



# Durham Virtual School

## Annual Report 2023-2024

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

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

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

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

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

We strive to achieve the best for Children in Care and are constantly looking for innovative ways to improve the offer of the Virtual School. This year we have seen a stronger offer for children who have previously been in care, and their families, whilst embedding the processes for children with a social worker across Durham.

The Virtual School September 2023 to July 2024.....	4
Executive Summary Children in Care 2023-24 .....	5
Summary statement.....	5
Headlines .....	6
Key Stage 1 .....	6
Key Stage 2 .....	6
Key Stage 4 .....	6
Attendance and Suspensions/Permanent Exclusions.....	7
Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus.....	7
1. Introduction.....	8
2. Durham Virtual School .....	8
2.1 What is the role of the Virtual School? .....	8
2.2 Who are we? .....	9
2.3 Structure Diagram .....	10
2.4 Who do we report to and how are we held accountable? .....	10
3. Profile of learners and numbers on roll at the virtual school.....	10
3.1 How many learners are on roll? .....	10
Table 1: Number of CIC by Year Group 23 July 2024.....	11
3.2 What is the profile of the statutory school age cohort? .....	11
3.3 How well do we promote placement and school stability? .....	12
3.4 How many of the cohort have Special Educational Needs (SEND)? .....	12
Table 2: Number of CIC with SEND by year group July 2024 (for academic year 2023-24).....	13
Table 3: Charts to show the rates of SEN across different phases. ....	14
3.5 What are the primary needs of our cohort with an EHCP? .....	15
Table 4: Charts to show primary need of CIC with EHCP.....	16
3.6 How do virtual school caseworkers support children in care with identified special educational needs? .....	18
3.7 How do we collaborate to support children in care with identified SEN?.....	19
4. Duties to previously looked after children .....	19
4.1 How do we meet our duty towards previously looked after children?.....	19
4.2 How many previously looked after children of statutory school age are there? .....	21
5. Achievement and Progress.....	22
5.1 Early Years Update .....	22
5.2 How well do our children do at KS2?.....	23
Table 5: KS2 Expected Standards or above. ....	23
5.3 How well do our young people achieve in English and Maths KS4?.....	25

Table 6: KS4 English, Maths and Basics Outcomes.....	26
5.4 How well do our young people achieve and participate at KS5 / post 16?.....	27
Table 7: 16-17 CIC and CL –Qualifications (CCIS data).....	28
5.5 What were the destinations for our young people? .....	29
Table 8: Destinations post 16 2023 .....	29
Table 9: Destinations post 16 2022 .....	29
Table 10: Destinations post 16 2021 .....	30
5.6 How do we support our young people to ensure they participate in EET?.....	31
Table 11: 2022 –24 Participation in EET of Children in Care / Care Leavers aged 16 + .....	31
Table 12: Time Series: Participation in EET of Children in Care / Care Leavers aged 16-17 ...	31
5.7 How well do our young people achieve and participate in Higher Education?.....	35
6. Attendance and Exclusion .....	35
6.1 How well do our young people attend school?.....	35
Table 13: National Absence Data .....	36
Table 14: Attendance over three years for CIC.....	37
Table 15: Attendance of CIC by year group.....	37
Table 16: Attendance bands for CIC.....	38
6.2 How many of our young people have been suspended? .....	38
Table 17: Suspensions over three years for CIC .....	39
Table 18: Number of CIC with 2+ Suspensions over three years.....	39
7. Admissions, transitions, managed moves and OOC placements.....	40
7.1 How many children moved school mid-year? .....	40
Table 19: School Moves 2023-24 .....	41
7.2 How many of our children experienced supported off site placements? .....	42
7.3 How many of our children are placed in out of county education settings?.....	42
8. Personal Education Plans (PEP), (PP+) and Academic Progress.....	42
8.1 How does the virtual school ensure the quality of the PEPS? .....	42
8.2 What information does the PEP record?.....	43
8.3 What is the quality of the PEPs? .....	43
Table 20: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2023-24 .....	44
Table 21: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2017-2024 .....	45
8.4 How do we distribute pupil premium plus funding?.....	46
8.5 What is the centrally held budget spent on? .....	46
8.6 What academic support and intervention do we provide from central funding?.....	47
What difference does our support make? Case study .....	48

8.7	What therapeutic support do we provide from central funding? .....	50
8.8	How do schools spend their allocation? .....	50
	Table 22: How schools spent their PP+ budget on individual pupils .....	51
	Table 23: Total spend linked to outcomes and EEF Intervention category of spend .....	52
9.	Training Provision .....	54
10.	Support for mental and emotional wellbeing .....	55
10.1	What screening takes place? .....	55
10.2	How does our Educational Psychologist make a difference? .....	55
10.3	How do our counsellors make a difference? .....	57
	Table 24: Counselling Access by Year and Gender .....	58
	Table 25: Total Counselling Sessions Attended .....	58
	Feedback from children, carers and teachers on the counselling .....	60
	Case Study .....	61
11.	Voice of the Young Person .....	61
12.	Enrichment, Unleashing Aspiration and Celebration .....	62
12.1	What do we currently offer? .....	62
12.2	What are we planning for 2024-25 to support CIC and schools? .....	63
12.3	How do we celebrate success? .....	63
13.	Summary .....	63
14.	Outline Priorities for 2024-25 .....	64
15.	Recommendation .....	65
	Appendix A – Wider Teams .....	66
	Appendix B - Abbreviations .....	67



## The Virtual School September 2023 to July 2024

This year the virtual school has continued to support schools and settings to achieve the best outcomes for Children in Care (CIC). The Virtual School has worked with carers, social workers, and schools to ensure that children were able to access the best possible education available supported by some of the therapeutic interventions we are able to offer through our connections with colleagues within the Local Authority (LA). The following information summarises how we have supported Children in Care:

- All schools have had access to the Recovery Grant Premium and School Led Tutoring funding.
- The virtual school provided a transition workbook for children in year 6 who were moving to secondary school in September 2024. A copy was sent out by post to every year 6 child and their Carer.
- The virtual school has worked with the Behaviour and Inclusion Panels to support transition for CIC in Year 6 and to identify the correct Alternative Provision (AP) when a child struggles to access their usual school.
- The virtual school have worked with Full Circle to develop a therapeutic offer for schools to help support children who have experienced trauma in their lives to support them with their educational experiences. This provides training focused on Attachment and Trauma for all Designated Teachers who have a Durham CIC on roll in their school. Delivered via Teams this allows schools outside of the LA to attend.
- Staff from the virtual school liaised with various local authorities to secure education for several of our children who are placed out of area. This often brings additional challenges when a child has an EHCP.
- The Caseworkers continue to attend PEP meetings. This has helped to identify any extra interventions a child may need to prevent further gaps in learning developing, to support emotional wellbeing and to identify enrichment opportunities for CIC. Increasing caseloads bring additional challenge to this offer to schools.
- Caseworkers have supported year 11 students and have worked with the bespoke CIC PEP Caseworker and Durham Works to provide a smooth transition onto Post 16 pathways.
- Every child who has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) also had a SEND Caseworker whilst they live in Durham.
- Year 11, 12 and 13 received support from the Progression and Learning team. This has developed relationships with Social Care, the Young Peoples Service (YPS) and Post 16 providers.
- Post 16 CIC and Care Leavers attending College continued to be supported by Post 16 Pupil Premium plus. This continues to support engagement.
- Relationships with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) developed further. We were able to continue to allocate a small amount of funding to enable CIC to apply directly to

the CiCC for small grants when they have an interest they wish to pursue. The Education Fun Fund has enabled 45 CIC to pursue an interest this year.

- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) continue to be a focus for the Virtual School (VS) they sometimes require a bespoke package to meet their educational needs. Securing appropriate education has at times, been a challenge this year with limited resources and access to ESOL places in colleges. To support the young person to become school ready we secure twelve hours of tutoring, provide access to Flash Academy and equip each young person with a chrome book.
- We have held termly meetings with the DfE to discuss the work of Durham Virtual School and have shared our approach to the CPIC work through the appointment of a CPIC Officer.
- We have worked with Beamish Museum to host a day for Carers and children in July to enable them to meet the virtual School Team and develop stronger relationships.

## Executive Summary Children in Care 2023-24

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>, 2023, to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024 – hereafter referred to as the reporting cohort. This executive summary covers statutory school age, whilst the body of the report also includes Early Years and Post 16.

### Summary statement

At Durham Virtual School we believe we are making a difference to the education of children and young people in care. This report can evidence educational outcomes and progress from entry to care this year evidenced through formal examinations for Key Stages 2 and 4. Good attendance, few suspensions, high aspirations, strong vocational and academic pathways, and effective preparation for adulthood continue to be evident for most CIC. Where this is not the case, we have strong systems in place to address our concerns. 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 CIC. At the same time, we are taking our extended duties seriously and have developed strong working practice for those who are previously a child in care or a child with a social worker, through the Grant 31 funding to strengthen the workforce in these areas.

## Headlines

### Progress

## Key Stage 1

KS1 SATs are sat by students in Year 2 as they reach the end of the KS1 curriculum. As of the academic year 2023/24, the government announced these “tests are now optional and are no longer a statutory requirement”. To this end, it is up to individual schools if they'd like their students to sit these assessments. Based upon this guidance the Virtual school have not reported on KS1 optional tests this academic year.

## Key Stage 2

There were 63 children in Year 6, with 51 of those in the reporting cohort. Of the 51 pupils in the reporting cohort, 46 attended mainstream primary schools with 4 attending a special school and 1 not on the roll of a school following a move back into the area. The majority (86%) attend primary schools in Durham with 6 being placed outside of the area.

84% of children attended schools rated Good or better, with only 4 children in a school graded Requires Improvement. The remaining pupils were in schools without Ofsted judgements, as they were Academy Converters who have yet to be inspected.

Although only 4 children attended a special school, 65% of the reporting cohort had SEN (18% more than last year), with 10 of those having an EHCP. Of those with an EHCP, most children had a primary need related to Cognition and Learning. Girls in this cohort are more likely to have SEN, with 66.7% of girls having SEN.

Outcomes in Reading this year are above both the Durham and National figures from 2023 and in line with those in Writing from the same years. Unfortunately, we have dipped in Writing, Maths and R/W/M. However, we believe in part this may be due to the high level of SEND in this cohort. We also expect this to be partly due to the continued impact of the disruption caused by Covid. Reading continues to be supported by the Virtual School across KS1 and KS2 by our commitment to provide all children in the primary phases with regular access to high quality reading materials and packs.

## Key Stage 4

There were 117 children in Year 11, however only 83 were counted in the reporting cohort. The remaining young people were not counted for a variety of reasons, including a high number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the time they entered care, some not on a school roll at the time of census or being in a school outside of England. The reporting cohort was therefore adjusted accordingly.

Of the 83 pupils remaining in the reporting cohort, only 49 attended mainstream secondary schools, 15 attended maintained or academy special schools, 9 attended an independent special school, 3 were in a Pupil Referral Unit, 5 were in Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision and 1 had no school. Those in the Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision had access to a GCSE curriculum. One pupil was following an EOTAS package, bespoke to their needs.



69% of children attended schools rated Good or better, with 12% graded less than Good. A further 15 pupils were in schools without Ofsted judgements, as they were either not in school or in Academy Converters who have yet to be inspected.

41% of young people were not in Mainstream Schools, an increase of 9% from last year, and although all followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs, 47% of these young people did not access GCSEs in Maths and English, therefore impacting on the outcome measures. Although slightly above in English 4-9 grades from last year, we saw a drop in the 4-9 EM basics measure. This was in part due to the drop in those achieving 4-9 in Maths. This was then further impacted by those not accessing GCSE curriculum due to their SEN, but improving this will remain a focus for next year. Continued monitoring and targeted use of support will be used to ensure our young people can access the help they need to achieve their potential.

## Attendance and Suspensions/Permanent Exclusions

We are disappointed to report that there have been two permanent exclusions for 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. Working with the four secondary Behaviour and Inclusion Panels we are usually able to avoid a permanent exclusion before a crisis point is reached. Sixty CIC received at least one suspension 2023/24 which represented 7.7% of the CIC cohort, an increase of 2.4%. This academic year thirty three CIC experienced more than one Suspension, 4.2% of the CIC cohort, a reduction of 1% against 22/23. The overall attendance for children in care has dipped since 2019. Local data for CIC has been obtained from schools and providers between September 2023 and July 2024. The local overall attendance for the whole CIC cohort was 90%. This shows a dip of 1.4% against last year.

## Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus

2019/20 saw the introduction of the Welfare Call electronic PEP system, and since that date we have undertaken a yearly review of the document and process. A cycle of constant reviewing has led to an efficient process, allowing easy access for the Caseworker to monitor the quality of the PEP and the progress of our young people. During the last year we have been using the enhanced Welfare Call Analytics system to ensure quick and easy access to key data. The PEP also allows monitoring and oversight of progress and Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) use. Schools were encouraged to use Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) to support CIC 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. This year we introduced new guidance and recording for identifying the use of PP+ cohort spend. Where this has been completed fully, it helps schools and the Virtual School to identify use of funding more accurately.

## 1. Introduction

As Virtual School Head for Durham County Council, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for Durham Virtual School 2023/2024 (Academic Year), which details our work, alongside our partners and the wider local authority to improve progress, outcomes and ultimately the life-chances of the children in our care.

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

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

## 2. Durham Virtual School

### 2.1 What is the role of the Virtual School?

The role of the Virtual School Head and the Durham Virtual School team is to take the lead in promoting the educational achievement of children in care, and from September 2018, that of Children Previously in Care (CPIC), 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 with 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 schools through the lens of visibility. Multi Agency working has also been a large part of the scope. In September 2022 this was extended to include all CWSW in the last six years.

We want our children in care to attend, engage with and enjoy school so 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 continues to be 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 CIC to catch up as we move forward into the next academic year.

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

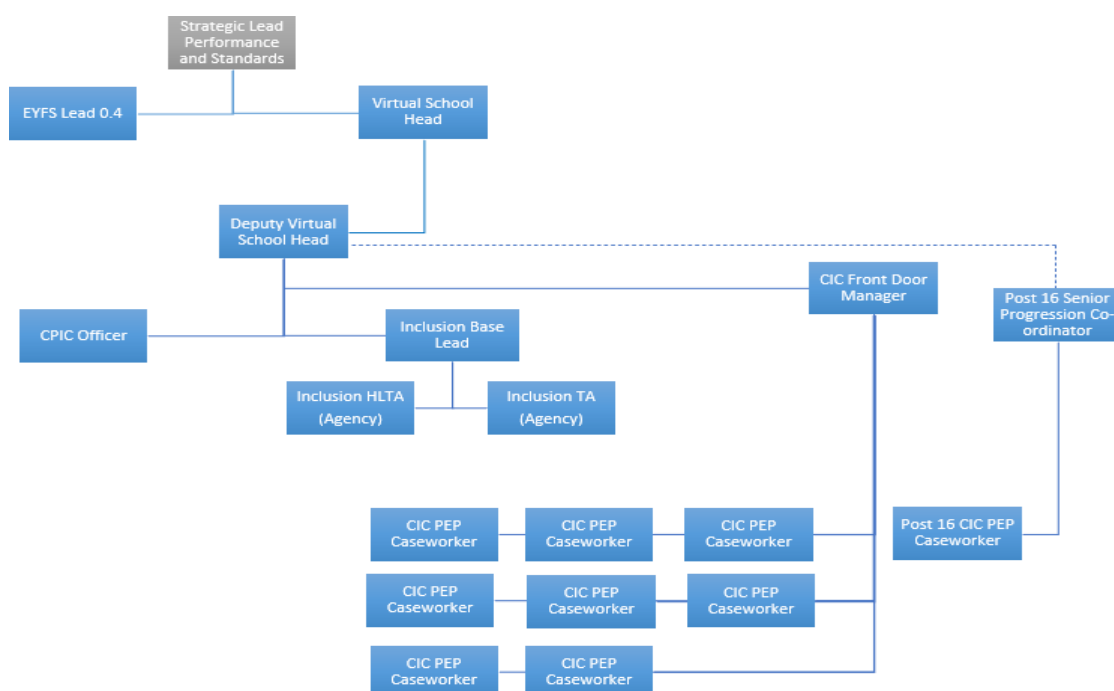
The introduction of the Front Door Manager role has led to improved communications with schools, Alternative Provisions, Social Workers and Carers.

