18	46
8	23	22	22	67
9	21	25	36	82
10	21	20	42	83
11	26	12	39	77
<b>Total SSA</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>676</b>
12	18	6	57	81
13			16	16
<b>Total P16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>97</b>

<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>773</b>
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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.

**Table 5: 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 44% 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 is a significant difference of 24% 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 31% of children, which is the joint highest with Cognition and Learning – Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD).

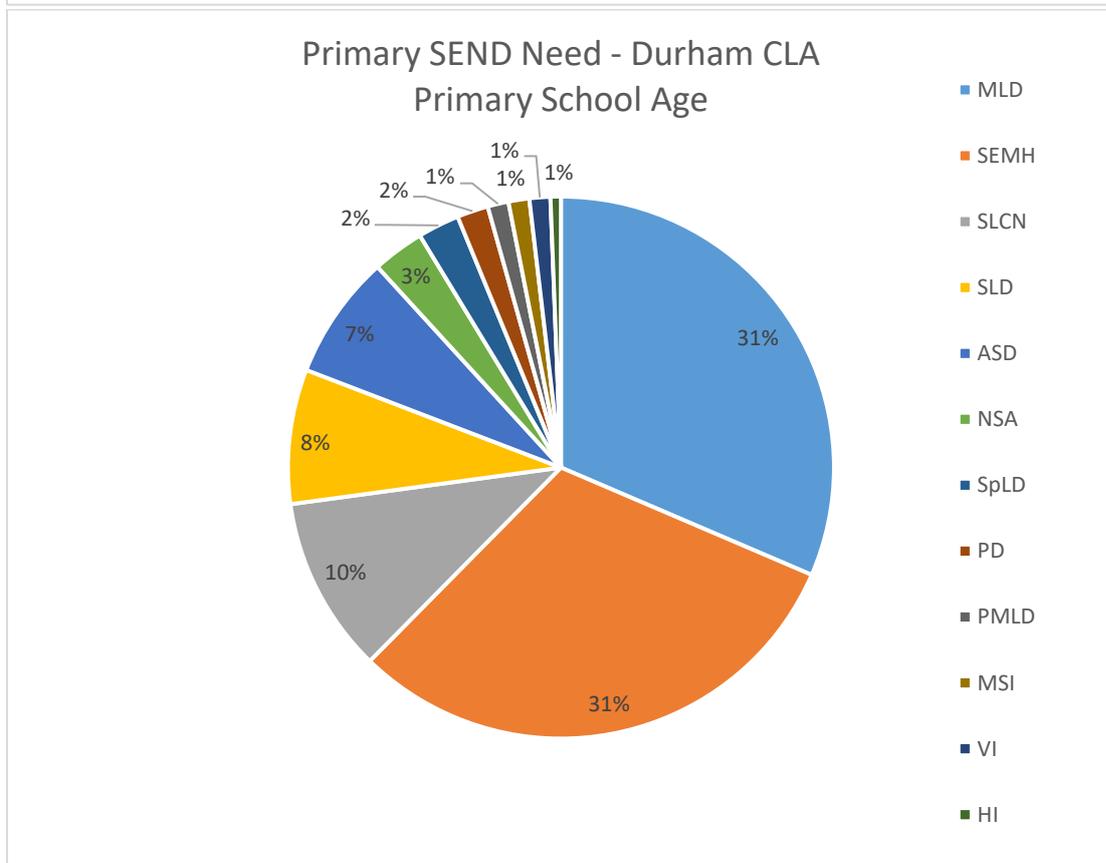
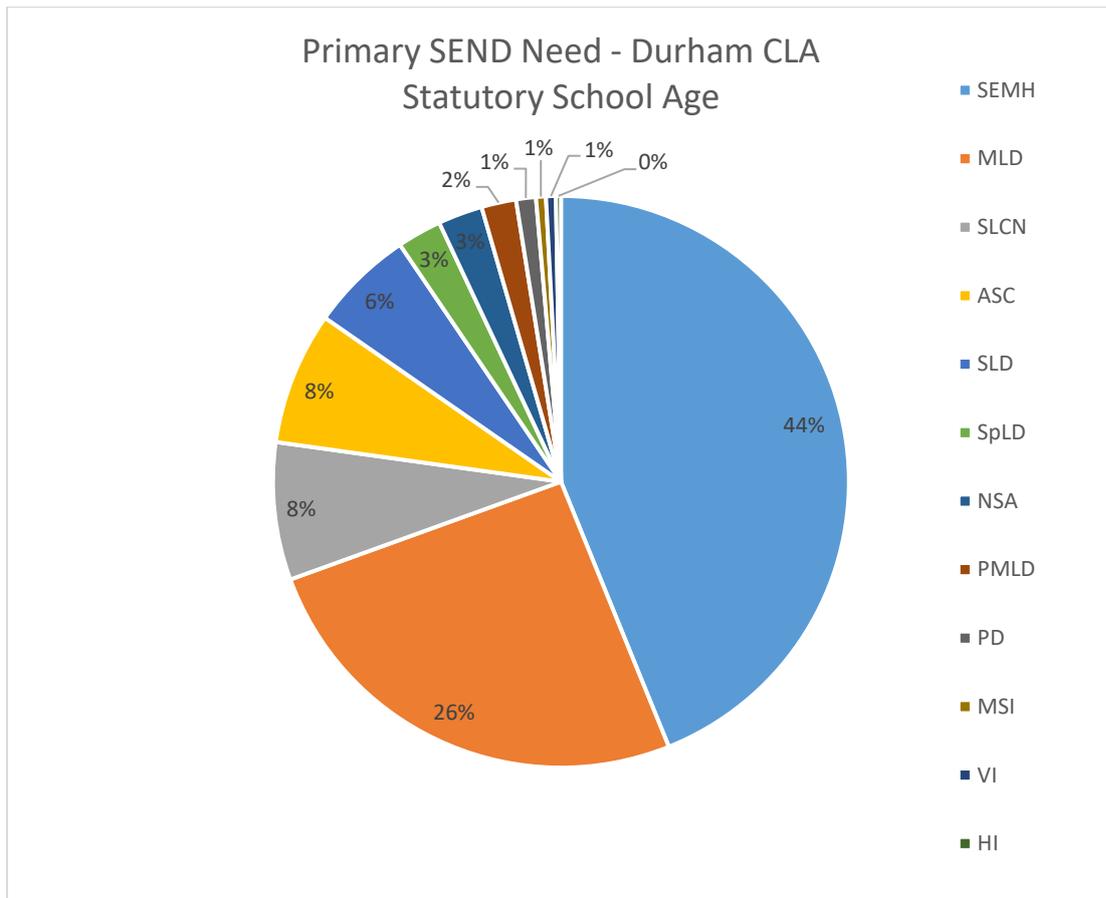
It is important that schools work effectively with the Durham Virtual School to ensure that the needs of children looked after are fully recognised and that a child presenting with attachment-based behaviours, for example, is provided with the correct level of therapeutic support. The virtual School 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:

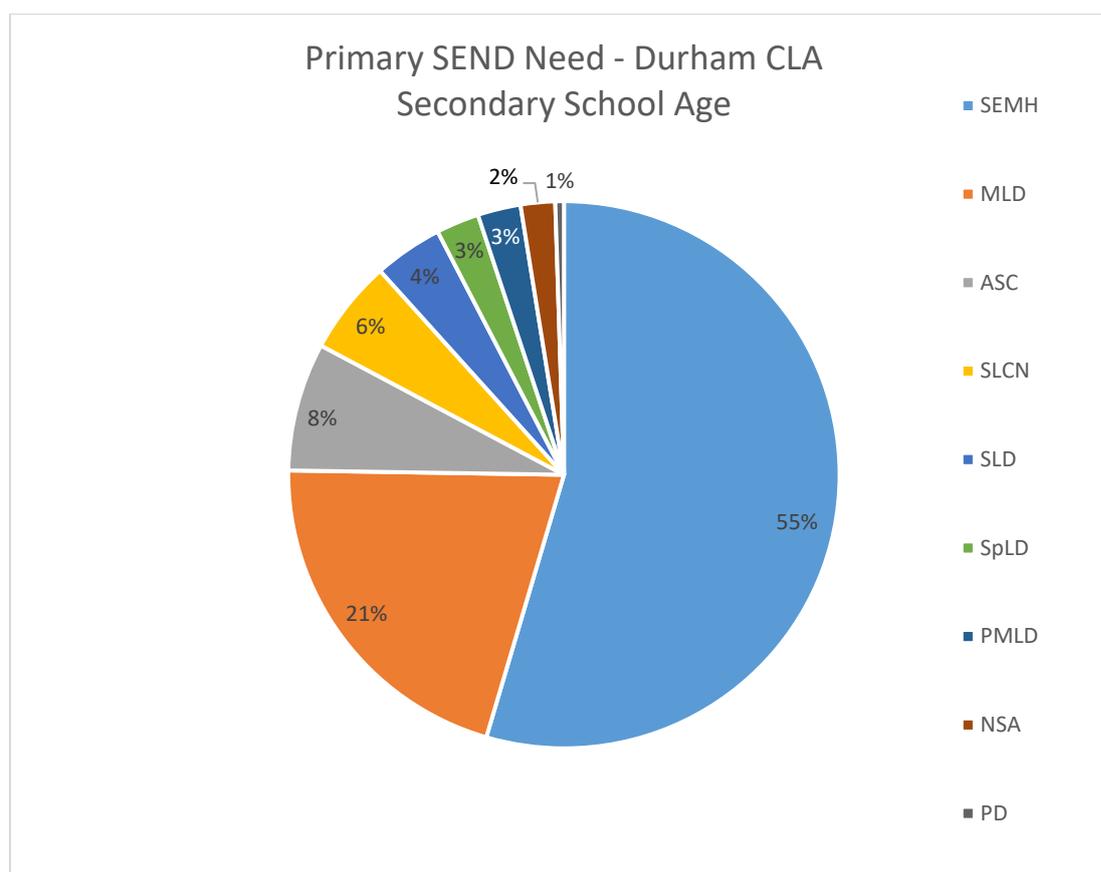
- Additional support for KS1 and KS2 children at risk of exclusion from their school
- An enhanced support agreement with the Local Authority EWEL Team
- Increased School counsellor support for Durham children looked after
- Enhanced support from a Senior Educational Psychologist

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 increase 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 and Speech and Language support to help to support our children in care with SEND.

