



Virtual School Annual Report 2024-2025

June 2025



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, Children in Kinship Care Arrangements 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, that is bespoke to their individual needs and journey.

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 appropriate, 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.

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Introduction

During 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, St Helens Virtual School has continued to fulfil its statutory duty in ensuring that Looked After Children, Previously Looked After Children, children in Kinship Care arrangements 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:

- All our children and young people, regardless of the age, ability or where they live
- 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 2024-2025 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 31st March.

Acknowledgements

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

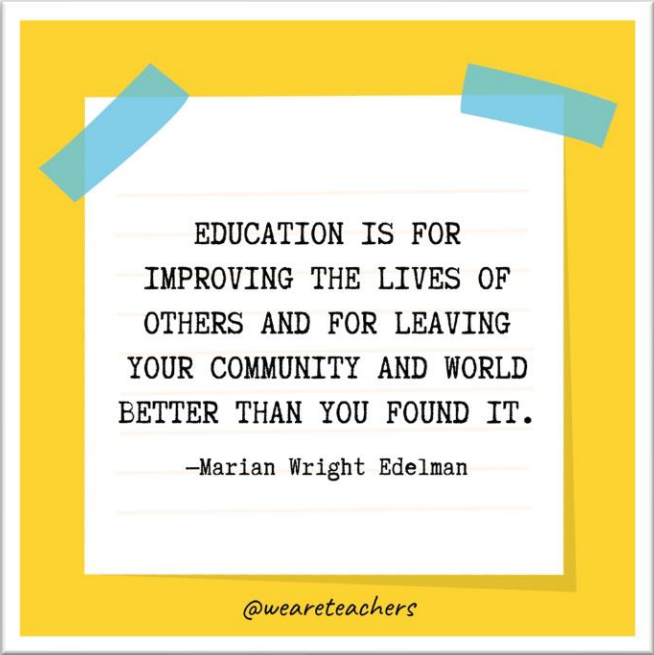
- Once again, all of our amazing children, young people and care leavers who never fail to astound us. Thank you for always working so hard, showing tremendous resilience and for participating in all that we do.
- The families and carers we work with each and every day and their ongoing commitment to 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. It is truly a joined up collaborative approach that makes the biggest difference for our children and young people.

The Virtual School Head would also like to personally thank the hard work and dedication of the Virtual School Team. Staff within the Virtual School remain tenacious and passionate and work tirelessly to ensure they achieve what our children and young people deserve. The team display creativity, innovation and empathy and truly hold each of our young people within their heart.

Heather Addison

Virtual School Head

June 2025





Attainment

- 2023-2024 EYFS data saw **42.9%** Children we Look After achieving a Good Level of Development. This was a **15.6% increase** from 2022-2023 and was also **14.9% above** the national average.
- 2023-2024 EYFS data also saw 43% of Children with a Social Worker achieving a Good Level of Development. This was a **23% increase** from 2022-2023 and was also **5% above** the national average. This is the first academic year where CWSW have been above the national average.
- 2023-2024 Phonics data for Children we Look After was **8.9% higher** than 2022-2023 and **18% above** the national average. This is the **third consecutive year** that St Helens Virtual School has achieved significantly above the national average for Phonics.
- In KS2, outcomes for Children with a Social Worker were **above** the national average in **all** areas, apart from Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling. These were **significant improvements** from 2022-2023, ranging from between **12-22% increase**.

Attendance and Behaviour

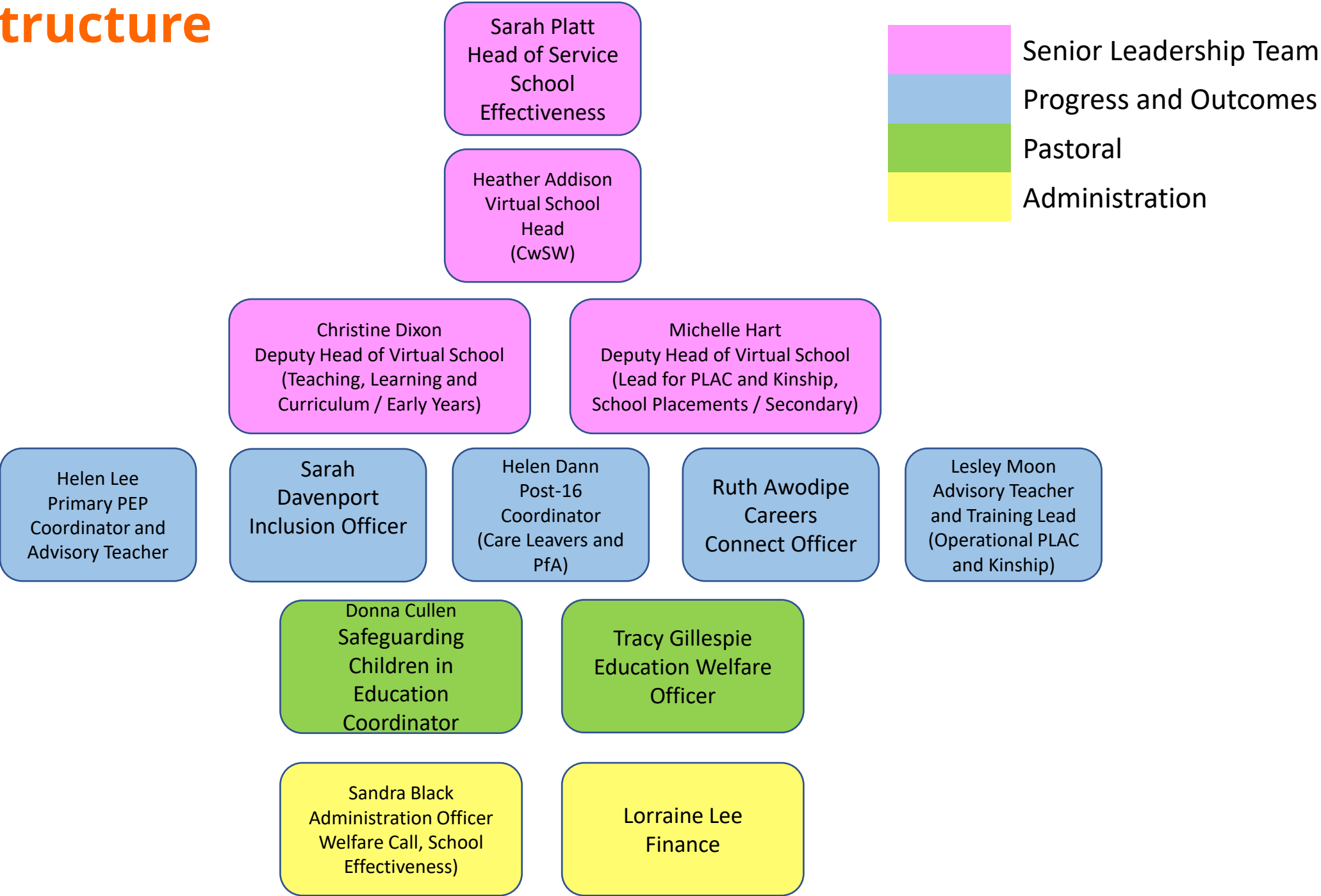
- The permanent exclusion rate for Children we Look After remains below the national average. The Virtual School works hard to ensure that permanent exclusions are avoided at all costs.
- There has been significant improvements in attendance and behaviour outcomes for Children with a Social Worker:
- Persistent Absenteeism for Children with a Social Worker has **decreased by 1.6%** compared to 2022-2023.
- Severe Persistent Absenteeism for Children with a Social Worker has also decreased by 1% compared to 2022-2023.
- Suspensions for Children with a Social Worker have significantly **reduced by 14.70**. This is also the first academic year where suspensions for CWSW have been **below the national average**.

Success Headlines

Other Achievements

- The St Helens Virtual School Team is now at capacity with two new Deputy Headteachers in place. The increase and stability in staffing means that further improvement work can be undertaken and there has been a significant shift from compliancy to quality.
- The Virtual School has provided a comprehensive training offer throughout the academic year. This supports schools, social care and families to develop sustainable approaches to support our children and young people.
- For the past three years, 100% of Children we Look After have accessed their 15 free hours once they have turned three.
- EET data for Care Leaver is above the national average.
- There has been a significant increase in Care Leavers accessing Higher Education then from previous years.
- The new 'Gold' standard PEPs have continued to increase in number since their launch at the beginning of 2023-2024 academic year. This reflects the ongoing improvements in PEP quality.

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.

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 as well as those children or young people in Kinship Care Arrangements. Therefore, the Virtual School also adheres to **Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension** (*March 2024*).

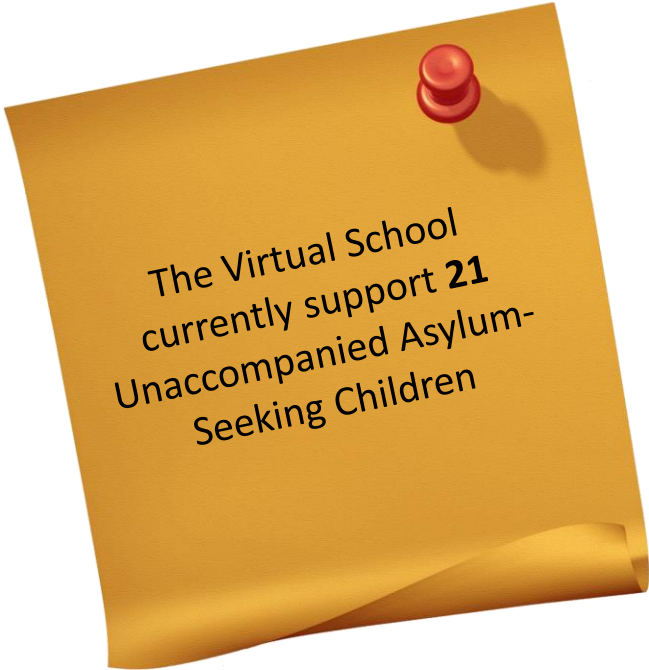
Virtual School Offer

- To champion the educational needs and outcomes of children and young people who are Looked After, who are Previously Looked After, who have a Social Worker or who are in a Kinship Care Arrangement.
- 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 as well as ensuring appropriate intervention where there are emerging concerns.
- To provide a high quality breadth of training for Designated Teachers, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Social Workers, Foster Carers, Residential Carers and families.
- 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 emerging 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.

Overview of Cohort

There are **442** Children and Young People currently cared for by St Helens. **409** 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	32	Year 7	27
Reception	10	Year 8	29
Year 1	16	Year 9	46
Year 2	23	Year 10	40
Year 3	20	Year 11	37
Year 4	17	Post 16 - Year 12	38
Year 5	24	Post 16 - Year 13	23
Year 6	27	Total	409



- There are currently 10 young people we Look After who are being supported by the Youth Justice Service. This number has significantly reduced over the past year.
- There are 24 children with a Child in Need Plan currently accessing the service.
- There are 3 children with a Child Protection Plan currently under the Youth Justice Service.

