

VIRTUAL  
SCHOOL



# Virtual School Annual Report 2023-2024

February 2024



# UNICEF Rights of the Child



St Helens Virtual School acknowledges and embeds the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child in everything that it does. Although the full Convention underpins our practice, the Virtual School has a particular focus and commitment to the following:

## Article 3

The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

## Article 12

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously. The right applies at all times for example during [...] the child's day to day home life.

## Article 28

Every child has a right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in school's must respect children's dignity and their rights.

## Article 29

Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights [...].

## Article 39

Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

# Borough Strategy 2021-2030

St Helens Virtual School is underpinned by **St Helens Council Borough Strategy**.

Our Borough Strategy shows the key strategic priorities for the Council and the borough, and sets out how we can achieve better results for our communities by working together and supporting each other.

The Virtual School's work and ethos is directly underpinned by the Borough Strategy's first priority:

## **Ensuring children and young people have a positive start in life.**

We want to make a **difference** to the lives of children and young people who live in the borough, **improve outcomes** for all children, whilst tackling deprivation and child poverty and **protecting children from vulnerable backgrounds**.



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENSURE CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
HAVE A POSITIVE  
START IN LIFE

# Our Three Obsessions

The work and practice of the Virtual School is shaped by our **Three Obsessions**, which focus on **attendance**, **inclusion** and **wellbeing**.

These key principles shape our SEF and Improvement Plan, as well as the culture and ethos of the Virtual School.



## How this looks within the Virtual School:

### **Obsession 1 - All learners of all ages have the right to the best quality of education**

The Virtual School will strive to raise the educational achievement of Children in Care, Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker.

The Virtual School will ensure that every Child in Care has an effective and up to date, high quality Personal Education Plan.

The Virtual School will support and develop the role of the Designated Teacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead in schools, including through training and professional development.

### **Obsession 2 - We promote equity in inclusion to reduce inequality. We actively work together to champion the disadvantaged children and challenge every organisation and profession across the borough to do the same.**

The Virtual School will provide support and ensure access to full time educational placements for all our children and young people.

The Virtual School will provide support the transition process for all our pupils, including at key stages within their education.

The Virtual School will work to reduce and prevent suspensions and permanent exclusions for all our pupils.

The Virtual School will strive to improve the attendance of vulnerable children.

The Virtual School will aim to reduce Persistent Absenteeism and Severe Persistent Absence amongst our children and young people.

The Virtual School will ensure that our pupils are not subject to a reduced timetable unless it is an exceptional circumstance and in line with legal framework.

### **Obsession 3 - We focus on the needs and wellbeing of children and young people, rather than the needs of institutions or groups**

The Virtual School will offer training and support to the agencies we work with, including foster carers, residential settings, educational settings and social workers.

The Virtual School will work collaboratively and innovatively with agencies and teams who are involved in our children's lives.

The Virtual School will improve the accuracy of educational data and use this to inform planning and intervention.

The Virtual School will obtain the views and lived experiences of our children and young people and use this to strategically drive change within the Virtual School.

# Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Success Headlines 2022-2023
3. Staffing Structure
4. Virtual School – Duties and Offer
5. 1 page summary Self Evaluation
6. Overview of Cohort
7. Overview of Cohort: SEND
8. PEP Completion Data
9. Ofsted Judgements
10. Voice of the Child
11. Attainment EYFS
12. Attainment Phonics
13. Attainment Key Stage 1
14. Attainment Key Stage 2
15. Attainment Key Stage 4 – Children we Look After
16. Attainment Key Stage 4 – Children with a Social Worker
17. Post 16
18. Care Leavers
19. Youth Justice Service
20. Children with a Social Worker
21. Previously Looked After Children
22. Non-Negotiables
23. Attendance
24. Suspensions and Exclusions
25. Inclusion
26. Quality Assurance Framework
27. School Packs
28. Love of Reading
29. Training and Development
30. Ofsted Inspection
31. Pupil Premium Plus
32. Case Study
33. Governance
34. Education Safeguarding
35. 2023-2024 Priorities

# Introduction

During 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, St Helens Virtual School has continued to fulfil its statutory duty in ensuring that Looked After Children, Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker make good progress, achieve good outcomes and proceed into positive destinations at every stage. The wishes, feelings and lived experiences of all of our children and young people, sit at the heart of everything we do. The Virtual School works to promote a child centred approach and champions the needs and best interests of all of our pupils.

## The Virtual School Team continues to work with:

- Our children and young people
- Schools and education settings, both in and outside of St Helens
- Designated Teachers, Designated Safeguarding Leads and Headteachers
- Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- Parents, foster carers, kinship carers, adoptive parents and residential carers
- SEND Teams and Educational Psychologists
- Youth Justice Colleagues
- Other relevant services and partners.

## The 2023-2024 Virtual School Annual Report details:

- What has been delivered;
- What has been achieved;
- Our challenges and;
- Our priorities moving forward.

## Data Sources

All data included within this Annual Report is sourced from the following platforms:

- **Welfare Call** (attendance (current); PEP completion; cohort information; educational settings)
- **Nexus** (attainment; attendance; suspensions; exclusions (overtime and comparable))
- **Power BI** (present cohort information; present educational settings; present attendance and suspension data)
- **Census return** (Previously Looked After cohort)
- Finance information is provided by Virtual School Principal Accountant.

Unless otherwise stated, the data within this report for CWLA refers to children and young people who have been in the care of St Helens for 12 months or more as of 31<sup>st</sup> March.

## Acknowledgements

The Virtual School Head and the Virtual School Team would like to acknowledge the following:


- All of our amazing children, young people and care leavers who never fail to astound us. Thank you for always working so hard, showing tremendous resilience and for participating in all that we do.
- The families and carers we work with each and every day and their ongoing commitment to our children and young people.
- The hard work of all partners who come together to support the academic and emotional outcomes of all of our children and young people. This includes, but is not limited to: Designated Teachers; Designated Safeguarding Leads; Headteachers; school staff; Governors including the Virtual School Governing Body; Social Workers; Independent Reviewing Officers; Educational Psychologists; SEND Teams; therapeutic and mental health services; Youth Justice colleagues; Preparing for Adulthood Team; Futures Team and Personal Advisors.

The Virtual School Head would also like to personally thank the hard work and dedication of the Virtual School Team. Their passion, commitment, innovation and empathy, ensures that all our children and young people receive the best quality support.

**Heather Addison**

**Virtual School Head**

**January 2024**



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed. It is the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead



## Attainment

- 2022-2023 Phonics data for Children we Look After was **9.1% above** the national average. This is the **second consecutive year** that St Helens Virtual School has achieved significantly above the national average for Phonics.
- Key Stage 1 results for 2022-2023 **significantly exceeded the national average**. There was also **significant improvement** from academic year 2021-2022.
- In KS2, for RWM combined, maths and GPS, our pupils achieved **significantly higher than the national average**. The 2022-2023 results in these areas also **exceeded** the previous year's data.
- 2022-2023 Attainment 8 scores were **higher** than the national average.
- There was an **11% improvement** in the number of Early Years Children with a Social Worker who achieved GLD compared to 2021-2022.
- Phonics attainment for Children with a Social Worker is **6% above** the national average. There has also been an **21% increase** from last year's attainment data.
- For Children with a Social Worker, Key Stage 1 attainment data is **consistently above the national average** for 2022-2023. There has also been an **improvement** in results when compared to 2021-2022 academic year.
- There has been a **significant improvement** in Attainment 8 **across all areas** for Children with a Social Worker compared to last academic year.

## Attendance and Behaviour

- The Virtual School works closely and meetings regularly to discuss the attendance data of our Youth Justice Service cohort. This ensures robust oversight and that some of our most vulnerable children are consistently engaged in education.
- For the third consecutive year, suspension data for Children we Look After remained below the national average.
- For **2022/2023**, the Permanent Exclusion Rate for children with a Child Protection Plan is **0.66**, which is **lower** than the national average of **0.82**.
- The Virtual School works closely with our children and young people, their parents and carers, their education settings and social workers to prevent Permanent Exclusion wherever possible.

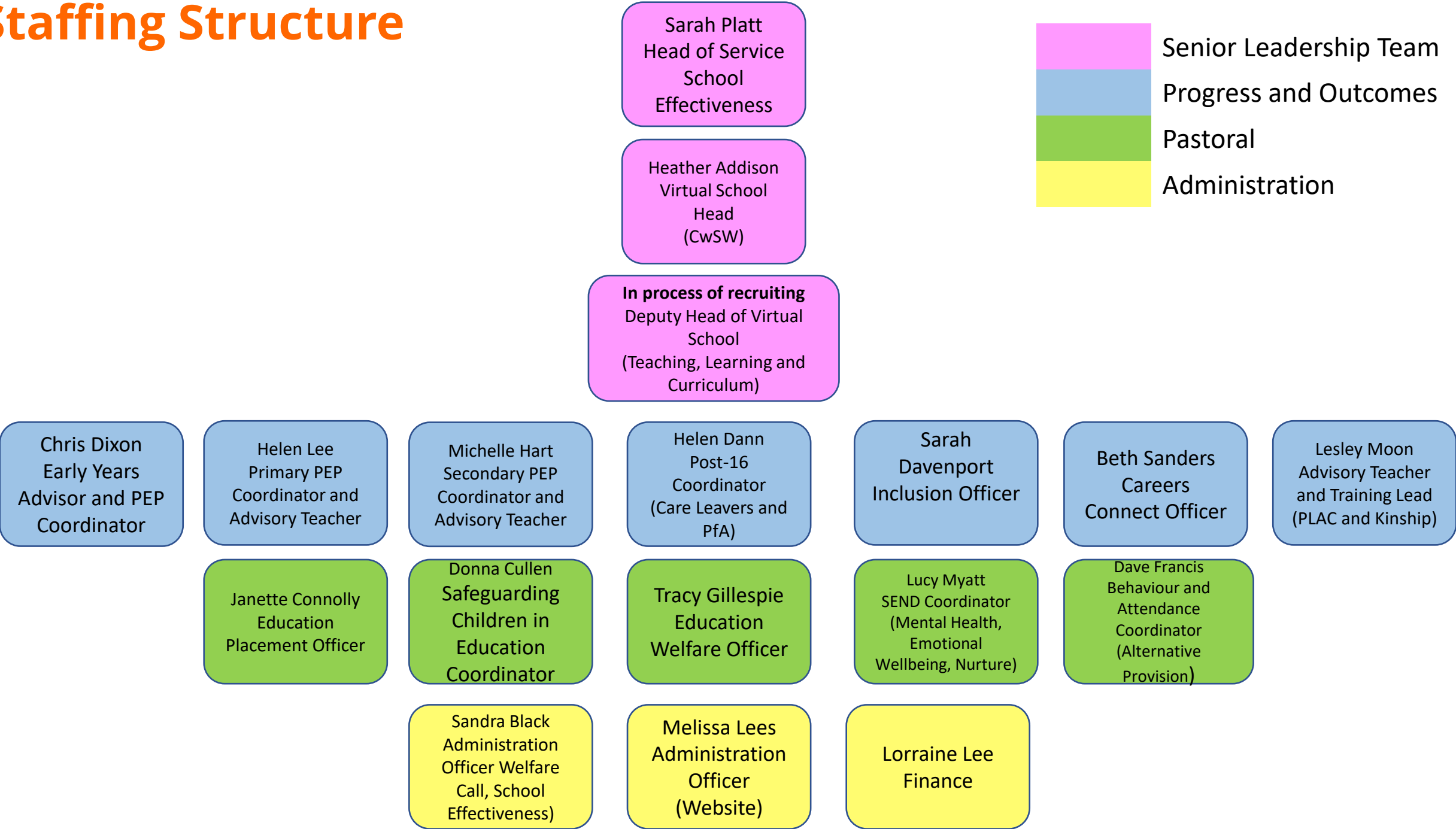
# Success Headlines

## Other Achievements

- St Helens achieved a judgement of 'Good', including Outstanding for the experience and progress of care leavers, in July 2023 ILACS inspection. The work of the Virtual School was acknowledged by Ofsted and featured within the report:
- *"Most children in care make good progress in education. The virtual school works in close partnership with schools to ensure that pupils receive the right provision. Exclusions of children in care are very rare and alternative provision is swiftly made".*
- *"Care leavers receive strong and effective support to engage in education, employment or training (EET). This support comes from a range of sources, including the dedicated EET worker, the virtual school and PAs, all of whom are ambitious for their care leavers".*
- *"The virtual school works effectively alongside the preparing for adulthood and futures teams to prepare young people to take up the opportunities available to them".*
- The St Helens Virtual School Team is now at capacity with the majority of vacant roles being appointed to. The increased staffing levels means that further improvement work can be undertaken and there has been a significant shift from complacency to quality.
- 81.38% of our school aged Children and Young People attended schools judged to be either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.
- For the past two years, 100% of Children we Look After have accessed their 15 free hours once they have turned three.
- 37% of Care Leaver in training and employment which is significantly above the national average.
- 63% of Post 16 UASC are on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses



# Staffing Structure





# Virtual School – Duties and Offer

## Virtual School Duties

The Virtual School's duties are set out and directed by the government guidance, **Promoting the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children** (*February 2018*). This legislation sets out the statutory responsibilities of Local Authorities, including each Local Authority Virtual School Head.

The Virtual School also pays due diligence to the corresponding guidance, **The Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children** (*February 2018*). This legislation sets out duties for schools and education settings in supporting the educational outcomes of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children.

In 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head was extended by the Department for Education (DfE) to promote the education of children and young people from birth to 18 years who have a social worker.

In December 2023, the Government launched its first ever National Kinship Strategy, Championing Kinship Care. This strategy extended the role of Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers to provide advice and information to schools to promote the educational achievement of children who have left Local Authority care through a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order.