**Table 6: 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)





### 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.
- 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.
- 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 work 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 of 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, 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 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.

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.

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

According to the Spring Census 2022, there are currently 988 previously looked after children on roll in Durham schools (maintained). This reflects an increase of 117 children from January 2021.

The breakdown is:

Category	Number of pupils
Adoption	444 (398 Spring 2021)
Child arrangement order	70 (53 Spring 2021)
Special guardianship order	442 (376 Spring 2021)
Residence order	32 (44 Spring 2021)

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 maintained schools, January 2022. This shows an increase of 117 children, based upon the joint figure of 871 last year. This is a rise of 13.4%, compared to a rise of 12% last year.

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 1623 children and young people.

## 5. Achievement and Progress

At Durham Virtual School we use FFT targets to measure how well our children achieve against their previous attainment. We use series 50 to account for the disruption many children in care have faced. However, we are looking to use series 50 as a minimum target. As our cohorts are small and vary in terms of their profile from year to year it is difficult to measure trends.

## 5.1 Early Years Update

Provisional EYFS Profile data for 2022 notes that 39% 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 18 of the 21 Children in the reporting cohort for 2021/22 with 7 children achieved a GLD. Of the remaining 11 children - 9 had SEND, including 2 children with EHCPs.

Of the remaining 4 children, one child delayed his entry to reception and the further 3 attended schools outside of County Durham and their data is currently unavailable.

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

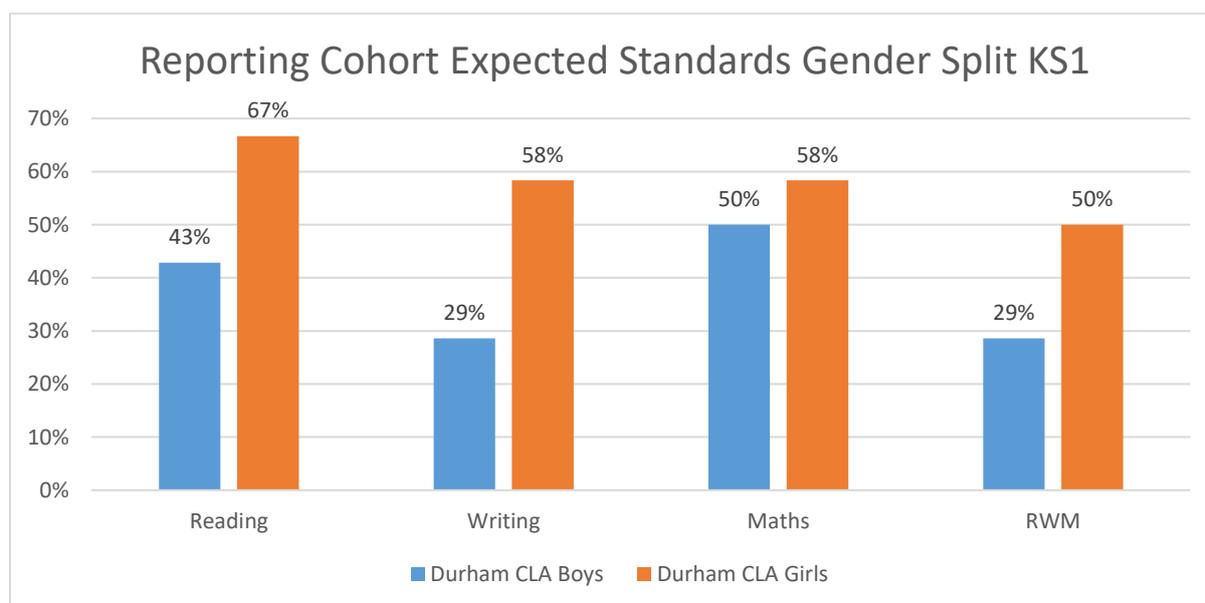
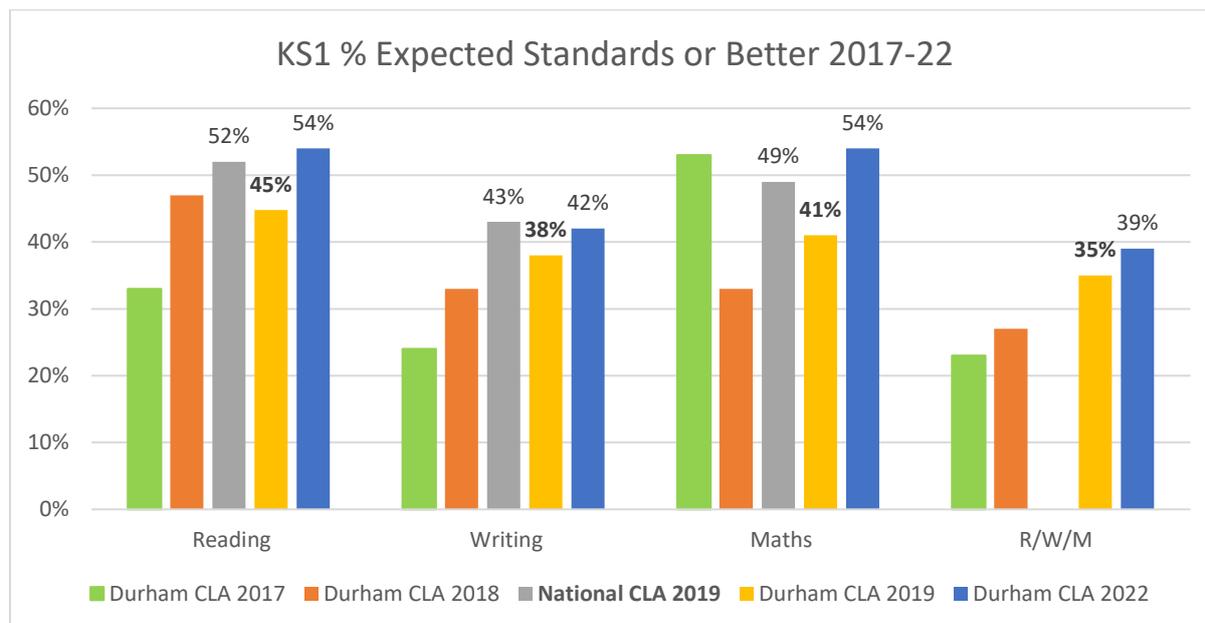
- It is important to note that The Early Years Foundation Stage progress is a measure of a child's attainment at the end of the reception year and that the Early Learning Goals are based upon typical child development at the age of 5. It does not demonstrate a child's progress or learning journey from 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 26

- There was a roughly equal split of 12 girls and 14 boys.
- 65% of the cohort attended schools in Durham, with a further 24% being educated in the neighbouring local authorities.
- Two children who should have been included in the reporting cohort were educated outside of England, meaning their data was not included in these figures.
- 10 (38%) children had SEN, with 2 having an EHCP and 8 with an SEN Support Plan
- The most common Primary need in SEND was Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH)

**Table 7 KS1 Expected Standards or above**

As the first children to undertake formal assessment in Year 2 since 2019 due to the pandemic, this cohort have had a disrupted education since starting school in Reception. 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. Despite this, the outcomes for this year in all areas are above those from 2019 for Durham CLA. The results also compare favourably with the National CLA results from 2019, with only writing being slightly below the national outcomes.

Our girls have performed better than the boys across all areas, with quite significant differences in reading and writing. However, only three children achieved Greater Depth in Reading, one in Writing and one 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

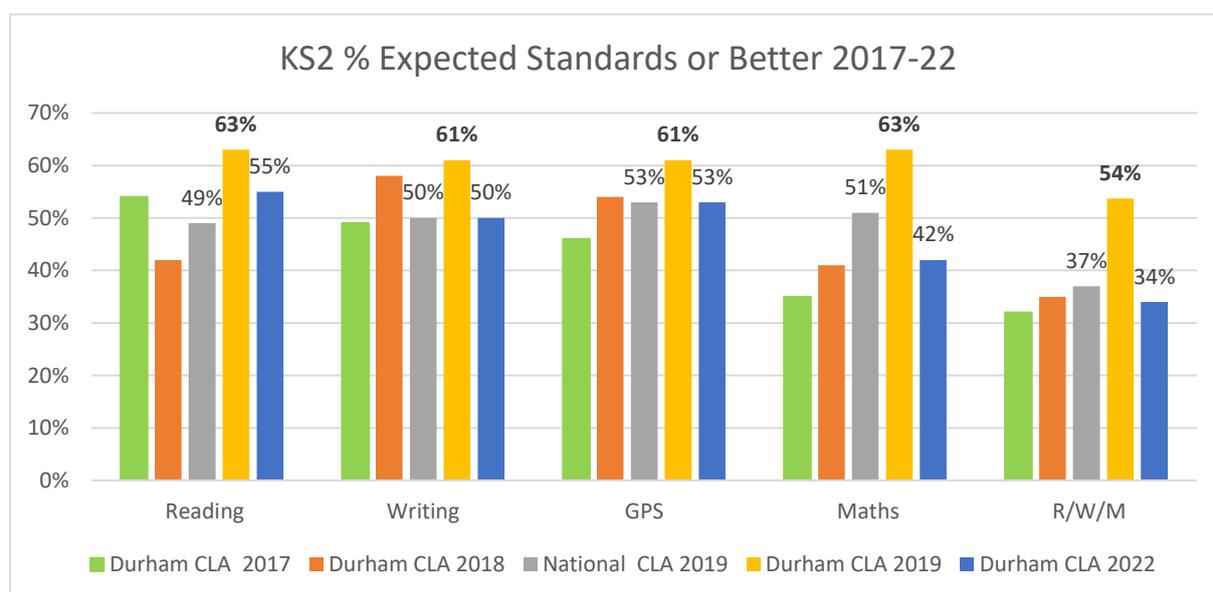
up on missed learning. The Virtual School continues to provide high quality reading materials across KS1 & KS2, and these children will also have access to learning Apps purchased through the top sliced Pupil Premium Plus.