## 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 Virtual School team sit in Education. The Virtual School Head is supported by a Deputy Virtual School Head, who has taken on additional responsibilities.

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

## 2.3 Structure Diagram



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

The virtual school contributes to Education Durhams Operational plan. In addition to this there is a bespoke development plan for the VS. We use this to carry out regular self-evaluation against the priorities in the plan. The VSH reports to the Head of Service for Education and Skills through Education SMT and meets with the Head of Social Care. The VSH also attends the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) and presents the annual report and education outcomes. Line management and reporting for the wider team sits within Education. The virtual school reports to a subgroup of the CPP which is chaired by the vice-chair of the CPP and comprises elected members, local school leaders and representatives from care. We attend the Children in Care 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 2024, there were 721 learners (R – yr. 11) on roll of the Virtual School. This is an increase of less than 1% on the same time last year. There were a further 257 post 16 (an increase of 13% from 2023) and 72 pre-school (Nursery 1 and Nursery 2). In total there were 1050 children and young people on the roll of the Durham Virtual School.

**Table 1: Number of CIC by Year Group 23 July 2024**

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

	Male	Female	Total	% Total	Male	Female
<b>R</b>	23	21	44	4.69%	52.27%	47.73%
<b>1</b>	31	19	50	5.33%	62.00%	38.00%
<b>2</b>	27	21	48	5.12%	56.25%	43.75%
<b>3</b>	31	20	51	5.44%	60.78%	39.22%
<b>4</b>	34	20	54	5.76%	62.96%	37.04%
<b>5</b>	40	29	69	7.36%	57.97%	42.03%
<b>6</b>	31	32	63	6.72%	49.21%	50.79%
<b>7</b>	37	34	71	7.57%	52.11%	47.89%
<b>8</b>	33	20	53	5.65%	62.26%	37.74%
<b>9</b>	37	33	70	7.46%	52.86%	47.14%
<b>10</b>	49	40	89	9.49%	55.06%	44.94%
<b>11</b>	65	52	117	12.47%	55.56%	44.44%
<b>12</b>	98	41	139	14.82%	70.50%	29.50%
<b>13</b>	14	6	20	2.13%	70.00%	30.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>938</b>		<b>58.64%</b>	<b>41.36%</b>

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

At the end of July 2024, there were 779 children of statutory school age (SSA) in care. This is an increase of 1.7% from the same time at the end of the 2022-2023 academic year. This indicates that the number of SSA CIC is levelling off. As with previous years, there is roughly an equal primary / secondary split. 48.7% in primary and 51.3% in secondary. The gender split across SSA and Post 16 is 41.36% female and 58.64% male. Although there are consistently more boys of this age in care, this number has increased slightly from last year. The more marked difference, however, is in P16, where 70% are male and 30% are female.

22% of children and young people (R - yr. 11) attend out of county schools; this is an increase of 0.34% from last year. 75.7% are educated in schools based in County Durham. A further 2.3% of children were not in provision and a number of these were in care placements outside of the local authority. The number not in provision may in part be a reflection on the difficulty in placing children in Special Schools appropriate to their need. Those children not in Durham are placed across 45 other local authorities, although a significant number of these are placed in our neighbouring local authorities.

As of July 2024, 77.8% of the cohort attended a school with an Ofsted judgement of good or better and 9.6% attended a school with a grade of Requires Improvement or below. To avoid additional trauma, we do not routinely remove a child from a school which becomes inadequate unless there was an exceptional reason, but we do provide additional scrutiny and



academic support if required. In Durham this will include having conversations with colleagues in Education to understand the support and scrutiny that is being offered to schools and for those outside of Durham, this may include having conversations with the local Virtual School. In all cases, where we place a child in a school rated less than good, extra scrutiny is applied by the PEP Caseworker and Virtual School Head. 80 young people attended schools where a current Ofsted judgement isn't available due to a recent academy conversion.

At the end of July there were 22 UASC children of statutory school age on the roll of the Virtual School. 16 attended schools outside of the local authority for care reasons. This brings additional challenges when seeking a school placement. 18 were in Year 11, all of whom had a Post 16 destination organised.

### 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 to learn. We operate in line with the Children's Commissioners vision for CIC and the vision that every child should be on the roll of a school and attending\*. The report issued in May 2023 stated that 2.7% of looked after children are not in school. In Durham, as of July 2024, 2.3% of children were not on a school roll, although this figure also includes Year 11's who were not on a school roll before the official leaving date. Young people not on a school roll bring additional oversight from the VSH and managers within the VS, as progress towards identifying an appropriate education provision is monitored weekly.

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

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

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

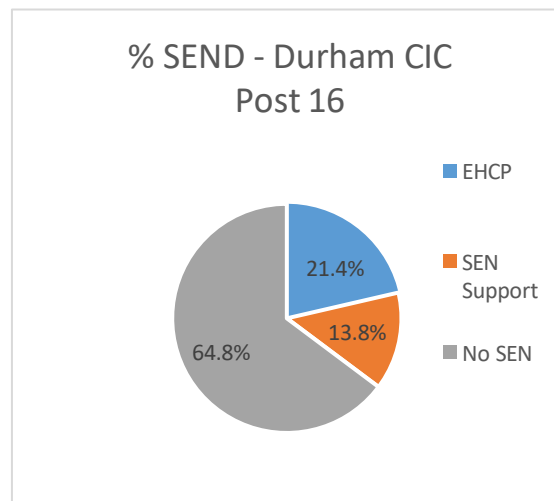
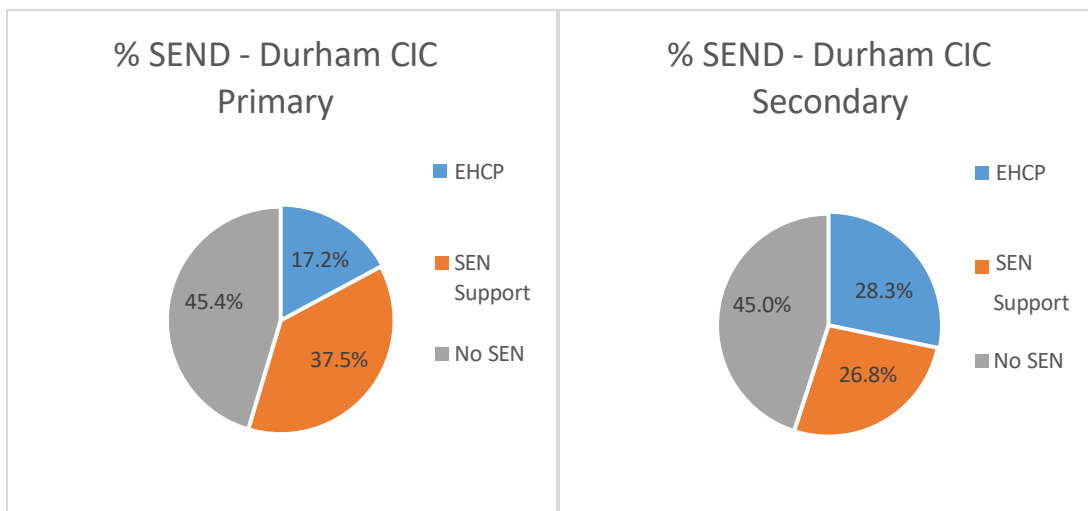
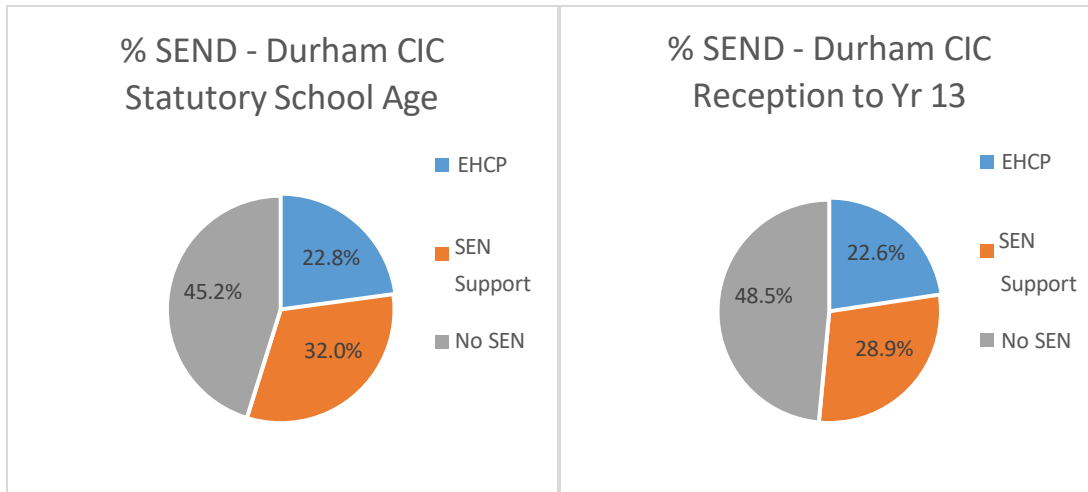
Children in care (12 months at 31 March) are over three and a half times as likely to have an identified SEN and seven times more likely to have an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) than all children. Nationally in 2023, 58.1% of children in care had a special educational need compared to 17.1% of all children. In Durham 2023-24, 54.81% of children and young people (R-Y11) had identified special educational needs requiring either an SEN Support Plan or EHCP; 22.85% were supported by an EHCP whilst 31.96% had school SEN support plans (K code). There is a slight increase from last year.

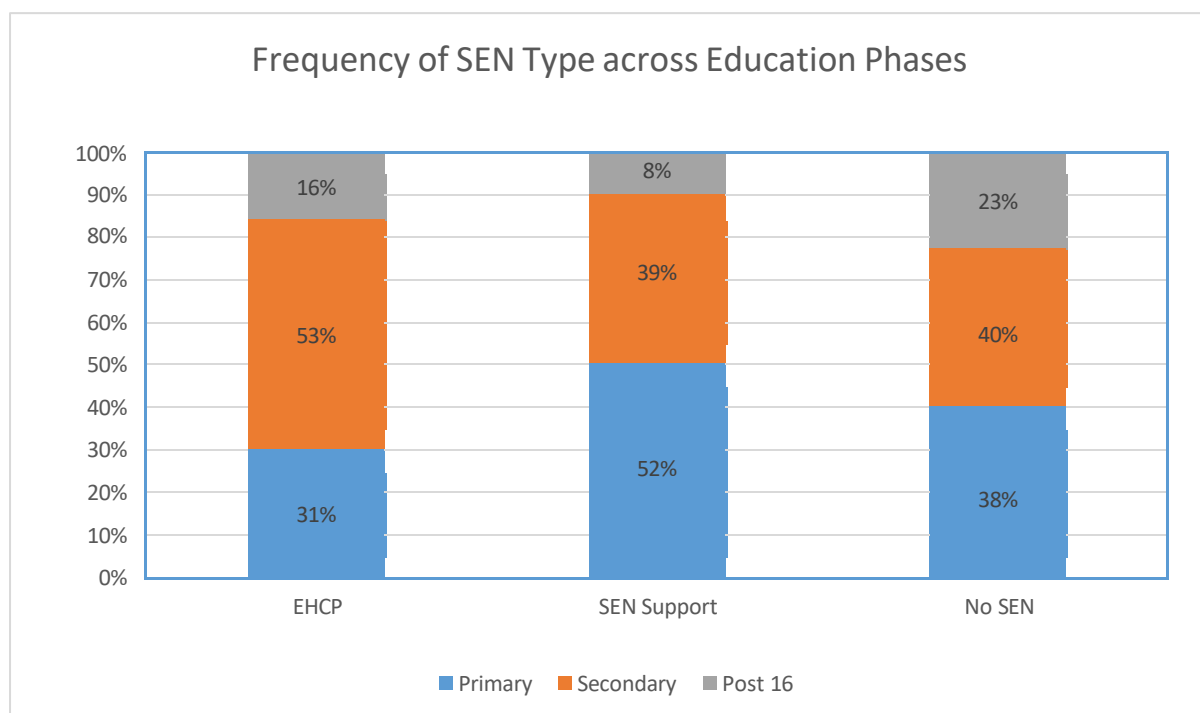
**Table 2: Number of CIC with SEND by year group July 2024 (for academic year 2023-24)**

Year	EHCP (E)	SEN Support (K)	No SEN	Total
R	4	18	22	44
1	8	13	29	50
2	7	15	26	48
3	11	17	23	51
4	6	20	28	54
5	16	32	21	69
6	13	27	23	63
7	17	20	34	71
8	12	19	22	53
9	20	20	30	70
10	33	19	37	89
11	31	29	57	117
<b>Total SSA</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>779</b>
12	26	20	93	139
13	8	2	10	20
<b>Total P16</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>938</b>

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

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





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

Nationally children in care are 3 times more likely to have social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) as their primary need than their peers. This is reflected in Durham where 45% 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 5 years from 54% in 2019. However, there remains a significant difference of 25% in the levels of SEMH needs between secondary and primary aged Durham CIC. The level of SEMH need amongst Secondary age young people with an EHCP is 54%. In Primary, SEMH is the primary need for 29% of children, a reduction of 6% from last year.