## Virtual School Offer

- To champion the educational needs and outcomes of children and young people who are Looked After.
- To ensure that we not only address the educational needs of our children and young people, but also ensure that we support their social and emotional development in order to prepare them for adult life and ensure they are happy, well rounded individuals.
- To understand and empathise with the social and emotional barriers many of our children and young people face as a result of their lived experiences. To provide appropriate emotional and mental health support where required in order to remove barriers to learning.
- To ensure all children and young people we Look After achieve high aspirations through their Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- For each PEP to be effectively quality assured to ensure that all our pupils have aspirational targets that help them to achieve, and to ensure that Pupil Premium Plus is spent effectively.
- To ensure that Pupil Premium Plus is allocated to the relevant schools or educational settings, following the completion of a high quality PEP.
- Tracking, monitoring and reporting on the attendance and behaviour of all our children and young people. We will ensure appropriate intervention where there are emerging concerns.
- To provide a high quality breadth of training for Designated Teachers, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Social Workers and parents and carers.
- Ensuring children and young people with known or suspected special educational needs or disabilities receive the correct support and provision in a timely manner.
- Bespoke information, advice and guidance to all partner agencies and families.
- Ensuring that children and young people who are awaiting a school place receive interim tuition to prevent gaps in their education.
- Issuing school directions when a setting inappropriately refuses to admit a child or young person into their school.
- To oversee the educational offer of our children and young people who are accessing alternative provision and ensure this is appropriate to their needs.
- Bespoke and direct work to prevent our young people from becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). High quality support to ensure that our young people enter the right Post-16 destinations.
- Effective and consistent cross borough working with relevant agencies to support our pupils who live or attend school outside of St Helens.
- Input into multi-agency meetings to ensure a consistent and robust approach for our children and young people.
- Collaborative work with all relevant partner agencies in order to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.

# 1 Page Summary SEF: Virtual School 2022-2023

## What have we delivered?

- PEP Coordinators in place for Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Post-16
- Developed 'Non-negotiables': fundamental expectations to be adhered to by all professionals working with Children in Care across education.
- Behaviour and attendance tracked in real time through BI Dashboards providing key data around attendance, PA, suspensions and exclusions. Key themes identified and actioned.
- Daily attendance collections via *Welfare Call* - details all Looked After pupils with attendance below 90% and severe PAs.
- Presented at the multi-agency Attendance and Behaviour Board providing scrutiny by key agencies.
- Appointed an Attendance and Behaviour Coordinator working directly with educational settings and vulnerable children to help improve overall attendance.
- Created Quality Assurance Framework to improve consistency and quality of PEPs: a multi-agency document which clearly details the expectations around completing PEPs.
- Created an external moderation group, responsible for certifying that PEPs are being quality assured in line with the framework., external and independent oversight of the VS, provides an extra layer of assurance that targets & PP+ funds are in place.
- The Designated Teacher Forum held on a termly basis. Run for education staff who support our pupils both in and out of borough and covering a variety of topics.
- Corporate Parenting Forum Aspiration Workstream implemented: a multi-agency group to determine what aspiration means for young people and how this can be supported. Commissioned Vibe to work on understanding the barriers that CYP identify in relation to aspirations and ambitions. Feedback shared with key partners to inform future workstreams. Aspiration Pathway created; a new visual section of the PEP document, which supports children and young people to reach their goals. Now live on the PEP document.
- Wide CPD offer in place for schools, SWs and foster carers-Lego and Play Therapy training and DESTY mentors.
- Provide transition packs for pupils at key points in their education, providing equipment to support positive transitions.
- Festival in Learning in May 2023, with the theme 'The Power of Connection'. Accredited guest speakers and workshops supported education staff in understanding how imperative significant relationships are in supporting children and young people to achieve.

## What difference have we made?

- EY data remained marginally in line with the NA for CLA (29%) at 27.3%. Phonics data was significantly higher than the NA (52%) at 61.1%.
- KS1 data was significantly higher than the NA; 80% achieved ARE in reading compared to 40% nationally; 80% achieved ARE in writing compared to 31% nationally; 100% of our CLA cohort achieved ARE in maths compared to 40% nationally and 100% achieved ARE in science compared to 50% nationally.
- For KS2, in Reading, Writing and Maths combined, 38.5% of children achieved ARE compared to 32% nationally. In maths 53.8% of children achieved ARE compared to 44% nationally and in GPS, 53.8% achieved ARE compared to 44% nationally.
- In KS4, although Attainment 8 was higher than national (16.3 compared to 12.3), Progress 8 was slightly lower at -1.67 compared to -1.25.
- The recent Ofsted inspection highlighted that most Children in Care make good educational progress. It also highlighted the strength in post-16 and outcomes for care leavers.

## What have been our challenges?

- Attendance and behaviour continue to be a main area of focus for the VS. Persistent absenteeism is high for Children with a Social Worker.
- Overall attendance for CLA 22/23 was 90.3%. This was slightly lower than national at 91%.
- Persistent Absenteeism for CLA was higher than national (22%) at 25.1%.
- Severe Persistent Absenteeism for CLA was higher than the national average (5%) at 6.9%.
- Behaviour of young people who have experienced significant trauma which impact their learning and attendance at school.
- The suspension rate for CLA pupils for 22/23 was 26.99 per 100 pupils. This was an increase from last academic year but was lower than the national average for the third consecutive year.
- Reading and writing at Key Stage 2 sat below the national average, with 38.5% for reading compared to 48% nationally and 38.5% for writing compared to 42% nationally.
- Academic outcomes for CwSW need to improve.

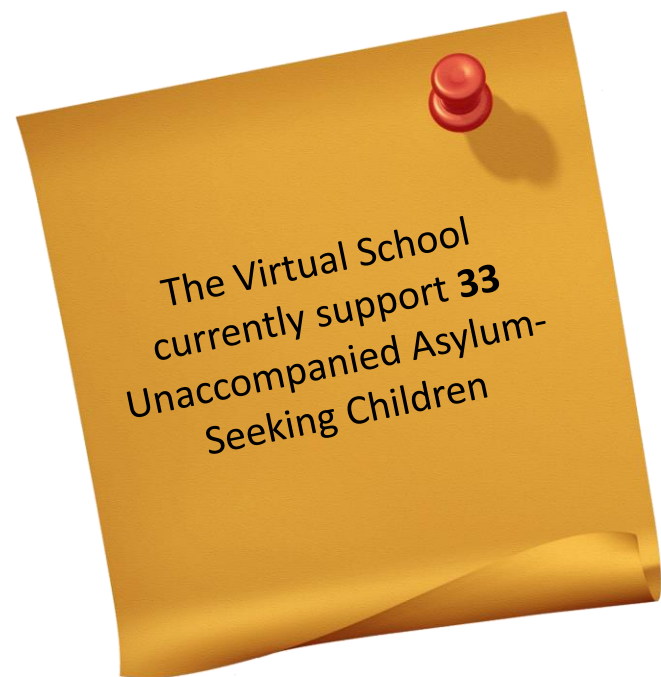
## What do we still need to do?

- Improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism for CLA and CwSW.
- A focus on a love of reading needs to be developed for our pupils.
- Improvement work with schools around outcomes in reading and writing.
- Appoint a Deputy Headteacher for the Virtual School who will lead in teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- Develop and improve the Virtual School Website, so that it includes robust information, support and guidance.
- Improve outcomes for CwSW; this will include dip sampling of plans around educational outcomes.
- Fund a nurture pilot for KS3 and 4 pupils to address social and emotional developmental delays.

# Overview of Cohort

There are **485** Children and Young People currently cared for by St Helens. **461** are currently pupils of the Virtual School. It is important to note that this figure will fluctuate throughout the course of the year.

|             |    |                   |            |
|-------------|----|-------------------|------------|
| Early Years | 37 | Year 7            | 23         |
| Reception   | 19 | Year 8            | 40         |
| Year 1      | 26 | Year 9            | 37         |
| Year 2      | 25 | Year 10           | 32         |
| Year 3      | 15 | Year 11           | 30         |
| Year 4      | 27 | Post 16 - Year 12 | 44         |
| Year 5      | 25 | Post 16 - Year 13 | 60         |
| Year 6      | 21 | <b>Total</b>      | <b>461</b> |



- There are currently 14 young people we Look After who are being supported by the Youth Justice Service.
- There are 18 children with a Child in Need Plan currently accessing the service.
- There are 2 children with a Child Protection Plan currently under the Youth Justice Service.

## In Borough / Out of Borough

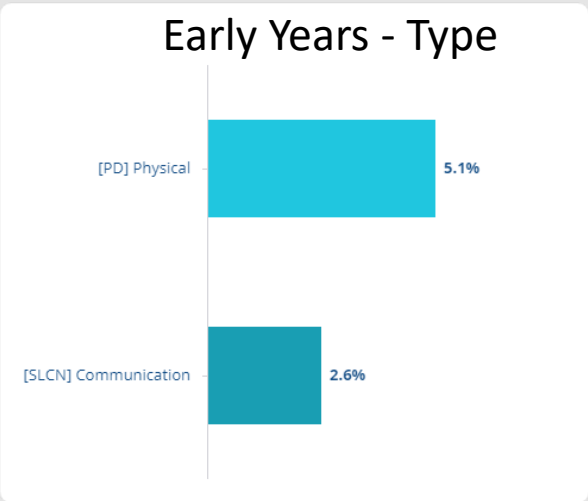
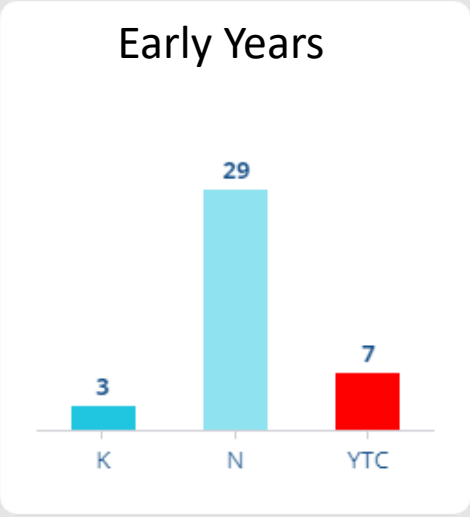
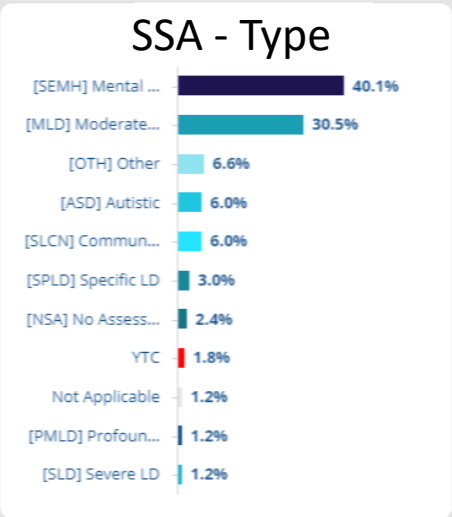
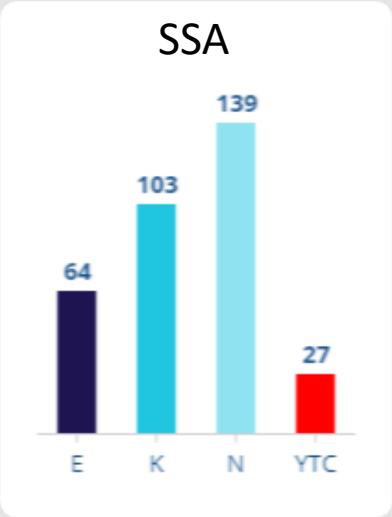
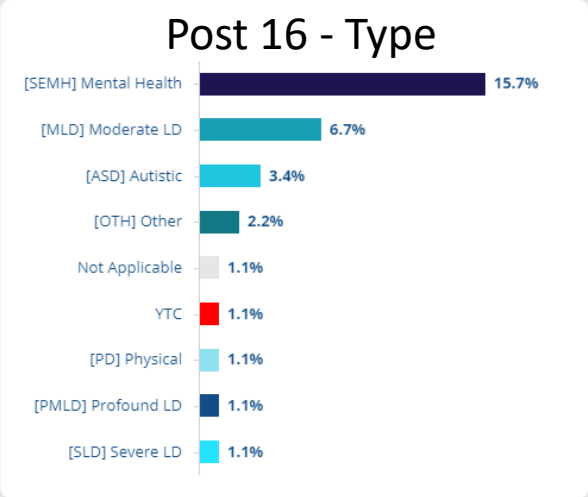
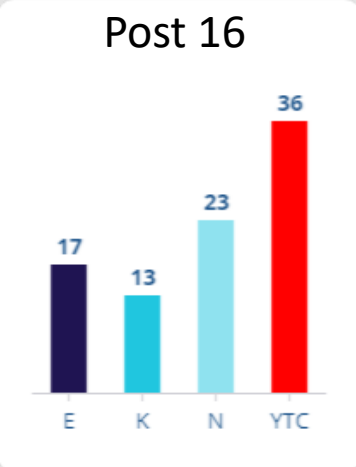
| Early Years |                | Statutory School Age |                | Post 16    |                |
|-------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| In Borough  | Out of Borough | In Borough           | Out of Borough | In Borough | Out of Borough |
| 31          | 6              | 208                  | 112            | 63         | 41             |

There are currently 19 children and young people within the Virtual School accessing Alternative Provision, both in and out of borough.

# Overview of Cohort: SEND

## Children we Look After

- 19.2% of SSA CWLA have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 30.9% of SSA CWLA have SEND Support.
- 41.7% of SSA CWLA have no SEND identified.
- 8.1% of SSA CWLA are yet to confirm.
- For SSA CWLA, the predominant SEND need is Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH)
- 7.7% of EYFS CWLA have SEND Support
- 74.4% of EYFS CWLA have no SEND identified.
- 17.9% of EYFS CWLA are yet to confirm.
- For Early Years CWLA, the predominant SEND need is Physical Development, followed by Communication.
- 19.1% of Post 16 CWLA have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 14.6% of Post 16 CWLA have SEND Support.
- 25.8% of Post 16 CWLA have no SEND identified.
- 40.4% of Post 16 CWLA are yet to confirm.



## CwSW

### Child in Need

- 88 children with a CIN plan have an Education Health and Care Plan (21.5%).
- 106 children with a CIN plan have SEND Support (25.9%).

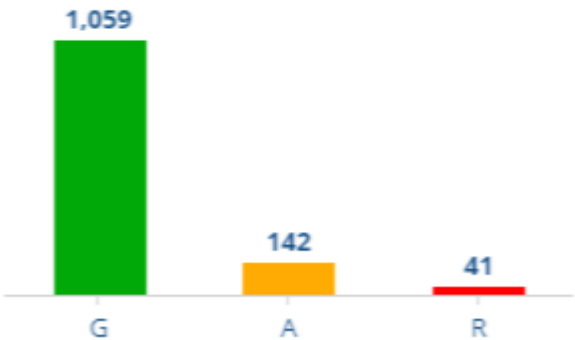
### Child Protection

- 11 Children on a Child Protection Plan have an Education Health and Care Plan (8.7%).
- 42 children on a Child Protection Plan have SEND support (33.3%).