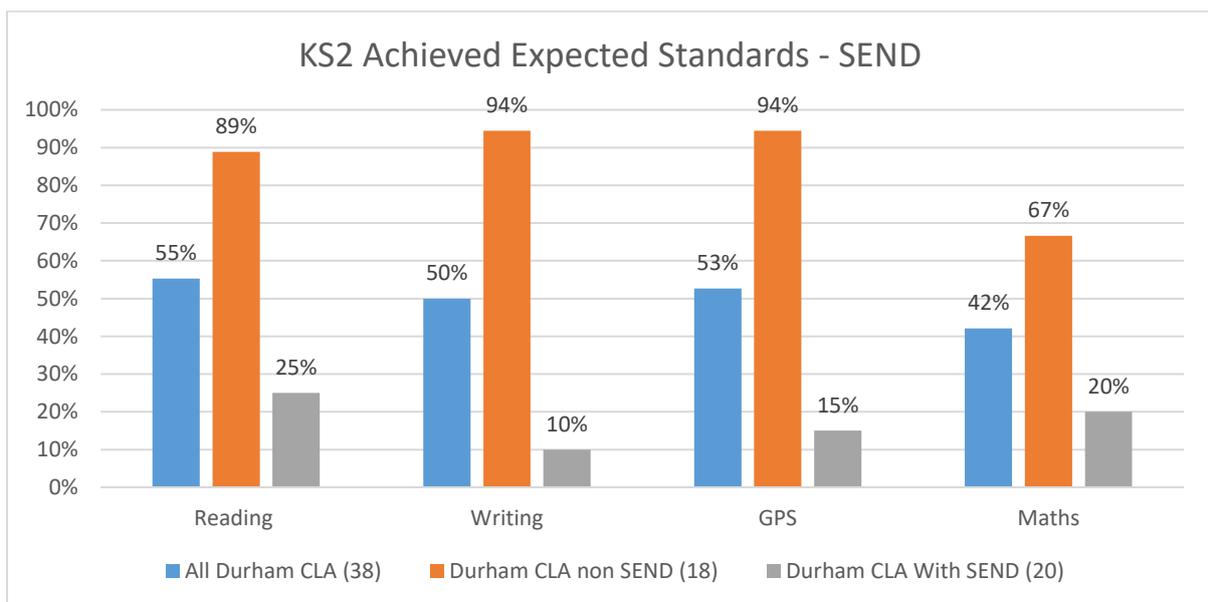
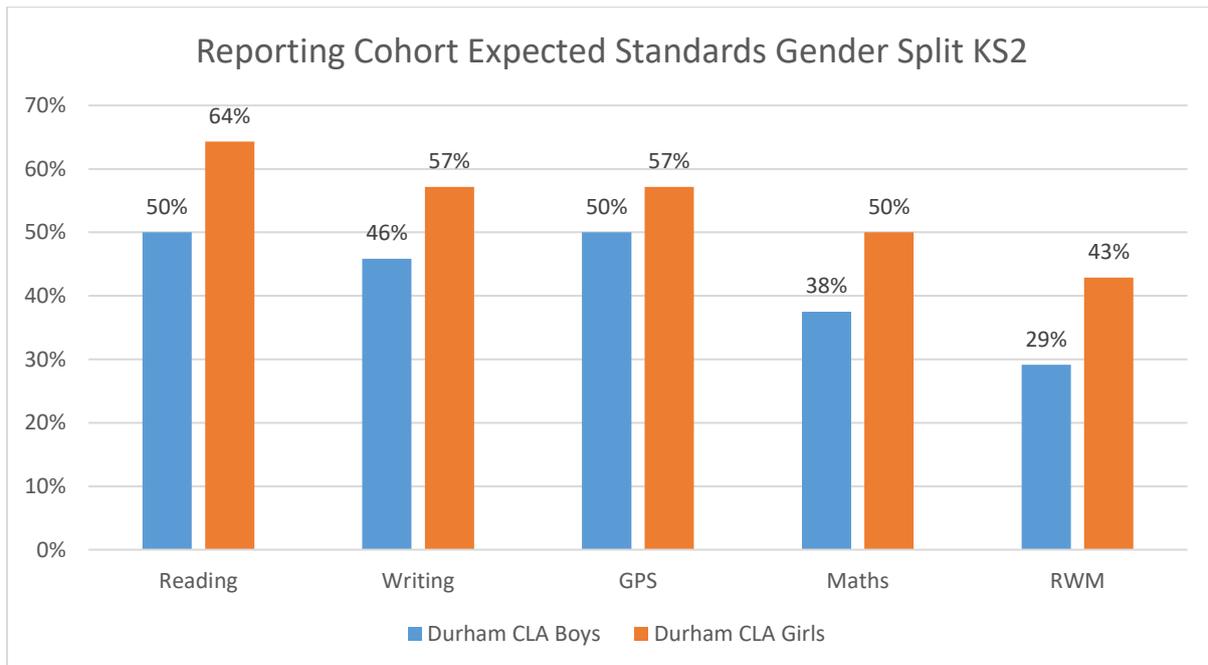
### 5.3 How well do our children do at KS2

The reporting cohort in Year 6 was 38; there were 48 children in care at the time of the tests.

- 24 boys and 14 girls in the reporting cohort. There is a large differential making comparisons on gender more difficult.
- 35 of the reporting cohort attended schools in Durham, with the other 3 attending schools in neighbouring authorities.
- One child who should have been included in the reporting cohort attended a school in Ireland, meaning their data was not included in these figures.
- 20 (53%) children had SEN, with 8 having an EHCP and 12 with an SEN Support Plan

**Table 8: KS2 Expected Standards or above**





This is the first 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. Although Reading Writing and GPS is largely in line with National CLA results from 2019, they are significantly below in Maths. The outcomes for this year are also significantly below those in 2019 for the Durham CLA.

Our girls have performed better than the boys across all areas, with a significant difference notable in Reading and Maths, although boys do account for 63% of the cohort, making it difficult to make valid comparisons for the gender gap. However, it is also worth noting that the boys account for 16 (80%) of the children with SEN, with 60% of those with SEN having

difficulties in cognition and learning. Those with identified SEN, either SEN Support Plan or EHCP, account for a low number of those who achieved expected standards in the KS2 measures, and a number of these were not entered for 1 or more of their SATs tests. However, 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.

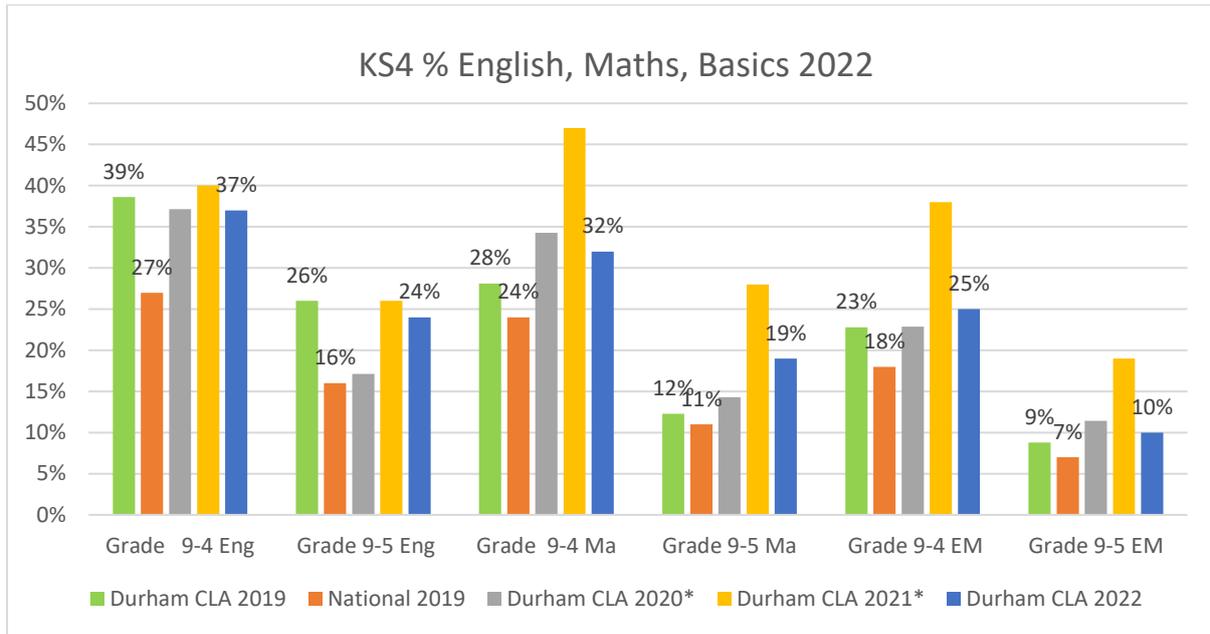
Although disappointed with some results, given the disrupted education they have experienced and through increased monitoring, we expected this to be the case. However, PEP Caseworkers remain focused in PEP meetings to ensure gaps in learning are being addressed through appropriate support funded through 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 121 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 59 young people in the reporting cohort with a full cohort of 75. Of the 59 young people in the reporting cohort:-