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

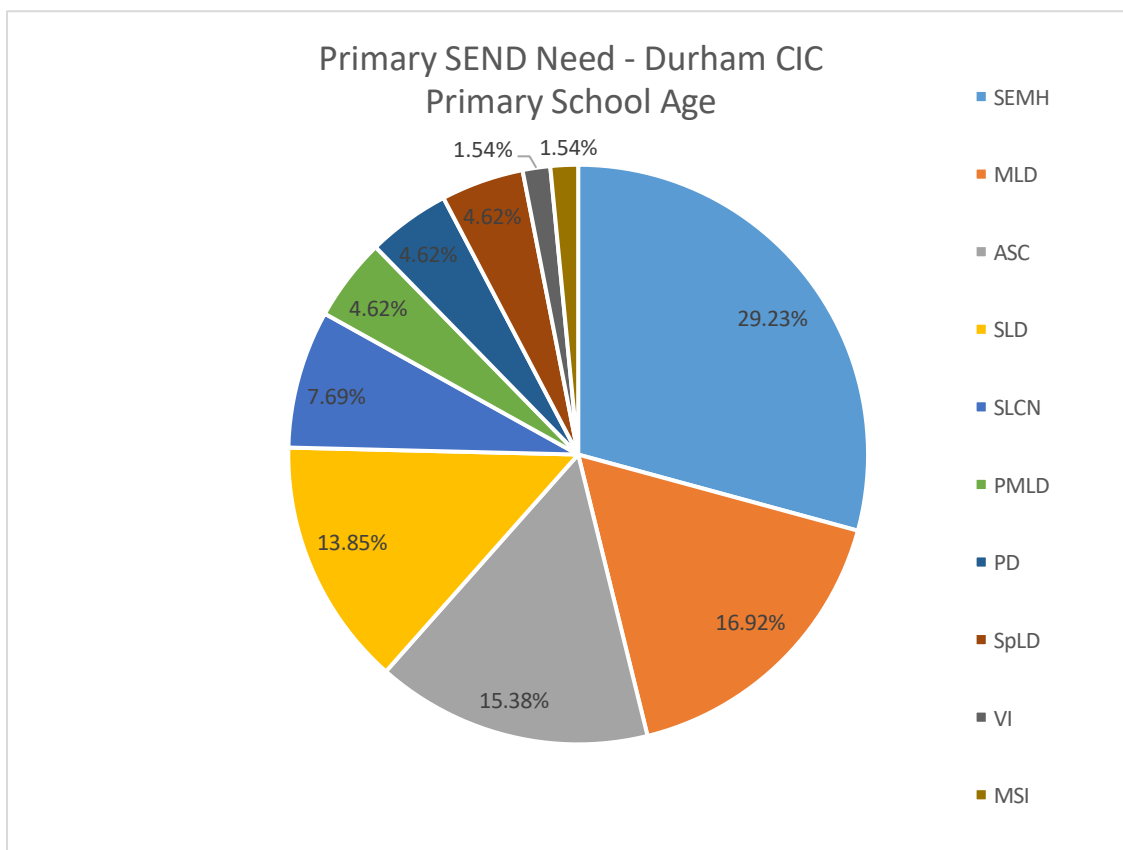
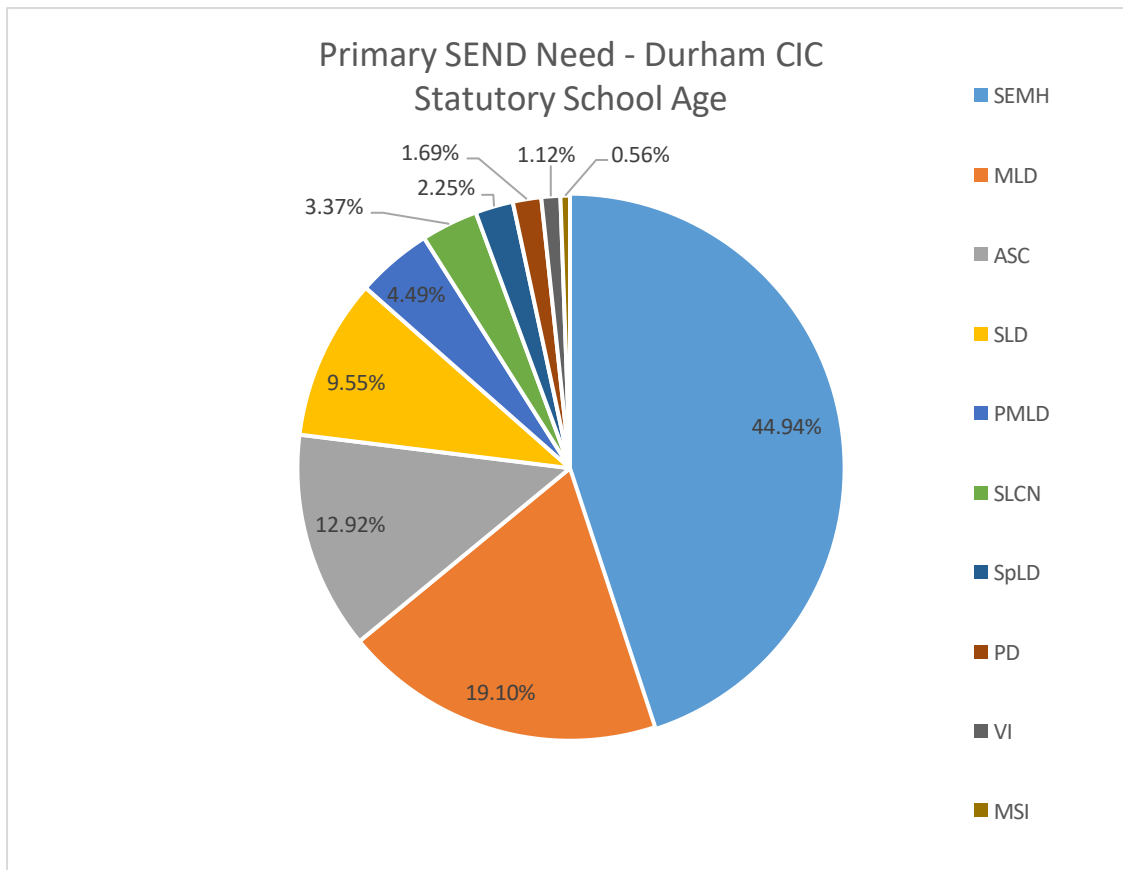
- Additional support for KS1 and KS2 children at risk of exclusion from their school
- An enhanced support agreement with the Local Authority EWEL Team
- Increased School counsellor support for Durham children looked after.
- Enhanced support from a Senior Educational Psychologist
- Additional training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

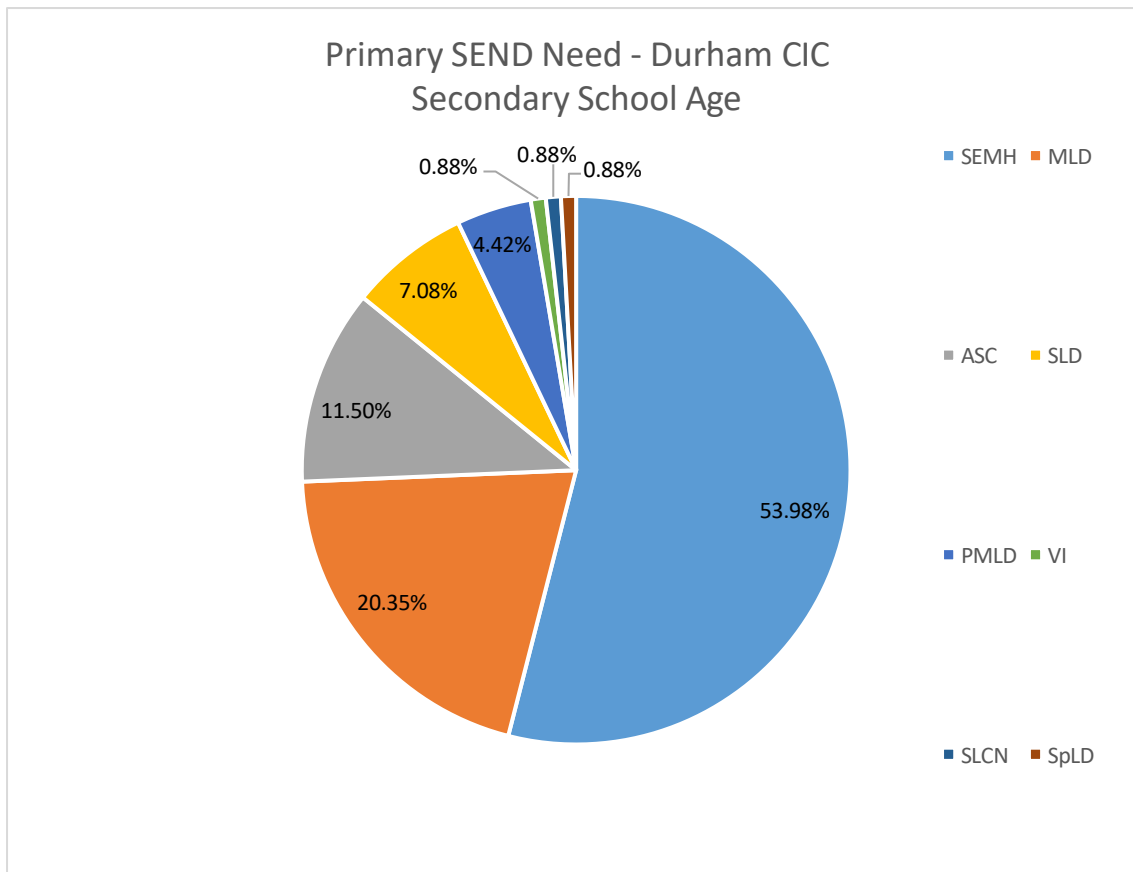
Our casework team has expertise in SEND and offers strong advice and support in all areas of SEND. To meet increased need we have continued to use the PP+ grant to maintain our counselling offer and continue to work with Full Circle to ensure schools have access to advice and support through a dedicated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

**Table 4: Charts to show primary need of CIC 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)
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)







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

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

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

- Where there are difficulties requesting statutory assessment through schools, working closely with the social worker to complete a professional/parental request for statutory assessment.

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

The PEP 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 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 for CIC and shared this with all stakeholders involved with the child. All Durham CIC who have a Durham Plan 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?**

The Virtual School continues to commit to offering a 'Gold Standard' service for our Children Previously in Care and their families. Until the start of the year our service was met through Managers advice and guidance, both to those families seeking out support from the team or to professionals and schools working with this cohort. We had developed good links with both SGO and adoption teams and offered regular and clear guidance and updates for schools through the Designated Teacher Network meetings and Head Teacher briefings. Queries received centred mainly on 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. Due to the increased volume of queries, at the start of the academic year, we decided that the funding we received would be better used by employing a CPIC Officer who, under the direction of the Deputy Virtual School Head, had responsibility for developing the service we offered and improving our links with Kinship Carers, adoptive families, and professionals. The CPIC Officer joined the service in February 2024 and has made great strides in developing resources and establishing processes.

The service we offer now includes: -

- Resources for DT's and Schools regarding the needs of this cohort and how best to offer support. This includes a DT Toolkit for CPIC, including specific guidance of how to support and engage with parents/carers, signposting to available services and advice on how to access support. There is also enhanced guidance on Pupil Premium Plus for CPIC.

- A dedicated officer for parents and Kinship Carers to contact who has a good understanding of the services that can support families.
- Strong links with both the SGO and Adoption teams, including attendance at parent/carer events.
- Regular drop-in sessions on education matters for the SGO support team.
- Development of a DVS Pen Portrait that can be used for children leaving care on SGO/Adoption order to ensure key messages are shared with schools and improve understanding of how best to support the child. The CPIC Officer will also maintain contact with the family for up to two terms, to ensure continuity of advice.
- Development of a directory of useful local and national services/organisations/services for signposting.
- Our CPIC Officer now sits on the Adoption and SGO Panels to ensure that there is an education perspective and to share advice.
- A survey has been shared with the Durham Schools Head Teachers and Designated Teachers to improve links and ensure that the service we offer is based on current need.
- A strong presence at DT Network Meetings to share good practice and ensure schools have up to date guidance.
- A tracking system to record and monitor the types of queries we receive to ensure future developments are based on need.

We will continue to develop this role and ensure the Virtual School offers a comprehensive and high standard of service to the cohort of PCIC. Future developments will include further consultations with schools, services, and families, as well as the development of a comprehensive training package for schools.

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

According to the Spring Census 2024, there are currently 1045 previously looked after children on roll in Durham schools. This reflects an increase of 46 children from January 2023.

The breakdown is:

Category	Number of pupils
Adoption	468 (433 Spring 2023)
Child arrangement order	98 (88 Spring 2023)
Special guardianship order	459 (445 Spring 2023)
Residence order	20 (33 Spring 2023)

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 2023. The data is from the census for all schools (maintained and academy) in January 2024. This shows an increase of 46 children, based upon the joint figure of 999 last year. This is a rise of 4.4% from 2023.

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 2067 children and young people, an increase of 44 against 2023.



## 5. Achievement and Progress

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

### 5.1 Early Years Update

Provisional EYFS Profile data for 2024 notes that 46% of Durham's children in care achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). Regional and national comparators are not available at this time. 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 26 children in the reporting cohort for 2023/24 with 12 children achieved a GLD. Of the remaining 14 children - 13 had SEND, including 3 children with EHCPs. It should be noted however that of the 12 children who achieved GLD, 3 of them also had SEND, 2 girls and 1 boy.

As in the previous year, the findings differed significantly depending upon gender. Of the 26 children, there was an equal gender split. 4 of the 13 boys (31%) achieved a Good Level of Development compared to 9 of the 13 girls (69%)

When reflecting upon EYFSP outcomes for our Children in Care these three aspects of the statutory guidance should be fully considered

- The cohort size is statistically small.
- It is important to note that The Early Years Foundation Stage progress is a measure of a child's attainment at the end of the reception year and that the Early Learning Goals are based upon typical child development at the age of 5. It does not demonstrate a child's progress or learning journey from their starting points.
- It is a description of the child's level of development at that point in time and does not mean that the child has 'failed'.
- For those children who are 'emerging' in one or more of the Early Learning Goals additional information will be needed and any barriers to learning recognised, which will subsequently aid planning, identify appropriate support strategies and interventions for the child, as they transition through into year 1.

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

## 5.2 How well do our children do at KS2?

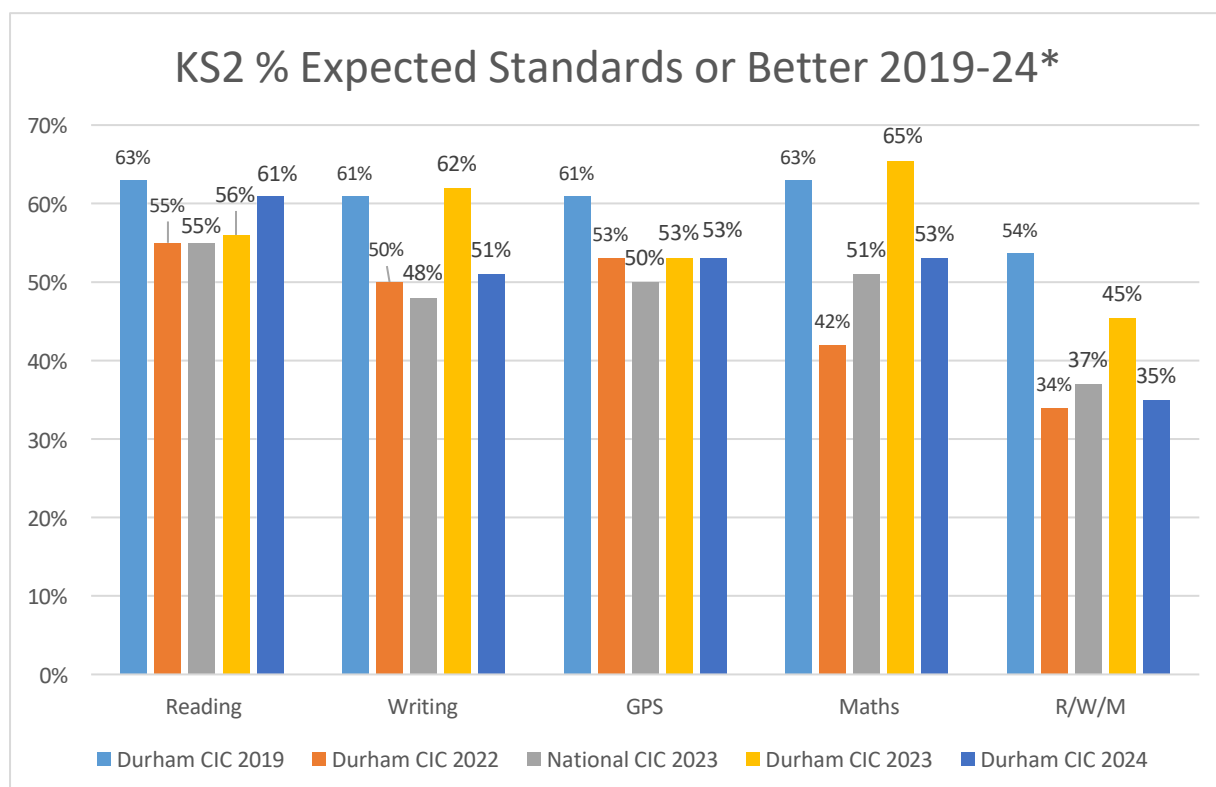
The reporting cohort in Year 6 was 51. There were 27 girls and 24 boys in the reporting cohort.