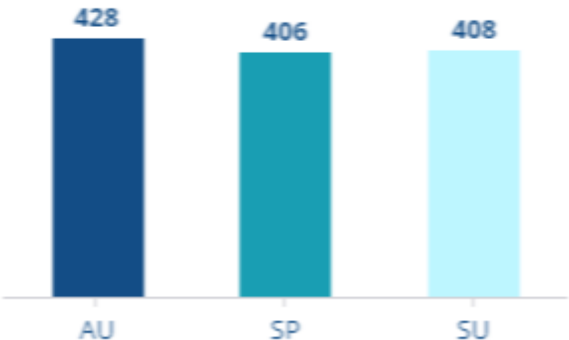
# PEP Completion Data

## 2022-2023

QA



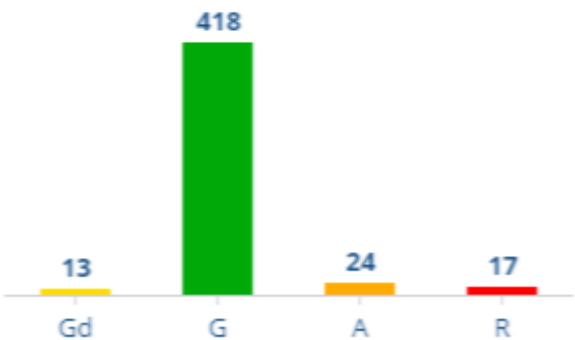
Academic Term



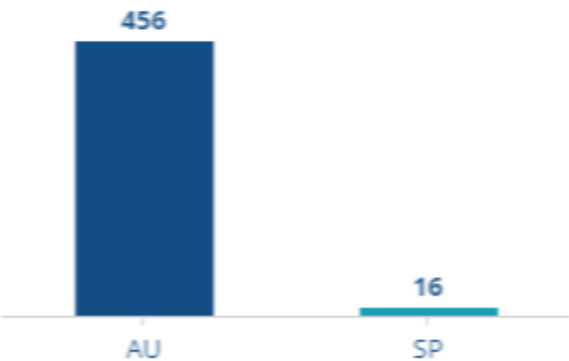
- Personal Education Plans are quality assured each term by the PEP Coordinators.
- PEPs need to be of a high quality in order for the school or educational setting to receive Pupil Premium +.
- Previously, due to capacity issues, PEP completion focused more on compliance rather than quality. However, following the expansion of the team, PEPs are now more thoroughly quality assured.
- The Virtual School now has allocated PEP Coordinators and Advisory Teachers for each key stage.
- This increase in scrutiny, has resulted in a decrease in green and an increase in amber PEPs; however, this is a more accurate reflection of quality and benchmarks where improvements need to be made.
- The Virtual School now has the Quality Assurance Framework in place to ensure that all PEPs are graded equally, and there are shared expectations for all partners.
- In Autumn 2023, the introduction of the 'Gold Standard' PEP was introduced, in order to highlight, exemplify and celebrate outstanding practice.
- A handbook has been created for Designated Teachers, to guide them through each stage of the PEP process, and how to complete the document to a high standard.

## 2023-2024 (Year to Date)

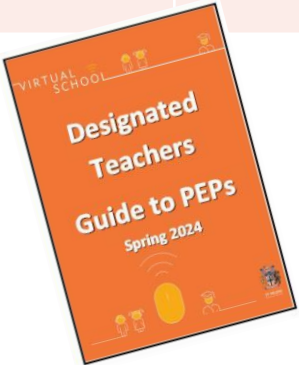
QA



Academic Term



|                        | Gold<br>(Outstanding) | Green<br>(Good) | Amber<br>(Requires<br>Improvement) | Red<br>(Inadequate) |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 2020-2021              | n/a                   | 1145            | 152                                | 25                  |
| 2021-2022              | n/a                   | 1157            | 50                                 | 43                  |
| 2022-2023              | n/a                   | 1059            | 142                                | 41                  |
| 2023-2024 (to<br>date) | 13                    | 418             | 24                                 | 17                  |



# Ofsted Judgements

## Statutory School Aged Pupils

- 81.38% of all out statutory school aged children attend a school that is judged either 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.
- Where a child or young person attends a school that is judged to be 'Requires Improvement', there is a clear rationale sitting behind this decision. This may include:
  - The school was not originally judged to be Requires Improvement when the child first started on roll;
  - The child has transitioned from Year 6 and their friends are attending the same provision;
  - The voice of the child or young person has indicated that they wish to attend that particular provision.
- For the small proportion of students (2 pupils) that attend provisions judged to be Inadequate, these young people's progress and outcomes are closely monitored by the Virtual School through the PEP process. We work in close conjunction with the relevant provision.

|                      | All Schools | In Borough | Out of Borough |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|----------------|
| Outstanding          | 9.61%       | 5.94%      | 16.67%         |
| Good                 | 71.77%      | 75.8%      | 64.04%         |
| Requires Improvement | 8.71%       | 10.96%     | 4.39%          |
| Inadequate           | 0.6%        | 0%         | 1.75%          |
| Not yet inspected    | 9.31%       | 7.3%       | 13.51%         |
| Good or outstanding  | 81.38%      | 81.74%     | 80.71%         |




# Voice of the Child

## Bright Spots Survey

Bright Spots were commissioned to complete a survey with all Children we Look After in St Helens. The Bright Spots Programme was set up to understand what is important to Children we Look After and to share this learning with key agencies.

St Helens had a response rate of 32%, which equated to 119 Children we Look After completing the survey.

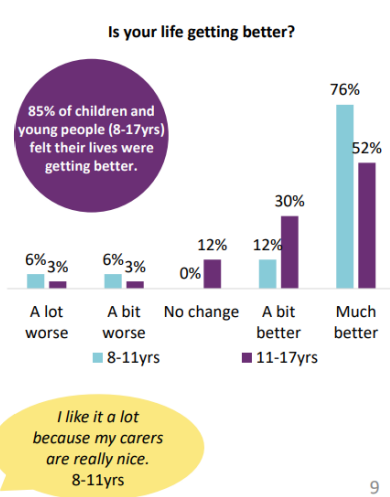


### Relationships with carers

Survey results indicated that children and young people had good relationships with their carers.

- The vast majority, including all of the youngest children, **trusted their carers\***.
- More than nine in 10 (92%) children and young people **'always' felt safe where they were living\***; a higher proportion than children (82%) in the general population.
- All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) thought their **carers noticed how they were feeling\*** and **liked their bedrooms\***.
- More than two-thirds (70%) of young people **talked regularly to their carers about things that mattered to them\***; a higher proportion compared with their peers (60%) in the general population.

\*Denotes a Bright Spot



9

### Building resilience

- All of the children (8-11yrs) and the majority (97%) of young people **had a trusted adult** in their lives.\*
- All (100%) of the children (4-11yrs) **had fun at the weekends\***.
- The proportion of children and young people (8-17yrs) who had **spent time outdoors in nature** at least once in the last week was higher than in the general population\*.
- All but two of the children (4-11yrs) **liked school**. 74% of the 11-17yrs group **liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit'\*** which was higher than young people (70%) in the general population.
- 89% of children (8-11yrs) and 93% of young people **felt the adults they lived with showed an interest in what they did at school or college** – a higher proportion compared to the general population (88%)\*.

\*Denotes a Bright Spot

### Positivity about the future

- A higher proportion of young people (90%) had moderate to high **positivity about their future** compared with the general population (88%).

### Relationships with social workers

- All of the children (8-11yrs) **knew who their social worker was\***.
- All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) **trusted their social worker\***.
- A higher proportion of young people (42%) had had **one social worker in the last year** compared with the national average (34%).

### Family time

- The proportions of children (65%) and young people (46%) who felt **happy with how often they saw their Mum** were significantly higher than the national average (47% and 39% respectively)\*.

10

| Age group | Number of responses | Response rate |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|
| 4-7yrs    | 26                  | 35%           |
| 8-11yrs   | 19                  | 34%           |
| 11-17yrs  | 74                  | 31%           |

## What could be improved?

### Feeling happy

- Although only two children (4-11yrs) recorded feeling **unhappy** the day before the survey, the proportion who felt **quite or very happy\*** was lower compared to children in other LAs in both age groups.

I want to know more about my family history 11-17yrs

### Understanding why you are in care

- Over half (54%) of the youngest children, over a quarter (28%) of the older children and one fifth of young people (20%) did not fully understand the reasons why they were in care.

### [What would make being in care better?]

To have a bigger bedroom. To be able to access the internet at home when I want to. To have some pocket money. To have some more independence. 11-17yrs

### Friends

- The proportion (9%) of children and young people (4-17yrs) that **did not have a good friend\*** was three times higher compared with children (3%) in the general population.

### Internet access

- Whilst the majority of young people (11-17yrs) had access to the Internet where they lived, 3 young people did not.

## Other key findings from the survey include:

A higher proportion of young people in St Helens (**70%**) reported high life satisfaction compared with the national average (**60%**). However, **11%** of young people had low wellbeing. Reasons for this included:

- not enjoying school;
- feeling unhappy with the way they looked;
- not having the chance to practice life skills;
- feeling unhappy with how often they saw family;
- feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying;
- not having a chance to be trusted;
- not being able to do similar things to their friends;
- worrying about their feelings or behaviour.



# Voice of the Child

## Vibe Consultation

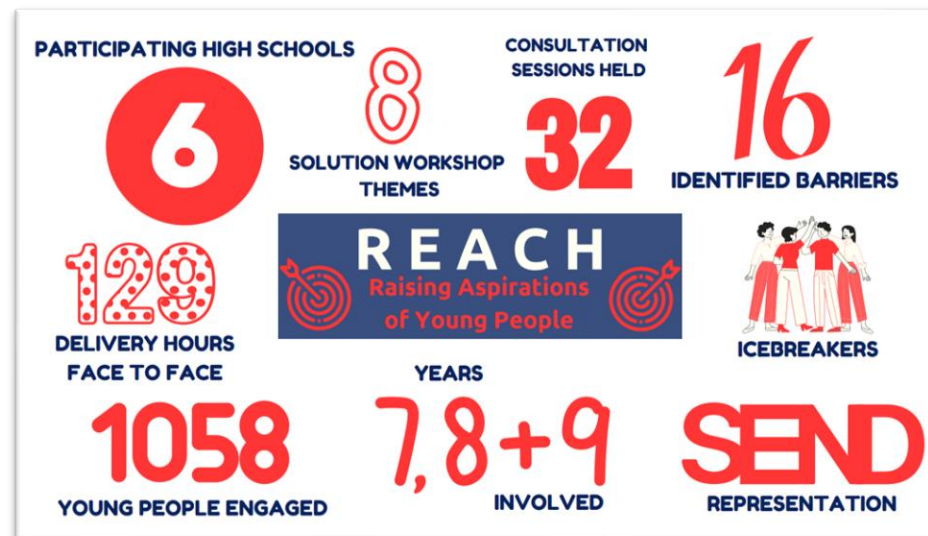
Public Health commissioned Vibe to complete a survey with children and young people across the borough, to help understand their views around aspiration, and any barriers they currently experience. This was a comprehensive piece of work, and the findings will link in with and help shape the work of the Virtual School, including the Aspiration Workstream from Corporate Parenting Forum.

6 schools participated in the initiative, with over 1000 young people taking part and providing their views. Children and young people identified 16 barriers when it comes to reaching their aspirations. These were:

1. Time
2. Location or area
3. Money
4. Age
5. Discrimination
6. Peers
7. Mental Health
8. Physical Health
9. Self-Handicapping
10. Motivation
11. Support
12. Quick Wins
13. Education
14. Learning Styles
15. Skills and Knowledge
16. Pressure

The top three barriers identified by children and young people were: **mental health; lack of opportunities and money.**

It is imperative that the Virtual School uses these findings to shape its improvement work moving forward.



## Key Findings

Throughout delivery, we noticed certain patterns in conversation and some issues were brought up frequently and more in depth discussions were held:

### Top 3: 1.Mental Health 2.Lack of Opportunities 3.Money

**1.Mental Health** - reported lack of self confidence, low self esteem to anxiety or depression, poor mental health impacting on a young persons ability to reach their full potential.

Young peoples solutions: more/better access to support and services, education around coping mechanisms, better understanding of themselves through skills/self development programmes or learning, peer support groups for young people to meet like minded people and share experiences. Free access to activities to support our physical health will in turn support our mental health.

**2.Lack of opportunities** - St Helens is lacking youth support, activities, youth centres, things to do, young people on the streets. solutions: A better local offer with more free activities for young people to take part in, youth clubs or youth centres as a safe space or yp to go, access to more options and opportunities to gain experience in a variety of fields, more young people engaged and staying off the streets and prevent ASB.

**3.Money** - Without money young people felt they were unable to access anything that supported them to better their futures, the cost of living crisis is having a massive impact and they felt poverty in their area is a massive issue.

solutions: Money support and education for young people around budgeting, understanding finances such as mortgages loans and accounts etc added to the curriculum, increased funding for opportunities for young people eg free activities/youth clubs. More cultural and arts activities commissioned in St Helens such as national theatre tours, exhibition that we/families cant afford to travel to see.

# Voice of the Child

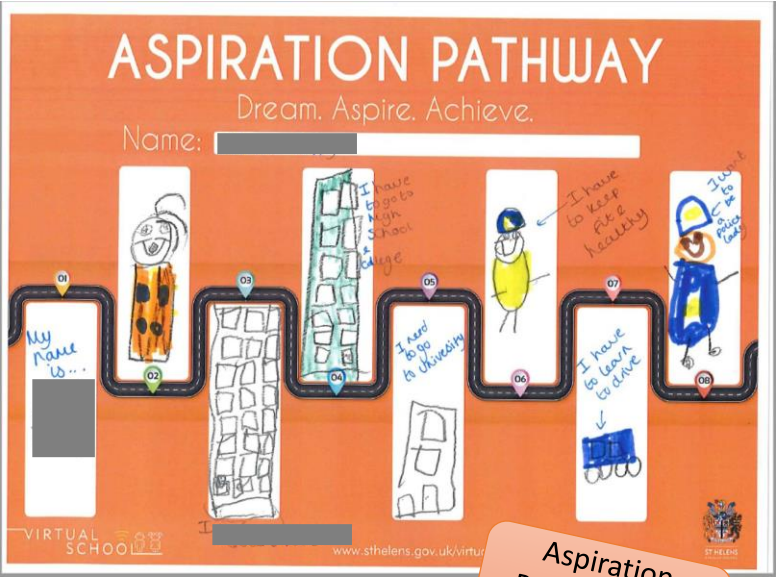
## Personal Education Plans

Each Personal Education Plan for each developmental stage, has a dedicated section in which to capture the views of our children and young people. This can be done with a standardised form provided on the PEP, or via more bespoke or individualised methods completed by the school.