In Borough / Out of Borough

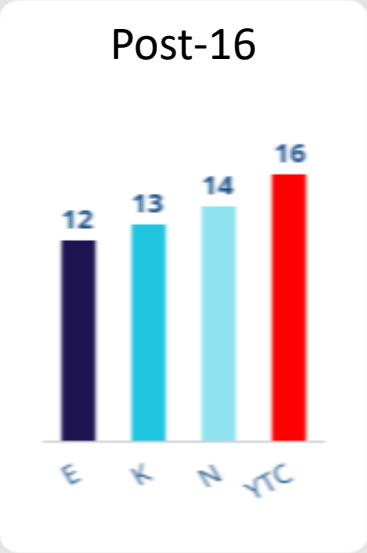
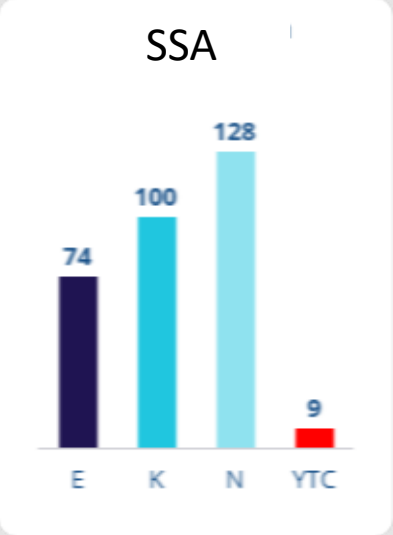
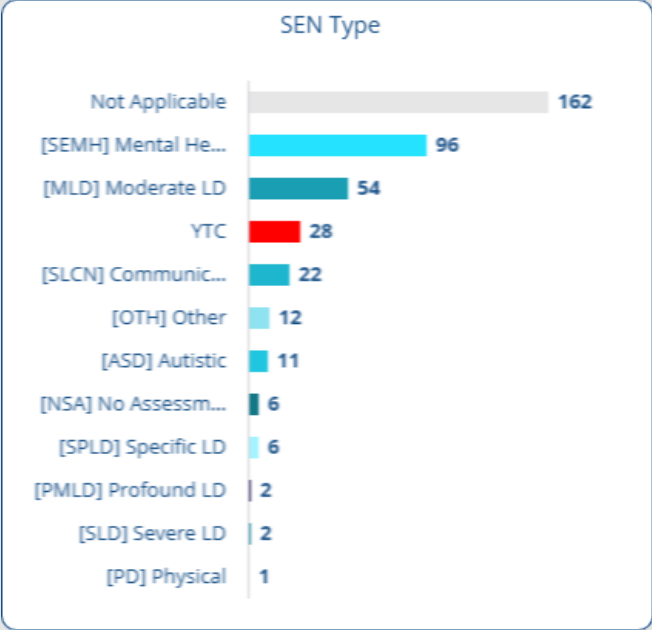
Early Years		Statutory School Age		Post 16	
In Borough	Out of Borough	In Borough	Out of Borough	In Borough	Out of Borough
22	10	205	111	36	25

There are currently 22 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

- 23.8% of SSA CWLA have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 32.2% of SSA CWLA have SEND Support.
- 41.2% of SSA CWLA have no SEND identified.
- 2.9% of SSA CWLA are yet to confirm.
- 2.8% of EYFS CWLA have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 22.2% of EYFS CWLA have SEND Support
- 66.7% of EYFS CWLA have no SEND identified.
- 8.3% of EYFS CWLA are yet to confirm.
- 21.8% of Post 16 CWLA have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 23.6% of Post 16 CWLA have SEND Support.
- 25.5% of Post 16 CWLA have no SEND identified.
- 29.1% of Post 16 CWLA are yet to confirm.
- The predominant SEND need for all CLA pupils is Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).
- It is important to recognise that SEND figures have increased across all cohorts from 2023-2024.



CwSW

Child in Need

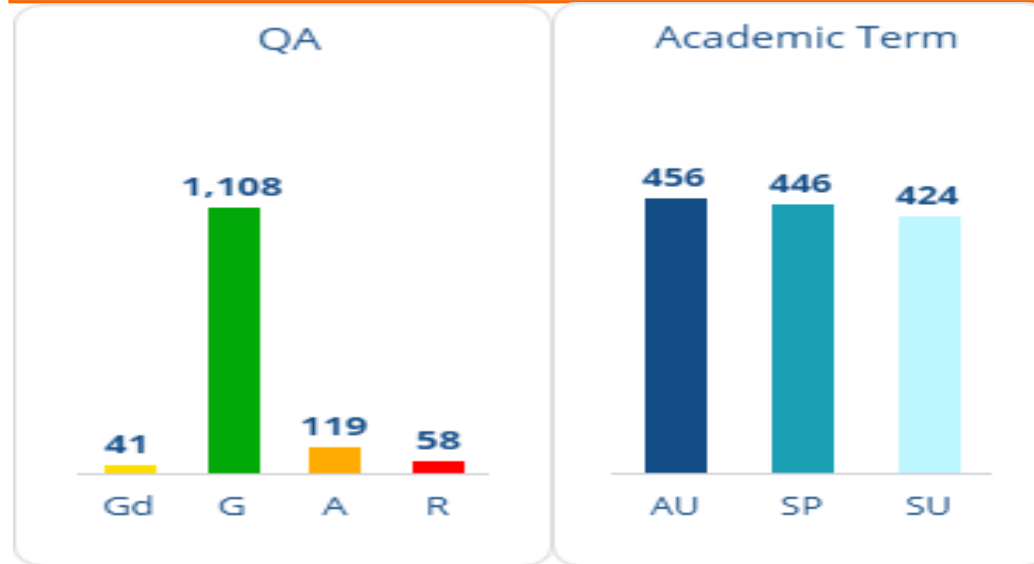
- 125 children with a CIN plan have an Education Health and Care Plan (14.8%).
- 131 children with a CIN plan have SEND Support (15.5%).

Child Protection

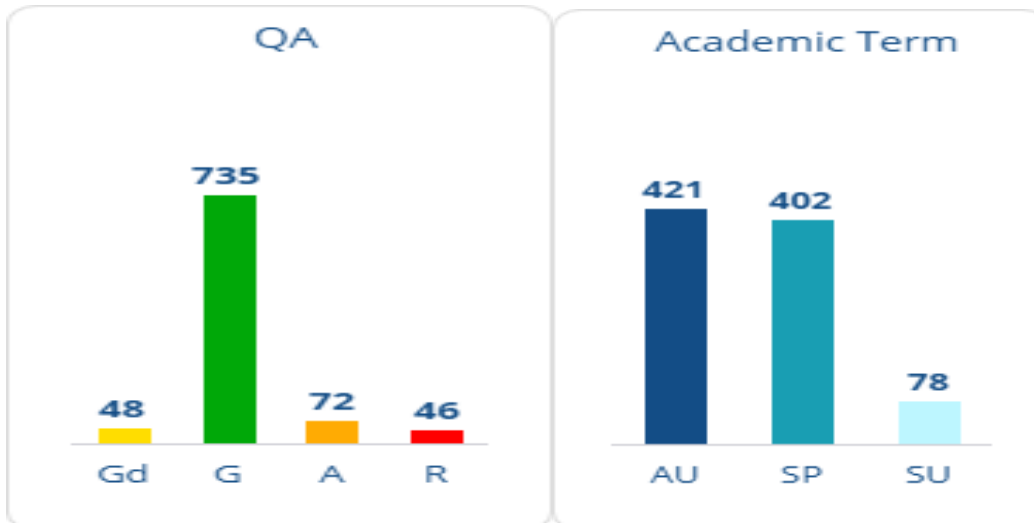
- 23 Children on a Child Protection Plan have an Education Health and Care Plan (10%).
- 41 children on a Child Protection Plan have SEND support (17.8%).

PEP Completion Data

2023-2024

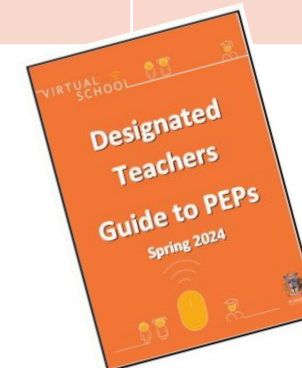


2024-2025 (Year to Date)



- 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 +.
- The Virtual School now has allocated PEP Coordinators and Advisory Teachers for each key stage.
- 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.
- This year sees the second academic year of our recognition of 'Gold Standard PEPs'. The data for the year so far, already exceeds the number of Gold PEPs last year which evidences continued improvement in quality.
- A handbook is also available for Designated Teachers, to guide them through each stage of the PEP process, and how to complete the document to a high standard.

	Gold (Outstanding)	Green (Good)	Amber (Requires Improvement)	Red (Inadequate)
2020-2021	n/a	1145 (86.61%)	152 (11.50%)	25 (1.89%)
2021-2022	n/a	1157 (92.56%)	50 (4.00%)	43 (3.44%)
2022-2023	n/a	1059 (85.27%)	142 (11.43%)	41 (3.30%)
2023-2024	41 (3.09%)	1108 (83.57%)	119 (8.97%)	58 (4.37%)
2024-2025 (year to date)	48	735	72	46



Voice of the Child

Early Years Personal Education Plans

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

"I did go on a big fire truck and I see the fire truck and I go in the fire truck and they drive it".

"I don't like coming in from outside and tidying up".

"Playing in the garden on the bikes and playing football. Reading stories, dancing and singing!"

"I love the home corner and talking on the phone. I like cooking and making food. I love playing outside in the mud kitchen where I can make food for the dinosaurs using mud and pine cones. I nlove minibeast hunts especially spiders. I love mark making and drawing spiders especially".

"Taking turns is really tricky for me and I need an adult to help me".

"Playing with my friends and learning new things".

"I love everything about my nursery".

"I am good at climbing, singing and I can now recognise numbers".

"Sometimes I don't like to tidy up".

"Sharing with my friends can sometimes be difficult so we have been practising taking turns".

"Drawing, building, tydying up, writing my name because it isn't tricky".

"Playing outside and building obstacle courses, drawing pictures, jumping and running".

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 Personal Education Plans this academic year:

"I have no worries or concerns at present. I enjoy Art and PE.

I find English difficult. I can struggle to concentrate on occasions".

Year 10 Pupil

[The things that help me best with my learning are] "my sensory box that you gave me. It makes me feel happy and excited to do learning."

Primary School Pupil

[The lesson I like best is] "PE and PSHE. We learn about a lot of things that make me feel like I am not the only one going through stuff".

Primary School Pupil

"I enjoy music and I enjoy English lessons. I also like science as well it's fun when we get to do experiments.

I do find English hard sometimes as well as I do have dyslexia but the teacher understands this and helps me.

I don't really worry about school but when my friendships are not going well that worries me".

Year 9 Pupil

"Well I didn't like dance club. I did like the cricket one. I would like to make clay, like a pot for you and a vase".

Primary School Pupil

"I enjoy English because I like to write stories. I find Maths difficult sometimes. Maths is hard because I don't know my tables. I find telling the time hard because there is so much information Music: it is loud. Nothing is worrying me".

Year 9 Pupil

"I really like science and enjoy learning about lots of things. I am really enjoying English- the teacher is really good and my work flows. Woodwork- got a really good class and really enjoy it. I did the triple jump for the first time and did really well".

Year 9 Pupil

*[When I am upset at school I would like the adults to help me by] "Miss ****, she gives me a big hug and talks to me".*

Primary School Pupil

"My Maths, but this subject has always been a struggle for me. I did a mock test a few days ago and I found it really hard, and my results were really bad. I'm worried about leaving school and going out into the big world".

Year 11 Pupil

"I like family time with my mummy – soon I will make pizza with my mummy. I like seeing daddy. I went to McDonalds this week. I am going to Little Harvester for my tea this week with daddy. I am excited"

Primary School Pupil

"I don't give up on my learning. I show resilience. I am really good at maths. I wonder if I will get an OBE?"

Primary School Pupil

[What I enjoy about coming to school is] "maths of course. The breakfast club I get to have toast".

Primary School Pupil

"I enjoy Art, English and Digital Literacy. I am not finding any difficult at the moment. Nothing is worrying me about school".

Year 7 Pupil

"I don't have any worries about school. I think it's going very well at school. I enjoy Science and Maths and History. History is my favourite as I like to learn about historical events. I don't think I find anything difficult really, I just try my best in all of my subjects".

Year 10 Pupil

[Things I like doing in school are] "playtime with my friends. I am not having lunch in the hall with all my friends".

Primary School Pupil

"I enjoy English, RE, PE, Geography. I find Science difficult, but the tutoring is helping. Worries: GCSEs but I know it is a long way away but I am worried about plans for after school and how well I do. End of year exams and I want to do well in Maths, English and Science".

Year 8 Pupil

11/2/2025

What I want you to know.
(using the shape to start, draw a picture of yourself)

To be completed by: [redacted]
Did anyone help? If so, who? [redacted]

The person who helps me with my school work and homework is:

Nobody helps me with my homework

When I am older I would like to:

be a Youtuber
I will get 100 subscribers
building lego

At school, I am good at:

PSHE Maths PE
Computing Rocksteady

In school I like:

Music PSHE
playtime

My friends are:

[redacted]

I am happy at school when:

It's hometime
- you can do what you want.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

I am learning to play guitar in Rocksteady. I can play Sweet Dreams all made of these.

At school, I would like to get better at:

Writing I am getting better I am good at spelling

The clubs I belong to and the things I'd like to try:

Football - Rainhill Utd
Swimming
Beavers

What I like to play with:

Marvel Characters
Mario Lego



the **Voices** of
Children

What I want you to know.
(using the shape to start, draw a picture of yourself)

To be completed by: [redacted]
Did anyone help? If so, who? [redacted]

The person who helps me with my school work and homework is:

school-homework [redacted]

When I am older I would like to:

be in the police

At school, I am good at:

playing with [redacted]

In school I like:

Home Time

My friends are:

[redacted]

I am happy at school when:
me being Child of the Day

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

I like watching TV.