- Most children attended schools within Durham, with only 6 children attending schools outside of the local authority.
- 33 (65%) children had SEN, with 10 having an EHCP and 23 with an SEN Support Plan
- The prevalence of SEND needs were slightly higher in girls than boys.

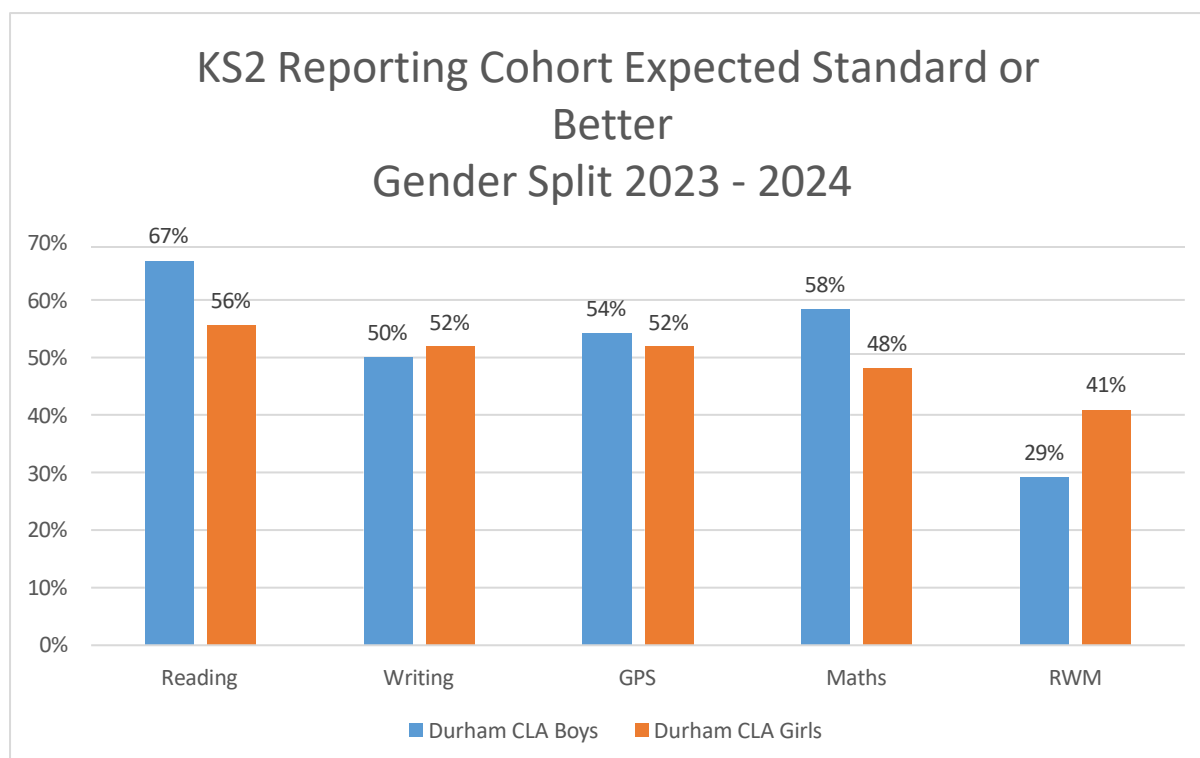
We expect CIC will need additional support to help close any emerging gaps created through the Pandemic. This is a focus for every PEP meeting. To support reading we continue to provide reading packages through Fiction Express, if requested.

This is the third 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. Whilst the cohort have improved in reading since last year, outcomes in Maths, Writing and R/W/M have dipped and are now more in line with those from 2022, although with changing cohorts and numbers it is difficult to make comparisons. Although we remain above most National CIC figures from 2023, there are still improvements to be made for those achieving RWM at expected standards or above.

**Table 5: KS2 Expected Standards or above.**



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



Our boys have generally performed better or in line with the girls across all areas apart from in matching all measures of R/W/M, where only 29% of boys achieved the expected standard compared to 41% of girls. However, it is also worth noting that the girls account for the highest prevalence of SEN, with Cognition and Learning being the primary need. For those children not entered for SATS, their PEPs have shown that they are following an appropriate curriculum in line with their academic and SEN needs. Children are monitored closely to ensure they are making expected progress in line with their ability.

Maths is an area for development as although boys outperformed girls, only 4 children achieved this at Greater Depth (110+ Scaled Score). We will continue to monitor this year's cohort as we need to improve the numbers achieving greater depth across all areas to ensure our young people have the best chance of achieving their potential. It is also important to ensure the cohort continue to receive support in their new schools to ensure they are given opportunities to improve and consolidate learning.

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

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

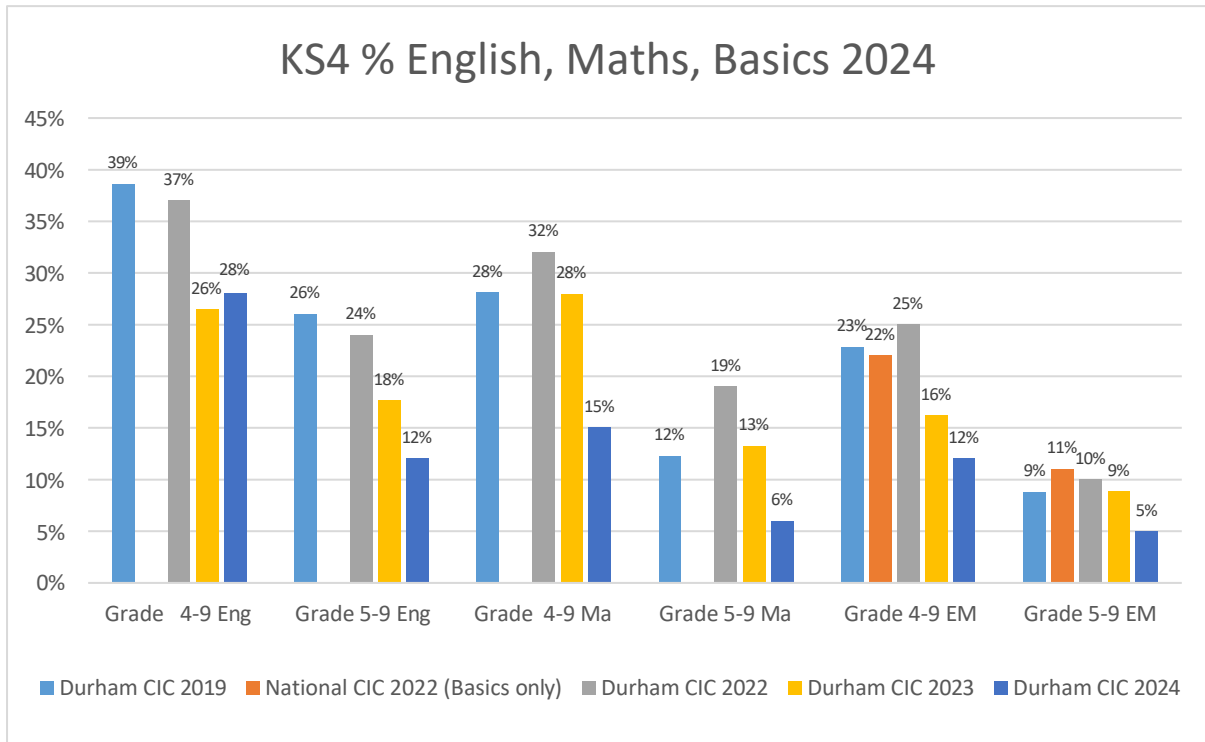
There were 83 young people in the reporting cohort with a full cohort of 94. There were a further 23 young people who were not reported on for outcome measures as they met certain criteria, including: -

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

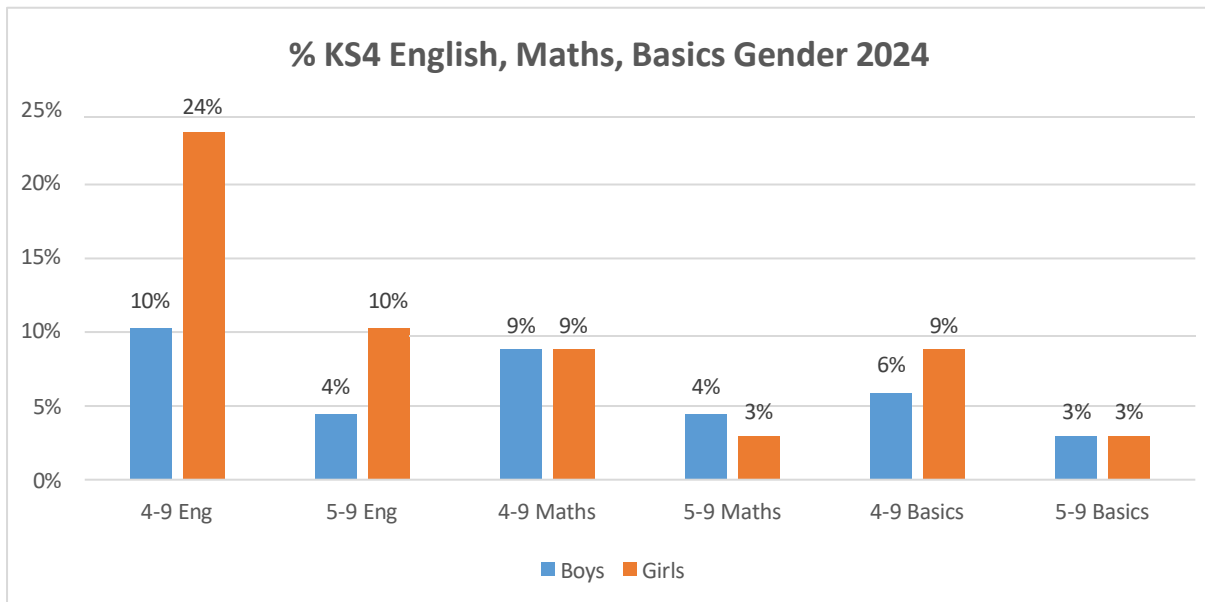
Of the 83 young people in the reporting cohort: -

- 48.2% girls and 51.8% boys
- 53 pupils had identified SEN, which is 64% of the reporting cohort.
- 29 of these had an EHCP, which is 35% of the cohort.
- Only 59% were in a mainstream school, which is 9% less than in the previous year.
- 18% of young people attended a Maintained/Academy Special School, with a further 10% placed in an Independent Special School. The percentage in special schools has increased 6% from last year.
- 18 young people followed a curriculum that did not include GCSEs in Maths and English. Of these, all but 4 had SEN, with 12 having an EHCP. All followed a curriculum appropriate to their needs including teaching in literacy and numeracy.
- 5 young people (6%) attended an Ofsted Registered Alternative Provision.

**Table 6: KS4 English, Maths and Basics Outcomes**



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



Although there was a drop in the basics grades across all areas over the last three years, it is important to note that the 2020-2021 results were based on Centre Assessed Grades. The disruption caused by Covid affected several areas including having a significant impact on young people's gaps in learning and social and emotional mental health. Schools worked hard to prepare pupils academically and emotionally for exams and utilised catch up funding, including Recovery Grant Premium, School Led Tutoring and Pupil Premium Plus to support their young people. The Virtual School has always supported our Schools to access additional funding and supports in identifying young people who would benefit from this support.

We have seen an increase in English grades this year, with 28% achieving grades 4-9. Unfortunately, this year we have seen a drop in all other areas, though this is most noticeable in Maths grades. Despite a significant amount of support offered by schools, this cohort of young people, we believe, remain impacted by covid. We have had a significant number disengaged from education and a continued number of persistent absentees, which we believe have impacted on grades.

However, the cohort this year have also had a higher level of SEN needs and less have been placed in a mainstream school. A significant number of young people had SEN and 35% had an EHCP, compared to 29% last year, with all but 5 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 unlike last year, where our girls and boys performed equally well in achieving 4+ in English, this year the girls outperformed boys significantly in this subject. Maths unfortunately dipped significantly from last year, with performance by both the boys and girls significantly lower than last year. There was also a drop in those achieving the higher grades in both English and maths. Due to the changes in cohorts, it is very difficult to compare each year's performance and consideration needs to be given to the challenges faced in each year's cohort. Further consultation will take place with colleagues in education to see if these are trends reflected across the general population. However, to ensure we have the correct support in place and can make appropriate provision and challenge, we have additional senior manager progress monitoring meetings in place this year.

## **5.4 How well do our young people achieve and participate at KS5 / post 16?**

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



**Table 7: 16-17 CIC and CL –Qualifications (CCIS data)**

<b>Destinations (of Cohort Participating)</b>	<b>February 2024</b>	<b>February 2023</b>	<b>February 2022</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>92</b>
Working Towards <L2	48%	43%	36%
Working at L2	20%	29%	23%
Working at L3	24%	23%	36%
Unconfirmed	8%	4%	5%

County Durham has seen an increase in the proportion of resident young people who are children in care/care leavers. This includes domicile for unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC).

This significant increase in the cohort has resulted in a large increase in the numbers participating in learning from 99 in 2023 to 131 in 2024.

As a result of expansion of the cohort, the increase in the numbers of Care Leavers working below level 2 has continued with 48% in 2024 compared to 36% in 2022. This increase has a direct linkage to the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeker children entering County Durham's care experienced cohort who will be participating in ESOL and other entry level/level one programmes.

Conversely, the proportion participating in learning and working towards L2 has fluctuated but is displaying its lowest level in 2024 compared to the previous two years.

The proportion of the cohort studying at L3 has seen a small increase on 2023 figures with the proportion of unconfirmed levels also seeing an increase.

DCC's apprenticeship recruitment drive occurred in the middle of the Spring term this year which is earlier than usual. DurhamWorks promoted the apprenticeship opportunities and targeted support to Care Leavers for applications and interviews. 2 Durham Care Experienced Young People have subsequently secured apprenticeships for September 2024. These are in refuse and recycling and HGV roles with 1 Care Leaver continuing onto the 2nd year of a Degree Apprenticeship within DCC.

We recognise the need to improve this offer into 2025 as no apprenticeship opportunities were ringfenced in 2024 (unlike previous years) owing to the smaller number of multiple roles available. Action is being taken to ensure DCC is meeting its corporate parent responsibilities including further work with HR and senior managers across departments to ensure significant progress is made.

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

**Table 8: Destinations post 16 2023**

Destination	No of 2023 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2023 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2023 Year 11 School Leavers CIC/CL	% of 2023 Year 11 School Leavers CIC/CL
Total Participation in Learning (including custodial sentence)	5255	92.3	54	74.0
Re-engagement	45	0.8	3	4.1
Temporary Break in Learning	28	0.5	1	1.4
Employment without training	114	2.0	1	1.4
NEET Total	206	3.6	14	19.2
Other including destination not known	45	0.8	0	0.0

**Table 9: Destinations post 16 2022**

Destination	No of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers CIC/CL	% of 2022 Year 11 School Leavers CIC/CL
Total Participation in Learning (including custodial sentence)	5120	92.9	46	76.7
Re-engagement	18	0.3	0	0.0
Temporary Break in Learning	35	0.6	0	0.0
Employment without training	105	1.9	4	6.7
NEET Total	171	3.1	10	16.7

Other including destination not known	62	1.1	0	0.0
---------------------------------------	----	-----	---	-----

**Table 10: Destinations post 16 2021**

Destination	No of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers	% of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers	No of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers CIC/CL	% of 2021 Year 11 School Leavers CIC/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

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 participation for the whole population, but the proportion who are securing education, employment or training (including personal development opportunities and employment without training) remains above 95.0%.