Each views, wishes and feelings section is quality assured along with the other sections of the PEP document. Data indicates that the quality and completion of the views, wishes and feelings declines at secondary school. This can be due to a poor quality PEP, or sometimes because the young person has stated that they do not want to complete this section.

## Aspiration Pathway

The new Aspiration Pathway is another format in which we obtain the views, wishes and feelings of our children in regards to what they want to achieve in the future. Our pupils share their goals and dreams for the future, as well as identifying what steps are required in order to achieve this.



Aspiration Pathway for a Year 1 Child

Early Years PEP views page

|       |          |
|-------|----------|
| Gold  | 0 (0%)   |
| Green | 25 (89%) |
| Amber | 2 (7%)   |
| Red   | 1 (4%)   |

Primary PEP views page

|       |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Gold  | 22 (15%)  |
| Green | 117 (80%) |
| Amber | 6 (4%)    |
| Red   | 2 (1%)    |

Secondary PEP views page

|       |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Gold  | 7 (3%)    |
| Green | 156 (76%) |
| Amber | 30 (15%)  |
| Red   | 12 (6%)   |

Post 16 PEP views page

|       |          |
|-------|----------|
| Gold  | 0 (0%)   |
| Green | 25 (29%) |
| Amber | 1(1%)    |
| Red   | 60 (70%) |

Total PEP views page

|       |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Gold  | 29 (6%)   |
| Green | 323 (70%) |
| Amber | 39 (8%)   |
| Red   | 75 (16%)  |

# Voice of the Child

## Early Years Personal Education Plans

Below are examples of what our children in nursery have told us within their Autumn 2023 Personal Education Plans:

"I like to roll playdough and cut shapes, making marks with paint, pencils and chalking on the board"

[Things I don't like doing in nursery]  
"Sitting for circle time"

"I like to play with my sister and we like to make dinner in the kitchen"

[Things I don't like doing in nursery]  
"Tidy up time and not going outside"

"I like to sit on my key workers knee and have a cuddle when I am feeling upset or tired"

"I don't like some of the sounds that are played on the CD player such as sirens or a creaking door"

"I can complete shape sorters and do peg jigsaws, and loved getting soaked in the water play"

"I enjoy washing the baby dolls in the bubble water, drying them and putting a nappy on the baby"

"I don't like waiting for the next activity, for my dinner or waiting to play outside"

"I like to play 'Mr Wolf' with my friends in the garden and egg and spoon races"

"If I don't want to do something or I'm feeling tired or not well, I will find my own space by hiding under the table or chair"

"I like everything – I am a happy girl!"

"I love to make sticky pictures and play in the home corner kitchen preparing the food and setting the table"

"I don't like coming inside after outdoor play"

"I like to dance to my favourite songs and music. I love to climb and run as fast as I can and I like to chase my friends in the garden"

[Things I don't like doing in nursery]  
"Listening in large groups as I find it difficult to concentrate"

"I like to make my own game up of hide and seek to see who can find me. I will hide under the table or chair"

"I don't like it when the routine changes or when new adults come to work in my room"

# Voice of the Child

## Statutory School Age Personal Education Plans

Below are examples of what our children and young people attending school have told us within their Autumn 2023 Personal Education Plans:

Things I like about school (KS1):  
*"Playing in PE, playing with my brother in breakfast club, the Rainforest and Rainbow Dream Den, my teacher and dance. I like litter picking at playtimes with Miss XXXX"*

Things that would make school better (KS1):  
*"I'd like to do more PE. I like school but not loads of work"*

Things I like about school (KS1):  
*"I like drawing pictures and colouring them in. I like playing with my friends and having fun. I like going to sensory and having some time on the Lego. I like speaking to the teachers."*

Tell us more about education or your care arrangements / Lessons you enjoy (KS3):  
*"My foster placement is amazing. I would still like to have friends for tea or over for a sleepover."*

Things that worry me about school (KS3):  
*"Loads of people and being behind in lessons"*

Tell us more about education or your care arrangements / Lessons you enjoy (KS3):  
*"Maths because I am doing really well in my SPARXs and am top of the class"*

Things that would make school better (KS1):  
*"If we had a bigger playground!"*

Things I like about school (KS1):  
*"I like staying healthy and hydrating. I like playing games in Shine"*

Things that would make school better (KS1):  
*"Spending more time with my brother"*

Things that worry me about school (KS3):  
*"Nothing so far although a little nervous about algebra in lesson. I find it difficult to make friends but I'm working on this"*

Tell us more about education or your care arrangements / Lessons you enjoy (KS3):  
*"Art because I feel like my drawings look really realistic compared to year 7. We are learning about Luke Dixon and I like how does his drawings, they are really inspiring."*

Things that worry me about school (KS3):  
*"Nothing worries me about school"*

Things that would make school better (KS2):  
*"Recently there has been friend struggles with another girl in my class, however we are now friends again"*

Things I like about school (KS2):  
*"I like my teacher Miss XXXX. She is funny. I have good friends."*

Things that would make school better (KS2):  
*"Make the classroom a little bit quieter"*

Tell us more about education or your care arrangements / Lessons you enjoy (KS4):  
*"I feel that I have learnt so much, especially in English, I now longer need an interpreter when communicating."*

Things that worry me about school are (KS4):  
*"Don't like asking for help."*

Tell us more about education or your care arrangements / Lessons you enjoy (KS4):  
*"I feel I am good in all areas of my education, although need support to catch up with my peers"*

Things I like about school (KS2):  
*"I like English. I like the different stories. We are reading 'How to train your Dragon' at the moment"*

Things that would make school better (KS2):  
*"More playtime, less lessons"*

Things I like about school (KS2):  
*"Playing with my friends, doing art with my art therapist and working with my tutor"*

Things that worry me about school are (KS4):  
*"My friendships are a worry. I sometimes worry if I have the right friends"*

Tell us more about education or your care arrangements / Lessons you enjoy (KS4):  
*"I am enjoying coming to school each day"*

Things that worry me about school are (KS4):  
*"My behaviour and results (exams)."*

# Voice of the Child

## Post-16 Personal Education Plans

Below are example of what our Post-16 young people have told us within their Autumn 2023 Personal Education Plans:

“Everything is going well, happy at college and happy at home”

“Not sure what to do at the moment – thinking about being a chef but it’s long hours”

“I have a good group of friends at college. I enjoy college and I’m on top of my studies. I enjoy going to the gym with friends outside of college”

“Everything, I enjoy college very much”



“I am also very tired most of the time and struggle to get into college on time and also stay awake when in college”

“Not worried about anything at the moment, everything is ok”

“I want to be in education and learn new skills”

“I am worried in college about the number of students who are arguing and fighting about wars”



# Attainment Early Years 2022-2023

## Children we Look After

| Children we Look After |                   |           |                      |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| 2021-2022              |                   | 2022-2023 |                      |
| National               | St Helens         | National  | St Helens            |
| 27%                    | 40% <b>(+13%)</b> | 29%       | 27.3% <b>(-1.7%)</b> |

## Children with a Social Worker

| Children with a Social Worker |                  |           |                      |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| 2021-2022                     |                  | 2022-2023 |                      |
| National                      | St Helens        | National  | St Helens            |
| 23%                           | 17% <b>(-6%)</b> | 39%       | 287.3% <b>(-11%)</b> |

## Findings and reflections - CLA

- There has been a decrease in the percentage of pupils achieving GLD compared to 2021/2022.
- Despite this, for 2022-2023, the percentage of pupils achieving GLD is marginally in line with the national average for Children we Look After.
- Review of individual level data indicates that the main area in which our Early Years pupils did not achieve GLD was in literacy, both reading but in particular, writing.
- Understanding the World was another key improvement area; however, this difference is usually attributed to the lived experience of some of our children. The attainment gap usually narrows in this area as their time in education and a stable placement increases.

## Findings and reflections - CwSW

- Early Years outcomes for Children with a Social Worker are significantly below the national average for the second consecutive year.
- However, there was an improvement of 11% of pupil achieving GLD this academic year compared to 2021-2022.

## Attainment Phonics 2022-2023

### Children we Look After

| Children we Look After |                |           |               |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| 2021-2022              |                | 2022-2023 |               |
| National               | St Helens      | National  | St Helens     |
| 46%                    | 62.5% (+16.5%) | 52%       | 61.1% (+9.1%) |

### Children with a Social Worker

| Children with a Social Worker |            |           |           |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| 2021-2022                     |            | 2022-2023 |           |
| National                      | St Helens  | National  | St Helens |
| 49%                           | 37% (-12%) | 52%       | 58% (+6%) |

### Findings and reflections - CLA

- For the second consecutive year, St Helens CLA children achieved higher than the regional and national average for phonics.
- However, our 2022-2023 results were 1.4% below the previous academic year.

### Findings and reflections - CwSW

- Phonics attainment for Children with a Social Worker is 6% above the national average.
- There has also been an 21% increase from last year's attainment data.



# Attainment Key Stage 1 2022-2023

## Children We Look After

|         | 2021-2022 |                  | 2022-2023 |                    |
|---------|-----------|------------------|-----------|--------------------|
|         | National  | St Helens        | National  | St Helens          |
| Reading | 36%       | 35% <b>(-1%)</b> | 40%       | 80% <b>(+40%)</b>  |
| Writing | 27%       | 35% <b>(+8%)</b> | 31%       | 80% <b>(+49%)</b>  |
| Maths   | 35%       | 35%              | 40%       | 100% <b>(+60%)</b> |
| Science | 46%       | 50% <b>(+4%)</b> | 50%       | 100% <b>(+50%)</b> |
| RWM     | 24%       | 30% <b>(+6%)</b> | 27%       | 80% <b>(+53%)</b>  |
| RWMS    | 24%       | 30% <b>(+6%)</b> | 27%       | 80% <b>(+53%)</b>  |

## Findings and reflections - CLA

- Key Stage 1 results for 2022-2023 significantly exceeded the national average.
- There is also a significant improvement from our 2021-2022 results.

## Children with a Social Worker

|         | 2021-2022 |                  | 2022-2023 |                   |
|---------|-----------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|
|         | National  | St Helens        | National  | St Helens         |
| Reading | 38%       | 39% <b>(+1%)</b> | 40%       | 51% <b>(+11%)</b> |
| Writing | 29%       | 35% <b>(+6%)</b> | 31%       | 48% <b>(+17%)</b> |
| Maths   | 38%       | 37% <b>(-1%)</b> | 41%       | 44% <b>(+3%)</b>  |
| Science | 49%       | 53% <b>(+4%)</b> | 51%       | 59% <b>(+8%)</b>  |
| RWM     | 25%       | 24% <b>(-1%)</b> | 28%       | 38% <b>(+10%)</b> |
| RWMS    | 25%       | 24% <b>(-1%)</b> | 27%       | 38% <b>(+11%)</b> |

## Findings and reflections - CwSW

- For Children with a Social Worker, Key Stage 1 attainment data is consistently above the national average for 2022-2023.
- There has also been an improvement in results when compared to 2021-2022 academic year.

# Attainment Key Stage 2 2022-2023

| Children we Look After |           |                       |           |                      |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
|                        | 2021-2022 |                       | 2022-2023 |                      |
|                        | National  | St Helens             | National  | St Helens            |
| RWM                    | 26%       | 29.4% <b>(+3.4%)</b>  | 32%       | 38.5% <b>(+6.5%)</b> |
| Reading                | 42%       | 52.9% <b>(+10.9%)</b> | 48%       | 38.5% <b>(-9.5%)</b> |
| Writing TA             | 35%       | 41.2% <b>(+6.2%)</b>  | 42%       | 38.5% <b>(-3.5%)</b> |
| Maths                  | 36%       | 52.9% <b>(+16.9%)</b> | 44%       | 53.8% <b>(+9.8%)</b> |
| GPS                    | 39%       | 44.1% <b>(+5.1%)</b>  | 44%       | 53.8% <b>(+9.8%)</b> |

| Children with a Social Worker |           |                    |           |                     |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|
|                               | 2021-2022 |                    | 2022-2023 |                     |
|                               | National  | St Helens          | National  | St Helens           |
| RWM                           | 23.5%     | 24% <b>(+0.5%)</b> | 25.5%     | 18% <b>(-7.5%)</b>  |
| Reading                       | 38%       | 43% <b>(+5%)</b>   | 38.7%     | 27% <b>(-11.7%)</b> |
| Writing TA                    | 32.1%     | 35% <b>(+2.8%)</b> | 35%       | 27% <b>(-8%)</b>    |
| Maths                         | 33%       | 35% <b>(+2%)</b>   | 35.6%     | 27% <b>(-8.6%)</b>  |
| GPS                           | 35%       | 34% <b>(-1%)</b>   | 36.3%     | 29% <b>(-7.3%)</b>  |

## Findings and reflections - CLA

- In KS2, for RWM combined, maths and GPS, our pupils achieved significantly higher than the national average.
- The 2022-2023 results in these areas also exceeded the previous year's data.
- Outcomes in reading and writing are a concern as they fall below the national average and last year's attainment data.

## Findings and reflections - CwSW

- Outcomes for Children with a Social Worker for KS2 were below the national average for 2022-2023.
- There has also been a reduction from 2021-2022 outcomes.