At school, I would like to get better at:

Maths

The clubs I belong to and the things I'd like to try:

Freddie Frog Club

What I like to play with:

my Load on Roblocks



Voice of the Child

Post-16 Personal Education Plans

Below are example of what our Post-16 young people have told us within their 2024-2025 Personal Education Plans:

[YP] said might like to become an electrician, a mechanic or a lawyer in the future. Currently, he is studying ESOL Entry Level 3. Once he has achieved a sufficient level of English proficiency, he will be able to pursue further study to gain the skills necessary for his chosen career.

“Everything is good for me, I feel happy and safe at college. I enjoy coming to college, I have friends and the teachers are very good”.

“Everything is going very well, I'm happy and safe at college. Every one of my tutors is great. I have a good group of friends”.

“To continue to learn how to speak English, I want to become an Engineer”.



“I have passed my course”.

“Everything is good at college, I have friends, i feel happy and safe and the teachers are very good”.

“I would like to be working on cars as a mechanic or a painter”.

“I don't have any worries about college but I have completed documents for the home office for the second time and I haven't heard back yet”.

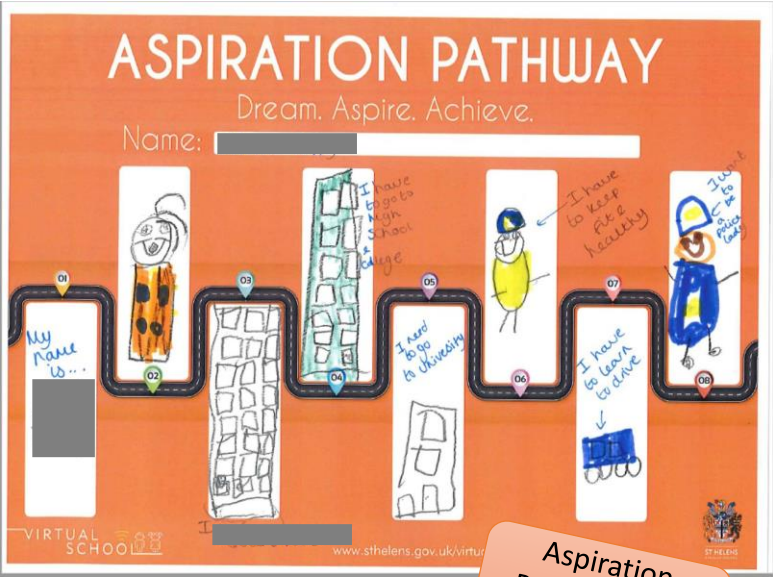
Voice of the Child – Aspiration Pathway

Aspiration Pathway

The Aspiration Pathway has now been running since last academic year, and 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.

A mid-point data was analysed in November 2024 to monitor levels of completion and to identify aspirations chosen. At that time 269 School Age PEPs had a completed Aspiration Pathway. The mid-point review showed us some preliminary themes regarding our children and young people’s future goals. Grading of the Aspiration Pathway forms parts of our standard Quality Assurance Framework, and the pathway is expected to be completed for all pupils from Year 1 upwards.

There are some excellent examples of the Pathway with pupils really encouraged to think about the steps needed to reach their goal, and staff working in creative ways to help children to start on their journey. This has included work experience, beauty workshops and sports coaching. Data will continue to be reviewed in order to proactively identify any commonalities that could be strategically addressed by either the Virtual School or through Corporate Parenting Forum. The Virtual School Head continues to feed back on the Aspiration Workstream to members on the Forum.



Aspiration Pathway for a Year 1 Child

	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Career	19	35	54	45
Academic / Education	5	9	9	13
Life Enriching	1	3	4	3
Sports	6	14	7	2
Emotional Well-being	3	3	5	1
The Arts	1	0	4	1
Volunteering	0	2	0	1
Other	5	8	5	1

Attainment Early Years 2023-2024

Children we Look After

Children we Look After					
2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
27%	40% (+13%)	29%	27.3% (-1.7%)	28%	42.9% (+15.6%)

Findings and reflections - CLA

- There has been a 15.6% increase in the percentage of pupils achieving GLD compared to 2022-2023.
- In addition to this, for 2023-2024, the percentage of pupils achieving GLD for St Helens was 14.9% higher than the national average for Children we Look After.

Children with a Social Worker

Children with a Social Worker					
2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
23%	17% (-6%)	39%	20% (+3%)	38%	43% (+23%)

Findings and reflections - CwSW

- There has been a significant improvement in Early Years outcomes for Children with a Social Worker.
- There has been a 23% increase compared to 2022-2023.
- St Helens Children with a Social Worker also achieved 5% above the national average.
- This is the first academic year since the extended duties where this has been achieved.

Attainment Phonics 2023-2024

Children we Look After

Children we Look After					
2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
46%	62.5%	52%	61.1% (-1.4%)	52%	70% (+8.9%)

Children with a Social Worker

Children with a Social Worker					
2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
49%	37%	52%	58% (+21%)	54%	55% (-3%)

Findings and reflections - CLA

- For the third consecutive year, St Helens CLA children achieved higher than the national average for phonics.
- The 2023-2024 Phonics results were also 8.9% higher than the previous academic year.

Findings and reflections - CwSW

- Phonics attainment for Children with a Social Worker is 1% above the national average.
- However, there was a 3% decrease from 2022-2023's data.

Attainment Key Stage 2 2023-2024

Children we Look After						
	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
RWM	26%	29.4% (+3.4%)	32%	38.5% (+6.5%)	30%	31.6% (+1.6%)
Reading	42%	52.9% (+10.9%)	48%	38.5% (-9.5%)	47%	36.8% (-10.2%)
Writing TA	35%	41.2% (+6.2%)	42%	38.5% (-3.5%)	41%	36.8% (-4.2%)
Maths	36%	52.9% (+16.9%)	44%	53.8% (+9.8%)	42%	36.8% (-5.2%)
GPS	39%	44.1% (+5.1%)	44%	53.8% (+9.8%)	42%	36.8% (-5.2%)

Findings and reflections - CLA

- In KS2, for RWM combined, our pupils achieved significantly higher than the national average. However, this was a 6.9% decrease from the previous academic year.
- In reading, CLA pupils were 10.2% below the national average. There was also a 1.7% decrease from the previous academic year's data.
- In writing, CLA pupils were 4.2% below the national average. There was also a 1.7% decrease from the previous academic year's data.
- In Maths, CLA pupils were 5.2% below the national average. There was also a 17% decrease from the previous academic year's data.
- In Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (GPS), CLA pupils were 5.2% below the national average. There was also a 17% decrease from the previous academic year's data.

Attainment Key Stage 2 2023-2024

Children with a Social Worker						
	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
RWM	23.5%	24% (+0.5%)	25.5%	18% (-7.5%)	30.8%	39.0% (+8.1%)
Reading	38%	43% (+5%)	38.7%	27% (-11.7%)	46.9%	49% (+2.1%)
Writing TA	32.1%	35% (+2.8%)	35%	27% (-8%)	41.1%	43% (+1.9%)
Maths	33%	35% (+2%)	35.6%	27% (-8.6%)	42.2%	47% (+4.8%)
GPS	35%	34% (-1%)	36.3%	29% (-7.3%)	42.8%	41% (-1.8%)

Findings and reflections - CwSW

- There have been significant improvements Children with a Social Worker KS2 outcomes.
- For Reading, Writing and Maths combines, CWSW achieve 8.1% higher than the national average. There was also a 21% increase from 2022-2023.
- For Reading, CWSW achieved 2.1% above the national average. There was also a 22% improvement from 2022-2023.
- For Writing, CWSW achieved 1.9% above the national average. There was also a 16% improvement from 2022-2023.
- For Maths, CWSW achieved 4.8% above the national average. There was also a 20% increase from 2022-2023.
- For Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (GPS), CWSW were 1.8% below the National Average. However, there was still a 12% improvement from 2022-2023.

Attainment Key Stage 4 2023-2024

Children We Look After						
	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
Overall Average Attainment 8 Score	20.4	↑ 21.8	12.3	↑ 16.3 (-5.5)	14.0	↓ 11.3 (-5)
Overall Average Progress 8 Score	-1.30	↑ -1.25	-1.25	↓ -1.67 (-0.42)	-1.26	↓ -1.60 (-0.07)
English Average Attainment Score	4.6	↑ 4.9	2.7	↑ 3.9 (-1)	3.2	↓ 2.5 (-1.4)
English Average Progress Score	-1.42	↑ -1.32	-0.55	↓ -1.53 (-0.21)	-0.73	↓ -1.15 (+0.38)
Maths Average Attainment Score	4.1	↑ 4.2	2.5	↑ 3.3 (-0.9)	2.9	↓ 2.7 (-0.6)
Maths Average Progress Score	-1.03	↓ -1.17	-0.39	↓ -1.41 (-0.24)	-0.55	↓ -0.74 (+0.67)
EBacc Average Attainment Score	5.5	↑ 5.6	3.3	↑ 4.1 (-1.5)	3.8	↓ 3.1 (-1)
EBacc Average Progress Score	-1.36	↑ -1.35	-0.52	↓ -1.68 (-0.33)	-0.70	↓ -1.04 (+0.64)
Other Attainment Score	6.2	↑ 7.1	3.7	↑ 5.1 (-2.0)	4.1	↓ 3.0 (-2.1)
Other Progress Score	-1.43	↑ -1.16	-0.56	↓ -1.59 (-0.43)	-0.73	↓ -1.16 (+0.43)

Findings and reflections

- This year's KS4 attainment shows improvements in English Average Progress Score, Maths Average Progress Score, Ebacc Average Progress Score and Other Progress Score compared to 2022-2023.
- However, KS4 attainment data is below the national average in all areas.
- KS4 attainment continues to be a priority for the Virtual School.

Attainment Key Stage 4 2023-2024

Children with a Social Worker						
	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	National	St Helens	National	St Helens	National	St Helens
Overall Average Attainment 8 Score	15.9	↓ 14.7	12.7	↑ 13.3 (-1.4)	12.6	↓ 12.5 (-0.8)
Overall Average Progress 8 Score	-1.43	↓ -1.44	-1.43	↓ -1.64 (-0.20)	-1.45	↓ -1.56 (+0.08)
English Average Attainment Score	3.7	↓ 3.4	2.9	↑ 3.0 (-0.4)	2.9	↓ 2.8 (-0.2)
English Average Progress Score	-0.95	↑ -0.90	-0.84	↓ -1.30 (-0.40)	-0.89	↓ -1.11 (+0.19)
Maths Average Attainment Score	3.1	↓ 2.6	2.6	↑ 2.7 (+0.1)	2.6	↑ 2.7
Maths Average Progress Score	-0.78	↓ -0.86	0.67	↓ -1.09 (-0.23)	-0.72	↓ -0.80 (+0.29)
EBacc Average Attainment Score	4.4	↓ 3.6	3.4	3.4 (-0.2)	3.5	↓ 3.3 (-0.1)
EBacc Average Progress Score	-0.94	↓ -1.01	-0.80	↓ -1.27 (-0.26)	-0.86	↓ -1.03 (+0.24)
Other Attainment Score	4.8	↑ 5.0	3.8	↑ 4.2 (-0.8)	3.6	↑ 3.7 (-0.5)
Other Progress Score	-1.02	↑ -0.76	-0.90	↓ -1.20 (-0.44)	0.94	↓ -1.05 (+0.15)

Findings and reflections

- This year's KS4 attainment shows that CWSW have achieved higher than the National Average in Maths Average Attainment Score and Other Average Attainment Score.
- CWSW have also improved from 2022-2023's data in Overall Average Progress 8 Score, English Average Progress Score, Ebacc Average Progress Score and Other Progress Score.

Post 16

The Virtual School continues to second 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 overall outcomes for our young people.

The Post-16 Coordinator also works in close conjunction with the Future's Team to support our young people into their transition to adulthood. Although the Virtual School only has oversight of young people up until their 18th birthday, the Virtual School has this year made a commitment to support and young person until the end of Year 13, regardless of when their birthday falls. Although this will not be through a formal PEP document, Personal Advisors and Social Workers can request additional support and funding where required to support EET Outcomes.