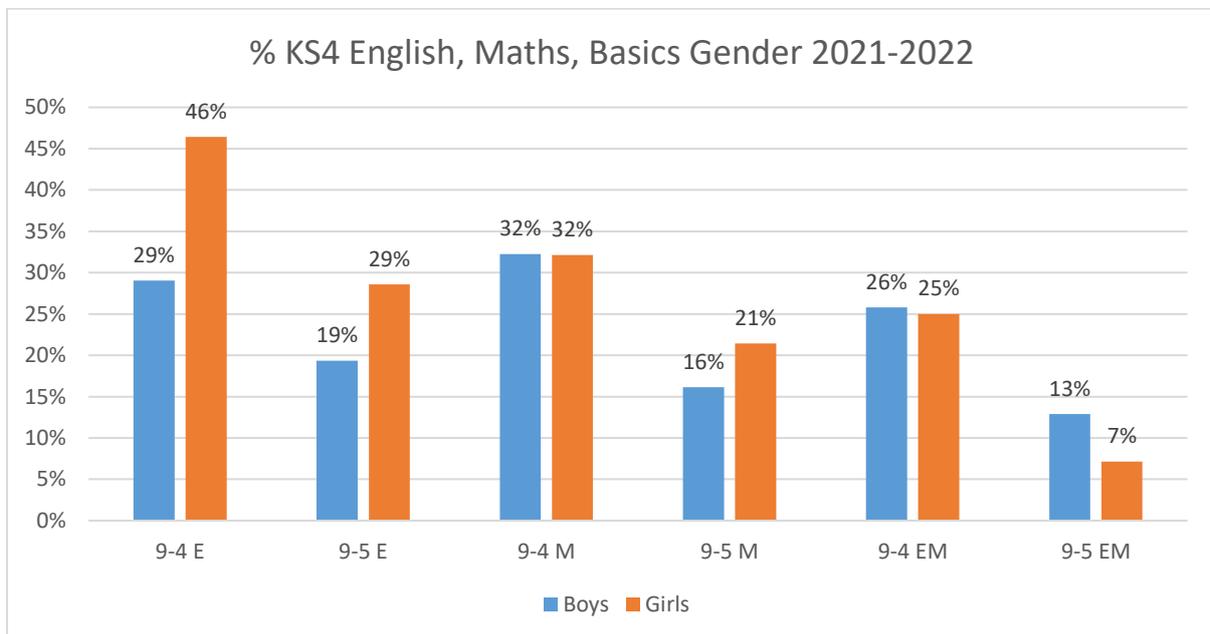
- 47% girls and 53% boys
- 29 pupils had identified SEN, which is 49% of the reporting cohort
- 19 of these had an EHCP, which is 32% of the cohort, an increase of 4% from 2021.
- Only 54% were in a mainstream school, which is 12% less than in the previous year.
- 17% of young people attended a Maintained/Academy Special School, with a further 5% placed in an Independent Special School
- 14 young people followed a curriculum that did not include GCSEs in Maths and English. Of these, all had SEN, with 13 having an EHCP. All followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs including teaching in literacy and numeracy
- 7 young people (12%) attended an Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision.

**Table 9: KS4 English, Maths and Basics Outcomes**



\*2020-2021 Based on Centre Assessment Grade

2019 – 2020 Based on Teacher Assessed Grades



Although there was a drop in the basics grades across all areas from last year, it is important to note that the 2020-2021 results were based on Centre Assessed Grades. This was the first year of formal GCSE examinations since 2019. The disruption caused by Covid affected a number of 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. However, despite the additional challenges facing our young people they mostly performed in line or above in the basics when compared to the last formal examinations in 2019. Although English results were below the 2019 figures for Durham CLA, our cohort this year consistently performed above the National figures from the same year. We believe this highlights the impact of the support provided by our schools, carers, social workers and Virtual School Caseworkers to ensure young people can access the correct support to make good progress.

A significant number of young people had SEN and almost a third had an EHCP, with the majority of these young people attending special schools. 14 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 our girls have outperformed boys significantly in English, which is a similar trend to that in 2019 when GCSEs were last sat as formal exams. However, in Maths boys and girls performed equally well in the 9-4 grades, although only 16% of boys achieved the higher measure of 9-5 in Maths compared to 21% of girls. Interestingly, in the Basics 9-4 measure, boys and girls were equally matched, but it was boys who performed better in the Basics 9-5 measure. It is also worth considering that 75% of the girls in the reporting cohort attended a mainstream school compared to only 35% 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?

In 2021, there were 5,621 Year 11 school leavers. 56 of these young people were identified as CLA or Care Leavers.

The below table is 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:

**16-17 CLA and CL – Destinations and Qualifications (CCIS data)**

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

There has been a reduction in the numbers of Care Leavers working below level 2 and a rise in the % of those working at level 2 over the past 3 years. The % working at level 3 although dipped in 2021 has been brought back up in line with previous years – so overall an improved picture for 2022 in terms of Care Leavers in EET and their levels of attainment.

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 a bespoke training programme and individual support as required.

It was agreed six apprenticeship opportunities would be ring-fenced specifically for Care Leavers as part of Durham County Council's recruitment programme. However, owing to the COVID pandemic the overall number of apprenticeship opportunities were halved during 2020 and 2021. This resulted in a reduction in those ring-fenced for Care Leavers to three for each year. In 2021, all three posts were recruited to including one extra therefore we now have 7 Care Leavers undertaking Apprenticeships within Durham County Council. A bespoke training programme was delivered via DurhamWorks in 2020 and then again virtually in 2021.

## 5.6 What were the destinations for our young people?

We will receive the data for 2022 leavers in November. Please see below destinations for 2021 leavers:

**Table 11: 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 12: 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	4	6.3
Temporary Break in Learning	16	0.3	0	0.0
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

**Table 13: Destinations post 16 2019**

Destination	No of 2019 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2019 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2019 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL	% of 2019 Year 11 School Leavers CLA/CL
Total Participation in Learning (including custodial sentence)	4706	94.9	53	86.9
Re-engagement	29	0.6	2	3.3
Temporary Break in Learning	19	0.4	0	0.0
Employment without training	46	0.9	2	3.3
NEET Total	130	2.6	4	6.6
Other including destination not known	31	0.6	0	0.0

The tables above demonstrate the numbers entering and maintaining post 16 placements as of 1<sup>st</sup> November for the past 3 years. The trends are continuing to show a drop in the % of young people entering EET and a rise in the % of those NEET. The drop in EET correlates with the wider population of school leavers and appears to be a direct impact of COVID. The decrease in lack of Re-engagement destinations has had a larger impact on the Care Leaver cohort – again this was the inability to run and lack of access to these opportunities as a result of Covid. “Employment without Training” has seen a large increase in the wider cohort and is reflected in the older population too, because of the changing nature of the Labour Market. 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. This is not reflected in the Care Leaver cohort for year 12 which could be down to several factors inc. lack of confidence and the tendency to be dealing with more complex issues which make employment at this age difficult to find and maintain. However, it is mirrored in the older cohort as demonstrated below in table 14.

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

The following table 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.

This data is 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 14: 2020 –22 Participation in EET of Children Looked After / Care Leavers aged 16 +**

	March 2020%	March 2021 %	March 2022%
<b>Education</b>	46.8	47.5	44.3
<b>Employment</b>	10.2	10.9	15.8
<b>Training</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>Re-engagement Activities</b>	10.2	3.1	3.6
<b>Total EET</b>	<b>72.8</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>68.4</b>
<b>NEET</b>	23.4	30.7	27.3
<b>Not Known</b>	3.4	2.3	2.8
<b>Combined NEET and Not Known</b>	26.8	33.1	30.0

Participation was much improved in 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 with provision such as First Point and the Plan Ahead programme, 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 (bubbles etc), 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.

We are beginning to see the start of a recovery for 2022 with an increase of EET participation and reduction of NEET since 2021. There has been a noticeable change in the destinations of those in EET during 2022. 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 further direct impact of COVID-19 in terms of the resulting Labour Market trends and young people choosing to opt for the now wider available employment-based opportunities.

Care Leavers receive additional support to enable them to progress into education, employment or training through DurhamWorks. 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 partners 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 the entire 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.

Care Leavers on DurhamWorks took part in a consultation exercise during Dec 20 – Jan 21 to ensure we are listening to young people in terms of their experiences with EET, DurhamWorks and how we can help. 88% rated the support as 4 or 5 out of 5 and over 70% said they would recommend the service to a friend. We asked what further help they would want which varied but many said, “getting paid for training” and “more job opportunities”. Please see attached You said We Did document for some further detail in how we responded alongside the work complete with Care Leavers from regular meetings held. We also asked if there was anything they would like us to change about the support they receive – please see below quote from one of the responses:

*“Honestly speaking I wouldn’t change anything because Durhamworks do all they can to help”*

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 a DurhamWorks Grant, which provides financial support to small and medium sized enterprises to enable them to employ young people.

County Durham Adult Learning and Skills Service 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 a Traineeship programme specially designed to meet the needs of Care Leavers. In addition, the Service has a Supported Internship programme for young people, including Care Leavers, who have Special Educational Needs.

Other examples of initiatives to improve opportunities and support for Care Leavers post 16 include the Sessional Employment Programme which offers Care Leavers 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.

A Sessional Employment Co-ordinator (0.5 FTE) has been appointed to facilitate the programme and is currently actively working with Care Leavers, YPA's, 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; 10 Care Leavers were live on the programme in 2021/22.