# Attainment Key Stage 4 2022-2023

| Children We Look After             |           |                      |           |                      |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
|                                    | 2021-2022 |                      | 2022-2023 |                      |
|                                    | National  | St Helens            | National  | St Helens            |
| Overall Average Attainment 8 Score | 20.4      | 21.8 <b>(+1.4)</b>   | 12.3      | 16.3 <b>(+4)</b>     |
| Overall Average Progress 8 Score   | -1.30     | -1.25 <b>(+0.5)</b>  | -1.25     | -1.67 <b>(-0.42)</b> |
| English Average Attainment Score   | 4.6       | 4.9 <b>(+0.3)</b>    | 2.7       | 3.9 <b>(+1.2)</b>    |
| English Average Progress Score     | -1.42     | -1.32 <b>(+0.10)</b> | -0.55     | -1.53 <b>(-0.98)</b> |
| Maths Average Attainment Score     | 4.1       | 4.2 <b>(+0.1)</b>    | 2.5       | 3.3 <b>(+0.8)</b>    |
| Maths Average Progress Score       | -1.03     | -1.17 <b>(-0.14)</b> | -0.39     | -1.41 <b>(-1.2)</b>  |
| EBacc Average Attainment Score     | 5.5       | 5.6 <b>(+0.1)</b>    | 3.3       | 4.1 <b>(+0.8)</b>    |
| EBacc Average Progress Score       | -1.36     | -1.35 <b>(+0.01)</b> | -0.52     | -1.68 <b>(-1.16)</b> |
| Other Attainment Score             | 6.2       | 7.1 <b>(+0.9)</b>    | 3.7       | 5.1 <b>(+1.4)</b>    |
| Other Progress Score               | -1.43     | -1.16 <b>(+0.27)</b> | -0.56     | -1.59 <b>(-1.03)</b> |

Findings and reflections

- This year’s KS4 attainment data reflects a consistent pattern where overall average Attainment 8 scores are higher than the national average. However, Progress 8 is lower than the national average for 2022-2023.
- This year’s KS4 outcomes for the Virtual School are lower than 2021-2022 results.

# Attainment Key Stage 4 2022-2023

| Children with a Social Worker      |           |                      |           |                      |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
|                                    | 2021-2022 |                      | 2022-2023 |                      |
|                                    | National  | St Helens            | National  | St Helens            |
| Overall Average Attainment 8 Score | 15.9      | 14.7 <b>(-1.2)</b>   | 12.7      | 13.3 <b>(+0.6)</b>   |
| Overall Average Progress 8 Score   | -1.43     | -1.44 <b>(-0.01)</b> | -1.43     | -1.64 <b>(-0.21)</b> |
| English Average Attainment Score   | 3.7       | 3.4 <b>(-0.3)</b>    | 2.9       | 3.0 <b>(+0.1)</b>    |
| English Average Progress Score     | -0.95     | -0.90 <b>(+0.05)</b> | -0.84     | -1.30 <b>(-0.46)</b> |
| Maths Average Attainment Score     | 3.1       | 2.6 <b>(-0.5)</b>    | 2.6       | 2.7 <b>(+0.1)</b>    |
| Maths Average Progress Score       | -0.78     | -0.86 <b>(-0.04)</b> | 0.67      | -1.09 <b>(-0.42)</b> |
| EBacc Average Attainment Score     | 4.4       | 3.6 <b>(-0.8)</b>    | 3.4       | 3.4                  |
| EBacc Average Progress Score       | -0.94     | -1.01 <b>(-0.7)</b>  | -0.80     | -1.27 <b>(-0.47)</b> |
| Other Attainment Score             | 4.8       | 5.0 <b>(+0.2)</b>    | 3.8       | 4.2 <b>(+0.4)</b>    |
| Other Progress Score               | -1.02     | -0.76 <b>(+0.26)</b> | -0.90     | -1.20 <b>(-0.30)</b> |

## Findings and reflections

- There has been a significant improvement in Attainment 8 across all areas for Children with a Social Worker compared to last academic year.
- However Progress 8 remains below the national average.
- There is an almost identical pattern that we have seen with out Looked After Children and this may suggest that if more progress was made, overall attainment could be higher.

## Post 16

This year, the Virtual School appointed a Post-16 Coordinator. Their role is a middle leadership responsibility for overseeing the completion and quality of Post-16 PEPs, ensuring any pupils who are NEET are supported and strategically improving outcomes for this cohort.

The Virtual School also has the support of a Careers Connect worker to support our pupils in exploring careers and NEET Prevention.

## Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

**27.7%** of Year 12 cohort are NEET (13 out of 47 pupils)

**28.8%** of Year 13 cohort are NEET (15 out of 52 pupils)

Overall NEET figure: **28.3%** (28 out of 99 pupils)

**100% of our NEET young people are in borough.**

There is robust oversight and work being completed with the newly appointed Post-16 Coordinator for each of these pupils, including home visits. All NEET young people are discussed regularly, including in Middle Leadership Meetings.

The Virtual School has purchased additional support from Careers Connect for 2 days per week to ensure that this offer continues for Key Stage 4 pupils upwards. This has further increased capacity across the Post-16 Team.

## Careers

### Careers Officer

- Seconded from Careers Connect and working alongside the Post-16 Coordinator.
- Pre and Post 16 careers guidance, starting from Key Stage 4
- Targeted support for identified pupils
- NEET Prevention work
- Support around CVs and job applications

### Careers event

The Virtual School attended an event in 2023 at St Cuthberts High School, around informing students about different career options and pathways. As well as the Virtual School, there were Local Authority stalls for Children's Social Care, Educational Psychology and the music service.

## UASC

There are currently 33 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in St Helens.

Of the 33:

- 1 is 14 years of age
- 7 are 16 years of age
- 17 are 17 years of age
- 8 are 18 years of age.
- 91% are male and 9% are female.
- 63% of Post-16 UASC are currently enrolled on ESOL courses. Some of those young people waiting can be because they have arrived mid-way through an academic year and are waiting for the next cohort to start.
- However, there are currently no ESOL courses offered in St Helens for young people under 19.
- For school-aged UASC, EAL support can be accessed through TESSA.

# Care Leavers

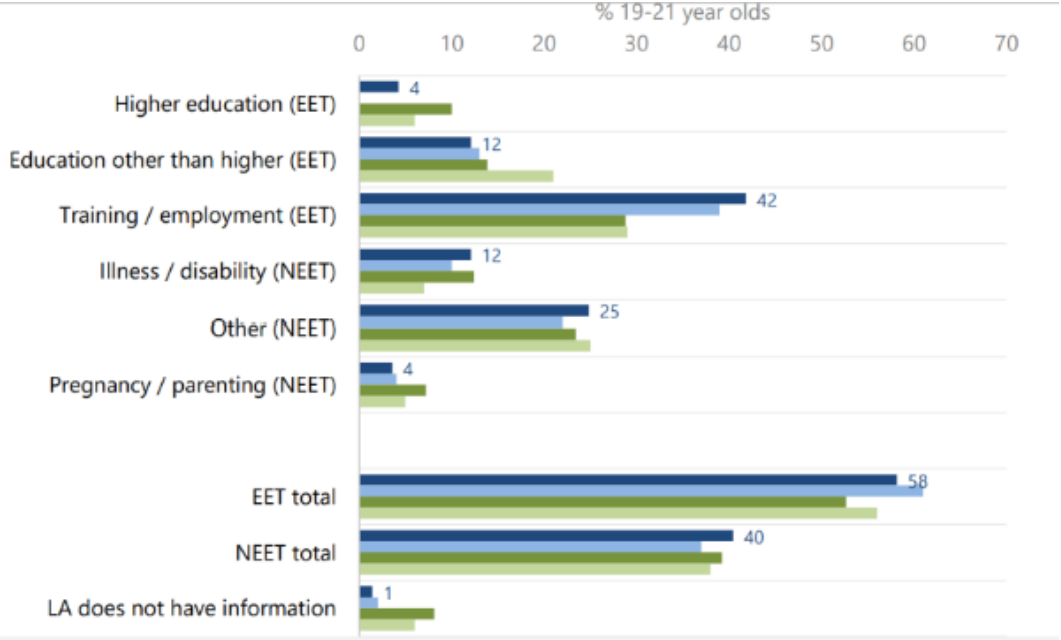
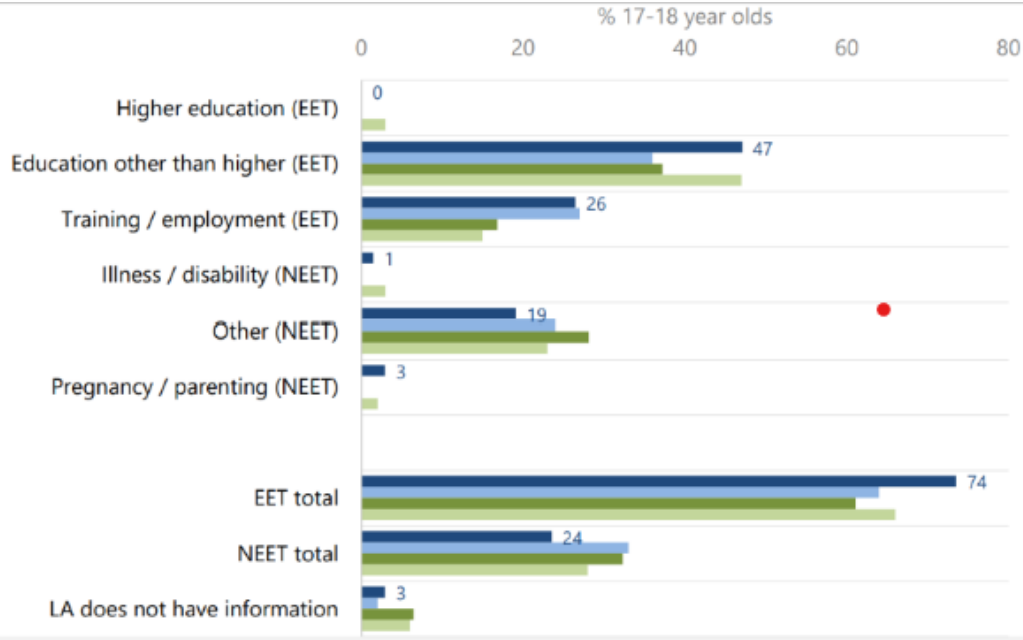
The Virtual School works in close conjunction with our Futures Team, to support the transition of our young people into adulthood.

Currently, **64%** of our Care Leavers are engaged in Education, Employment or Training (EET).

Below is the breakdown of data at the end of the 2023-2024 financial year (this includes the 17-19 year old cohort and the 19-21 year old cohort combined).

The final graph shows both cohorts with St Helens in blue and the National Average in light green.

|           | Higher Education | Education (not higher) | Training or Employment | NEET (due to illness or disability) | NEET | NEET due to pregnancy or parenting |
|-----------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|
| St Helens | 3%               | 24%                    | 37%                    | 9%                                  | 23%  | 3%                                 |



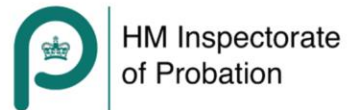
# Youth Justice Service

- In November 2022, St Helens Youth Justice Service was inspected and judged to be Good, with elements of Outstanding.
- The Virtual School Head sits on the Youth Justice Board to strategically implement change for children with a social worker who have experienced criminality.
- Youth Justice have recruited an Education Re-engagement Worker, who works in close collaboration with the Virtual School, in order to provide robust oversight of any children or young people open to YJS who are either disengaged from education or who have ongoing attendance issues.
- The Education Re-engagement Worker and Virtual School Head work closely and share up-to-date attendance data, obtained through Welfare Call, to ensure regular monitoring of vulnerable students.
- Children of concern registers are cross referenced between the Virtual School and Youth Justice Service in order to ensure that our most vulnerable children are robustly tracked and receive support and interventions in a timely manner.
- Half-termly education meetings have been put in place between the Virtual School, key education staff and Youth Justice Service to discuss any pupils of concern and emerging themes or trends.
- The Attendance and Behaviour Coordinator is working with some of our more vulnerable pupils to help support them back into education.

## Cohort Information

At the time of writing this report, there were:

- **15** children and young people we Look After who were open to the Youth Justice Service.
- **53%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- **4** of these CYP are severely persistently absent; **3** are persistently absent.
- For Previously Looked After Children, **9** are severely persistently absent and **2** are persistently absent.
- There are **6** children and young people currently open to Youth Justice who have a Child Protection Plan.
- **83%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- There are **23** children and young people currently open to Youth Justice who have a Child in Need Plan.
- **65%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- There have been **5** young people known to YJS who have been permanently excluded from school.
- **74.51%** of the young people open to YJS have an identified SEND need.
- There are currently **no** CLA or Children with a Social Worker who are in custody.



An inspection of youth offending services in  
**St Helens**

HM Inspectorate of Probation, February 2023



Snuffle Mats made  
by our children and  
young people and  
donated to dogs  
trust.



# Children with a Social Worker

St Helens Virtual School has received confirmation of their allocation from the DfE, for Children with a Social Worker over the next two years:

- **2023/2024** - £100,000
- **2024/2025** - £100,000

As it is such a significant area of focus in improving outcomes, strategic responsibility for CWSW has now been placed with the Virtual School Head. With the introduction of BI Dashboards and data packs available on Nexus for this cohort, the Virtual School now has greater and more accurate oversight of the strengths and areas of development for this group of children.

As outcomes for this cohort are below national for both attainment and attendance, this is a considerable area of improvement for the next academic year.

## Projects and Initiatives

- **Nurture Pilot** – two of our secondary schools have agreed to take part in our Nurture Pilot, where both schools will receive training and a start up grant to run a full time nurture provision for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils. The conditions of the pilot dictate that the provision is to be accessed by either Looked After Children or Children with a Social Worker in order to address social and emotional developmental delays, improve mental health and behaviour and reduce suspensions.
- **Attendance Project** – two schools (one secondary and one specialist provision) have been selected and agreed to participate with an innovative new attendance project. This project is being completed in conjunction with identified children’s social workers and is a venture which aims to improve how we engage with families, children and young people, to support their interests and improve their attendance in school.
- **BI Data Dashboards** – The Virtual School now has access to dedicated BI Data Dashboards which provide key data around children with a social worker, including demographic information, attendance and suspensions. Attainment data can also be collected from Nexus.
- **Education review of multi-agency plans** – Child in Need and Child Protection Plans are dip sampled on a quarterly basis to assess whether educational issues are appropriately identified and addressed through the child’s plan. Findings are reported back to senior leaders including the Principle Social Worker.

### Outcomes and Concerns:

- June 2023 outcomes report, highlighted that St Helens CIN population (March 2022) has the second highest absence rate compared to our regional counterparts (19.7%).
- The report also highlighted that the same CIN cohort has the highest level of persistent absenteeism in comparison to other regional authorities (57.3%).
- St Helens CIN in March 2022 achieved 16.6 in Attainment 8 scores; this sits 4.2 below the national average.
- St Helens CIN cohort achieved the second lowest percentage of children achieving the Expected Standard in Reading, Writing and Maths in the North West at 18%, 10% below the national average.
- Therefore, improving outcomes for Children with a Social Worker is a key area of development on the 2023-2024 Improvement Plan.