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

This year's Post-16 Allocation was £55,322.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

43.64% of Year 12 cohort are NEET (24 out of 55 pupils)

28.57% of Year 13 cohort are NEET (2 out of 7 pupils)

Overall NEET figure: **41.94%** (26 out of 62 pupils)

For the second consecutive year, 100% of our NEET young people are in borough.

NEET Figures have increased from last academic year. 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 also works closely with the Preparing for Adulthood Team, to strategically address gaps in provision within St Helens.

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



Care Leavers

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

Below is the breakdown of data at the end of the 2024-2025 financial year (this includes the 17-19 year old cohort and the 19-21 year old cohort combined).

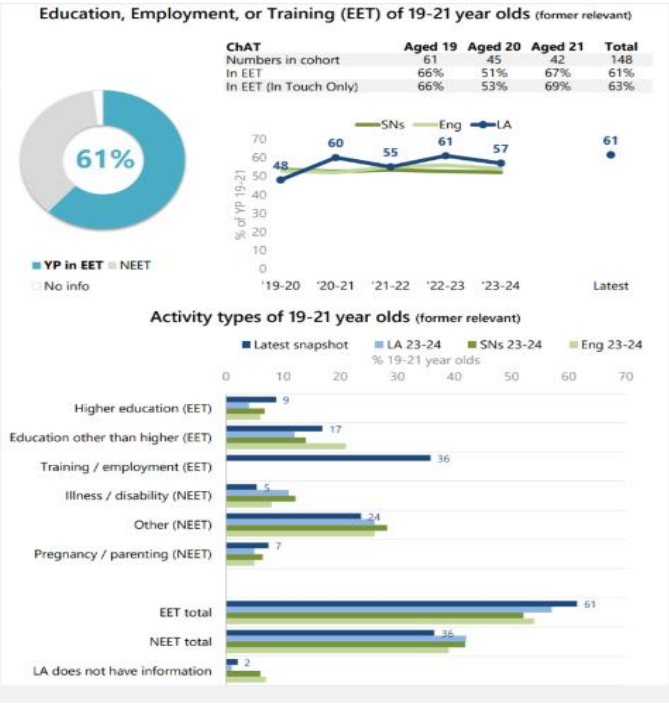
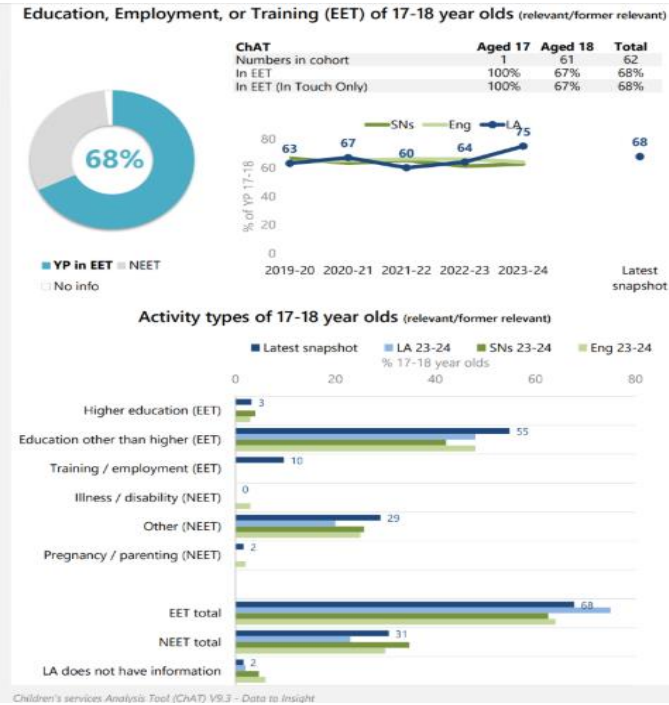
The final graph shows both cohorts with St Helens in blue and the National Average in light green.

The Futures Team have 210 care leavers who we report data on to the DfE aged up to 21:

EET data is above our statistical neighbours and the England average. NEET data is below our statistical neighbours and the England average.

There is a significant increase this year in Higher Education from previous years.

	Higher Education	Education (not higher)	Training or Employment	NEET (due to illness or disability)	NEET	NEET due to pregnancy or parenting	No info held
St Helens	8%	26%	28%	4%	26%	6%	2%



Youth Justice Service

Youth Justice Board

The Virtual School Head sits on the Youth Justice Board and attends each meeting. This allows a connected and joined up approach to supporting children and young people who may have experienced, or be at risk of criminality. Data around children and young people open to the service is circulated weekly for oversight. The Virtual School is also committed to supporting the YJS and the wonderful work they complete with some of our most vulnerable young people.

ROCLA Strategy

The Virtual School has been involved in the review of the YJS ROCLA (Reducing Offending of Children Looked After) Strategy. Over the past 12 months, there has been a significant reduction in the number of CLA children open to Youth Justice Service. However, it is vital that as a Multi-Agency Partnership, we continue this positive work.

A review was completed in April 2025, and a multi-agency focus group established which included the Virtual School Head. The review identifies changes that are now in place since the previous strategy, as well as identifying key lines of work that still need to be completed. A ROCLA 2025-2026 Action Plan sits alongside the review and actions are making steady progress.

Bi-Monthly Attendance Meetings

The Virtual School meets Bi-Monthly with the YJS Education Re-engagement Mentor to look at the attendance, suspensions and exclusions of Looked After Children, Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker who are open to the Service. The Education Re-Engagement Mentor comprehensively tracks children and young people in education, identifying any themes or issues that could then be addressed strategically, by both YJS and the Virtual School.

These meetings reflect close partnership working and evidence how the attendance of vulnerable children is seen as a shared responsibility.



Cohort Information

At the time of writing this report, there were:

- **15** St Helens Children and Young People we Look After who were open to the Youth Justice Service.
- **50%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- **5** St Helens Previously Looked After Children.
- **60%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- There are **3** children and young people currently open to Youth Justice who have a Child Protection Plan.
- **66%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- There are **16** children and young people currently open to Youth Justice who have a Child in Need Plan.
- **69%** of these young people are currently in education, employment or training.
- There is currently **1** young person who is in custody.

Children with a Social Worker

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

- **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. Support is also provided for schools and Children’s Social Care from the Safeguarding Children in Education Coordinator.

The Virtual School Tracks contacts for advice and guidance for Children with a Social Worker. The data is as follows:

- For this academic year, there has been 32 contacts for the 2024-2025 academic year to date.
- 1 contact from Complex Safeguarding
- 4 contacts from Education
- 2 contacts from The Safeguarding Unit
- 25 contacts from Children’s Social Care

The themes for the contacts are:

- School admissions x 12
- Behaviour, suspensions and exclusions x 7
- Safeguarding x 10
- Tuition and Alternative Provision x 3
- Mental Health and Wellbeing x 2
- Attendance x 10
- Multi-Agency Resolution x 2
- SEND x 2

Please note, one contact may cover multiple issues.

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 of our secondary schools have agreed to participate with our 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 to assess whether educational issues are appropriately identified and addressed through the child’s plan. There has been a particular focus this academic year on whether those pupils who are Persistently Absent, have attendance featured explicitly within their plan, alongside measurable and specific targets.

Cohort Information

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

Child in Need

- **878** children have a Child in Need Plan. **550** of these have a corresponding EYES record.
- **52%** of the school population are male; **48%** are female.
- **67 (12.18%)** have an Education Health and Care Plan
- **64 (11.64%)** have SEN Support.

Child Protection

- **230** children have a Child Protection Plan. **134** of these have a corresponding EYES record.
- **54%** of the school population are male; **46%** are female.
- **23 (17.16%)** have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- **41 (30.59%)** 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 **£53,463** this academic year to fulfil their duties for Previously Looked After Children.

Support Provided

Between 15th May 2024 – 15th May 2025 - 42 children in the borough of St Helens have migrated from being a looked after child to a previously looked after child.

The chart below shows the information regarding previously looked after children within St Helens and OOB previously looked after children who are educated outside of St Helens.

	2023			2024			2025		
	Meet	Email	Phone	Meet	Email	Phone	Meet	Email	Phone
Primary	3	2	1	5	16	2	2	8	2
Secondary	1	4	0	1	2	1	0	4	1
Special	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	6	1	6	24	3	2	14	3

	Concern						
	Attendance	Behaviour	Suspension/Exclusion	Emotional Wellbeing/Mental Health	Attainment	Health	SEND
2023	1	3	2	3	0	0	1
2024	3	7	1	6	0	0	4
2025	0	5	0	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	4	15	6	10	0	0	5

Support offered					
Advice	Signposting	Attendance at meeting	Additional Funding	Home Visit	Together for Adoption
8	6	2	1	1	1
10	11	4	0	0	1
4	5	1	0	0	0
22	22	7	1	1	2

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
- **1** pupil out of borough

Information taken from October 2024 Census data



Kinship Care

Kinship Care

The Virtual School also received £28,786 for 2024-2025 to complete its new duties around children in Kinship Care Arrangements.

This year, the Virtual School has been working closely to support those children who are in a Kinship Care arrangement, and to develop our offer as a service.

Support Provided

- Increased collaborative working to support SGO families through close relationships with the SGO Senior Social Worker and Team Manager from the Adoption Team.
- Liaising directly with school and families to provide advice, support and guidance to care experienced children.
- Advice session provided to SGO Support Group to answer any questions relating to education.
- Involvement with the PLAC and Kinship North West Subgroup 5 – authority action planning.
- Kinship training events have been advertised through the Virtual School monthly news letter and signposted to appropriate families.
- Various members of the Virtual School Team have provided workshops delivered by the Kinship Care Charity in order to strengthen our offer and response.
- Discussion around Book Trust partnership with Kinship Care at the annual NAVSH conference.



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.

www.sthelens.gov.uk/virtualschool

ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Attendance

Attendance Data

CwLA	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Virtual School	88.6%	91.2% (+2.6%)	90.3% (-0.9%)	88.7% (-1.6%)
National CLA	90%	90%	91%	91%

CwSW	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
St Helens (CSWS)	85.6%	84.7% (-0.9%)	83% (-1.7%)	82.5% (-0.5%)
National (CSWS)	88.6%	86.2%	85%	84.5%

Persistent Absenteeism

CwLA - PA	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Virtual School	38.7%	20.3% (-18.4%)	25.1% (+4.8%)	26.4% (+1.3%)
National CLA	31%	19%	22%	20%

CwSW - PA	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
St Helens (CSWS)	40.9%	43.1% (+2.2%)	47% (+3.9%)	45.4% (-1.6%)
National (CSWS)	31.3%	37.4%	43%	42.7%

Severe PA

CwLA - SPA	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Virtual School	0.4%	4.8% (+4.4%)	6.9% (+2.1%)	8.5% (+2.1%)
National CLA	3%	3%	5%	6%

CwSW - SPA	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
St Helens (CSWS)	5.5%	8.4% (+2.9%)	13% (+4.6%)	12% (-1.0%)
National (CSWS)	3.8%	5.6%	10%	9.3%

Projects and Initiatives

- Persistently Absent Children we Look After are tracked on a weekly basis to measure progress. Any pupils with concerning attendance have a targeted plan put in place.
- Children Placed With Parents and children who are Section 20 also have their attendance tracked on a weekly basis in order to proactively identify any themes or issues.
- The Virtual School has presented for a second academic year at the 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. This year's presentation focused on the attendance of vulnerable children, in particular, looking at common themes for Persistent Absenteeism.
- The 'Count Me In' attendance project has been launched over the last academic year with two of our in borough secondary schools.
- 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.

Count Me In Project



Count Me In - Attendance Project for CWSW.

The project has ran throughout the Spring Term 2024-2025, across two schools in St Helens Secondary Schools.

Throughout the term, a high number of the students selected were closed to social care, which can be typical of those requiring less intensive support. Only 2 remained open at the end of the term, with 1 additional child having a new referral and being re-opened.

All 6 of the children selected from one of the Secondary Schools, recorded a decrease in attendance with significant declines in some cases.

Whilst 2 of the 4 children at the other school had a positive increase in their attendance, with 1 maintaining a similar attendance and 1 declining.

The interventions and process reported from the second school were overall more successful and were more active in following the process outlined in the project.

Children from this setting also completed a questionnaire to express their feelings about school and to explore some reasons around barriers and non-attendance.