For those care experienced young people, we have seen fluctuation in the participation rates with a peak last year and a 2.7% reduction this year. Comparing overall EET rates for this cohort, we have seen an increase from 75.0% in 2021 to 79.5% in 2023.

The instability in participation rates is being severely impacted by the continued rise in “Employment without Training”, which can be strongly attributed to the changing nature of the Labour Market and the “cost of living” crisis. Post Covid there is increased access to shorter term, lower paid, less skilled jobs, and the need to gain paid employment from young people can be both attractive and encouraged by a household needing the income.

2023 data shows a higher proportion of young people are experiencing significant barriers and require re-engagement/shorter term programmes that increase confidence and motivation and raise self-esteem.

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

Table 11 shows the proportion of Children in Care and Care Leavers aged 16+ who are: Participating in Learning, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), and whose current destination is Not Known. March is considered a representative and stable snapshot, by the Department for Education, and used widely for monitoring participation rates.

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

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

**Table 11: 2022 –24 Participation in EET of Children in Care / Care Leavers aged 16 +**

	March 2021 %	March 2022%	March 2023 %	March 2024 %
<b>Education</b>	47.5	44.3	37.3	41.1
<b>Employment</b>	10.9	15.8	17.8	13.7
<b>Training</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Re-engagement Activities</b>	3.1	3.6	11.1	8.6
<b>Total EET</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>71.1</b>	<b>66.0</b>
<b>NEET</b>	30.7	27.3	27.9	32.6
<b>Not Known</b>	2.3	2.8	0.0	0.6
<b>Combined NEET and Not Known</b>	33.1	30.0	27.9	33.1

**Table 12: Time Series: Participation in EET of Children in Care / Care Leavers aged 16-17**

	2020/21 %	2021/22 %	2022/23	2023/24
Education	62.8	52.3	51.3	55.1
Employment	6.8	13.5	14.1	8.1
Training	6.6	5.3	5.1	3.0
Re-engagement Activities	3.3	4.1	12.6	8.6
<b>Total EET</b>	<b>79.5</b>	<b>75.2</b>	<b>83.1</b>	<b>74.8</b>
NEET	20.5	24.6	16.9	24.7

Not Known	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.5
Combined NEET and NK	20.5	24.8	16.9	25.2

2020/21 data shows the highest proportion of full-time education and training which was just prior to the onset and later effects of COVID.

2021/22 data shows the biggest drop-in full-time education but a higher proportion in employment because of the increased availability of low skilled job opportunities and effects of young people's disruption to their previous education provision (as a result of COVID).

2022/23 data showed extremely positive signs with an increase in EET rates, which exceeded pre-pandemic levels owing to the larger number of re-engagement opportunities and continuing employment trends. The NEET and Not Known rate has also reduced to below pre-pandemic levels.

2023/24 data shows a reduced EET rate, which includes a stronger education rate, but further reductions in those entering full time training and employment. Whilst re-engagement % remains very strong, it is also reduced from the peak seen in 2022/23.

The variable data over recent years can reflect the changing nature of the Children in Care and Care Leaver cohort, the numbers are rising year on year owing to a number of factors including increasing numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers bringing challenges in terms of ensuring ESOL and re-engagement provision is readily available. The 16+ data displayed in table 15 mirrors very similar trends described above.

Further intensive multi-agency work is being planned for 24/25 to address the variable performance of the EET status this will be managed through a strategic EET group and will include the production of a more thorough NEET analysis and accompanying recommendations and action plan to monitor progress.

**DurhamWorks** ensures Children in Care and Care Leavers receive additional support to enable them to progress into education, employment or training. This is a 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 quarterly EET surgeries where internal staff to DCC work closely in partnership to discuss the Care Experienced Cohort, their educational status and future employment/progression opportunities. These meetings are often themed depending on priorities at that time.

EET quarterly meetings are also held with wider external partners, including Universities, Colleges & providers in attendance to ensure a strong focus on support and the ability to ensure opportunities are maximised for our Children In Care and Care Leavers in terms of their progression

Between 2022 and 2023, 243 participants on DurhamWorks identified themselves as either Children in Care or a Care Leaver. Of the 243, 124 or 51.0% secured education, training or employment immediately on leaving their supported journey.

For those who did not secure EET on leaving, a wide range of softer outcomes were demonstrated including enhanced employability as well as increased confidence and self-esteem.

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.

County Durham Adult Learning and Skills Service (DurhamLearn) delivers a range of programmes which support young people, including Care Leavers, to develop skills and gain qualifications to progress into employment. Programmes include Apprenticeships as well as Traineeship and Supported Internship programmes specially designed to meet the needs of those who have Special Educational Needs, including Care Leavers.

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

SEP is continuing to grow in strength. Originally meant for our 18+ Cohort of Care Leavers on review it has been extended as an opportunity for Academic Years 12 and 13 Children In Care Cohort too.

35 Care Experienced Young People have completed the Sessional Employment Programme in a variety of placements across DCC. Examples of placements being, HR Department, Farming in Protected Landscapes, The Gala Theatre, UASC Team, Peterlee Pavillion, Meadowfield Stores, Leisure Centres and Care Leaver Team.

The variety of service areas highlights the commitment across DCC to corporate parenting responsibilities. Young People can be in EET and NEET to access SEP. YP in education are accessing this programme to complement their studies and enhance their CV's. Recruitment is ongoing.

**Implementation of 'Any time' travel bus passes** –Progression and Learning worked together with partners and local FE Colleges to implement the 'top up' bus passes for Care Leavers attending our local colleges. This was a success and continued from 2021 until January 2024 when 'anytime travel' became part of the Social Care offer to Care Leavers, offering travel passes for buses, metros and ferries across the region.

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

**DurhamWorks Programme for Schools** - provides extra support to aid progression. Its aim is to better prepare and support young people on leaving school targeted to support those at risk of becoming NEET of which those Children in Care are a key priority group. Support includes access to groupwork within an educational setting to better prepare them for leaving school; individual careers guidance; attendance at PEP and EHCP reviews to ensure



partnership working; intensive mentoring support to help transition into their chosen post 16 placement; and support to ensure the post 16 placement is maintained.

For the academic year 2021/22 a total of 1,204 year 11 school leavers identified as being at risk of NEET (not in education, employment, or training) were supported. Out of the 72 in year 11 with Children in Care status 49 (68.1%) were supported, out of the remaining 23 (31.9%), 5 of these were not initially referred but are being supported by the DurhamWorks post 16 team and the remaining are in contact with our other support services including Durham County Council's Sessional Employment Programme. 85.7% of those who received support from DWPfs progressed into a place in education, employment, or training (1<sup>st</sup> November 2022).

For the academic year 22/23 1,412 year 11 school leavers identified as being at risk of NEET (not in education, employment, or training) were supported. Out of the 98 in year 11 with Children in Care status 56 (57.1%) were supported, out of the remaining 42 (42.8%), 36 of these young people successfully went into education, employment or training, 6 young people are supported by the DurhamWorks post 16 team and the remaining are in contact with our other support services including Durham County Council's Sessional Employment Programme. 80.3% of those who received support from DWPfs progressed into a place in education, employment, or training (1<sup>st</sup> November 2023).

Following the removal of ESF funding in Dec 2023 there was a subsequent reduction in resource for the programme for schools' team, however Children in Care remained a priority for the team. Despite this for the academic year 23/24 1,078 year 11 school leavers identified as being at risk of NEET (not in education, employment or training) were engaged, and continue to be supported to their next steps, further data on the outcomes for these will become available over the autumn term 2024 and will be evidenced in next year's Virtual School report.

**Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)** - The focus is Year 12 and 13 Care Experienced Young People with the aim to support entry to and sustainment in EET by providing PP+ funding similarly to the way extra funding is provided to school age Children in Care. To strengthen links between Virtual Schools, Social Care, Progression & Learning and Colleges providing both practical and financial support to students to prevent disengagement from education and more recently includes the ability to support NEET Young People in the academic year 24/25.

Following consultation with local FE providers and DCC our current offer is: A dedicated adviser (0.5 FTE) to support those young people currently in full time education opportunities such as FE, Sixth Form and training, providing help to young people and professionals both in college and in the community; Alongside the implementation of a 'Keep In College' cash incentive to the young people paid termly which equates to £100 per term for 90% -100% attendance and £80 per term for 80% - 89% attendance and also acts as a further incentive to NEET young people to enter full time education.

In 2023-2024 142 Young People received "Keep in College" payments with feedback showing an incredibly positive response from both young people, carers and professionals that some of the funding was going direct to the young people themselves. It has been invaluable in terms of creating excellent relationships with the designated leads in post 16 providers showing them the importance of ensuring needs are met and this cohort is prioritised.

PP+ funding has been announced for 2024/25 with a significant increase to allow more support for the NEET cohort – planning is currently underway to allocate and will be reported in future.

**North East Regional Virtual School Steering Group-Post 16** - Meet termly. It is proving useful to share experiences, challenges, ways of working and examples of good practice with neighbouring Virtual Schools. Current initiatives include collating information on a regional level that advisers can access to support the CIC Post 16 cohort who could be attending provision outside of Durham.

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

In 2023-2024 Durham Care Leavers have excelled in Higher Education with 28 attending Universities across the UK including Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds, Bangor, Bristol, Canterbury, Warwick and Sunderland. Some of the courses being studied are Social Work, Nursing, Law, English Literature, Animal Physiotherapy, Radiography. 1 Young Person is on a degree apprenticeship at Northumbria University,

10 have graduated this summer 2024. Progressions include Masters Degree, PGCE, Employment as Community Nurse and employment in other areas.

17 young people have been offered and accepted places at universities and are due to start in September 2024. Some have studied A levels and some BTEC courses, examples of degrees to be studied are Law, History, Computing, Sports Coaching, in Kent, London, Bangor, London and a number are studying in the North East.

## 6. Attendance and Exclusion

### 6.1 How well do our young people attend school?

Attendance continues to be a strength of the virtual school due to focused monitoring and challenge to all stakeholders. The slight increase in absence and persistent absence is in line with the national and local trend.

Comparisons between the current year's data and previous years (from published verified data) shows that the local overall absence rates and rates of persistent absence are consistently below those observed nationally, although rates of overall absence are more comparable with national rates over the 2022/23 academic year, yet rates of persistent absence are considerably lower locally than nationally for this cohort.

The most recent national absence data available for outcomes for CIC was published on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 and was for the whole 22/23 academic year and based on those children and young people who were CIC continuously for at least 12 months at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The next national data is expected to be published in March 2025 and will include the whole year 2023/24.

**Table 13: National Absence Data**

	Overall absence %		Persistent absence %	
	National	Local	National	Local
CIC 12 months at 31 March 2023 (attendance for whole 2022/23 six half terms)	8.3%	8.2%	20%	16.6%

Since returning to school in September 2023 attendance of Children in Care has mostly been good. Attendance of Primary aged children is strong, the attendance of Secondary aged children is an area to focus on. The Attendance Improvement Team have collected attendance data in July to provide a picture for the academic year.

Attendance was 90%, almost 1.4% lower than this point last year. Attendance was broken down as follows:

- Attendance of primary school age CIC (including reception, Y1-Y6) = **95%** which is 0.3% below last year.
- Attendance of secondary school age CIC = **85%**, a **1.2%** dip against last year.
- Attendance of CIC in County Durham schools and settings = **89.2%** a 0.7% decrease against last year
- Attendance of CIC in out of County schools and settings = **93.4%** a 2.8% increase against last year

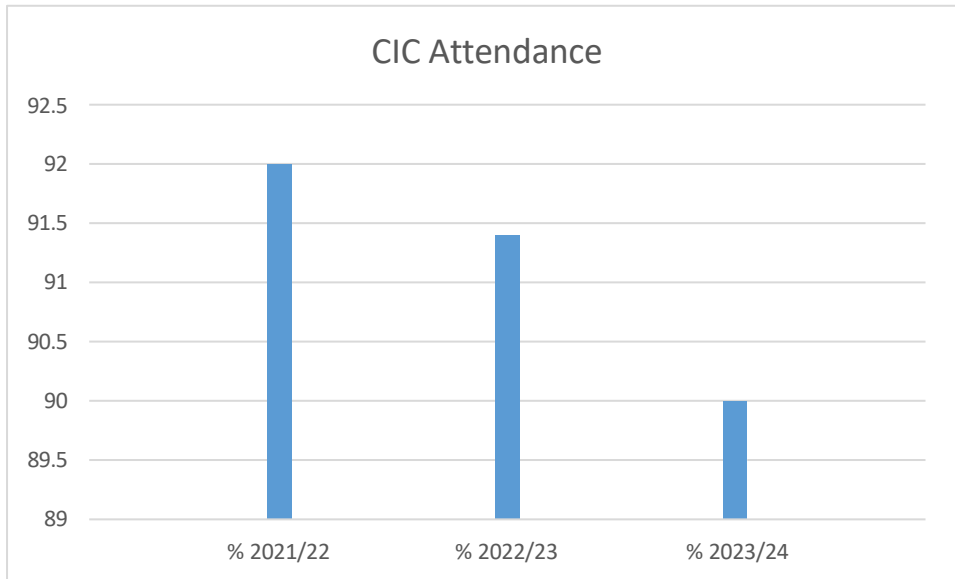
Attendance of our young people is testament to the work of the DVS casework team who maintain regular contact with both schools and carers and to our schools who recognise the importance of attendance for children in care and young people and seek to engage them and meet their needs.

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

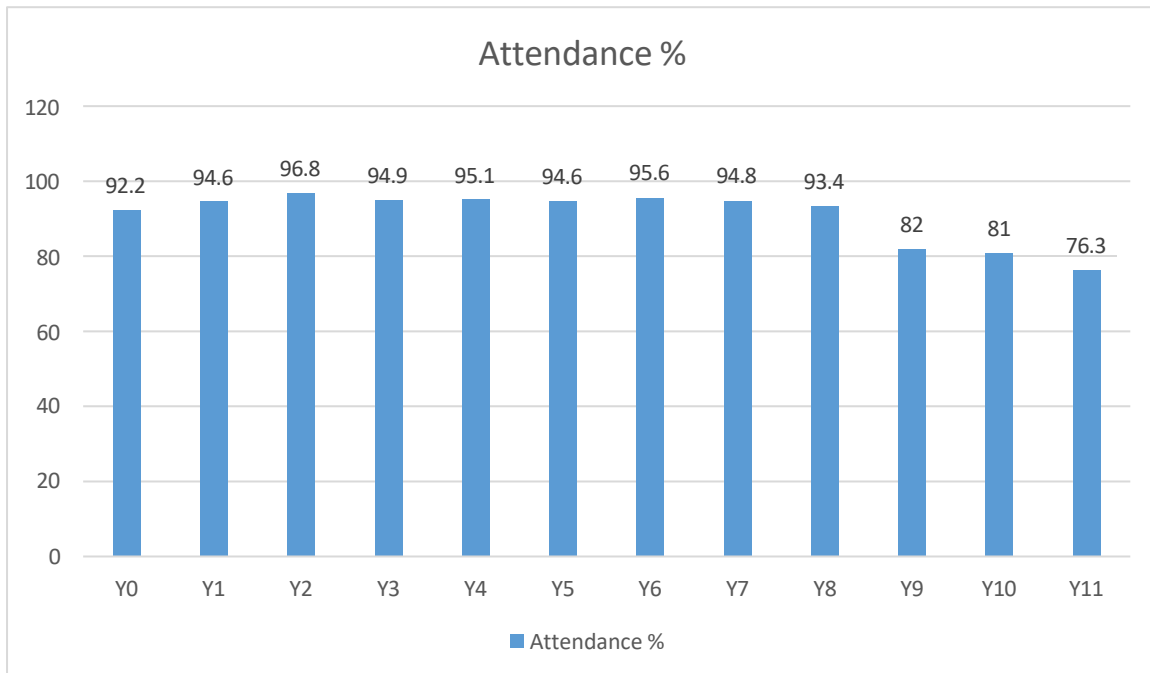
The appointment of the Education Welfare Officer for Children with a Social Worker has brought additional oversight to the attendance of CIC. The support at meetings we feel is beginning to make a difference.