## Cohort Information

At the time of writing the annual report, the current cohort was as follows:

### Child in Need

- **567** children have a Child in Need Plan. **411** of these have a corresponding CAPITA record.
- **53.09%** are male; **44.09%** are female and **2.82%** are unclassified.
- **15.5%** have been on a Child in Need Plan for longer than 12 months.
- **88 (21.5%)** have an Education Health and Care Plan
- **106 (25.9%)** have SEN Support.

### Child Protection

- **197** children have a Child Protection Plan. **118** of these have a corresponding CAPITA record.
- **50.76%** of these are male; **47.72%** are female and **1.52%** are unclassified.
- **21.3%** are on a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time.
- **18.8%** of the children on a Child Protection Plan, have been on a plan for over 12 months.
- **11 (8.7%)** have an Education Health and Care Plan
- **42 (33.3%)** have SEN support

It is important to note that this is a fluid cohort and children can have plans for varying amounts of times.

# Previously Looked After Children

## Previously Looked After Children

The Virtual School has been granted **£29,440** to fulfil their duties for Previously Looked After Children.

Our newly seconded Advisory Teacher and Training Lead will also take strategic responsibility for Previously Looked After Children. A key component for the 2023-2024 improvement plan, will be developing the Virtual School offer for Previously Looked After Children.

## What is our offer?

- The Virtual School now has a named member of staff who leads on support for Previously Looked After Children. Now there is increased capacity in place, our offer for Previously Looked After Children and their families can increase.
- Although the Virtual School's responsibility is to provide advice and guidance, we do offer support to schools and families for more complex cases. This has included:
- Home visits to support with attendance
- Attending multi-agency meetings
- Signposting to specific services
- Providing additional funding in order to obtain support in a timely manner (e.g. Educational Psychology Assessment).

**Northwest Fostering and Adoption Subgroup** – our PLAC Coordinator meets with a regional group on a termly basis in order to develop a conjoined approach for Looked After Children whose adoption is in the process of being finalised. Due to this cohort of children often moving across different local areas, the purpose of the group is to improve signposting to schools, share contact details and external agencies that are relevant, as well as attend final PEP meetings so families can meet in person with their new borough contact. The group reviews the offer provided to families with regards to things such as training opportunities. The meetings are also attended by Together for Adoption to ensure a coordinated approach and this initiative supports a smooth transition for children and young people who are in the process of becoming adopted.

## Cohort Information

- There are currently **319** Previously Looked After Children within St Helens schools. This includes:
- **189** children within Primary Schools
- **127** young people within Secondary Schools
- **3** children within Specialist Provision



## Kinship Care

In 2024, the Government launched its new **National Kinship Strategy: Championing Kinship Care.**

Within this document, new duties have been placed with the Virtual School. The strategy outlines:

*Virtual School Heads and designated teachers provide advice and information to schools to promote the educational achievement of children who have left local authority care through a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order.*

*As part of their strategic role, Virtual School Heads also promote the educational achievement of:*

- *all children in kinship care assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker,*
- *children who have previously had a social worker.*

*Designated Safeguarding Leads provide help for these children within schools by supportively engaging with parents and carers when families face difficult circumstances or if there are safeguarding concerns and by promoting their education and welfare.*

# Non-Negotiables

In addition to our Three Obsessions, in order to ensure that each and every child under The Virtual School receives high quality, consistent support, the Virtual School has introduced our 'non-negotiables'.

These are fundamental expectations that must be adhered to by all professionals working with Looked After Children in education, in order to ensure the best possible outcomes.

VIRTUAL  
SCHOOL



## NON-NEGOTIABLES

1

We must have the highest aspirations for all Looked After Children, post Looked After Children and children with a social worker. We should hold the same standards and aspirations as we would children within our own lives. This is our responsibility as corporate parents.

2

No child under the Virtual School should have a reduced timetable unless it is an extreme circumstance and is in line with the legal framework. Where a school or setting may be facing challenges, the Virtual School will always offer support and guidance.

3

Everyone working with a pupil of the Virtual School should have consideration, empathy and understanding to the experiences the child or young person may have faced, and the impact this may have on their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

## Attendance Data

Attendance, Persistent Absenteeism and Severe Persistent Absenteeism, continues to be an area of high priority for the Virtual School.

| CwLA           | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022     | 2022-2023     |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Virtual School | 88.6%     | 91.2% (+2.6%) | 90.3% (-0.9%) |
| National CLA   | 90%       | 90%           | 91%           |

| CwSW             | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022     | 2022-2023   |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| St Helens (CSWS) | 85.6%     | 84.7% (-0.9%) | 83% (-1.7%) |
| National (CSWS)  | 88.6%     | 86.2%         | 85%         |

## Persistent Absenteeism

| CwLA - PA      | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022      | 2022-2023     |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Virtual School | 38.7%     | 20.3% (-18.4%) | 25.1% (+4.8%) |
| National CLA   | 31%       | 19%            | 22%           |

| CwSW - PA        | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022     | 2022-2023   |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| St Helens (CSWS) | 40.9%     | 43.1% (+2.2%) | 47% (+3.9%) |
| National (CSWS)  | 31.3%     | 37.4%         | 43%         |

## Severe PA

| CwLA - SPA     | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022    | 2022-2023    |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| Virtual School | 0.4%      | 4.8% (+4.4%) | 6.9% (+2.1%) |
| National CLA   | 3%        | 3%           | 5%           |

| CwSW - SPA       | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022    | 2022-2023   |
|------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| St Helens (CSWS) | 5.5%      | 8.4% (+2.9%) | 13% (+4.6%) |
| National (CSWS)  | 3.8%      | 5.6%         | 10%         |

# Attendance

## Projects and Initiatives

- Welfare Call Analytics has been purchased to provide more robust oversight and deeper analysis of data.
- Persistently Absent Children we Look After are tracked on a fortnightly basis to measure progress. This spreadsheet is reviewed within Middle Leadership Meetings and children causing concern have a targeted plan put in place.
- Children Placed With Parents have their attendance tracked on a fortnightly basis in order to proactively identify any themes or issues.
- Our newly appointed Attendance and Behaviour Coordinator works directly with some of our most vulnerable children and young people. They spend time building an authentic relationship and work creatively to try and engage these young people back into education.
- The Virtual School was the first education setting to present at the newly launched Attendance and Behaviour Board. This is a multi-agency panel in which individual education settings present data and analysis around their attendance, suspension and exclusion figures. This forum provides an ideal environment to pose professional challenge in order to improve outcomes.
- As attendance continued to be a prevalent issue for those children with a social worker, the Virtual School has launched an Attendance Pilot with two of our schools, to look how practitioners from education and social care work to engage families and build esteem in young people.
- The Virtual School works closely and meetings regularly to discuss the attendance data of our Youth Justice Service cohort. This ensures robust oversight and that some of our most vulnerable children are consistently engaged in education.

# Suspensions and Exclusions

## Suspension Data

The Fixed Period Exclusion Rate for 2022/2023 CLA pupils was **26.99 per 100 pupils**. This is a increase of **8.77** from the previous year, however, St Helens Virtual School has remained below the national average for the third consecutive year.

| CwLA           | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022      | 2022-2023     |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Virtual School | 10.47     | 18.22 (+ 7.75) | 26.99 (+8.77) |
| National       | 15.00     | 24             | 28.00         |

| CwSW           | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022      | 2022-2023      |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|
| Virtual School | 15.00     | 27.00 (+12.00) | 41.00 (+14.00) |
| National       | 16.00     | 25.00          | 30.00          |

## Exclusion Data

For **2022/2023**, the **CLA** Permanent Exclusion Rate is **0.57** which is greater than the national average of **0.16**.

However, it is important to clarify that only **one child** was Permanently Excluded in 2022-2023, whilst they were in care. The figure above related to two children, the second of which was previously in care, but not at the point they were Permanently Excluded.

For **2022/2023**, the Permanent Exclusion Rate for children with a Child in Need Plan is **1.46**, which is **considerably higher** than the national average of **0.50**.

For **2022/2023**, the Permanent Exclusion Rate for children with a Child Protection Plan is **0.66**, which is **lower** than the national average of **0.82**.

## Projects and Initiatives

- The Virtual School works closely with our children and young people, their parents and carers, their education settings and social workers to prevent Permeant Exclusion wherever possible.
- The Virtual School is currently completing a Nurture Pilot with two of our in-borough secondary schools. The project will see both schools set up a full time Nurture Provision to support the social and emotional developmental delays of both Children we Look After and Children with a Social Worker. This will provide intensive support and intervention for children who have experienced trauma in their lives and support the development of regulation strategies that should help to prevent escalated displays of behaviour in school that often leads to suspensions.
- Our newly appointed Attendance and Behaviour Coordinator works directly with some of our most vulnerable children and young people. They spend time building an authentic relationship and work creatively to try and engage these young people back into education, and reduce incidents of escalated behaviour.



# Inclusion

Within the Virtual School, given the complex background our children and young people have experienced, it is imperative that we champion their needs and ensure inclusion is at the heart of what we do. This is in line with our **Three Obsessions**.

## What have we achieved?

- Inclusion Officer seconded to the Virtual School who directly supports our children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans and identified SEND needs.
- Prevented and challenged exclusions and suspensions where appropriate and have provided intensive support for emerging behaviour concerns.
- Understanding that behaviour is a form of communication.
- Created our Non-Negotiables which coincide with our inclusive ethos within the Virtual School.
- Attended multiple attendance and behaviour meetings to ensure pupils are receiving appropriate support to access their education.
- Close collaborative working between the Virtual School, SEND, Children's Social Care and Educational Settings to develop and implement bespoke educational offers for some of our children and young people with the most complex needs.
- Service Level Agreement with St Helens Educational Psychology Service to ensure that children and young people receive assessment and support in a timely manner, as well as the delivery of strategic training around inclusion.
- Provide interim tuition to children and young people who have been waiting to access a new school place or special provision.



# TESSA

Triage for all **E**ducation **S**upport and **S**pecialist **A**dvice  
*for educational settings supporting children and young people*

# Think Equal

As part of the 2023-2024 improvement plan, the Virtual School has funded the 'Think Equal' Programme across 10 of our schools and private nurseries.

Think Equal is a global initiative which aims to end discrimination and the cycle of violence and ensure positive life outcomes for our children.

The programme is targeted to the Early Years (children aged 3-6), and aims to provide early intervention in order to promote valuing one another and healthy relationships.

Each pack provided to settings has been created by world-leading experts in the field of education, neuroscience, psychology and human rights.

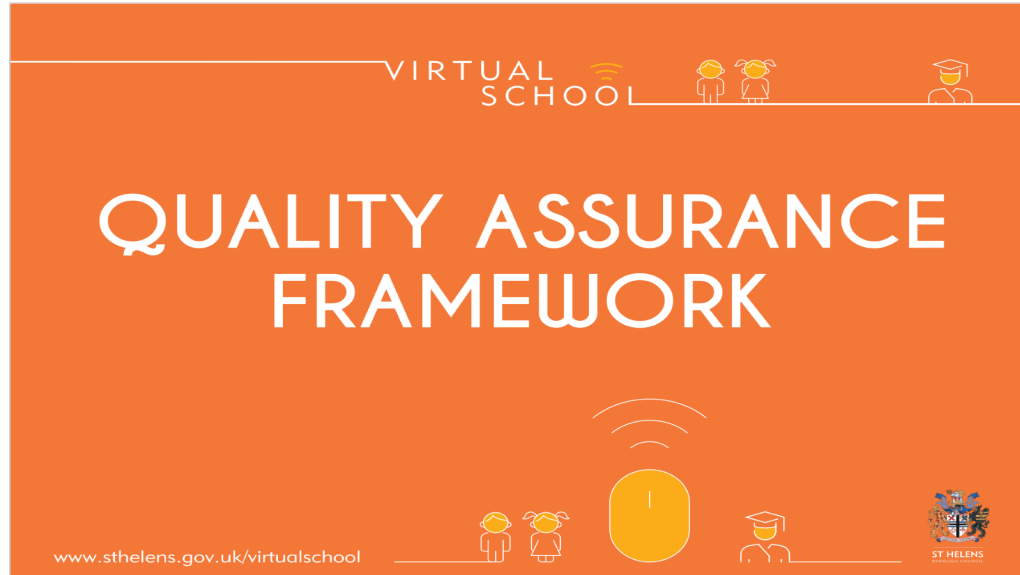


# Mental Health and Wellbeing

In the Virtual School, we acknowledge that the majority of our learners will have had adverse experiences and trauma prior to coming into care. It is therefore imperative that we provide targeted support for emotional health and wellbeing, and support professionals and education settings in ensuring healthy neurological development of our children.

- **Culture** – our Three Obsessions and Non-negotiables focus on inclusion and supporting the wellbeing of our children.
- **TESSA** – Centralised education triage service which utilises the graduated approach and provides support and dedicated plans to schools.
- **Lego Therapy** – training sessions to upskill school staff with the expertise to utilise this therapeutic approach.
- **ARC Project** – Pilot in which three schools have signed up to receive the accreditation around attachment and trauma.
- **Nurture Group Pilot** – Pilot in which two of our secondary schools are opening full time nurture provisions to address social and emotional developmental delays.
- **Desty Mentors** – A resource funded by the Virtual School and provided to schools to help develop resilience and self-confidence. This resource is not only accessed by CwLA, but also Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker.

# Quality Assurance Framework



Historically, the quality and content of Personal Education Plans was variable; due to a lack of capacity in the Virtual School, reviews of termly PEPs focused more on compliance rather than quality. This was also something that was noted by Ofsted during the 2023 ILACS inspection as an area of improvement.

Personal Education Plans are a statutory document for our children and young people We Look After, and it is key that this is completed to a high quality in order to ensure the best outcomes for our pupils. In 2022-2023, the Virtual School created a Quality Assurance Framework; a shared document for Designated Teachers, Social Workers and Virtual School Staff which clearly sets out the requirements for a high quality PEP. There are separate documents for Early Years, Statutory School Age and Post-16 cohorts, to reflect the different elements situated within their Personal Education Plan.

By creating this document, any ambiguity was removed. There are now clear, shared expectations regarding the content of Personal Education Plans, and what is required to achieve a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' judgement. The QA Framework also ensures that PEP Coordinators are reviewing PEPs consistently for all Children we Look After, both in and outside of St Helens.