Some reasons stated for barriers to good school attendance were:

- Lack of motivation to attend
- School work being too difficult
- Struggling to get up in time to get to school
- Poor relationships with teachers
- Suspensions
- Illness/ Health problems
- Bullying or feeling unsafe

Some areas that the children thought would improve their school experience:

- Through having more positive interactions with teachers and school staff
- Better support for school work
- More attention to emotions and mental health
- Better transport options

As a review of the project and moving forward, the Virtual School is looking at a more strategic response at the point of the new referral to social care. Adding a layer into the process to look at attendance if this is identified as an issue for a child or young person. The questionnaire provided some valuable information, and this would be needed on a larger scale to have deeper insights into trends and to plan for more widescale support. The interventions and process reported from the second school were overall more successful and were more active in following the process outlined in the project.

Discussions with social care colleagues are ongoing to look at the next steps to provide more information and to have a wider impact.

Suspensions and Exclusions

Suspension Data

The Fixed Period Exclusion Rate for 2023-2024 CLA pupils was **29.88 per 100 pupils**. This is an increase of **2.89** from the previous year. This is also the first year where St Helens Virtual School has sat above the national average.

CwLA	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Virtual School	10.47	18.22 (+ 7.75)	26.99 (+8.77)	29.88 (+2.89)
National	15.00	24	28.00	28.03

CwSW	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Virtual School	15.00	27.00 (+12.00)	41.00 (+14.00)	26.30 (-14.70)
National	16.00	25.00	30.00	26.66

Exclusion Data

For **2023-2024**, the **CLA** Permanent Exclusion Rate is **0.00** which is lower than the national average of **0.06**. It is also **lower** than last year's figure of **0.57**.

For **2023-2024**, the Permanent Exclusion Rate for Children with a Social Worker is **0.51**, which is slightly higher than the national average of **0.41**.

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 Permanent 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.
- Training delivered by the Virtual School aims to support schools and other agencies in developing a Trauma Informed Approach to behaviour. Rather than solely taking a punitive response, the Virtual School works to support settings in understand the communication around behaviour, and find alternative strategies to help support the child or young person.

Inclusion



TESSA

Triage for all Education Support and Specialist Advice
for educational settings supporting children and young people

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.
- 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.

"The books are more open to talking about their emotions and can name a range of emotions, Children respond well to the stories and can tell you what the book of the week is about. More empathy shown".

Feedback for Think Equal Programme

Think Equal

Think Equal is a curriculum based programme that supports social and emotional development from ages 3-6. This is the second academic year that the Virtual School has funded this innovative programme.

Think Equal helps children learn to:

- Manage their own emotions and impulsive behaviours;
- Build their confidence and self-esteem
- Have empathy and show consideration for others;
- Solve problems effectively and learn to resolve conflicts peacefully;
- Build critical thinking skills and make responsible decisions;
- Maintain healthy relationships and learn to collaborate.

In 2023-24 the Virtual School funded 10 sets of Think Equal packs for children at 3 Primary Schools and 5 nurseries.

In 2024-25, following the feedback, the Virtual School funded 10 more packs for 4 Primary Schools as well as 2 nurseries. Feedback was again very positive with schools using the stories in assemblies as well as weekly as a part of the schools PSED curriculum.

The Virtual School have worked closely with Think Equal who have now offered to fund Think Equal for one year group for every school in St Helens. We have decided to offer this to all our Reception Classes within St Helens. This is exciting initiative, and schools are currently signing up before the training session on 25th June 2025.



Inclusion

Have a Go Avocado

Have A Go Avocado offers insights and support to others on their educational journey, retold through the creative perspective of our Foundation Learning students from Carmel College. This fabulous and innovative resource has been produced to support the EHCP process for young people across the borough. Each page has been carefully crafted by our nine student authors, retelling personal experiences and struggles at school by encapsulating an inspiring message of overcoming fear, apprehension and challenges by having a go.

Six children from one of our local Primary Schools attended Carmel College on 18th November to collaborate on the 'Have a Go Avocado' project with the students who designed and wrote the book.

The children had an amazing morning and were well and truly inspired by the students at Carmel. They benefitted from so many aspects...

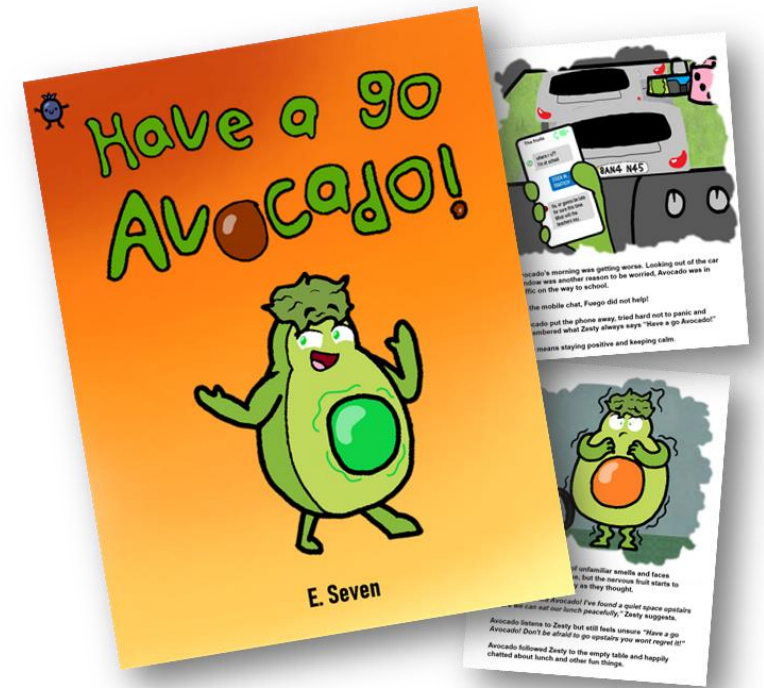
- Confidence to collaborate
- Aspirational student role models
- Being valued for their opinions
- Raising self esteem and sharing feelings

Carmel has been reaching out to other Primary Schools in the borough to further explore the potential of further workshops. This also provides the young people involved in the project the chance to gain essential life skills through demonstrating and presenting their book to Primary children in the authority and providing a level of support than only one of our young people can give.

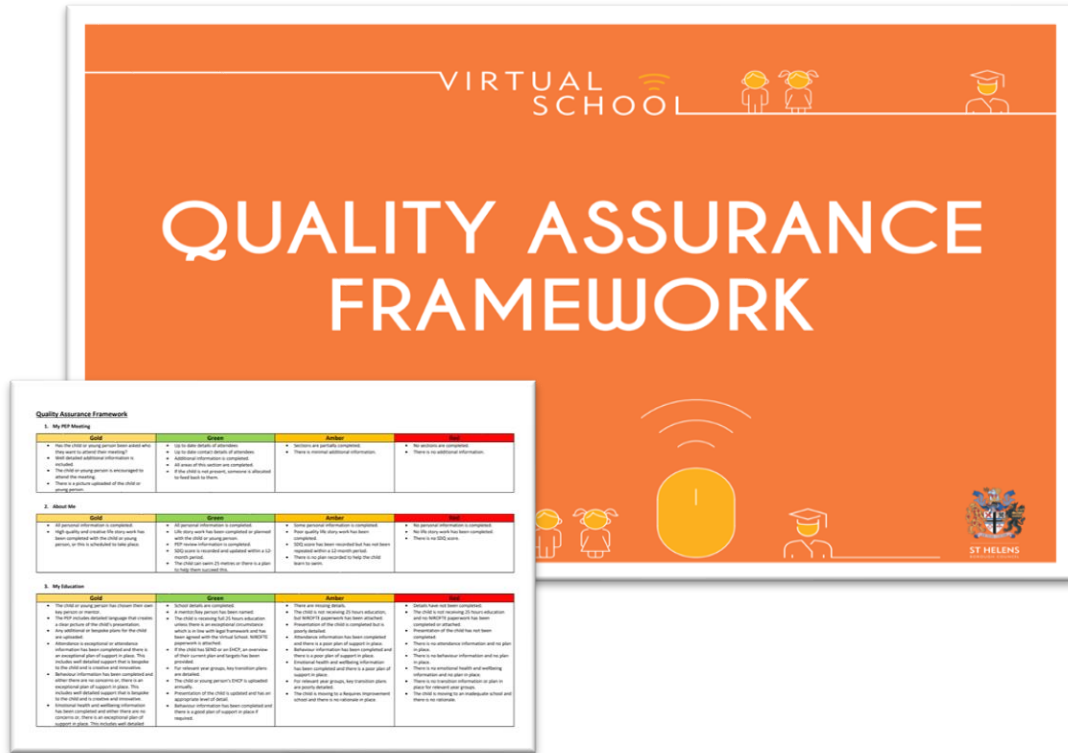
The Have a Go Avocado story is just beginning, with plans to publish further and attach the characters to the St Helens Council EHCP paperwork so that pupil voice will become one with concept.

Carmel are currently attending Primary Schools regularly to deliver their workshops and schools are following up by recording next chapters in the Avocado's journey.

Our young people have also presented at the SEND conference and the Festival of Learning in front of large audiences. It has been a pleasure for the Virtual School to be involved in this outstanding piece of work.



Quality Assurance Framework



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. This is the second academic year in which the Quality Assurance Framework has been in place for the Virtual School.

This is 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.

This document is reviewed each academic year, in line with any changes, improvements or updates that are made to the Personal Education Plan. The Virtual School wants to ensure that we continue to strive for the highest quality for our children and young people.

External Moderation Group

In order to further strengthen the Quality Assurance process, the Virtual School has 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

In addition to this, volunteer Designated Teachers from our schools have also joined the moderation group which is sincerely welcomed.

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.

As previous moderations were providing consistent feedback around the quality assurance of PEPs, this year, we have decided to run thematic moderations in preparation for our Local Area SEND Inspection.

In the Autumn and Spring of 2024-2025, PEP Moderation has been focussed around children with Education Health and Care Plans and those pupils who are SEND Support. These external reviews, as well as identifying recommendations, have highlighted that Personal Education Plans enhance EHCPs, rather than duplicating them. This ensures the most effective use of spend in line with aspirational plans that meet individual needs.

Starting School Pack

Starting School Pack

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

This pack provides them with everything they need for starting school and supports a positive transition. The pack also provides materials and equipment which helps to develop key skills which are required to achieve a Good Level Development.

Each pack includes:

- A story
- A school bag
- Paper
- Pens and crayons
- Glue sticks
- Pencil case
- A photo frame to proudly display their first day of school picture
- A game
- Playdough
- Safety scissors

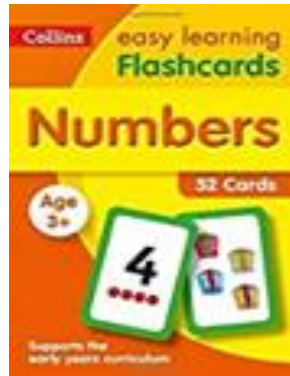
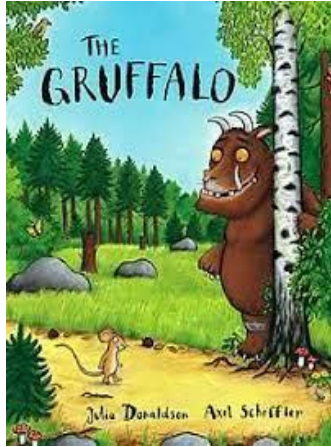


Reception Class Packs

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.

This year, the packs included advice for carers, a 'Phonics Buster' workbook, pencils and stickers.

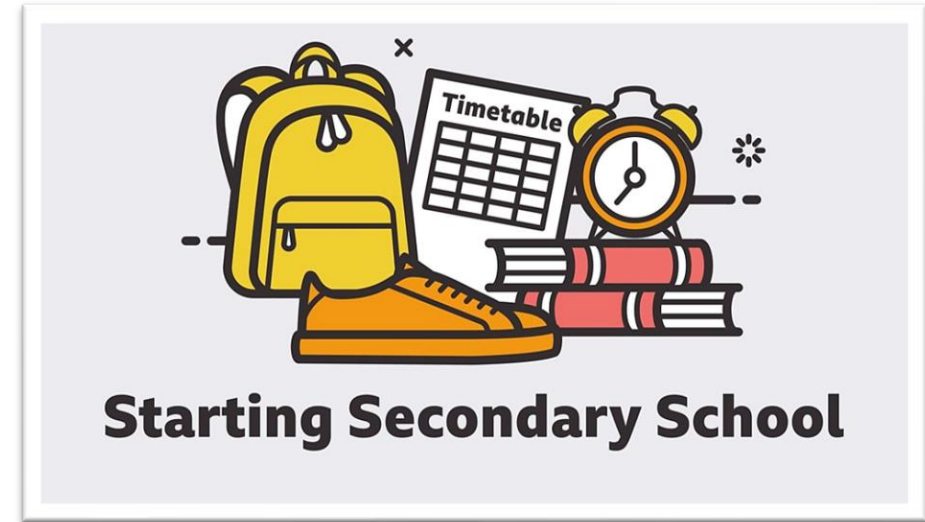


Key Stage 2 Transition Pack

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.