Working in partnership with Social Care has brought challenge to those children taking holidays during term time, schools are instructed to mark all holidays as unauthorised. From September 2024 the DFE attendance guidance will apply to Carers and the fixed penalty system will be applied.

**Table 14: Attendance over three years for CIC**



**Table 15: Attendance of CIC by year group**



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

The distribution of attendance can also be broken down into attendance bands as seen in the table below.

**Table 16: Attendance bands for CIC**

	Autumn & spring 2023/24 count
Below 50	57
50-69.9	40
70-74.9	15
75-79.9	17
80-84.9	34
84.9-89.9	57
90-94.9	106
95-99.9	361
100	71

This shows that most children had attendance at 95 - 99% or above. This information is used to create target groups for the EWO and the CIC PEP Caseworkers. Any child below 94% will be identified for additional scrutiny in the Autumn term PEP meeting 2024/25.

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

There has been two permanent exclusion 2023/24. One child was placed in a Durham school, whilst the other was in a school out of County. 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.

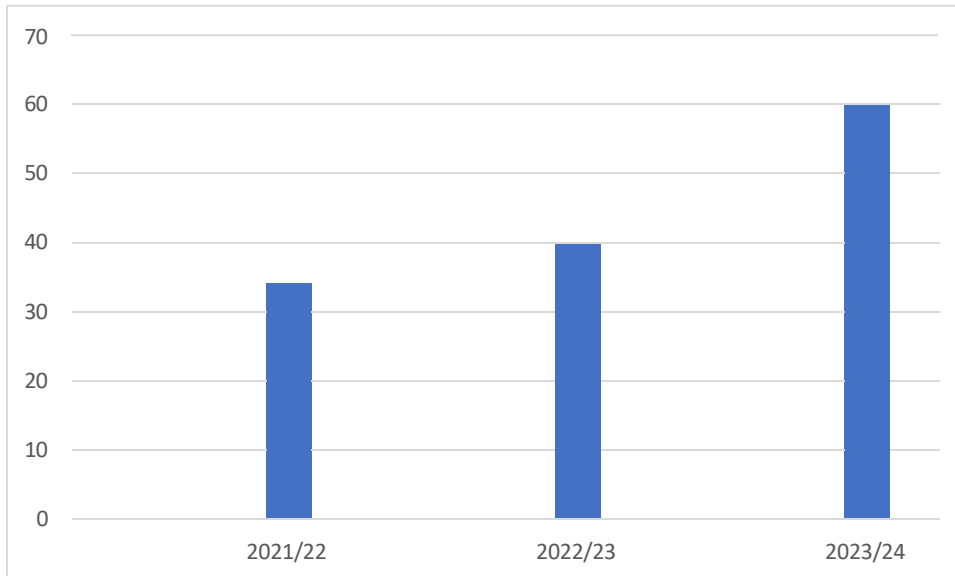
There have been sixty Suspensions during the academic year 2023/2024 for CIC. This is an increase of 20 children/young people against 22/23. 33 children/young people experienced more than one period of Suspension, an increase of 12 against last year. 39 children attended the secondary sector, an increase of 12 against last year, 7 were primary aged children a reduction of 3 against last year, 8 children attended Specialist Provision, an increase of 5 against last year and 6 attended a Pupil Referral unit.

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.

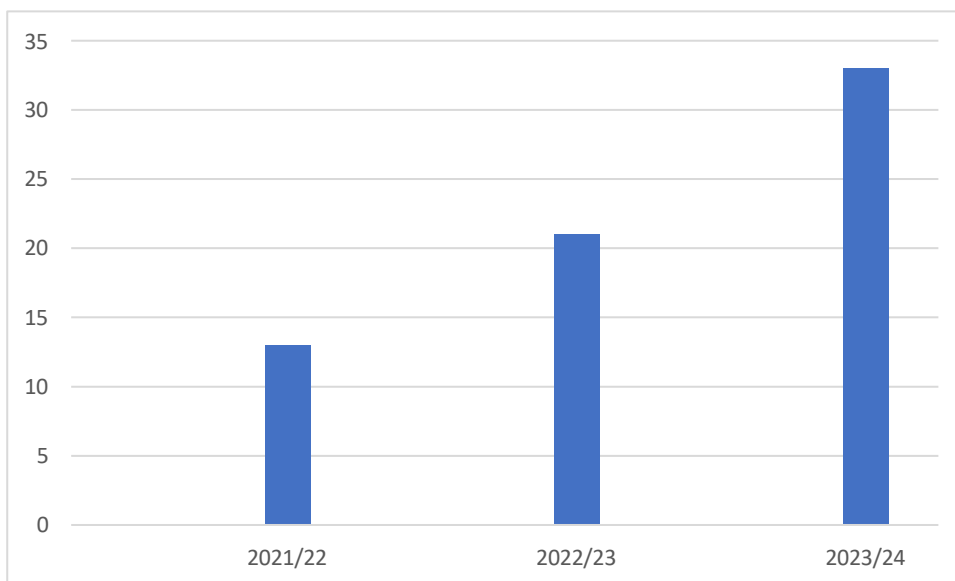
The VSH works closely with the Behaviour and Inclusion Panels (BIPs). To provide additional support and act as the corporate parent for children who are displaying challenging behaviour, the VSH will attend Permanent Exclusion Governors meetings to support the case for a CIC not to be permanently excluded.

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, and to give them time to plan more appropriately for a young person's needs.

**Table 17: Suspensions over three years for CIC**



**Table 18: Number of CIC 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.

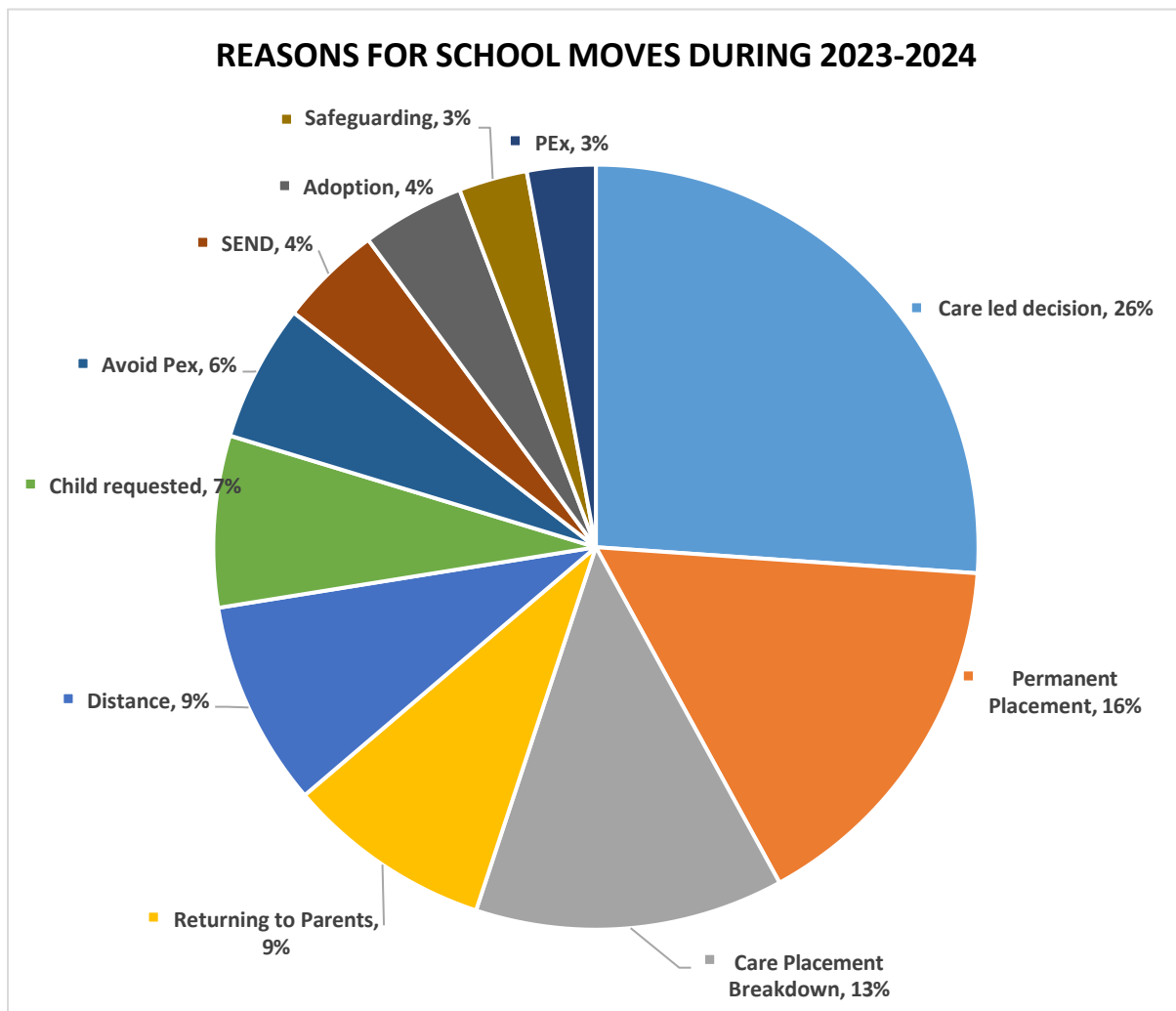
### 7.1 How many children moved school mid-year?

In 2023-2024 there were 69 school moves that took place during the academic year. A further 32 were suggested, but challenged by the Virtual School and therefore did not take place. We aim to ensure moves take place at the end of an academic year, but there are occasions where a move mid-year is beneficial. Working with the care teams, we have supported moves which:

- were due to the outcome 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.

---

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

**Table 19: School Moves 2023-24**

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

The main reason for moving school during the academic year was where the move was due to a care led decision, with 26% of school moves completed for this purpose. These are often unavoidable due to a care placement breakdown, where the child is usually placed at such a distance where they cannot reasonably maintain their place at their current school. The next highest reason for a school move is due to a permanent care placement being found. These only take place once consideration has been given to the stability of the care placement and whether there may be a benefit to maintaining the place at their current school. Wherever

possible, the education placement should remain stable, but often the distance travelled and opportunities to develop peer groups in their local area need to be considered.

4% of school moves were due to a child leaving care on an Adoption Order, where a school move is usually inevitable and best to support the child in their new home. SEND reasons factored in only 4% of in year school moves, although a proportion of these will have been a move to a school more suited to the child's needs and therefore supported by the Virtual School. However, in all cases the PEP Caseworker oversees the move, including agreeing the chosen school. The Virtual School Head has the final say in agreeing school moves and the PEP Caseworker ensures they are consulted fully in the process.

## 7.2 How many of our children experienced supported off site placements?

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

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

171 (22%) of the school age cohort were educated out of the boundaries of County Durham in 2023-24. This remains roughly in line with figures from previous years.

# 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 is with schools as it is believed they are best placed to have an in-depth knowledge of the young person's education.

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

Both early years and Post 16 colleagues are involved in the development of the PEPs and are responsible for training settings and social workers. This ensures a level of expertise appropriate to these schools and settings. Our Early Years colleagues are responsible for the QA of Nursery PEPS, whilst the PEP Caseworkers complete QA for the Statutory School Age PEPs. There is a dedicated Post 16 PEP Caseworker to lead on co-ordination of meetings

and completion of the PEPs. There is a robust system in place to 'handover' responsibility to the Post 16 Caseworker as all young people have a 'profile' completed by their Statutory School Age (SSA) Caseworker. The Post 16 PEP Caseworker is employed jointly by the Virtual School and the Progression and Learning team. The services work closely together to ensure young people have a high quality PEP in place and that they receive effective advice and guidance. All PEPs have a QA document embedded in them which allows communication between the Caseworkers and settings.

## 8.2 What information does the PEP record?

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

The Virtual School continue to offer training for DTs and SWs new to using the system, although to ensure staff have ongoing support, PEP Caseworkers also offer advice and support. Ongoing support is provided to schools through caseworker involvement, business admin and manager support from the Virtual School and the Welfare Call support helpline. PEP quality and feedback on issues and developments are provided to Designated Teachers regularly either through sharing emails or at DT network/training sessions.

During 2023-2024, 2407 PEPs (2,193 PEPs in 22/23) have been completed for 894 (834 in 22/23) young people of statutory school age. These have taken place across 51 Local Authorities. PEPs ordinarily take place virtually, which allows our PEP Caseworkers to attend more regularly, and we aim to have Virtual School representation at a minimum of 2 out of 3 PEPs held for the child. The focus has been on providing ongoing support on completion of PEPs for Designated Teachers through increased PEP Caseworker participation in PEP meetings. Where a child has no education provision, one of our Caseworkers leads the PEP and ensures there is a robust plan in place to secure a placement, that is then recorded in the PEP document.

The PEP Caseworkers work very closely with the DTs and provide advice and guidance on high quality PEP completion and within timescales. Late submission and completion of the document affects quality as we are unable to share outcomes and interventions with the wider school staff and carers. Therefore, over the last year we have revised our policy to grade any

PEP as not High Quality if it is not signed off by DTs within 30 days of the meeting. Unfortunately, this has had an impact on the number of PEPs graded 'Green', although we have seen a gradual increase in PEPs graded high quality and we believe this strategy has had an impact on completion times. In addition to the support given to DTs PEP Caseworkers also work closely with colleagues in Social Care to offer the same support and guidance. This year we have focussed on providing additional support to Social Workers and during the year Virtual School Managers have provided: -

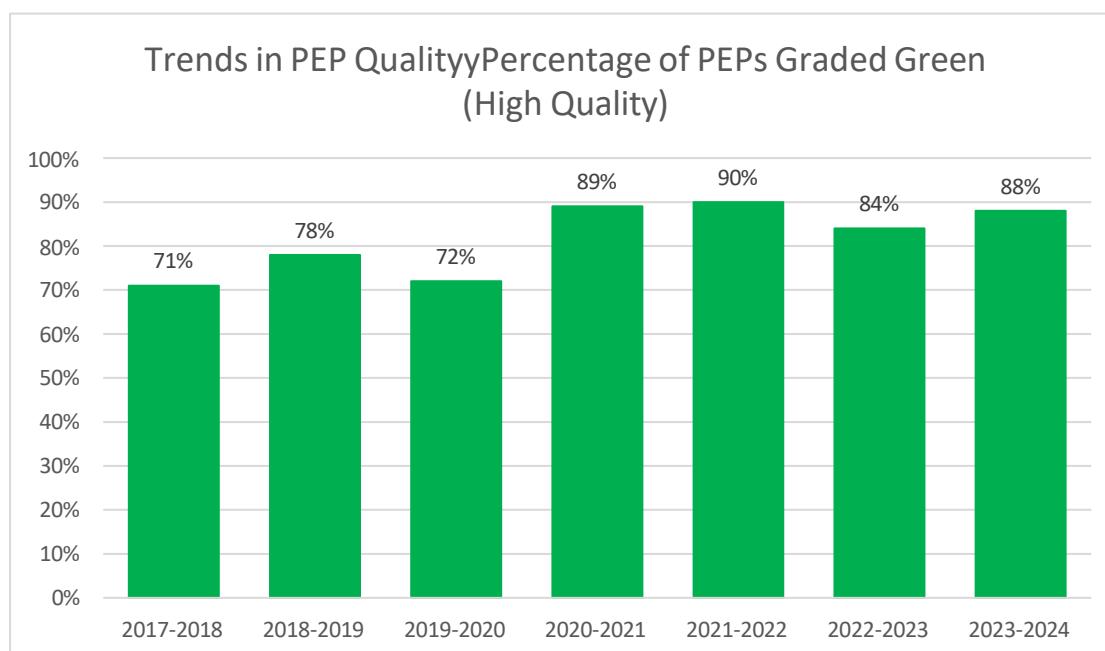
- Regular communication with senior Social Care managers to ensure key messages are disseminated throughout teams.
- IROs have access to the PEP documents.
- Specific written guidance on Welfare Call and the EPEP shared with Social Workers
- Additional support offered to social workers and DTs of Post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

A quality assurance document was introduced and embedded in the ePEP document and process. This increased transparency and continues to give schools and social workers feedback on how the quality can be improved. During 2023-2024 the Summer ePEP quality was rated as 89.5% Green (High Quality) and 10.5% Amber (did not meet expected standard to achieve high quality). This is an improvement of 2.8% High Quality PEPs from the same time last year. We believe the improvement in PEP quality is in part due to the increased scrutiny placed on completion times and additional monitoring and support offered by PEP Caseworkers. This year we will continue to work on driving up quality of PEPs and outcomes for our children and young people. The quality of the documents has remained high, but there has been an impact on the grading as any not signed off by DTs within a month, results in an automatic Amber. Over the year we have seen some improvement in sign-off time and will continue to strive for timeliness of sign off to drive up quality.