## External Moderation Group

In order to further strengthen the Quality Assurance process, the Virtual School has established an external moderation group, who's purpose is to ensure that PEP Coordinators are quality assuring plans in line with the shared framework.

This group consists of:

- Nursery Headteacher
- School Effectiveness Consultant
- Quality Assurance Coordinator
- Post-16 representative from Carmel College
- Secondary Principal
- Preparing for Adulthood Manager
- Primary Headteacher
- Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager
- Team Manager, IRO Service

The External Moderation Group meet termly and review a randomly selected sample (around 10%) of Personal Education Plans from that term. Findings are collated into a report and shared with the Virtual School Team in order to improve practice.

| Quality Assurance Framework   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1. My PEP Meeting   |  |   |  |
| Gold  | Green  | Amber   | Red  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Has the child or young person been asked who they want to attend their meeting?</li><li>Up to date version details of attendees</li><li>Well detailed additional information is included.</li><li>All areas of the section are completed.</li><li>The child or young person is encouraged to attend the meeting</li><li>There is a picture updated of the child or young person.</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Up to date details of attendees</li><li>Up to date version details of attendees</li><li>Additional information is completed.</li><li>All areas of the section are completed.</li><li>If the child is not present, someone is allocated to feed back to them.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sections are partially completed.</li><li>There is minimal additional information.</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No sections are completed.</li><li>There is no additional information.</li></ul>   |
| 2. About Me   |  |   |  |
| Gold  | Green  | Amber   | Red  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>All personal information is completed.</li><li>High quality and creative life story work has been completed with the child or young person, or this is scheduled to take place.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>All personal information is completed.</li><li>Life story work has been completed or planned with the child or young person.</li><li>PEP review information is completed.</li><li>SDQ score is recorded and updated within a 12-month period.</li><li>The child can swim 25 metres or there is a plan to help them succeed this.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Some personal information is completed.</li><li>Poor quality life story work has been completed.</li><li>SDQ score has been recorded but has not been repeated within a 12-month period.</li><li>There is no plan recorded to help the child learn to swim.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No personal information is completed.</li><li>No life story work has been completed.</li><li>There is no SDQ score.</li></ul>  |
| 3. My Education   |  |   |  |
| Gold  | Green  | Amber   | Red  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The child or young person has chosen their own key person or mentor.</li><li>The PEP includes detailed language that creates a clear picture of the child's presentation, which is in line with legal frameworks and has been agreed with the Virtual School. NDIS/TE assessments are attached.</li><li>Attendance is exceptional or attendance information has been completed and there is an exceptional plan of support in place. This includes well detailed support that is bespoke to the child and is creative and innovative.</li><li>Behaviour information has been completed and either there are no concerns or, there is an exceptional plan of support in place. This includes well detailed support that is bespoke to the child and is creative and innovative.</li><li>Emotional health and wellbeing information has been completed and either there are no concerns or, there is an exceptional plan of support in place. This includes well detailed</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>School details are completed.</li><li>A mentor/key person has been named.</li><li>The child is receiving full 25 hours education unless there is an exceptional circumstance which is in line with legal frameworks and has been agreed with the Virtual School. NDIS/TE assessments are attached.</li><li>If the child has SEND or an EHCP, an overview of their current plan and targets has been provided.</li><li>For relevant year groups, key transition plans are detailed.</li><li>The child or young person's EHCP is updated annually.</li><li>Presentation of the child is updated and has an appropriate level of detail.</li><li>Behaviour information has been completed and there is a good plan of support in place if required.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>There are missing details.</li><li>The child is not receiving 25 hours education, but NDIS/TE paperwork has been attached.</li><li>Presentation of the child is completed but is poorly detailed.</li><li>Attendance information has been completed and there is a poor plan of support in place.</li><li>Behaviour information has been completed and there is a poor plan of support in place.</li><li>Emotional health and wellbeing information has been completed and there is a poor plan of support in place.</li><li>For relevant year groups, key transition plans are poorly detailed.</li><li>The child is moving to a Requires Improvement school and there is no rationale in place.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Details have not been completed.</li><li>The child is not receiving 25 hours education and no NDIS/TE paperwork has been completed or attached.</li><li>Presentation of the child has not been completed.</li><li>There is no attendance information and no plan in place.</li><li>There is no behavioural information and no plan in place.</li><li>There is no emotional health and wellbeing information and no plan in place.</li><li>There is no transition information or plan in place for relevant year groups.</li><li>The child is moving to an inadequate school and there is no rationale.</li></ul> |





All of our children moving into Reception receive a 'Starting School Pack'.

Each pack includes:

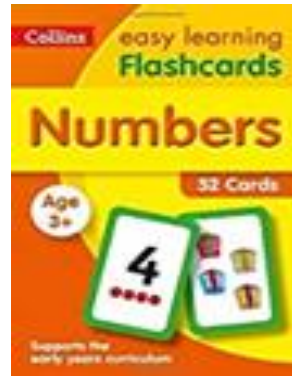
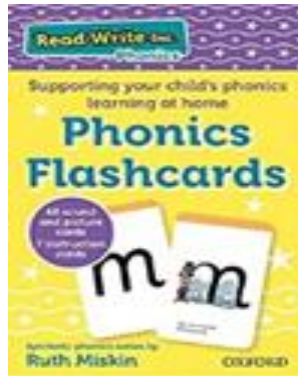
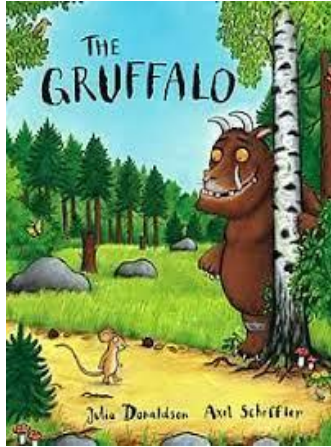
-

# Reception Class Packs

## Rainbow Pack



## Reception Class



## Rainbow Pack

This pack is sent out to our children during their first term in Reception Class. The aim is for the packs to provide families with information about how they can support their child's learning at home.

Each pack includes:

- Information about what children do in Reception Class and how to support their learning at home.
- A story to share together and ideas for games to play related to that story.
- Maths number cards, with games to play.
- Phonics cards with suggested activities.
- A copy of 'Small Talk' provided by The Communication Trust. Parents and carers can use this to assess their child's speech and language development.



# Year 1 Phonics Pack

## Rainbow Pack



## Year 1 Phonics

### Rainbow Pack - Phonics

This pack includes information about the Year 1 phonics screening check.

#### What is phonics?

Phonics is a method of learning to read. Phonics works by breaking each word up into its individual sounds before blending those sounds back together to make the word. Children learn to 'decode' words by breaking them down into sounds. Research has shown that phonics, when taught correctly, can be the most effective way of teaching children to learn to read. Sounds are taught from easiest to hardest: starting with single letter sounds and then moving on to two letters making a sound and then three and so on. Learning phonics and learning to read is one of the most important achievements children in early education as it gives your child the skills they need to move forward in every subject.



#### What is the Year 1 phonics screening check?

The phonics screening check is taken by all children in Year 1 in England and is usually taken in June. It is designed to give teachers and parents information on how your child is progressing in phonics. It will help to identify whether your child needs additional support at this stage so that they do not fall behind in this vital early reading skill.

St Andrew's Virtual School



## Year 1 Phonics Pack

The Year 1 Phonics Pack is sent to children currently in Year 1 at the end of the spring term. This resource is designed to help families understand the Year 1 phonics check and how they can support their child in preparing for this.

The school or educational setting of each child is consulted in order to obtain which phonics scheme they are using prior to the packs being sent out. This ensures consistency for our children.

Information is provided for families as well as phonic resources and ideas of games to play.

# Key Stage 2 Transition Pack

This pack is provided to our children starting secondary school. The pack provides them with all the equipment they will need to start Key Stage 3, and aims to further support the transition process.

Each child receives:

- £30 gift voucher for a school bag of their choice
- Scientific calculator
- Stationary bundle (pen's, pencils, highlighters etc.)
- Language dictionary
- Geometry set
- Post-it notes
- Book voucher to promote reading for pleasure.
- Picture frame for first day of school.



## Starting Secondary School

# Key Stage 4 Recognition



## Year 11 Leavers

All Year 11 leavers receive a handwritten card and a gift voucher as an acknowledgement of their hard work and dedication.

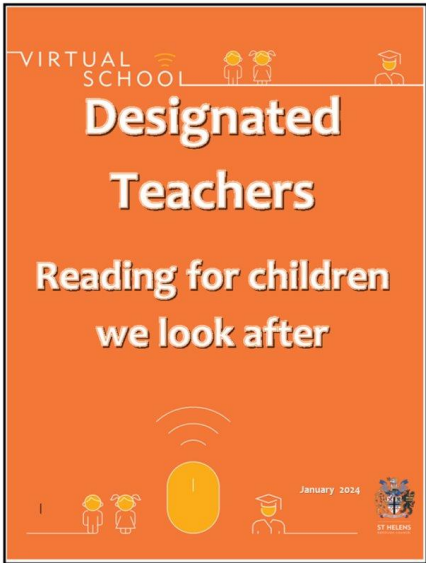
This gift not only provides well deserved recognition and develop self-esteem, but also supports the transition into KS5 education, employment or training.



# Love of Reading

For 2023-2024, reading, and in particularly the love of reading, is a priority for the Virtual School.

This originated from 2023 outcomes, where reading was identified as a particular area of development. In addition to this, we want to ensure that all of our children and young people develop a love of reading that they will carry with them wherever life takes them.



The Virtual School has developed targeted resources for Designated Teachers, to support them with incorporating reading initiatives into the child's learning journey and Personal Education Plan.

The booklet provides comprehensive information on reading initiatives, programmes and interventions that can be used not only with Children we Look After, but also those children and young people with a social worker.

The Virtual School wants to ensure that education settings and social workers use Pupil Premium Plus appropriately to promote reading, address any attainment gaps and provide new and exciting opportunities around literature.



## Reading Pilots

De La Salle School students visited the BookStop in St Helens to look around the shop and to choose books that were of interest to them, for them to take home, read, and keep.

The manager of the shop Nik, gave the students a tour of the facility and explained the future development of the shop including the event space upstairs.

Nik also provided a goody bag to each pupil, with some lovely treats which the students enjoyed. They also visited the 'Two Brothers' café inside the bookshop where they chose a hot or cold drink to enjoy whilst they started to read their new books.

The school were invoiced for the cost of the books and the drinks, and this was paid from PP+ and PP funding. The approximate cost including the books, transport (school minibus) and drinks was £50 of PP+ funds per student which was allocated on their Autumn term PEP through the targets section.



Hope Academy have been running a Book and Biscuits Club for students within their library. The group gather each week and read whilst enjoying a biscuit and a warm drink. Pupils discuss their books, share ideas and recommend books for one another to read.



# Training and Development

The Virtual School has a statutory responsibility to provide an array of training for our partners; this includes Designated Teachers, Social Workers and Foster Carers.

## **Festival of Learning**

In May 2023, the Virtual School funded a week-long Festival of Learning. This was an intensive programme of training and professional development, all focussed on the theme 'The Power of Connection'. Training sessions were delivered to school staff and Local Authority Officers around emotion coaching, neurodevelopment, safeguarding and relationships amongst others. This is an initiative that we aim to repeat each academic year in order to celebrate the importance of education and learning for our children and young people.

## **Desty Mentors**

The Virtual School continues to provide additional funding to schools to train Desty Mentors. This licensed programme upskills education colleagues to provide targeted emotional support for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children.

## **Lego Therapy**

Lego Therapy sessions were commissioned and funded by the Virtual School for our educational settings. Designated Teachers could book a place to enhance their skills in offering emotional support for children and young people through this key aspect of play. Due to its popularity, this is something that has continued into the Autumn Term 2023-2024, with a session held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and another session scheduled in for the Spring Term 2024.

## **Designated Teacher Forums**

Designated Teacher Forum is run every term; it is a face to face training and networking opportunity for our schools that provides invaluable opportunities to improve practice. The following sessions have been run for Designated Teachers over the academic year:

**Spring 2023** – Virtual School Updates; Advocacy Focus; Youth Justice; YPDAAT.

**Summer 2023** – Virtual School Updates; how to create a high-quality PEP target; introduction to the QA Framework.

**Autumn 2023** – Virtual School Updates; launch of aspiration pathway; QA framework.

**Spring 2024** – Love of Reading; Aspiration Pathway; Bright Spots feedback; Resources for Designated Teachers

Designated Teacher's Forum is also run online for our colleagues working out of borough, to ensure messages are delivered consistently and our children and young people get an equal offer.

The Virtual School also sends out a monthly newsletter to Designated Teachers to keep them updated on all the changes and requirements relating to the education of Children we Look After and Children with a Social Worker.

## **Guidance for Practitioners**

A series of information booklets, Microsoft Sways, monthly newsletter, guidance sheets and FAQs have been produced for our key partners, including education and social care. These briefing sheets and videos provide bitesize information to update stakeholders on any expectations and changes regarding the Virtual School.

## **Drop in Sessions**

PEP Coordinators run dedicated drop in sessions for social workers every half term. This provides a dedicated forum in which any questions or queries regarding Personal Education Plans can be supported and addressed.

## **Adoption Training**

The lead for Previously Looked After Children is participating in a North-West regional initiative in conjunction with Together for Adoption, to create a shared training package to upskill practitioners in supporting care experience children and young people. This will form part of the extended offer for our Previously Looked After Children.

## **Foster Carer Training**

The Virtual School works in conjunction with our Fostering Service to provide high quality and specialist training for our Foster Carers. An event was held at our Family Hub at the beginning of the Spring Term around Love of Reading, trauma and emotional wellbeing, speech and language, the library service and starting school.



Foster Carer  
Training  
Spring 2024



# Training and Development

## Safeguarding Children Partnership Training

As Education Safeguarding now sits within the Virtual School, the following courses are delivered by Virtual School Staff to the wider partnership:

- Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Understanding Childhood Neglect Training
- Graded Care Profile 2
- Designated Safeguarding Lead Training (this has now increased from once to twice per term).