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.

KS4 Revision Pack



In a bid to improve outcomes at Key Stage 4, during 2024-2025, the Virtual School created and provided revision packs to all pupils currently in Year 11. Packs were delivered to schools in St Helens, Wigan and Warrington. Packs for young people that live further away were passed onto social workers to deliver.

These packs ran alongside dedicated training for carers in how to manage exam worries and support effective revision techniques.

Each pack includes:

- A study planner
- A 'How to Revise' guide
- Revision flash cards
- Post-it notes
- Highlighters
- Pens
- Advice and top tips sheet from our Senior Educational Psychologist.

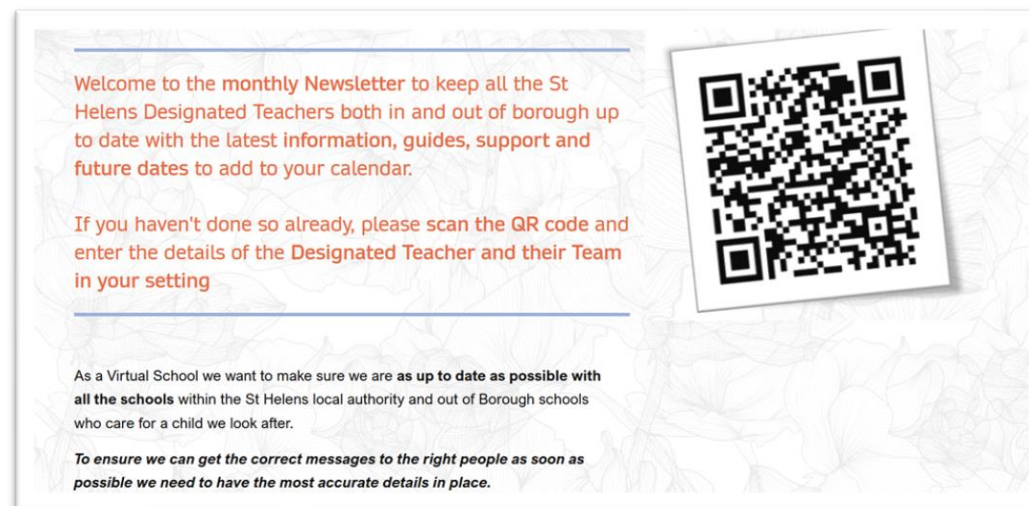
Monthly Designated Teacher Newsletter

The monthly Designated Teacher's Newsletter is a new initiative from the Virtual School, to ensure strong communication channels with our partners. Since 4th March 2024 – there have been 16 monthly editions of the DT Newsletter.

- Each newsletter is sent on the 1st of each month to the St Helens designated Teachers and the Out of Borough Designated Teachers who have a child within their school or setting who is looked after by St Helens.
- The MS Office Designated Teacher group, that distributes the Newsletter, also contains members of staff who would be connected to a child or young person we look after such as Pastoral Staff, SENCOs and Headteachers.
- Within the last six months the Newsletter has also been sent to Social Workers who are assigned on the child or young person's PEP and a Parents and Carers group.

Contents of the Newsletter:

- The newsletter provides information regarding training opportunities for Designated Teachers and Carers.
- The training provided/advertised within the newsletter is often in response to requests from Designated Teachers such as trauma informed practice, life story work, supporting additional needs and advice for home and school settings.
- The newsletter will also highlight training that has already taken place and resources that were developed and provided within, such as presentations and advice sheets.
- There are monthly reminders for Designated Teachers and Social Workers around key dates for the diary.
- The newsletter also highlights any changes in legislation or government publications that could affect the Children we Look After, Previously Looked After Children or Children with a Social Worker.
- The newsletter also provides information on opportunities available to our young people within St Helens as well as those residing out of borough.



TIME Programme

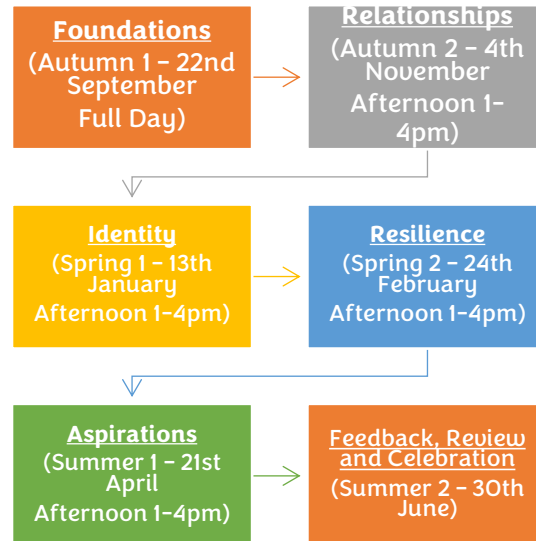
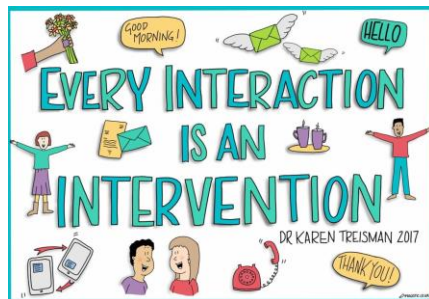
TIME Programme

TIME stands for **T**herapeutic **I**ntervention and **M**entoring in **E**ducation

The TIME programme has been designed in response to the need for trauma-informed, relational and restorative approaches to be at the core of our work with young people. The programme involves key members of staff mentoring identified children and developing personalised interventions to support them in their education. The programme is a collaboration between the Virtual School, the Educational Psychology Service and Youth Justice. It sits under Priority 4 in the Send Strategy Action plan.

The foundation day for the TIME pilot programme was held on 23rd September 2025. Future sessions during this academic year will cover topics such as relationships, identity, resilience, and aspirations. The programme is being piloted in two schools, one primary and one secondary and will be offered to more schools next year.

From 2026 we will be linking in with the University of Manchester as part of their Educational Psychologist training programme, and this will lead to published research looking into the impact of the programme.



Money Management Programme

Context

Following on from a survey, commissioned with Vibe, in which children and young people across St Helens told us they would like more support and education around financial management, the Virtual School has launched a Money Management Programme this academic year.

The Virtual School successfully bid for a grant from the Inequalities Commission, to run the project with all St Helens schools for 6 months. The aim of the work is to support our most vulnerable young people in St Helens by minimising gaps and disadvantages with financial management.

The Virtual School has worked with various banks and charities to develop a series of lessons and resources for schools, so they can teach young people financial management skills that are essential for later life. By having these key skills, young people will be able to make informed choices around their finances, which will look to tackle and end poverty but providing equal opportunities for our children.

Progress to date

The programme was launched in February 2025 and is available to Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Post-16 colleagues, all with adapted and varied content.

Cohort 1 was developed in February 2025 which consisted of 9 delegates from the following settings:

- 6 primary schools
- 1 Alternative Provision
- 1 Special School
- TESSA

Cohort 2 was developed in March 2025 which consisted of 12 delegates from the following settings:

- 8 primary schools
- 3 secondary schools

Most schools in the cohort have tackled savings, debt and opening a bank account as part of the maths and PSHE curriculum. However, some of the more negative aspects of money management such as gambling, money mules, poverty haven't really been taught in debt and in Primary settings addressed at all.

Wages, taxes leasing, renting have only been touched on in cohort 1's secondary settings.

The areas of money management that teachers thought our children and young people need to be aware of, but is currently not on the curriculum were:

- General budgeting and how to save
- I'm not sure as think most areas are
- Budgeting
- The difference between needs and wants. Budgeting. Saving up for a specific item. What household income is spent on.
- Overspending due to peer pressure / social media influence
- How to use bank accounts. Saving.



Enrichment and Aspiration



LMJU Summer Residential

Two of our pupils attended the LMJU Summer Residential Program. This provides young people who are Looked After the opportunity to experience university life, including lessons, lectures, independent living and city life.



Edge Hill University Trip

Seven Looked After Children from Years 9-11 from Cowley International Language College, attended a trip to Edge Hill University to take part in a program called "Discovering Your Potential". They pupils attended some motivational speeches, went to a variety of workshops of interest, had a tour of the campus and found out more about university life.

All the pupils enjoyed the day and showed interest in potentially attending university in the future.

Year 5 and 6 Enrichment Day

The Virtual School recently held their first Enrichment Day for Children we Look After. Pupils were invited from Years 5 and 6 to further develop their social and interaction skills as well as enhancing their resilience skills.

Twenty-two children from across the borough attended St. Austin's School for a Harry Potter themed day.

Team building tasks started the day which progressed onto Quidditch activities with all children joining in and eager to retrieve the 'golden snitch'.

After some literacy and art tasks (as well as much anticipated lunch!), the afternoon was taken up with orienteering activities.

The children all worked together with great team spirit – especially when the 'sorting hat' ensured that all the groups were mixed up randomly.

Helpfulness, teamwork and kindness abounded throughout the day with all children looking after each other so well.

Thank you to all the schools who allowed their children to be part of this first enrichment day.

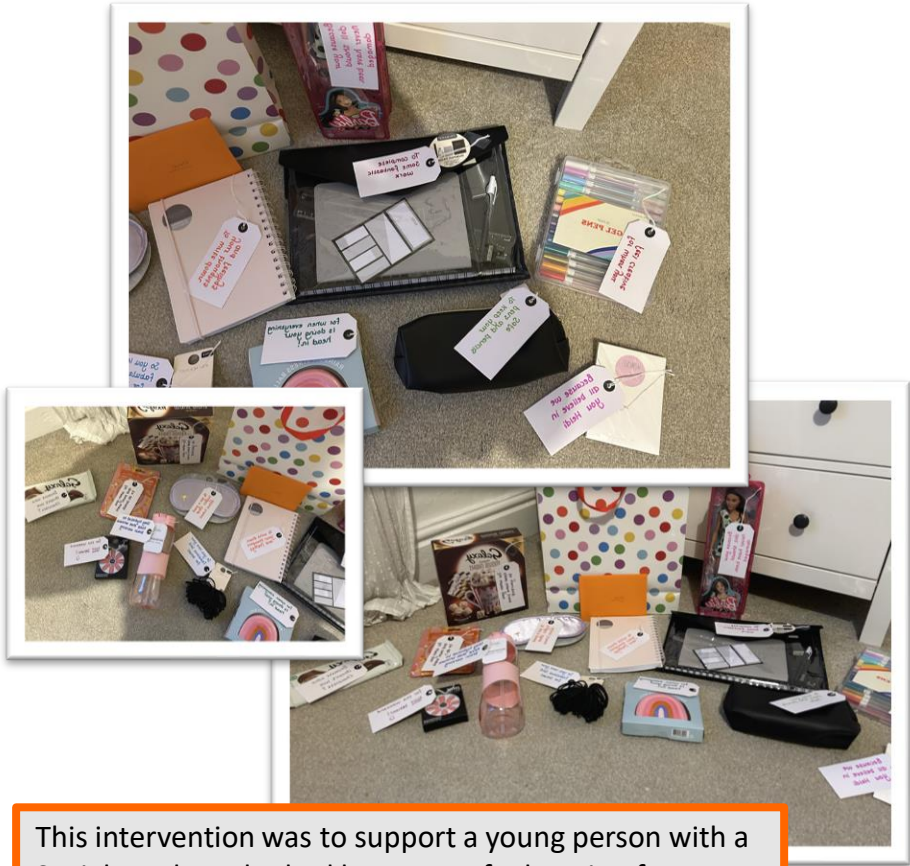
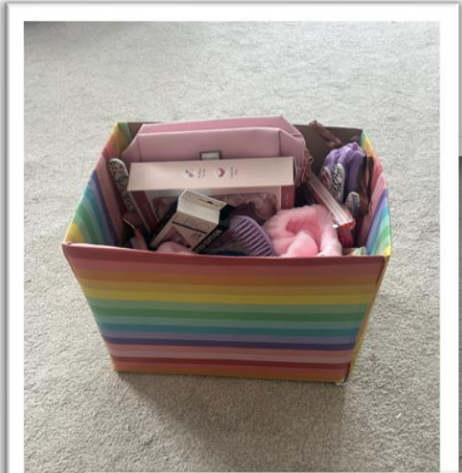
Our thanks goes to [Enrich Education](#) for creating a bespoke day for our Virtual School; to St. Austin's school for hosting this event and for all the schools who brought their children to the event; we could not have done this without you all. The benefits we saw of children developing their resilience and enhancing their social and interactive skills was immense.