Collaboration between the Virtual School, the Care Leavers team and Progression and Learning meant the programme has been able to be part of a national peer learning group led by Catch 22. The team have attended sessions in terms of sharing good practice with other Local Authorities across the country and Durham has been chosen to be held up as an example of this good practice to be shared with national senior leaders and managers at an event on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

The Kickstart scheme was launched during 21/22 with 9 opportunities within DCC being ringfenced to Care Leavers with DurhamWorks and Social Care working together to identify and support young people to apply. Four were successful and offered a ringfenced Kickstart opportunity in DCC with a further 2 successful in obtaining non-ringfenced opportunities elsewhere, therefore, in total 6 Care Leavers have accessed Kickstart opportunities. Of the 6 – 4 remain on placement, 1 is employed and 1 is continuing to look for work and being supported.

Many Care Leavers have told DCC that they would prefer to have "any time" travel bus passes to use rather than the limited travel passes in certain 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 County Durham Care Leavers. This has been initially for those attending the four County Durham based FE Colleges only recently with a view to expansion wherever possible.

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 where the pass is used on a weekend to get to Part Time job, this is a big incentive as a big cost to the young person. Encouraging sustainment of work. Increased confidence of using buses by using it on different routes and not just the 'known' college route.

The implementation of DurhamWorks Programme for Schools is a new initiative and 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 2020/21 a total of 822 year 11 school leavers identified as being at risk of NEET (not in education, employment or training) were supported. Out of the 53 in year 11 with Looked After or Care Leaver status 48 (90%) were supported, out of the

remaining 5 (10%), 2 of these were not initially referred but are being supported by the DurhamWorks post 16 team and 3 were out of county and continuing within their educational placements. 75% of these maintained and remained in an educational placement (1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2021). For the academic year 21/22 we have engaged 1160 year 11's who we are still supporting, further data on the outcomes for these will be available over the autumn term.

**Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Pilot (PPP+)** - DCC are 1 of 30 LAs across 9 regions of England that were successful following a bid to take part in this 6-month pilot from October 2021-March 2022. The focus was on 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 Looked After. 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 provided they start college during 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.

The Pilot ended on 31st May 2022. We started with 52 Young People attending 14 colleges across the country and ended with 52 Young People (A movement of 8 joining and 8 leaving)

The PPP+ has been awarded to DCC for the full academic year 2022-2023, we intend to follow the same format which has helped CLA feel part of the College community.

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

Young people have excelled again in Higher Education with 34 attending University during the academic year 21/22, 6 have graduated with good grades. Most have jobs, ranging from the civil service, to banking, a radiographer and midwife. One young person is considering a masters in nautical engineering, while one unfortunately failed their last year but is being supported to access employment.

Early indication shows that 17 Care Leavers achieved A Levels and BTEC equivalents in August 2022. Intended destinations show that 8 have secured a university place.

## 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. The Attendance Improvement Team have collected attendance data in July to provide a picture for the academic year.

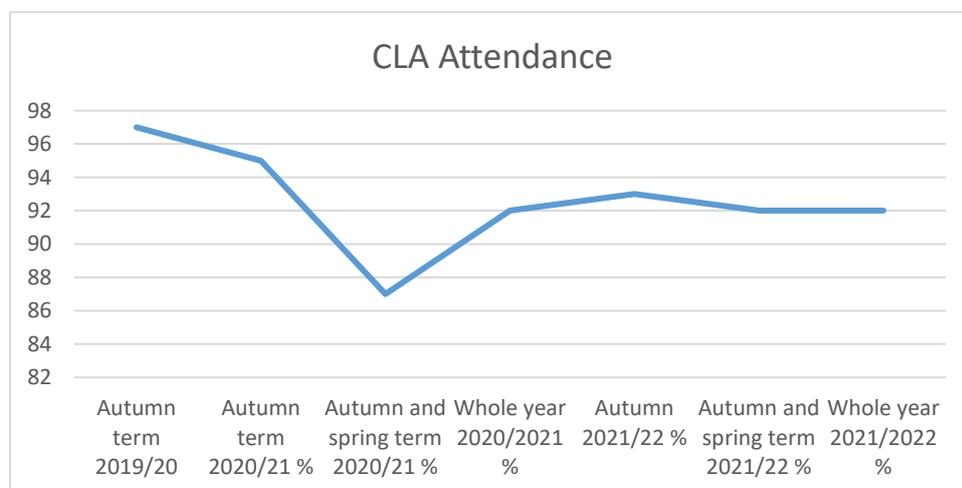
Attendance was 92%, almost 3% better than this point last year. Attendance was broken down as follows:

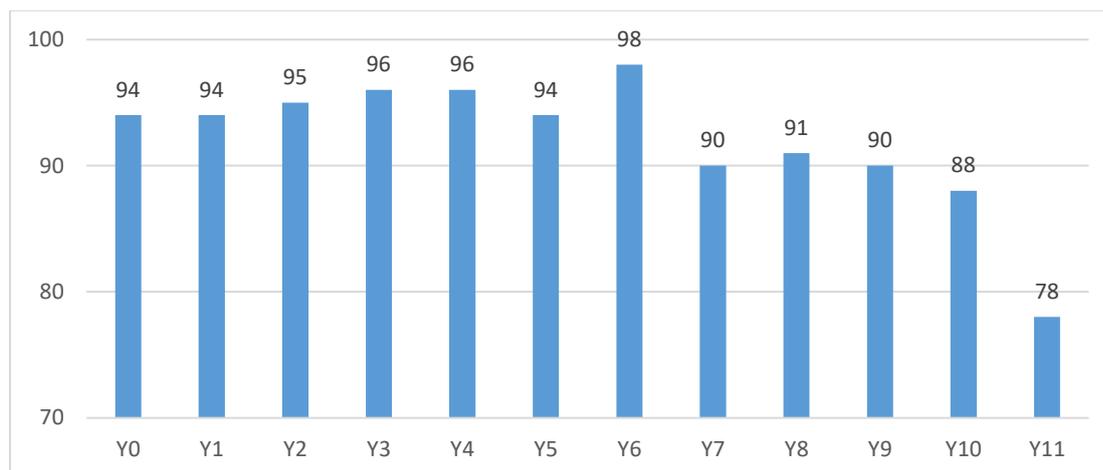
- Attendance of primary school age CLA (including reception, Y1-Y6) = **95.2%**.
- Attendance of secondary school age CLA = **88%**
- Attendance of CLA in County Durham schools and settings = **92%**
- Attendance of CLA in out of County schools and settings = **90%**

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.

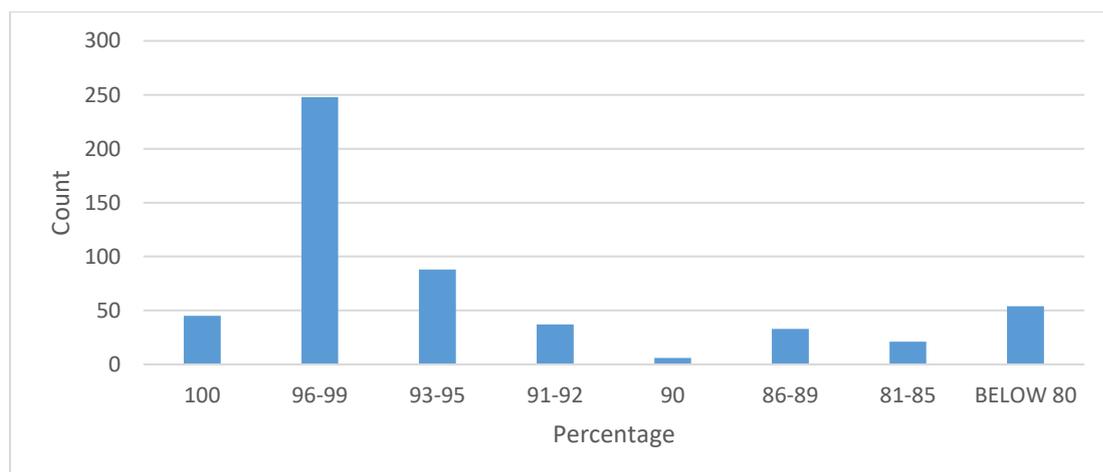
We work closely with the Attendance Improvement Team to ensure CLA are monitored closely and any concerns with attendance can be addressed swiftly.

**Table 15: Attendance over three years for CLA**



**Table 16: Attendance of CLA by year group**

This highlights the need for closer monitoring of CLA in Years 10 and 11 and the impact Covid has had upon their perception of school. Year 11 displayed anxieties around formal examinations and this reflects how some refused to attend school.

**Table 17: 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 96 - 99% or above.

## 6.2 How many of our young people have been excluded?

There have been two permanent exclusions 21/22. 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 thirty-four Suspensions during the academic year 2021/2022 for CLA. Thirteen children/young people experienced more than one period of Suspension. Eighteen

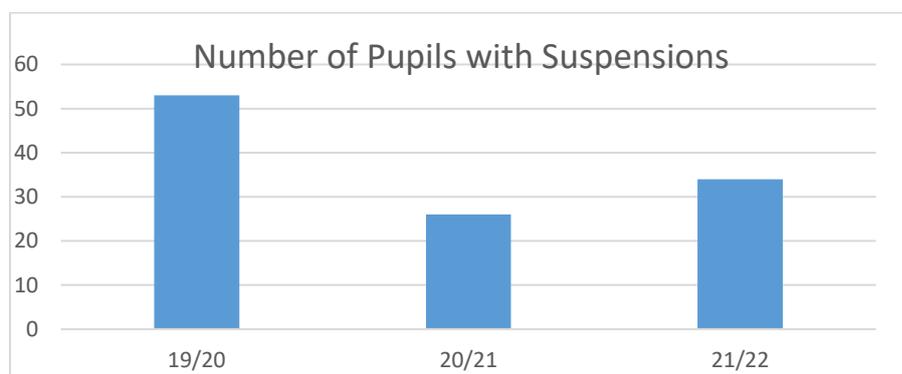
children attended the secondary sector, ten were primary aged children and five children attended Specialist Provision and one attended Alternative Provision.