**Table 20: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2023-24**

Term	Green High Quality	Amber Below expected quality
Autumn	87.1%	12.9%
Spring	87.4%	12.6%
Summer	89.5%	10.5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>12%</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 CIC PEP Caseworkers has taken place and a moderation exercise is planned for the next academic year.

**Table 21: Quality of PEPs Statutory School Age 2017-2024**

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

- Of the 818 PEPs completed during the Summer Term:
  - 58% were signed off by Social Worker within the 10 day deadline.  
(Average sign-off time 10.42 days)
  - 76% were signed off by Designated Teacher within the 10 day deadline.  
(Average sign-off time 7.10 days)
  - The average sign-off time for the PEP Caseworker was 2.46 days.  
(Virtual School to QA and sign off PEP within 5 days of the last sign off by SW/DT)

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



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

## 8.4 How do we distribute pupil premium plus funding?

In 2018-19 we adjusted our distribution so that the funding is available without undue bureaucracy when a child enters care and to aid forward planning for schools. We have allocated £600 each term. In line with the DfE guidance of Feb 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 has been strengthened this year with the introduction of a yearly funding resource plan.

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

In 2023-24 (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:

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

---

2

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/683556/Promoting\\_the\\_education\\_of\\_looked-after\\_children\\_and\\_previously\\_looked-after\\_children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf)

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

The importance of schools recognising and understanding the impact of insecure attachment and early trauma on the behaviour and progress of young people is well documented. Children and young people who experience toxic stress, emotional turmoil and insecurity will not be ready to learn and are more likely to be excluded from school. This has continued to be a driver in 2023-24 as we increased the allocation of retained funding to inclusion and therapeutic support. This is an area discussed in PEP meetings to highlight the support available. This has been further developed through our offer from Full Circle and our EWEL interventions.

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

This year we continued to encourage schools to take up the National Tutoring Programme funding to support our CIC from Y1 to Y11. Funding was allocated at PEPs and additional payments made to schools. Tutoring was also accessed through agencies for some young people not able to attend school and also for our UASC. In total 282 children benefited from this funding, with over 6000 hours of support offered in line with the NTP funding guidance. In addition to this, Recovery Premium funding was devolved directly to schools to support their Durham CIC cohort of young people.

We also commission six places at The Bridge turnaround base, which is part of The Woodlands. The number of placements has doubled from last year as we recognise the important work this provision does to re-engage our young people and support them back into school. 18 pupils accessed this during 2023 – 2024. Most pupils attended for short term placements, some remained longer term to prepare them for reintegration into their next education provision. At times, the Bridge will support the young person whilst they were going through statutory assessment, with the next provision being a new SEND school that meets their identified needs.

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

In addition to the centrally funded provision, we have an Inclusion Base, which for several years up until 2020-2021 was funded through de-delegated school funds. However, this meant it was only available for those attending mainstream secondary schools, unless schools agreed to fund the place. In 2021-2022, following the change of funding, we made the decision to continue to fund this provision using top-sliced PP+. In doing this we could open the support to all Durham secondary schools, and to our Durham children based in neighbouring local authorities (dependent on distance). 57 young people accessed our Inclusion Base over the academic year, which is roughly in line with last year. Reasons for referral to the Inclusion Base include to avoid an exclusion, to give some space in a more nurturing environment during times of crisis or to offer support for emotional wellbeing. In total there were 103 separate interventions delivered. Over the year 775 sessions (1/2 day = 1 session) were offered (attendance 81%) over a variety of packages, including inclusion support to prevent exclusion, bridging packages before transition and a 6-week part-time programme looking at communication skills. We also have a teacher on site who offers Maths and English lessons. Several young people made a successful reintegration back to their schools or alternative provision, although 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 and improve engagement in school. The success of the Inclusion Base is reflected in the figures for Permanent Exclusion, with only 2 young people unable to return to their school setting.

## What difference does our support make? Case study

### Background

- ✓ X was displaying negative and disruptive behaviours in school, impacting on both his learning and that of his peers
- ✓ X was continuously making poor choices that resulted in consequences in school
- ✓ X started receiving detentions due to lack of work
- ✓ X would often be rude to staff and peers
- ✓ Issues in placement resulted in X becoming detached from carers.
- ✓ X appeared to have low self-esteem and lacked the high aspirations he previously held.

### Action

- ✓ X was originally on an intervention, but it was identified he would benefit from an extended placement on the 6 week Programme – 2 days per week at The Link and 3 days in school.

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

### **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.
- ✓ Although hesitant at first, X engaged in lessons, completing work and began to have a positive outlook on education and his future.
- ✓ Feedback from school indicated that following work at the Link to support in areas of maths he struggled with, X became more confident in this area and offered support to his peers back in school when they were struggling.
- ✓ X became more confident in building positive relationships with staff and pupils, and this was reflected on the days he attended school.
- ✓ X used the time on the Programme to build on communication skills and made positive relationships with staff and peers.

### **Comments from Designated Teacher**

- ✓ Stated that had X not have had the support from the Link then when things began to go wrong in school, he would not have had the skills to be able to turn things around.
- ✓ X's behaviour and attitude about school has improved and he now has a much better relationship with staff.
- ✓ X now arrives in school early and is happy to catch up on any missing work.

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

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

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

The Virtual School through working with colleagues in Full Circle, the Emotional Wellbeing and Effective Learning (EWEL) Service and the CIC EP have established a more robust emotional and therapeutic offer for our children. We have developed a training package for our schools to improve DT's understanding of attachment and trauma informed approaches in school, providing stronger support for CIC.

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

In addition to this we also identified that our children would benefit from increased support from the EWEL team and purchased a further 100 credits with them to be able to offer assessment and intervention to be more proactive in addressing issues. Over 44 young people were supported through this SLA and several of them received multiple packages included assessment and support. We continue to invest in the EWEL credits to provide access to tailored support and intervention in the next academic year.

## 8.8 How do schools spend their allocation?

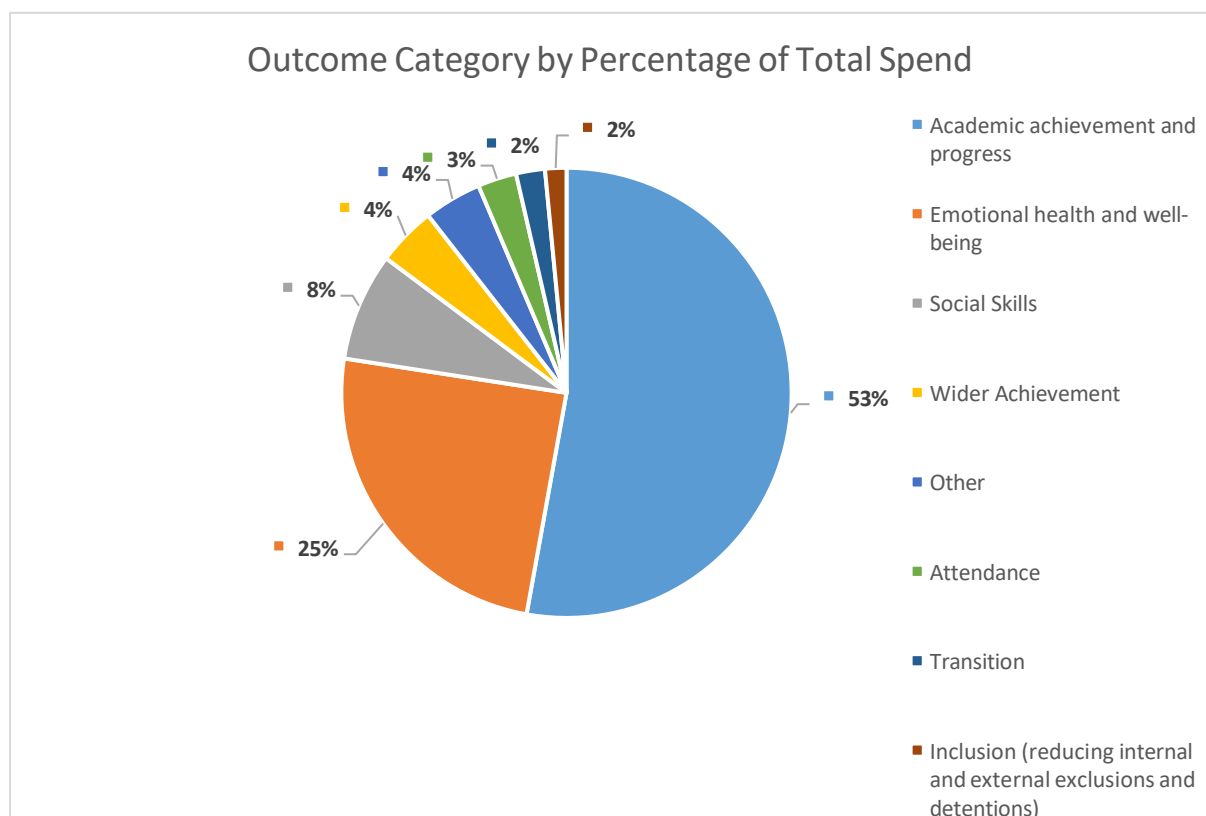
In 2023-24 (Financial Year) our total PP+ budget was £2,067,010. Schools were allocated £1,800 of the government allocation of £2,570), in 3 instalments. In total, approximately £1.4 million was provided directly to schools during the 2023-24 academic year to support their work with children in care. Recovery Grant Premium for eligible pupils was given directly to schools and usage was monitored in the PEP. The School Led Tutoring Grant was used to fund packages of support delivered to some of our most vulnerable learners, including those not attending school, in our children's homes, leaving secure and those at risk of permanent exclusion. Additional funding was also sent directly to schools to fund multiple packages of support.

One to one support is used effectively by schools to help to close the gaps in knowledge caused by school moves and poor attendance prior to entering care. Pastoral support for the CIC 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. 53% of PP+ funding given to schools was used to support individuals with academic progress and achievement, which is roughly in line with last year's figures. This has proved effective in improving basic skills and basic building blocks that our children need to progress, particularly important after the disruption caused by Covid. For our cohort, additional one to one and small group tutoring is found to be effective especially for those children who have moved schools several times prior to entering care. As was the case last year, the next highest expenditure is on emotional health and wellbeing, as ensuring

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

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

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





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

<b>Outcomes Achieved in Each Category</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Partial</b>	<b>Not Achieved</b>
Academic achievement and progress	36%	51%	13%
Emotional health and well-being	33%	57%	10%
Social Skills	30%	62%	7%
Other	29%	57%	14%
Wider Achievement	47%	34%	18%
Attendance	30%	38%	33%
Transition	54%	31%	14%
Inclusion (reducing internal and external exclusions and detentions)	30%	5%	65%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>13%</b>

EEF Category of Spend	Amount
One to one tuition	16.10%
Other	14.68%
Social and emotional learning	13.31%
Small group tuition	11.58%
Individualised instruction	8.58%
Metacognition and self-regulation	6.57%
Phonics	4.64%
Digital technology	3.06%
Behaviour Interventions	2.98%
Mastery learning	2.75%
Reading comprehension strategy	2.33%
Homework	2.04%
Early years interventions	2.01%
Outdoor adventure learning	1.97%
Mentoring	1.90%
Oral language interventions	1.54%
Arts participation	1.27%
Within-class attainment grouping	1.11%
Sports participation	0.75%
Collaborative learning	0.58%
Summer schools	0.08%
Feedback	0.07%
Parental engagement	0.05%

## 9. Training Provision

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

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

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

Our CIC EP has provided several training sessions and webinars on topics including supporting our children with transition, when is it necessary to request Statutory Assessment rather than use the SEN graduated approach and writing Preparing for Adulthood outcomes. We are developing this offer next year to include additional training opportunities both for our Designated Teachers and Children's Homes.

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

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

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

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

## 10. Support for mental and emotional wellbeing

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

### 10.1 What screening takes place?

The Virtual School 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. However, we have developed the PEP to ensure there is a conversation about possible SLCN that takes place with all new CIC. This is to identify if there is a need for further intervention. This year we have ensured there are early discussions with DTs regarding the identification of SLCN to ensure our children receive support as soon as they enter care.

### 10.2 How does our Educational Psychologist make a difference?

The Virtual School employs a Senior Educational Psychologist (0.5 time) to offer advice and support to young people and the team. Regular clinics are set up and our PEP Caseworkers complete a triage exercise with Designated Teachers before seeking advice or support at the clinic. The process is monitored, and involvements are tracked to ensure we have good oversight of our young people and emerging issues. Over the last year our EP was involved with 70 young people, with the majority of these first discussed at the clinics. There has been direct involvement with 40 students, which often involves observation and assessment and resulted in reports or an EHCP, with five children re-referred and receiving ongoing support over a second academic year. Liaison with school link EPs was frequent and several cases included planning with the EWEL team and school counsellors. Work has been across all Key Stages including children from reception both within mainstream, specialist, and alternative provision. Most of the work undertaken has been on behalf of Durham CIC, educated in Durham, although there is scope to extend involvement outside of the local authority and the EP provides a valuable resource for many of our children placed outside of the area.

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

**Individual assessment with the child** sought to clarify the nature of their SEND, strengths and challenges. Consultation included carers, educators, and social care so as to ensure an appropriate and thorough understanding of need and inform associated provision. In the majority of cases, holistic assessment of the child in context took place involving observation, and some cognitive and academic assessment but due to the number of referrals and capacity this involved discussion of the SEN plan and suitable outcomes for a range of needs. A review of existing provision also took place and future provision was discussed and advised.