We hope to continue this approach with other year groups in the future.



Bespoke Initiatives

This intervention was designed for a pupil who has struggled with school attendance following a period of illness and a period of transition. A reward chart and prize box was created to celebrate positive behaviour and contained all beauty essentials!



This intervention was to support a young person with a Social Worker who had been out of education for a period of time. Direct work was completed by The Virtual School to build a relationship and support transition back into education.

Bespoke Initiatives

Beauty Workshops

Aspiration continues to be high on the Virtual School agenda. Therefore, we want to explore careers and opportunities that genuinely interest our children and young people. This has been communicated to schools through our forums, network meetings and newsletters. The general idea is to link with local businesses or training providers to give young people a taste of working in specific industries, extending the careers work already being undertaken in our schools.

Beauty Aspiration Workshops were launched during the 2023-2024 academic year, in order to give students insight into working within the beauty industry.

The Virtual School collaborated with two local business owners, who ran a full day of workshops which taught pupils both practical and theoretical aspects of working as a nail technician. Young people completed a series of practical manicure and nail art tasks, as well as learning theoretical aspects. Pupils also asked the course leaders key questions around the reality of running your own business.

Four of our local Secondary Schools engaged with the programme, with a total of 50 pupils from Year 7 through to Year 11 attending the sessions:

This initiative has carried on into the 2024-2025 academic year, with the content of sessions expanding into eyelash extensions and make up application. The Virtual School is also planning to provide these courses to support pupils who are NEET re-engage with education or employment.



Bespoke Initiatives

New Beginnings Tiling Academy

The Virtual School had utilised a local training provision that has been offering school leaver courses and upskilling courses for adults. New Beginnings Tiling Academy offers a short-term course to training Post-16 young people who are NEET, or who want to explore tiling as a particular career.

There have been 10 young people who have completed the course, which aims to kickstart practical and business skills with the purpose of leading young people on to complete an apprenticeship, become self-employed or complete further training in a construction or tiling based field. Pupil Premium + has also been used to fund tiling kits where requested, and this permits our young people to progress into the world of work.

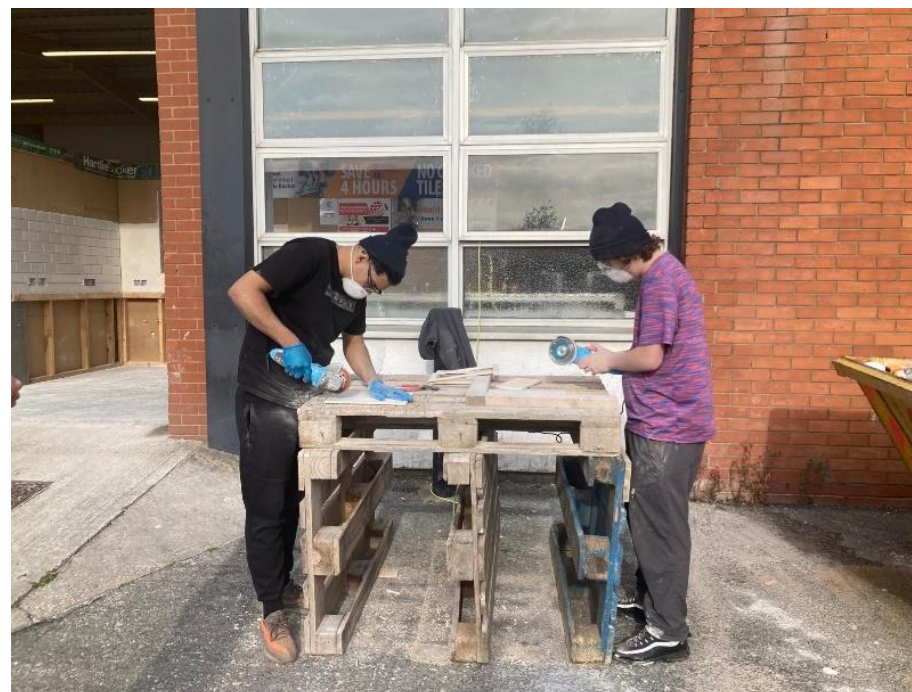
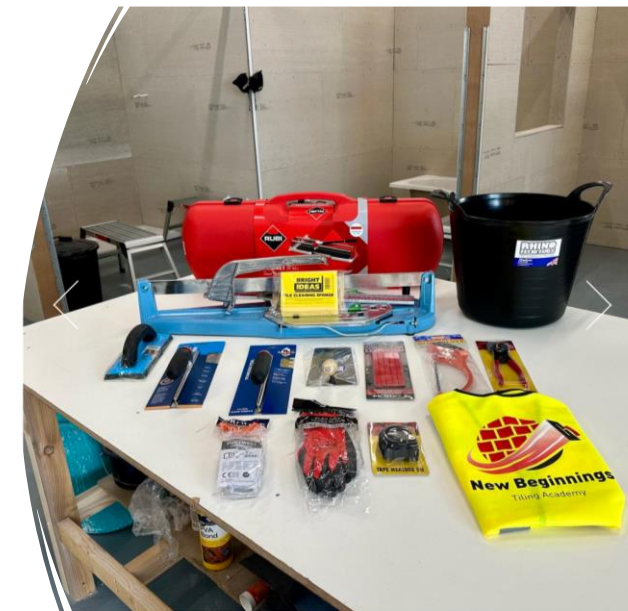
Those who have completed the course includes:

- 6 Post 16 Young people
- 4 Year 11 school leavers
- 1 Year 10 summer intervention programme.

There has been reciprocal positive feedback from both staff and young people who have completed the course, and this provision has provided opportunities for some of our most vulnerable pupils.



A beautiful piece of work completed by one of our Year 11 pupils.



Bespoke Initiatives



One of our fabulous pupils at their equine Alternative Provision placement. We never fail to be astounded at the challenges our young people strive towards and what they achieve.

Well done!



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.

Lego Therapy (October 2024)

In November 2024 schools attended Lego Therapy from Beata Bednarska. Bea is passionate about creating genuinely inclusive provisions to help children to become independent and happy adults. Everyone who attended the training got access to the Lego®-Based Therapy Essentials PDF for free! Some even won some special vouchers to the Lego store for winning the mini tasks along the way. A really interactive and fun way to get to the heart of what our children need.

As a Virtual School we highlight Lego Therapy training for our young people to support children's communication, social skills and well-being.

Designated Teacher Forums

- **Autumn Term** – 1st October 2024. Guest speakers from The Vision including Care Experienced young people; health colleagues providing vital training around SDQs and school spotlights from Thatto Heath Primary School and St Cuthberts Catholic High School on supporting large cohorts of vulnerable pupils and inclusive practice.
- **Spring Term** – 29th January 2025. Themed around transition, especially for pupils with SEND. School spotlights from Holy Spirit and Carmel College who shared how they support CWLA with additional needs and a launch of the Money Management Project for schools.
- **Summer Term** – 29th April 2025. Focused on multiagency working. School spotlights from Willowbank School and Broad Oak Primary School. Guest speakers from the FAST Team, a review of the MA Resolution Procedure and dedicated workshops for primary, secondary and post-16 colleagues.

FASD Training – October 2024

The Virtual School Primary PEP Coordinator attended training from the National Association for FASD, with the aim of subsequently delivering this training to education staff within St Helens. This follows a number of school staff requesting training on the subject, particularly as there is very little known about this condition. The training covered extensive theory behind FASD including how it presents; medical comorbidity and overlap with other conditions; diagnosis and strategies to support children and young people with FASD. There were also co-presenters on the day who provided inspirational first hand accounts of supporting children within their own lives with the condition. The training was well received by all delegates and feedback was positive.

Foster Carer Training

- **Transition and Anxiety Workshop** – Held at Sutton Family Hub in May 2024, this session designed for Designated Teachers and Foster Carers, provided expert advice around supporting young people with their emotional wellbeing. Guest speaker included Senior Educational Psychologist Rachel Blake and Merseycare Mental Health Support Team.
- **KS4 Revision Workshop** – Training for Foster Carers took place on 31st March 2025, to help carers support young people preparing for exams in Key Stage 4. This session was advertised to carers and staff in residential children's homes, and social workers and Designated Teachers were also asked to share the invite with relevant families. Dr Rachel Blake, Senior Educational Psychologist and Tara Mycock, trainee Educational Psychologist, spoke to carers about supporting exam stress and anxiety, with the emphasis on exam wellbeing. Michelle Hart, Deputy Headteacher and Secondary School Advisor, then shared practical tips and strategies for effective revision. Following the training, all delegates were given Key Stage 4 Revision Packs to take away with them.



Transition and
Anxiety Workshop
May 2024



"I wanted to let you know how good the event was this morning. It was clear that the Virtual School had really considered what teachers & foster carers might need in terms of information and access to virtual school professionals as well as Mersey Care Mental Health Support Team. There was a helpful input on anxiety and transition and then there was a marketplace event where we could directly to an individual about any concerns or questions we had to do with our looked after children and their education. I even managed to get a senior educational psychologist to attend a meeting tomorrow to help my looked after child out!"
- Foster Carer, Transition and Anxiety Workshop

Training and Development

"Life changing and viable"
- Educational Practitioner, Drawing and Talking Therapy

Drawing and Talking Therapy – the Virtual School hosted a full day's training, which included a year's membership to the Drawing and Talking Therapy Community. Drawing and Talking Therapy is an attachment based therapeutic intervention. It allows individuals to discover and communicate emotions through a non-directed technique, setting it apart from existing solution-focused and cognitive-based therapies and interventions. It is designed as a short-term, time limited, pro-active intervention intended to complement, rather than replace, the work of specialist mental health services. The day was led by Drawing and Talking Therapy CEO, Cath Beagley, who travelled to St Helens from London to deliver this bespoke training. The intention is that schools develop their own, self-sustaining range of therapeutic approaches, so they can provide swift and timely intervention to any child or young person who may require additional support. The training was extremely well received, with 100% of delegates finding the training beneficial.

New Headteacher's Induction

There are two sessions provided by the Virtual School which form part of the New Headteacher's Induction process. One session focuses around the role and expectations of the Virtual School within St Helens and how to support our Looked After, Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker. The second session is delivered by the SCIE Coordinator and provides essential and comprehensive safeguarding information, including policies and procedures within St Helens, especially in relation to Children's Social Care.

Safeguarding Children Partnership Training

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 (delivered at least termly to early years setting, schools and further education providers).

Ketamine in Education Workshop

The workshop was set up to provide information and guidance to education settings on Ketamine, signs and symptoms, physical harms, impact and support available. It was attended by 28 representatives from education settings. Information was delivered from YPDAAT, Wirral Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Public Health Nurse and Virtual School. Relevant documentation was circulated following the event.

Lego Therapy Training November 2024



**Drawing
and Talking**

"This is one of the best training courses I have ever attended and I am starting the therapy immediately."
- Educational Practitioner, Drawing and Talking Therapy

"Interesting, amazing and fabulous!"
- Educational Practitioner, Drawing and Talking Therapy



Training and Development

DSL Network Meeting

- **Autumn Term** – Record keeping and preparing witness statements for court; understanding signs of safeguarding when promoting outcomes for pupils with additional vulnerabilities; Drug Misuse and Child Exploitation; National Crime Reporting; Safeguarding Alert Flow Chart and Section 175 audits.
- **Spring Term** – Gathering Self-Harm Data – Beyond CYP Transformation Programme; Serious Crime Duty; Kooth; Beacon Counselling Trust; Operation Encompass – Missing from Home and Care Notifications.
- **Summer Term** – Building Attachment and Bonds Service; Supporting Refugees and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in School; Early Help Complex Safeguarding; Section 175 Audit Feedback; Operation Encompass research; Capturing Self-Harm Data – Beyond CYP Transformation Programme; YPDAAT and Prevalence of Vaping; Ariel Trust – free training for Primary Schools.