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.

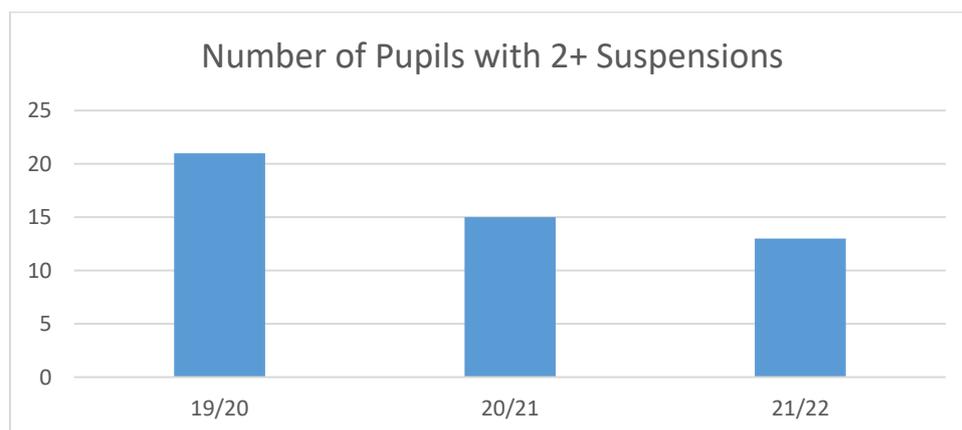
The VSH works closely with the Behaviour and Inclusion Panels (BIPs). To provide additional support and act as the corporate parent for children who are displaying challenging behaviour, the VSH will attend behaviour panel meetings to support the case for a CLA not to be excluded.

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 18: Suspensions over three years for CLA**



**Table 19: 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'<sup>1</sup> 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 2020-21, 33 children and young people moved mid-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. 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.

### 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.

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

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

133 (20%) of the school age cohort were educated out of the boundaries of County Durham in 2021-22. This is a slight increase of 1% from 2020-2021.

## 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 and last year was rolled out for nursery 2 and Year 12.

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 Post 16 PEPS. 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 also 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 2021-2022 the focus has been on providing ongoing support on completion of PEPs for Designated Teachers through increased PEP Caseworker participation in PEP meetings. 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, and this year we have made further improvements in this area. 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: -

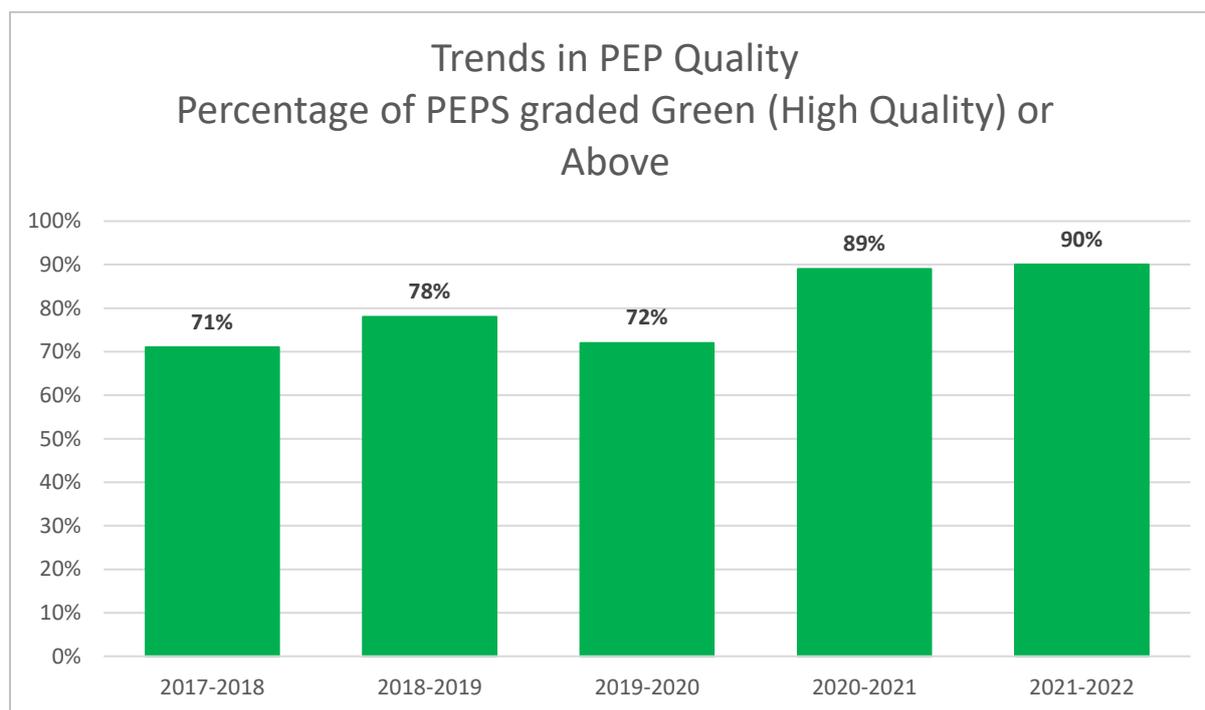
- Regular communication with senior Social Care managers to ensure key messages are disseminated throughout teams
- IROs have access to the PEP documents
- Improved system in place to ensure Social Worker and Team information is regularly updated to improve access to the Welfare Call system
- Virtual School Manager attended a number of Social Care locality Team Meetings to improve understanding of the PEP process
- Specific written guidance on Welfare Call and the EPEP shared with Social Workers
- Bespoke training offered to Social Work Teams requiring support, including those new to the system.

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 2021-2022 the Autumn ePEP quality was rated as 91.7% Green (High Quality) and 8.3% Amber (did not meet expected standard to achieve high quality). This is an increase of 8.63% High Quality PEPs from the same time last year. Over the year the number rated as Green (High Quality) has improved by 1% to 90%. There was a slight dip in the High Quality judgement in the Spring PEP, however we are not concerned about this and believe that this is a natural variation.

**Table 20: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2021-22**

Term	Green High Quality	Amber Below expected quality
Autumn	91.7%	8.3%
Spring	88.1%	11.9%
Summer	90.1%	9.9%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>10%</b>

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 2017-2022**

During the year we have continued to challenge schools who submitted PEPs late or below our expectations. We tackled the reduction in social worker involvement through team managers and briefings and provided further training to new designated teachers. This has resulted in an improvement in sign-off times for PEPs:-

- Of the 694 PEPs completed during the Summer Term:
  - 45.8% were signed off by Social Worker within the 10 day deadline
  - 67.6% were signed off by Designated Teacher within the 10 day deadline
  - 85.2% were signed off by PEP Caseworker within the 5 day deadline (Virtual School to QA and sign off PEP within 5 days of the last sign off by SW/DT)

Although the time taken to sign off PEPs has increased across the board, there have been a number of issues that have contributed to this. 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 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.

The quality of early years PEPs are overseen by colleagues in this service area. However, it has been decided to incorporate all early years and post 16 PEPs into the ePEP system and documents have been created in consultation with early years advisers and colleagues in the Improving Progression and Social Work Teams. 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?

Durham Virtual School (DVS) publishes guidance for schools on the distribution of PP+. 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 2018<sup>2</sup>, 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.

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[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](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)

## 8.5 What is the centrally held budget spent on?

In 2021-22 (Financial Year) Durham Virtual School retained approx. £600,000. 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 6 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
- Reach to Teach App for Designated Teachers
- Anspear Catch Up App for Children, Carers, and Schools.
- 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)
- 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
- 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 2021-22 as we increased the allocation of retained funding to inclusion and therapeutic support. This is an area discussed in PEP meetings and 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 three places at The Bridge turnaround base, which is part of The Woodlands. 6 pupils accessed this during 2020-2021. 3 pupils attended the full time KS3 turnaround provision. Of the 3 on KS3 turnaround, 1 went through statutory assessment and a specialist provision is being sourced. 1 young person has a place at a mainstream secondary school and 1 young person is still attending the Bridge.

Of the 3 KS4 pupils that accessed the Bridge, 2 went on to access full time alternative provision placements and 1 is still attending the Bridge. 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.

In addition to the centrally funded provision, we have an Inclusion Base, which for a number of 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 through the use of top-sliced PP+. In doing this we could open up the support to all Durham secondary schools, and also to our Durham children based in neighbouring local authorities (dependent on distance). 44 young people accessed our Inclusion Base over the year, 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 94 separate interventions delivered. Over the year 1080 (attendance 79%) 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. The number of sessions offered is an increase of 57% on the previous year. A number of young people made a successful reintegration back to their schools or alternative provision, although 22 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.

In addition to this, 4 young people were offered online sessions with either our teacher or Inclusion Support Worker. These sessions were offered as Maths and English Teaching, but also had a strong focus on getting the young people education ready, as the young people were not attending their education provision at the time.

## What difference does our support make? Case study

### Background

- ✓ X was displaying negative and disruptive behaviours in school, impacting on both her learning and that of her peers
- ✓ X was struggling with mental health and emotional wellbeing and experienced significant trauma around loss
- ✓ X would exert control over younger children in school, encouraging them to follow her lead.
- ✓ X was attending Alternative Provision for part of the week
- ✓ There was great uncertainty around X's living arrangements for the future.
- ✓ X had missed a significant amount of learning prior to becoming looked after.