**Consultation** with school staff, social workers, caseworkers, and carers took place on a daily basis however scheduled meetings with caseworker was offered every month. Consultation with school staff (teachers and support staff) often involved supporting them to understand the challenges and presentation of children and young people within the framework of trauma and attachment.

Using a Solution Oriented approach, a collaborative process was employed to consider strengths and exceptions before agreeing upon next steps and provision when meeting the child's needs.

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

**Statutory Work Involvement** included support for 14 EHCP referrals with SENCOs and Designated teachers. The EP prepared advice and attended reviews and multi -agency meetings for children who are looked after where we were preparing paperwork for Statutory Assessment.

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

#### Cases providing examples of impact include:

- Support throughout the year for a year 10 student with complex social and emotional needs which involved visits, liaison with EWEL and social care and culminated in statutory assessment that was urgently completed.
- Support for a year 8 student with learning, identity and emotional regulation following liaison with the Designated Teacher, caseworker, social worker, residential home and student.
- Supported a year 7 student after significant loss. I helped the secondary school to identify all of his social communication needs and long term provision.
- Support for two KS2 students around regulation, interaction and engagement. Discussion of transition was needed for the Year 6 student.
- Clarifying and providing a summary of needs and outcomes for a year 7 student who was moving schools within a trust to avoid exclusion. Liaison with student, carers and social care.

Training has been a feature of the role and this has been prepared and delivered for DT's and SENCOs. Training has also been offered to the Bridge on Executive Functioning and on belonging to our children's homes. The EP also regularly attends DT and SENCO forums to discuss the role and identify how best to support our young people.

Developments for the next academic year include: -

- Improving resources for the Virtual School and DTs including glossary of terms, toolkit, booklist, top tips
- Additional training for children's homes on belonging
- Inclusion of Link EP and Caseworker around complex casework/concerns
- Training on PCP approach and tools, Solution Circle, Formulation process
- Checklist of trauma informed provision for all children in care
- Additional drop in sessions for Caseworkers to embed and share good practise

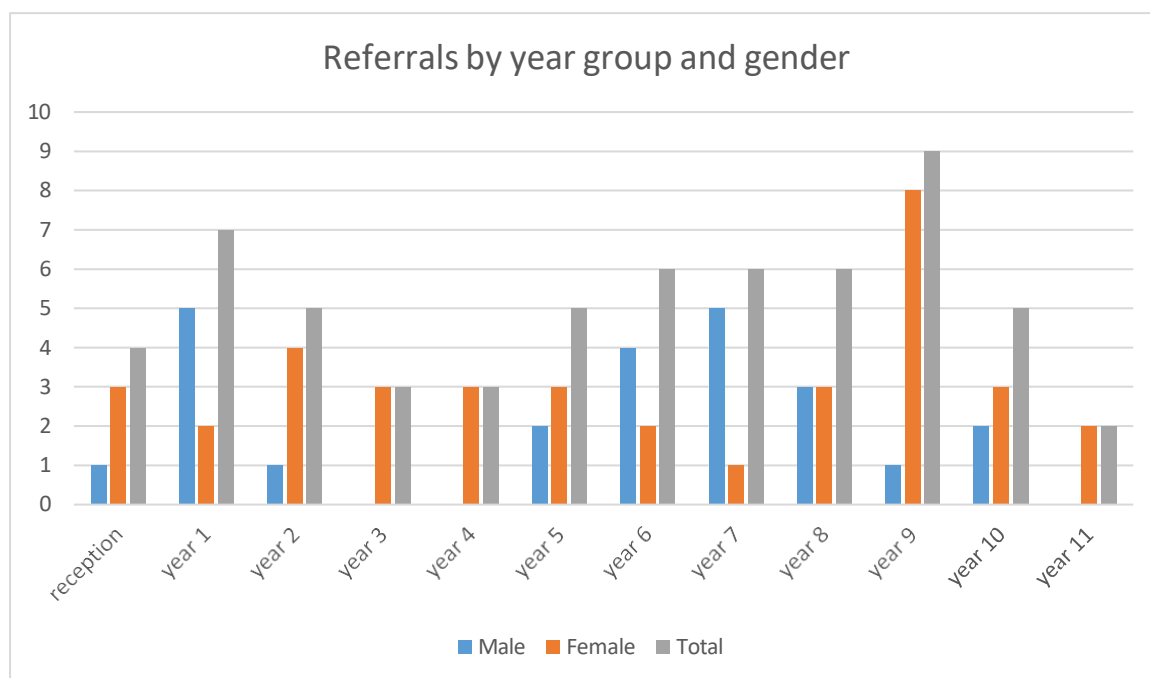
### 10.3 How do our counsellors make a difference?

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

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

The Virtual School SLA with our Schools Counselling Service provides the equivalent of 8 days per week (1.6 FTE) counselling for our CIC. This academic year 61 referrals were made to the counselling service, which included 14 carried over from the previous academic year. In addition to this, 5 of these children are on the list for review and can access counselling when timing is right for them. This year's referrals have been predominantly female. This year most referrals were of primary age, but with a significant number of referrals coming from KS2 and KS3. A breakdown of the referrals by year group and gender is shown below:



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

<b>Total number of counselling sessions offered</b>	<b>307</b>
Total number of counselling sessions attended	278
Total number of counselling sessions not attended	29
<b>Meetings with other professionals – includes CTM and LAR*:</b>	<b>155</b>

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

Children and young people from 23 primary schools and 19 secondary schools received support. Attendance and engagement in the sessions remains good and 307 direct intervention sessions were offered, with an attendance rate of 91%. We are very pleased with the engagement of our young people and the support offered by schools to facilitate the sessions.

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

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

This year the counselling team have found three overarching themes around the concerns schools are noticing: -

1. Survival mode behaviours – ie. Concerns about externalising behaviours, attention seeking, dysregulation, and school presence/avoidance. These are behaviours relating to the 5 F's - fight, flight, freeze, fawn, and flop.
2. PTSD-like symptoms and ways that students are coping – ie. A “stuckness” around trauma, relational issues (family and friends), anxiety, self-harm, low self-esteem.
3. Insecure attachments – which corresponds to all of the examples above.

Overall, behaviours that are causing concern include, the questioning or ruptures in relationships, signs of dysregulated emotional systems alongside unhealthy coping strategies.

There were also three overarching themes around the expected outcomes that school would hope to see happen or change for the student:

1. Improved emotional responses and ability to self-regulate, which in turn could lead to improved behaviours in school.
2. Help to process trauma, which could improve relationships and the students understanding of their past experiences.
3. Enhance student wellbeing, which could improve their sense of self, their focus and resilience in school, and their ability to cope with here-and-now issues.

Overall, the desire for a student to have a safe place to talk and express their thoughts and feelings could in turn give them a sense of understanding their past experiences and their emotions.

Interventions are 10 weeks as standard, with the option of extending to provide more in-depth long-term work where there is clinical need, and it has been agreed by all parties. There has been an increased need to deliver longer interventions this year due to the complexity of needs presenting. This flexibility is essential in providing children and young people with the child-centred support that they need, especially when there are transitions in placements. This year 56% of cases were completed within the 10-session intervention, with around 32% requiring a short (5 session) extension. A small number of complex cases (12%) required an extended intervention.

It is clear the children are well supported through the Counselling SLA and the service will continue to function in the same way next year. However, we are working with the team to develop a guidance document, bespoke to the Virtual School with a variety of topics that will advise and encourage schools in their role when supporting children entering and living in

care. Including what to expect, when, and how to make referrals to the counselling service, alongside psychoeducation on trauma and attachment.

## Feedback from children, carers and teachers on the counselling:

### Carers feedback

---

*"I feel like he's really got something out of it, thank you"*

*"I've noticed changes in X's ability to manage his emotions. There were a couple times I was worried he might have one of his 'wobbles' but he didn't."*

*"My foster-son was really happy with the service and seems content – many thanks to [the counsellor] for their positive impact on X's demeanour and wellbeing."*

---

### Child/Young Person Feedback

---

*"I'm feeling happier now".*

*"I've done a lot of fun and creative things whilst getting to know myself better."*

*"It's been really good to have a space each week to offload my worries, and I've learnt strategies to help me cope in class."*

---

### Feedback from teachers

---

*"Since the sessions X is able to recognise his emotions and discuss why he feels that way, previously he would struggle to navigate why he felt the way he did. The sessions have helped X become more open about his emotions."*

*"I've been off for a while and when I've come back, I can see a real change in her. She's holding herself differently, she looks more relaxed. It's wonderful!"*

*"X is doing really well in school, and we've seen his confidence really grow. We were worried about him going through his SATs and the transition, but he seems to be in a really good place at the moment and think he will just thrive next year".*

---

## Case Study

*'John'\* is in Primary School and has had a few transitions in his care due to witnessing domestic abuse between his parents; he moved to kinship care then returned to his parents' care. Although currently presenting as settled, school made a referral for counselling so that John could have the opportunity to talk to someone should he need it and to explore any feelings as they arise.*



*A series of sessions were facilitated by a child psychotherapeutic counsellor via the Virtual School and Durham School Counselling service agreement. The sessions were play-based and child-led allowing John to feel he had choices and control. Themes from the work included safety, security, nurture, and being valued. John used the sessions well to explore his recent experiences, and his feelings around his parents which presented a need to share safeguarding information with school.*



*At the completion of work John shared that he felt positive about life, and that he didn't have any other worries to talk about. He is settled in school and has positive relationships with staff and peers. This provides ongoing opportunities for him to talk to trusted key staff and know he is valued and responded to.*

## 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. We continue to give clear and strong guidance to DTs that the PEP is the child's meeting and as such they should be involved fully in the process. Wherever possible, this will mean they seek the views of the child or young person before the PEP meeting takes place, so their views can be presented and heard.

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 CIC 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".

Other areas they have raised with us this year focus on school behaviour and inclusion policies and the "Language that Cares document. The VSH attends the meetings to offer a balanced perspective on the systems in school. Their voice is reported back through Designated Teacher Network Meetings.

## 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.
- Holding an event at Beamish, offering opportunities for our CIC, their Carers and their families to meet the Virtual School team, complete enrichment activities and enjoy a day out exploring the museum.
- Working with the Progression and Learning Team to support CIC with sessional employment.
- Encouraging schools to put some of the PP+ towards enrichment activities, to allow them to participate in school residentials and cultural visits.
- Providing Good Luck cards before exams take place.
- Providing CiCC with a small budget to help CIC to explore their interests and dreams.
- Provided a book on National Book Day
- Supported several workshops in conjunction with Social Care colleagues and a resident poet, Katharine Goda, where CIC came together to write poetry. Their work was put together and a collection of poems from Care Experienced children/young people and Care Leavers is celebrated in the poetry book “Cherished”. A copy was sent to every school with a CIC in Durham.

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 2024-25 to support CIC and schools?

Our focus for 2024-25:

- We will continue to provide training and network meetings through Teams. The decision to do this is to support the schools out of borough and allows a consistent message for CIC placed outside of the borough. It allows strong relationships to develop with all schools. It also allows them to access our therapeutic training.
- Continue to work closely with Durham Works to support CIC onto their Post 16 pathway. Ensuring the Year 11 PEP includes the support of the Durham Works Adviser. This cohort will be tracked to identify those who are NEET, and work with Social Care to raise the aspirations of CIC. The support to Post 16 is enabled using the Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus and will be developed through additional roles in the Post 16 service.
- Work alongside Education Durham to ensure smooth transition across Key Stages.

## 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 in Care achievements are recognised at the annual Celebrate Me Awards.

## 13. Summary

In terms of educational outcomes, Key Stage 2 data reflects the gaps created through the pandemic, and the need to continue to target academic outcomes and identify needs early to secure the right intervention at the right time. This is an area to address at PEP meetings for Year 5 children. KS4 data has identified a dip in Maths but improvements in English, this is a key area to explore as we strive to support CIC to achieve a match in Maths and English to support them into Post 16 pathways that are suitable for their ability. This will be a focus for the Autumn term PEP meetings which 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 CIC 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 CIC. The report notes that for some young people at KS4, high GCSE grades are not within reach yet, but we acknowledge and celebrate the enormous effort they have made to make progress in the face of often huge barriers to enable them to move into education and training. An area of concern has been the attendance of Year 11 at such an important point in their school career, this was notable for the Y11 cohort this academic year. This is an area which we will focus on moving forward and will challenge at every opportunity. The development of monitoring questions as part of the Note of Visit for School Leadership Advisers to discuss with headteachers, along with the CIC 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 CIC cohort high on their list of priorities.

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

The extension to the role of the VSH to include all children/young people 0 – 18 with a social worker has developed over the year. The Government are continuing this into 2024/25 It is important to note that the strategic overview sits with the VSH, who is working in partnership with schools, settings, the wider education team, and social care to develop a model that highlights good attendance and inclusion for this cohort. This is a developing piece of work which focuses on excellent working practice and strong communication of everyone involved with the child and their family to achieve better outcomes through academic intervention and strong pastoral support. The pilot ran in the South of the county 22/23 has now been rolled out and disseminated across the LA. The Attendance Tool Kit for Children with a Social Worker has been shared with all stakeholders, and training/briefings has been provided, and is now in use.

The appointment of the Previously Child in Care Officer to strengthen the Virtual Schools offer for PCIC has enriched the work in this area. This has brought a seamless approach for children leaving care and moving onto adoption, and those moving onto SGO status. Attendance at panel meetings and liaison with schools and guardians is beginning to reflect a strong working partnership and has identified much scope for further development.

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

## 14. Outline Priorities for 2024-25

The key priorities for 2024-25 have been identified through consultation, data analysis, observations from work with schools and settings, work with the attendance team and the changing needs of CIC. Some of our priorities will roll over from 23/24 due to the needs identified.

### Continuing Priorities from 23/24

- Continue to increase the focus on attendance for CIC. Develop the systems now in place and build upon the contribution of the EWO for CWSW, to support schools and Social Care when overcoming attendance challenges.
- Continue to support Post 16 to reduce NEET data through a collaborative approach and by drawing upon the expertise within the Progression and Learning Team.
- Continue to contribute to an increasingly integrated and joined-up process with health and social care teams to provide a holistic and cohesive approach to support readiness to learn whilst ensuring CIC have stability in their education setting.

Ensure a robust system is in place to increase school stability through monitoring and challenge.

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

### **New Priorities for 24/25**

- To support more children to achieve higher levels / greater depth in KS2 and KS4 through early identification during the Autumn term PEP, Virtual School monitoring meetings and data available from Welfare Call Analytics.
- Develop work with Children's Homes to support school anxiety and other barriers to education. Drawing on the expertise of the therapeutic services we make available to schools.
- Embed the agreed process for CIC who require Statutory Assessment and work in partnership with SEND colleagues to identify how we can support our most vulnerable children placed outside of the LA who have an EHCP.

## **15. Recommendation**

That this annual report is noted by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Virtual School Subgroup, Virtual School Operational group, Children Looked After 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 CIC and CWSW 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 CIC 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 CIC.</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 CIC 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 CIC 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 CIC.</li> <li>- Support VSH and schools with inclusion issues around CIC</li> <li>- Support collection and analysis of data re attendance and exclusion.</li> <li>- Bespoke EWO for CWSW and CIC offering support to schools and Childrens Homes</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>- Implement and manage the Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus Pilot for the second year.</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 CIC PEP Caseworkers support Post 16</li> <li>- Embed the Post 16 PEP across providers.</li> <li>- Support CIC 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 CIC and CPIC</li> <li>- Lead on PEPs</li> <li>- Monitor and be accountable for outcomes for LA and CPIC</li> <li>- Advocate for CIC at times when adverse traumas are hindering progress and school stability.</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 CIC Policy</li> </ul>

## Appendix B - Abbreviations

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

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