## DSL Network Meeting

Designated Safeguarding Lead Network Meeting are held each term to offer training and development for education safeguarding staff. Sessions this year have included:

**Autumn 2023** – producing effective court statements; National Referral Mechanism; Child Sexual Exploitation; Safeguarding and the impact of relationships

**Summer 2023** – National Referral Mechanism; Reducing Parental Conflict; Operation Encompass; Cyber Connect

**Spring 2023** – Review Learning: Family K; Private Fostering; Supporting LGBTQ+ pupils.

## Governor Training

Governor training is also delivered each term by the Virtual School Head. There are currently three safeguarding courses available:

- Governor Safeguarding Training
- Child Exploitation
- Sexual Assault and Violence in Schools.

## New Headteacher's Induction

Sessions are also provided around statutory safeguarding responsibilities and the role and expectations of the Virtual School to Headteachers who are new to the borough. This forms a key part of their induction and provides vital information and contacts to ensure procedures are following in conjunction with St Helens Children's Services.



Lego Therapy  
Training  
March 2024





# Ofsted Inspection

## ILACS

St Helen received their ILACS inspection in July 2023.

Following the previous judgement of 'Inadequate' in 2019, we were thrilled to announce that we receive an overall judgement of '**Good**' with '**Outstanding**' for Care Leavers.

There was positive feedback for the Virtual School embedded within the report. Any areas for improvement had already been identified and were being addressed within the improvement plan.

"Most children in care make good progress in education."

"Most personal education plans are completed to a good standard, although there is some variability in quality, which is being addressed."



"Exclusions of children in care are very rare and alternative provision is swiftly made."

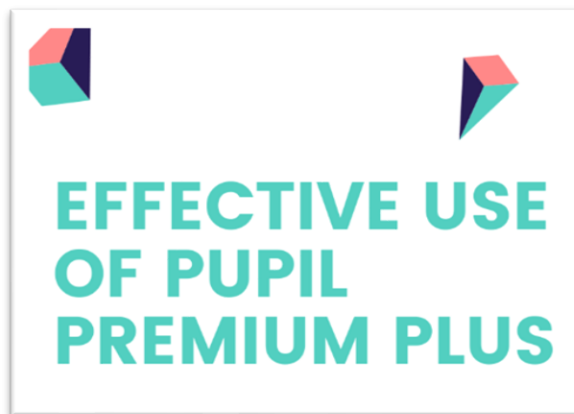
"The virtual school works effectively alongside the preparing for adulthood and futures teams to prepare young people to take up the opportunities available to them."

# Pupil Premium +

The Virtual School is responsible for the allocation of Pupil Premium Plus to schools and education settings, following the completion of a high quality PEP. Targets are quality assured and funding is retained where necessary, to ensure that fund are spend appropriately and that they achieve impact.

Within the annual report, the Virtual School Head is required to provide the following:

- *Details around how the VSH has managed PP+ and early years PP+ for looked after children; and*
- *Evidence of how the VSH spending of the premium has supported the achievement of the children looked after by their authority, including clearly setting out how top sliced funding has supported this.*



## Allocations

Within the Virtual School, for statutory school aged children, each child has an allocation of £2530. Within St Helens, schools and education settings are allocated £2000 (£666 per term) across the school year. £530 is top sliced and put into a central grant.

This central grant is used for:

- Additional funding requests for complex children;
- Training and professional development;
- Staffing;
- School transition packs;
- Subsidising the National Tutoring Programme.

Children in Early Years receive £353.40 for the academic year (£117.80 per term) whilst the Post-16 cohort receive £550 annually (£275 per term for 2 terms).

## National Tutoring Programme

The Virtual School has utilised the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) for the past two years, in order to support our children and young people who require additional help to minimise gaps in learning, or for those individual pupils aiming for Greater Depth.

In 2022-2023, the Virtual School spent **£77,256.13** on tutoring with 60% being paid through the NTP and 40% being paid by the Virtual School.

2023-2024 marks the final year of funding, and our aim is to ensure we don't have an underspend and maximise on the amount of children and young people who can receive additional tuition.

This year's allocation is **£42,607.50**, with the 50% contribution from the Virtual School.

Many schools choose to access tutoring through the Virtual School due to budget limitations within their own settings. This ensures that no Looked After Child misses out on this intervention.

Tracking systems have been created in order to monitor spend throughout the course of the academic year. There will be a mid-year review in April so we can ensure remaining funds are allocated prior to the return in September.

## Additional Funding

The Virtual School uses its centralised Pupil Premium Grant, to provide additional funding for individual children and young people, and provisions, where there are more complex needs.

In 2022-2023, over £52,000 was provided to support our young people achieve their potential. Reasons for request included:

- Whole school initiatives such as Therapeutic Schools Award and Festival of Learning
- Funding for alternative provision
- Laptops and specialist equipment
- Private Educational Psychology assessments
- Play Therapy
- Desty Mentor Programme
- Interim 1:1 support
- Tutoring
- Music lessons and equipment

All additional funding requests are tracked to ensure oversight of spend and to identify any emerging or reoccurring themes or issues which could be addressed more strategically.

# Case Study – Child G

A person wearing a dark jacket and black trousers is sitting on a concrete ledge. Their right hand is resting on the ledge. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a brick wall and some foliage.

## What did we do?

- Multi-agency meetings were held with school, the Virtual School, Children's Social Care and Child G's placement to discuss the concerns and risks. A robust risk assessment was put into place that ensured that Child G was in education full time but was also as safe as possible. These meetings included Child G so that their voice was heard and they were instrumental in shaping the plan.
- Child G expressed an interest to attend an Alternative Provision that specialises in mechanics, outside of St Helens. Child G's voice was listened to and this was set up by the Virtual School. The alternative provision was appropriately quality assured by Child G's secondary school.
- Attendance was tracked on a fortnightly basis on the Virtual School Persistent Absenteeism Tracker.
- The reduced timetable was ceased in order to ensure Child G had a full time offer and to further reduce any risks around exploitation.
- Child G received ongoing work and support with the Youth Justice Service, which included support around drug use.

## Context

- Child G is a Year 10 pupils attending an in borough mainstream secondary school.
- Child G was previously subject to a reduced timetable and there were concerns around attendance and suspensions from school, with a possible risk of permanent exclusion.
- Child G was also accessing an in borough alternative provision placement, however this was at risk of breaking down due to the behaviours being displayed by Child G.
- Child G's 2022-2023 attendance was 22.08%, with minimal change throughout the academic year.
- There were ongoing concerns around cannabis misuse and missing episodes and Child G was open to the Child Exploitation Pathway.
- Child G has a diagnosis of ADHD, however does not wish to take any medication, and instead self-medicates using cannabis.
- Child G was arrested following a significant incident in the community. Bail conditions were in place which prevented Child G from accessing the area and street where their school was situated. The nature of the incident also meant that Child G was at risk themselves.

## Impact

- Child G is now attending school regularly, including his chosen alternative provision for 2 days per week. Child G has a full time 25 hour offer that meets their needs.
- Child G's attendance in 2023-2024, has increased each week from 29.17% to 57.69% year to date. They are no longer a severe persistent absentee.
- Child G achieved Level 1 Functional Skills in January 2024.
- Child G received two suspensions in the first month of the academic year, but has not received any more over the following 5 months.

# Governance

St Helens Virtual School Governing Body, has the collective responsibility to support and challenge the Local Authority in fulfilling its statutory duty to promote the educational achievements and outcomes of Looked After Children, Previously Looked After Children, Care Leavers, Children with (or who have had) a Social Worker and children with Kinship Care arrangements.

The Virtual School Governing Body is made up of the following members:

- Elected Member (Chair)
- Virtual School Head
- Virtual School Staff Governor
- Designated Headteacher – Primary
- Designated Secondary Lead x2 (1x Vice Chair)
- Head of Service, Children we Look After
- Designated Principal – Secondary
- Named nurse for Looked After Children
- Head of Service for Inclusion and SEND
- Preparing for Adulthood Manager
- Business Intelligence Manager
- Children's Consultation and Review Officer

There are also several vacancies within the Governing Body which the Virtual School are working to fill.

The Virtual School Governing Body meets once per term throughout the academic year.



## Aims and Objectives

- To champion the educational needs of Virtual School pupils, across the Authority and those placed out of Authority in the case of Looked After Children.
- To oversee the development of St Helens Virtual School and secure the promotion of high standards of education, the narrowing of attainment gaps and the educational progress and wider outcomes of all children on roll with the Virtual School.
- To offer support and challenge to the Virtual School Head and to strategically drive the improvement journey of the Virtual School.
- To quality assure Virtual School systems, processes and policies.
- To ensure that all Looked After Children have a robust and effective Personal Education Plan that focuses on individual learning outcomes and details bespoke targets that aim to improve outcomes.
- To ensure that all Children we Look After receive their allocated Pupil Premium Plus funding upon the completion of a good or outstanding PEP, in line with the Virtual School Quality Assurance Framework.
- To ensure robust data systems are in place that track progress in relation to school attendance and educational outcomes and puts in place specific support to enable pupils to succeed.
- Ensure strategic decisions are made about the allocation of the Pupil Premium Plus grant and any other allocated grants provided to the Virtual School.
- To ensure that Looked After and Previously Looked After Children can access work placements and apprenticeships where appropriate, taking full advantage of the Council's local business contacts.
- To drive effective strategies for managing attendance, engaging young people in their education and early intervention to support improvement, having high aspirations, and raising the profile of all Children with a Social Worker.
- To oversee transition to adulthood and recognise the protected characteristic of Care Leavers.
- To ensure that the Virtual School is effectively supporting its pupils who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and that right provision is identified for the right children and provided at the earliest opportunity. This includes ensuring that key partners use the Graduated Approach effectively.
- To encourage collaborative working and to support the Virtual School Head to overcome systemic barriers to have a positive impact on the educational achievement of Children with a Social Worker.

# Education Safeguarding

## Education Safeguarding

Education Safeguarding now sits under the Virtual School; this is beneficial as it allows increased involvement and oversight for all vulnerable children, including LAC children and Children with a Social Worker. The Safeguarding Children in Education Coordinator is currently seconded to the Virtual School full time; however, the permanent position will be going to advert this academic year. Responsibilities of the SCIE Coordinator include:

**Preventative Approach** – a significant element of the SCIE coordinators role, is about preventative work with schools, including Early Help and the safeguarding curriculum. Where possible, we want to prevent children from needing statutory social care involvement, and instead, want to utilise pre-existing support structures currently in place for the young person. This impacts on the extended duties of the Virtual School for CwSW, as if we can prevent harm in the first instance, we can reduce the cohort and more children and young people will go on to achieve better outcomes.

**Front line safeguarding visits** – quality assurance visits are completed with a variety of schools and settings. These can either be self-requested by the Headteacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead or be initiated by the Local Authority where appropriate.

**Complaints** – inquiring and responding to safeguarding complaints which has been raised with Ofsted or that come directly from parents or carers.

**Section 175 Audit** – the SCIE Coordinator is responsible for completing the statutory s175 audit with all our schools and education settings. This is completed on a 2-year cycle, with the first year consisting of the completion of the audit tool, and the second year comprising of a series of randomly selected frontline visits.

**Section 11 Audit** – the Safeguarding Children in Education Coordinator also contributes to the completion of the Section 11 audit for the wider Safeguarding Children Partnership.

**Neglect Priority Subgroup** – the Virtual School Head chairs the multi-agency Neglect Priority Subgroup. Neglect has been identified as the sole priority for the Safeguarding Children Partnership in 2023-2024. This multi-agency group was formed and a robust action plan is in place, which aims to improve the identification and response to neglect across St Helens.

**LADO** – the SCIE Coordinator will attend LADO meetings in relation to any education staff. This provides additional support and advice for any subsequent plans, as well as disseminating wider learning.

**MACE** – the SCIE coordinator is a representative on MACE every fortnight. This provides robust oversight of children and young people who are at risk of exploitation and ensures that appropriate education provision is in place for this cohort.

**MARAC** – the SCIE coordinator also attend MARAC on a fortnightly basis. This provides additional safeguarding not only for statutory school aged children, but also to our Early Years cohort. Communication is held with the relevant setting to ensure a joined-up approach and effective planning for children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse.

**Representation at Multi Agency meetings** – the SCIE coordinator will represent education at a variety of meetings. This can include SCP improvement and priority groups; bespoke meetings for individual children or targeted support for schools and representation at Child Protection Conferences during the school holidays.

**Bespoke actions from case reviews and audits** – education safeguarding has the responsibility to disseminate learning and key findings from reviews back down to our education partners. This can be through newsletters, briefings, training or more tailored initiatives where required.

**Support, advice and guidance to schools** – the SCIE coordinator is a point of contact for schools and education settings to receive advice or guidance around any safeguarding concerns they may have. This ensures that our children and young people receive the right support at the right time and also offers an element of supervision to our Designated Safeguarding Leads.

**Training** – education safeguarding offers a variety of different training courses, not only for education staff but also for the wider partnership. This include statutory staff safeguarding training when requested.

## Children of concern tracker

The Virtual School has a 'Children of Concern Tracker' in which all pupils with additional or high-level vulnerabilities are tracked. These pupils are discussed each week during the team meeting; this ensures that no child slips through the net and that all staff within the Virtual School have appropriate oversight of this cohort.

The tracker also documents actions taken to help alleviate any concerns and ensure the best outcomes for the child or young person.



# Priorities moving forward

## Our future journey

1. To continue to improve the quality of Personal Education Plans. To continue with external moderation to ensure the work of the Virtual School, and to have stronger feedback from our children and young people, which can be used strategically to improve their lived experiences.
2. To develop a love of reading amongst our children and young people in order to improve academic outcomes and to develop a passion for literature that will guide them through the rest of their lives.
3. To enhance and develop the offer for Greater Depth pupils to ensure they have high expectations and achieve their potential.
4. To improve the attendance of both Children we Look After and Children with a Social Worker.
5. To reduce Persistent Absenteeism and Severe Persistent Absenteeism of both Children we Look After and Children with a Social Worker.
6. To stop the ongoing increase of suspensions for Children we Look After.
7. To significantly reduce the suspensions of Children with a Social Worker.
8. To prevent permanent exclusions for Children we Look After.
9. To create a professional marketplace for Previously Looked After Children and their parents and carers. This will be a one-stop-shop in order to receive any academic, social and emotional support and signposting.
10. To integrate the new National Kinship Strategy into the Virtual School offer.
11. To create Designated Teacher Training to upskill key members of staff around the Virtual School, Children we Look After, PEPs and the expectations and requirements in St Helens.
12. To develop and enhance the Virtual School website so that there is an array of information and guidance for children and young people, families and professionals.