### 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 she was supported in catching up with work she had missed.
- ✓ The Programme included sessions on self-esteem, confidence and making appropriate choices
- ✓ Time was allocated to support X to think about her communication and self-esteem and to equip her 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

### 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 was able to start and form positive friendships and bonds within the group and there was a significant improvement in her social interactions
- ✓ X was able to make positive relationships with staff
- ✓ Previously X had refused additional help and support in class, but by the end of the programme she was able to work with staff improve learning
- ✓ X was able to successfully transition into another placement

### Comments from members of young people's Care Team

- ✓ "We know when J has been with you for the day, he comes home settled and with a smile on his face, thank you for this. We have never seen this before after a day at school" – Carer
- ✓ "This has been a very positive experience for A. You don't realise how this support you have gave him has helped him settle with all the challenges he has had personally." – Social Worker
- ✓ "He has grown in confidence." – DT
- ✓ "I am proud of how much work I have actually done." – Young person

## 8.7 What therapeutic support do we provide from central funding?

For all our children looked after we offer access to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) assessment, Occupational Therapy assessment, Counselling and additional Educational Psychology time. This is funded through the retained PP+ funding and is open to all of 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.

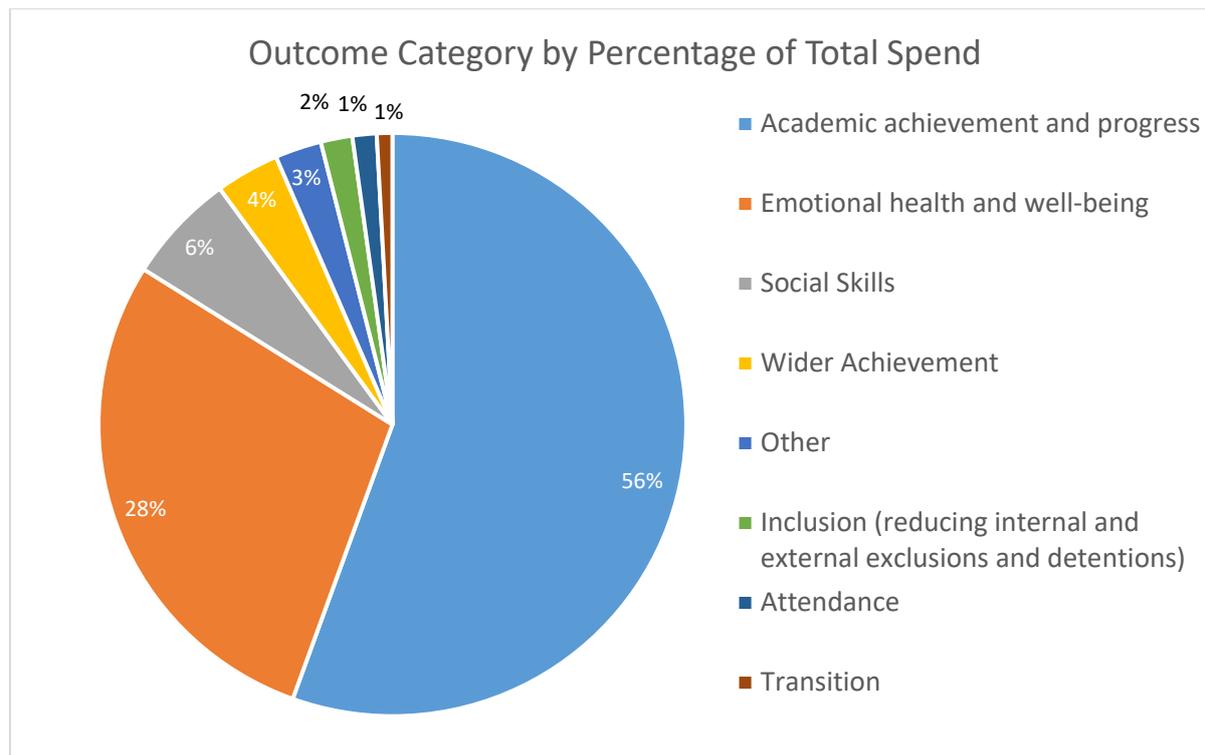
During 2020-2021 the Virtual School established a task and finish group working with colleagues in Full Circle, the Emotional Wellbeing and Effective Learning (EWEL) Service and the CLA EP to establish a more robust emotional and therapeutic offer for our children. Through this group we developed a training package for our schools to improve DT's understanding of attachment and trauma informed approaches in school. This year Full Circle have delivered 6 sessions of the Trauma Informed Approaches in Education training to our Designated Teachers. 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. We also identified that our children would benefit from increased support from the EWEL team and purchased 200 credits with them to be able to offer assessment and intervention in order to be more proactive in addressing issues. Over 40 young people were supported through this SLA and a number of them received multiple packages included assessment and support. We continue to invest in the EWEL credits in order to provide access to tailored support and intervention in the next academic year.

## 8.8 How do schools spend their allocation?

In 2021-22 (Financial Year) our total PP+ budget was £1,688,400. Schools were allocated £1,800 of the government allocation of £2,345 (now £2410 from April 2022), in 3 instalments. This was an increase of £100 from the previous years and was again an acknowledgement of the additional support children required in school to bridge the gaps from covid absences and

closures. In total, approximately £1,100,000 was provided directly to schools during the 2021-22 academic year to support their work with children in care. Recovery Grant Premium for eligible pupils was given directly to schools in two payments. Evidence of use was added to the PEP documents. 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 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 tutoring is found to be effective especially for those children who have moved schools a number of 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. Therefore, a focus of Designated Teacher training this year will be setting SMART outcomes, with an emphasis on using Pupil Premium Plus effectively. This is something we wish to improve upon this year and our Caseworkers will be attending meetings to ensure outcomes that are set are SMART and that feedback is given to schools where this is not the case. We can also see that a number of outcomes on attendance were not achieved, which although disappointing, on closer analysis, we see that most of those not achieved were for young people who had significant attendance issues. In all these cases the Virtual School were aware of the issues and were working with the full Care Team to 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%
Attendance	37%	22%	40%
Emotional health and well-being	37%	48%	15%
Inclusion (reducing internal and external exclusions and detentions)	29%	43%	29%
Other	39%	45%	16%
Social Skills	36%	46%	18%
Transition	46%	36%	19%
Wider Achievement	42%	37%	22%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>14%</b>

EEF Category of Spend	Amount
One to one tuition	16.32%
Social and emotional learning	13.49%
Other	13.47%
Small group tuition	12.53%
Metacognition and self-regulation	8.30%
Individualised instruction	7.95%
Behaviour Interventions	5.16%
Phonics	3.88%
Reading comprehension strategy	2.41%
Digital technology	2.37%
Mastery learning	2.16%
Outdoor adventure learning	1.68%
Mentoring	1.68%
Homework	1.58%
Early years interventions	1.40%
Arts participation	1.32%
Within-class attainment grouping	1.08%
Oral language interventions	0.98%
Sports participation	0.84%
Collaborative learning	0.74%
Feedback	0.30%
Peer tutoring	0.29%
Summer schools	0.07%
Parental engagement	0.00%

## 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.

The SALT team provided training to Designated Teachers regarding identification and support of speech, language and communication needs for our CLA.

Full Circle delivered 6 training sessions on Trauma Informed Approaches in Education for our Designated Teachers. We are developing this offer next year to include additional training opportunities both for our Designated Teachers and Children's Homes.

Our CLA EP has provided a number of training sessions and webinars on topics including identification of need and challenges in supporting our CLA, prioritising the pupil voice, managing change and transition and supporting emotions and self-regulation.

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.

The team have been trained in the use of the Clear Cut Tool and will carry out this communication assessment for all new children coming into care who are aged 10 and above. They have also attended training on Trauma Informed Approaches in Education delivered by Full Circle.

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.

## 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 a number of 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 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. The outcome is recorded on the PEP. We are looking to develop this further next year to ensure that all the speech, language and communication needs of all our children are discussed regularly at PEPs.

### 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. Our EP meets with the Caseworkers both within a monthly scheduled meeting and across the month. Our EP had direct involvement with 24 of the 50 young people discussed between September 2021 and July 2021 following consultation with caseworkers and designated teachers. There has been indirect involvement with 30 students as consultation was provided to teaching staff and there was also liaison with school link EPs when possible in several cases including planning with the EWEL team. Most of the work undertaken has been on behalf of Durham CLA , educated in Durham. Work has been across all Key Stages including nursery 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 when possible 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 often cognitive and academic assessment. A review of existing provision took place and future provision was discussed and advised in a written format.

**Consultation** with school staff, social workers, caseworkers and carers took place. 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 was typical undertaken remotely but was followed with a written summary to key people involved in most of the cases either as a report in 13 cases 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 5 EHCP referrals with SENCOs and Designated teachers

**Liaison with Carers and other services [e.g. EWEL, Social Care, Full Circle]** around needs and strategies to support regulation, routines and skills. This occurred with 10 CLA cases both within meetings and phone calls or on teams.

#### Cases providing examples of impact include:

- Support for a year 11 student with learning, exam organisation and emotional regulation as a result of liaison with the Designated Teacher, key worker in the residential home and student.
- Support for a year 8 student including assessment and a summary of need with teaching staff. Liaison with social care included advice about needs when securing residential provision for a Key Stage 3 child
- Assessment of two sisters [one primary and one reception] who had been out of school for several months and so information provided for future settings around skills, strengths and possible difficulties.
- Support for educational provision in the residential home for a year 7 student following an EHCP and liaison with the school's SENCO and key workers in two meetings regarding progress and needs.
- Several meetings around the planning and re-integration of a year 8 student from the Virtual School involving key staff from the secondary school. This included 3 visits and a part time, bespoke timetable which was a change from usual practice that involved student returning to mainstream school from full time Alternative provision.
- Liaison with a residential home around routines, emotional support and attachment during two visits.

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

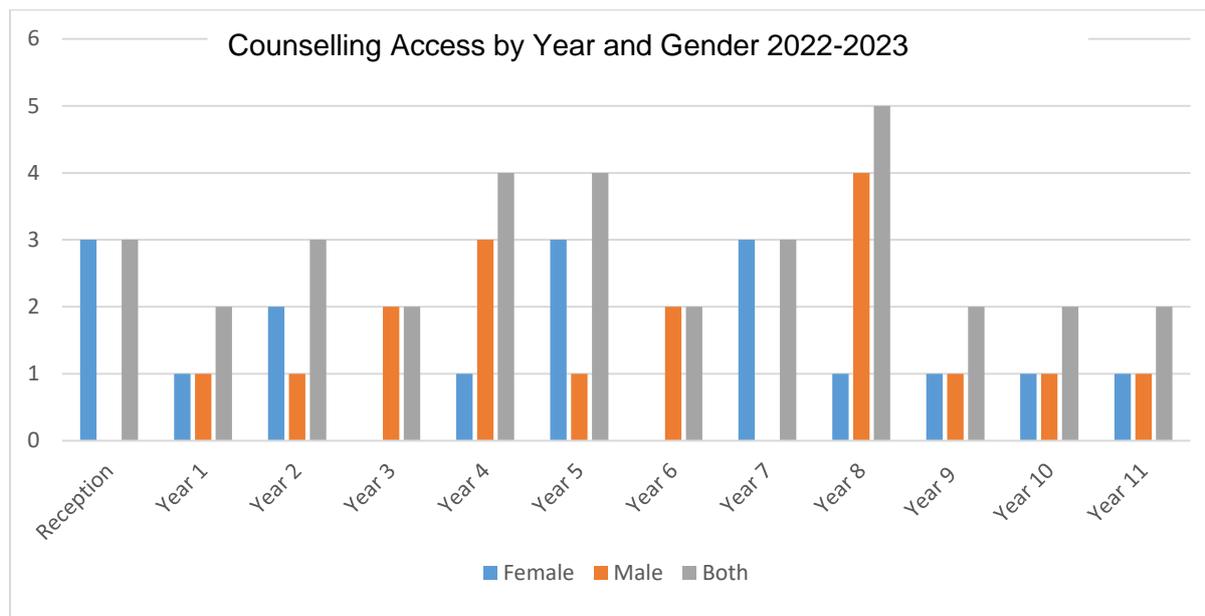
- Reduced stress in and increased resilience and feelings of personal efficacy in teachers and support staff so that they are better placed to support the child
- Support for inclusion for children who might otherwise be excluded or moved into more specialist provision or internal units remaining included in their mainstream school
- Learning difficulties 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.
- Due to the complexity of several children's needs being identified this led to the provision of SEN Support Plans and Education Health and Care Plans.

### 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 supports children and young people to build awareness of and work through their experiences and emotions in a safe and contained space. Counselling can take the form of talking therapy but may also include play and creative therapy to promote self-expression. Younger children in particular convey their inner world through play, so this will often provide the medium in which to express themselves, make sense of their experiences and work through difficulties. 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 as a whole.

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 counselling provided by our 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, we 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 6 days per week counselling for our CLA. This academic year 35 referrals were made to the counselling service, with a further 17 carried over from the previous academic year. The children referred have been split evenly across gender. The most commonly occurring age group for referrals has been from year 8, closely followed by year 4 and year 5. We have found that this year our year 8 pupils have been having many difficulties in school, and we find that a significant number of our more complex cases are in this year group, possibly impacted by the lack of transition from Primary to Secondary school due to Covid. It is therefore expected that a larger number of our referrals for counselling and support would be from this age group. 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**

<b>Total number of counselling sessions offered</b>	<b>384</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total number of counselling sessions attended</li> <li>Total number of counselling sessions attended</li> </ul>	<b>370</b> <b>14</b>
Meetings with other professionals*:	<b>16</b>
Meetings with carers*:	<b>15</b>

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

Children and young people from 21 primary schools and 14 secondary schools received support. Attendance and engagement in the sessions remains good and 384 direct intervention sessions were offered, with an attendance rate of 96%. This is an improvement of 9% on last year, and we are very pleased with the engagement of our young people and the support offered by schools to facilitate the sessions.

Presenting issues so far this year have been around 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 challenging behaviour in high arousal states, or withdrawal in low arousal states, emotional regulation difficulties, as well as difficulties building relationships with staff and/or peers.

The children and young people we work with are part of a vulnerable group, many of whom have experienced trauma. The majority 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 we are always mindful of delivering interventions that are bespoke to the child and take into account their readiness to engage with the issues they may be facing, and the support structures around them. As such, important to our 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. 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

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*“He’s really enjoyed his sessions and talks positively about them when he comes home.”*

*“She’s loved her sessions. Thank you for all that you’ve done.”*

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### Secondary child

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*“This has given me a calm space within my day; like I can relax.”*

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### Feedback from teachers

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*“In a recent topic on family, X responded positively about their living situation.”*

*“Thank you so much for talking to us about how to support X. I went home and for the first time in a long time, I felt that everything was going to be OK.”*

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## Case Study

*'John' is in year 8 and is currently living in kinship care after being removed from the care of his parent. He has an unsettled and uncertain relationship with mam, and irregular and intermittent contact with dad. There is a court procedure ongoing to decide on an SGO, which is providing John with a consistent and stable home.*

*School is concerned about John's presentation, describing him as academically capable and bright, however can appear to shut down and 'zone-out' in class. A counselling referral was made so John could have a space to explore his past experiences.*



*Children who have experienced adverse experiences can have an underdeveloped emotional regulation system, and present with a range of symptoms ranging from high-energy in a hyper-aroused state, through to low-energy in a hypo-aroused state. Counselling intervention can help children widen their emotional regulation system so they can better tolerate life's stressors.*



*My sense was John was hypo-aroused, with low self-esteem. Through joining and building a therapeutic relationship of trust with John, he was able to share his likes and interests, often bringing conversations to his present and immediate future events.*

*Listening, reflecting, and delighting in John's world encouraged his sense of belonging and worth, thus building on his self-esteem. Additionally, we used sensorimotor media for the exploration of grounding strategies, which we can utilise when we feel we're distracted to help bring us into the present moment.*



*Having a safe and confidential space in which to express his thoughts and feelings around his family, himself, and his experiences, has benefitted John. School report that he appears content and his attention in class has improved.*

*John valued his sessions attending all 10 that were offered to him. He shared that his ongoing custody case has been invasive and unsettling, and that the counselling sessions have provided a space of calm and relaxation. Ongoing mindfulness practices will support the development of John's emotional regulation skills, as well as grounding and attention, to support him into his future.*

## 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.

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 2022-23 to support CLA and schools?

This is a focus for us for 2022-23:

- 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.
- 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.
- Work with colleagues in our Special Schools to provide relevant support for CLA in their settings.
- Develop the extended role of the VSH for Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

## 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, we have experienced the return to formal testing for KS1 and 2 children and formal exams for KS4 young people. KS 1 and 2 data reflects the gaps created through the pandemic, however KS1 data is stronger than KS2. This is an area for questioning at PEP meetings for Year 6 moving into Year 7 KS4 data has shown a trend in line with that of 2019 and better than 2019 national measures. PEP meetings inform us of the progress a child is making through the year. 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. 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 addition of the Front Door Manager has developed further this year to manage the CLA PEP Caseworkers. This has strengthened the service we offer and the support we are able to give to our schools. 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. This was initially a pilot; however, the Government have decided to continue this into 2022/23 to include all children who have had a social Worker in the last 6 years, this is known as the Ever6 CWSW model. It is important to note that the strategic overview sits with the VSH, who is working in partnership with schools, settings, 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. It is important to note that the offer to the CLA cohort remains strong with a Virtual School team who have not changed their way of working with schools and settings.

## 14. Outline Priorities for 2022-23

The key priorities for 2022-23 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 21/22 due to the needs of CLA.

- Support KS1 to close gaps emerging during Lockdown
- Support more children to achieve high scores / greater depth at KS2
- Appropriate curriculum access / bespoke offers when a child requires a different approach.
- Increase the focus on attendance for CLA.
- Work in partnership to develop clear academic and vocational pathways in preparation for adulthood
- Develop systems to identify earlier intervention to support Post 16 to reduce NEET data.
- Increase the CLA PEP Casework Team to enhance the service we offer and appoint a bespoke caseworker for Post 16.
- Further raise awareness in all schools and settings of the impact of early trauma and insecure attachment on behaviour and learning and support schools to review policies and implement change
- Further strengthen links with CICC.

- 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 the additions to the casework team enhances our offer for children in care through support and challenge for schools and attendance at PEP meetings.
- Focus on Years 6 and 11 to allow early intervention and release catch up funding during the Autumn term.
- Further develop our therapeutic offer to schools through the Full Circle SLA, develop the training package provided by Full Circle to all Designated Teachers with a Durham CLA in school.
- Develop the EWEL offer to schools to support early intervention and reduce the numbers of Suspensions.
- Develop work with Children's Homes to support school anxiety and other barriers to education.
- Work with other areas, including schools to ensure PLAC and those with a SGO are aware of the support available and how to access this.
- Ensure a robust system is in place to increase school stability through monitoring and challenge.
- Work with Social Care and Commissioning to provide advice for children who are placed outside of County Durham when education is difficult to source.
- Develop the work with the SEND and Inclusion Team to ensure all CLA with an EHCP have a named SEND Caseworker, raising the awareness of the need to find a suitable placement when the child needs to change school through a placement breakdown
- Further embed the work for Ever6 CWSW through extended role of the VSH having a strategic lead with this cohort of children.

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

## 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
Fixed Term Exclusion	FTE <sub>x</sub>
Teacher Assessed Grades	TAG's
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