Governor Training

The Virtual School provides two separate sessions for Governors:

- Safeguarding Awareness for Governors
- Governor Training for Looked After, Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker.

Each session is delivered on a termly basis as part of the offer through Governor Services.

Secondary School DT Network Meeting

There have been two Secondary DT networks this year:

- Autumn 25/11/2024 at St Cuthberts High School
- Summer 29/04/2025 as part of the DT Forum at Willowbrook.

The meetings are a great opportunity for school staff to share anything that is working well for them and also if they need any support to discuss solutions through shared working. A few points that have been discussed as part of the network this year:

AQA unit awards - Some schools already deliver the AQA units to selected groups of children and it was felt by the group that this was really beneficial in terms of them feeling success and being motivated by school. A shared area will be set up to add lessons/ information for schools to support each other with this. The awards don't contribute to the overall school results, but the group felt there were huge benefits to the children.

Beauty - Schools that have had the beauty workshops discussed how that went and the content of the sessions.

Tiling academy - Y11 After exams, summer (2-week course) - Tiling academy courses £650 without kit - £850 with kit. The programme was successful in the summer term to give our Y11s two-week training in the tiling academy after they finished their exams or in the summer holidays. Funded using the PP+ from the final PEP in Y11.

Farm provision - Pinehurst Farm provision discussed for use of PP+ to provide a package of enrichment activities that could possibly linked in with a AQA unit award.

Application for Post 16, support for positive destinations - Post 16 Coordinator to run an online session to ensure that everyone is up to date with the process for applying for college places. There will also be an opportunity to discuss any children who schools feel could be at risk of being NEET.

Discussion around use of PP+ with some ideas from external agencies schools recommend to each other:

The Vision - Staff training and support groups; Vibe – Mentoring; Prospero - mentoring and tuition; Talking and Drawing Therapy.

College colleagues attended to build relationships with school staff to have links to support transition - College colleagues along with Career connect/ Virtual school Post 16 advisors attended the summer meeting to develop the networks between school and college and to support transitions for students to prevent students dropping out or becoming NEET.



Training and Development

Festival of Learning

The St Helens Festival of Learning is an annual event which brings together all professionals and carers who are there for just one reason – the children we care for.

Each year the Festival is centred around a theme. This year (2024) the theme was 'BEAT the motivation barriers'. BEAT emphasises the acronym of the main barriers for children attending school in St Helens this year; Behaviour, Exclusion, Anxiety, and Trauma. The three-day festival was aimed at all contributors to our children's education from Foster Carers to Headteachers.

Monday and Tuesday's event was held at the 'Totally Wicked Stadium' and offered a range of engaging speakers with successful solutions that have beaten barriers in their field, these included: Dave Harris from Independent Thinking, Luke Brettingham from No Isolation, Megan King and Siobhan Hagan from our very own mental health team, Naomi Summers and Rachel Blake, St Helens Educational psychologists, Paul Oginsky from VIBE and Phil Denton who wrote the leadership book – "The first 100 days"

There was also a marketplace stands with advice, tools and offers for all attending. They ranged from AV1 robots accessing remote teaching from home to psychologists breaking down the mental barriers and trauma our children are facing. The Festival of Learning was not only a chance to bring professionals together, but also a chance to show our shared vision for the future of our children and a chance to show, as a Local Authority what systems we already have in place that schools and agencies might not be aware of.

Wednesday consisted of a virtual offer to ensure that everyone got the chance to attend the Festival. Our virtual speakers opened with John Bryant from 'When the Adults Change', followed by Nina Jackson who brought back our fizz, and then Maureen Mckenna who has changed the exclusion rates in Glasgow phenomenally, she shared her tried and tested methodology. The afternoon was shared between Luke Brettingham and Shahana Knight who shared her therapeutic approach to the classroom to conclude our festival on a very calming and positive note.

Would you like to see us all in action?

[Click here to see if you can spot yourself on our Festival of Learning Video.](#)

Overall it was a fantastic event that wouldn't have happened without the support, attendance, and interaction of all of St Helens Education services. St Helens working together made this event a success.



Training attended by The Virtual School

AIM Training

The Virtual School Head and Safeguarding Children in Education Coordinator both attended AIMS training this academic year. This included AIMS intervention training and AIMS Under 12. This was extremely beneficial as not only did it strengthen knowledge and expertise around Harmful Sexual Behaviour, but it also allowed us to develop a more coordinated and strengthened approach for those young people we directly support.

Attachment-Aware, Trauma-Responsive (AATR) Specialist Course

4 members of the Virtual School team successfully completed the specialist 7-day course for Virtual School teams on Attachment-Aware and Trauma-Responsive (AATR) practice.

The course, delivered over the span of a year by an experienced trauma practitioner, focused on equipping professionals who support children in care and care-experienced young people with the latest knowledge and skills in attachment, child development, and neuroscience.

The programme provided both theoretical understanding and experiential learning, deepening our team's confidence in advocating for children and young people who often communicate distress through behaviour. Key areas of study included:

- The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress
- The principles of polyvagal theory and the neuro sequential model (Regulate, Relate, Reason, and Repair)
- Approaches such as Thera-play, Sensory Attachment Interventions (SAI), and Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP)

By completing this course, our team has strengthened its capacity to lead trauma-responsive, attachment-aware practice across schools and settings, ensuring that children in care and care-experienced young people receive informed, compassionate, and effective support.

Peer Review Training – The Virtual School Head and Deputy Headteacher for Care Experienced Children attended a two-day Peer Review training course in December 2024. This extensive 2 day training, provided by the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH), subsequently permits senior leaders from St Helens Virtual School to review and evaluate the practice of other Virtual Schools across the country. This will strengthen national networks amongst Virtual Schools, grant staff the forum in which to see examples of strong practice, and provide individual professional development for senior members of the Virtual School team.

Other courses attended by the team include:

- Financial support for Kinship Families
- Kinship Carers FASD Webinar
- An overview of the adoption and special guardianship fund
- Understanding how to keep children in Kinship Care safe
- Managing contact for Kinship Families – the emotional journey
- Kinship Professionals Network
- SENDCo Conference
- Adoption Conference
- CAPE Meetings and Annual Conference
- Child Sexual Abuse Response Training
- Early Help Conference
- NAVSH New to Role Programme
- Welfare Call Analytics Training
- SDQ Training
- Autism Education Trust Early Years Training
- PINS Autism Training
- Wellcomm Speech and Language Training
- Trauma Informed Practice 4 day course MVP
- SDQ System Training

Training attended by The Virtual School

NAVSH Annual Conference 2025

Keynote Speaker Dr Lisa Cherry

Dr Cherry opened the conference reiterating the importance of a truly trauma informed approach. She highlighted how school isn't an equitable place for trauma affected pupils and expressed the need for exposure and understanding of care experience within our schools. Dr Cherry reflected on the quote "We're a community, we don't do this alone".

She explained the mechanisms of change:

- Language
- Cultivating belonging
- Self-awareness
- Trauma informed practices
- Collective care
- Transformational Leadership

Dr Cherry believes that cultivating belonging is at the heart of what practitioners must do to support young people to overcome disadvantage.

Through her research with care experienced adults the themes of what they said helped them where:

- Relationships
- Rejection of stigma
- Access to learning
- Community connection
- Connection with nature.

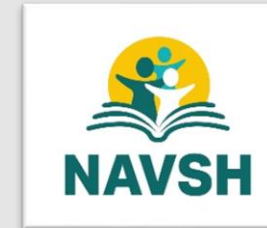
Mary Holder – The Black Curriculum

Patrick Ward virtually interviewed Mary Holder, NAVSH trustee for Race, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion about the NAVSH commitment to strive to become an inclusive organisation and address intersectional discrimination present in the system. Mary asked the DfE directly to call for multi-cultural learning and a review of the current curriculum. Mary's message is that we build respect by learning about each other.

Isabelle Trowler: Chief Social Worker

Isabelle Trowler joined NAVSH Conference remotely to share the widespread positive regard for Virtual School Heads and highlights the strengthened role of Virtual Schools in recent and proposed legislation. Particular reference was made to the Wellbeing in schools bill and the Statutory practice framework. Isabelle talked about Stability and permanence being a goal for our children. Reform is high on the agenda in the current government linking with the 5 missions. Specifically, through opportunity and removing underlying barriers.

Isabelle explained the significant changes and shared commitment to champion our young people. Respectful more family focused strategy with a focus on family help and child protection. Isabelle also outlined plans for dedicated pathways to CAMHS for our children through an expansion of mental health support.



Training attended by The Virtual School

NAVSH Annual Conference 2025

Matthew Brazier: Ofsted

Matthew Brazier addressed the NAVSH Conference to update delegates regarding the changes in Ofsted inspection and how they relate to Virtual Schools. Matthew shared three main updates:

- 1: Consultation on how we inspect - Matthew briefly explained the new report card system. The new system is being trialled through testing and pilots and the inspections will formally begin in Summer 2025. There is an opportunity now to give our views.
2. Response to the big listen
3. Updates in Research project. .

Other training and sessions over the two days included:

- Janet Daby – Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing
- Andrew Baxter – Department for Education
- Panel Discussion hosted by Ashley John Baptiste
- Workshop with Jonny Utley
- Workshop with Kinship representative Sandie Bailey
- Workshop – Springboard Foundation
- Workshop – Luke Rodgers Care Leaders
- Workshop – Lads Like Us
- Marketplace
- Keynote speaker: Michelle Bomber Touchbase Centre
- Calvin Kipling MBE – NAVSH Survey
- REES Centre



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 funds are spent 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 £2570. Within St Helens, schools and education settings are allocated £2000 (£666.66 per term) across the school year. £570 is then top sliced and put into a central grant for strategic and bespoke initiatives.

This central grant is used for:

- Additional funding requests for complex children;
- Training and professional development;
- Staffing;
- School transition packs;
- Strategic initiatives such as the Nurture Project or Think Equal Programme.

The DfE has confirmed funding rates for Looked After Children for the 2025-2026 academic year, in which Pupil Premium Plus will be increased to £2630 per child.

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).

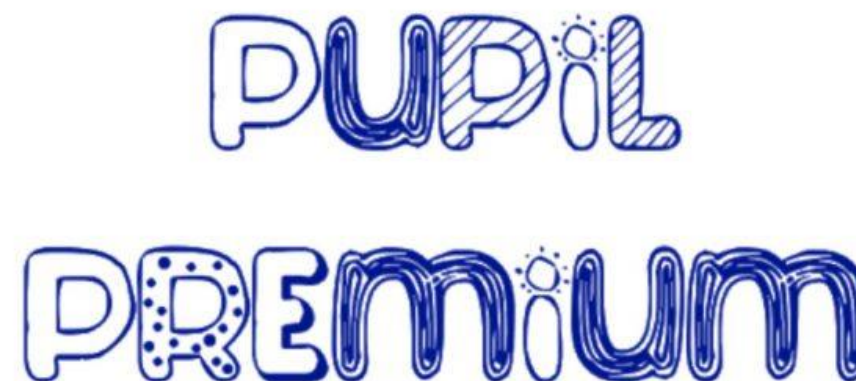
Additional Funding

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 2023-2024, over £91,000 was provided to support our young people achieve their potential. Reasons for request included:

- Subsidising the final year of the National Tutoring Programme. The final year saw St Helens Virtual School use the whole of its allocation for the first time.
- Funding training for professionals and carers, including the Festival of Learning
- Strategic initiatives such as the Think Equal Programme
- Funding for alternative provision
- Bespoke interventions such as the Tiling Academy course and equipment
- Laptops and specialist equipment
- Private Educational Psychology assessments
- Play Therapy
- Desty Mentor Programme
- Interim 1:1 support

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.



PUPIL
PREMIUM

Case Study – Child C

Context

- Child C is a Primary School aged pupil, attending an in borough school.
- The school raised concerns with the Virtual School regarding the level of trauma they had experienced.
- This was manifesting through violent displays of behaviour to school staff and peers.
- Poor school attendance in Child C's Early Year had a significant detrimental impact on their outcomes.
- School had completed referrals to TESSA and the Behaviour Improvement Team were involved.
- The school had put 1:1 support in school as this was the only way that Child C could remain in class.
- An EHCP application was submitted by school.
- Child C's wishes and feelings in Autumn 2024 were: *"I want to have a perfect day. I want to have lots of friends"*.

"They come into school with a big smile on their face and a spring in their step."

What did we do

- The Virtual School supported the setting in applying for emergency funding whilst the EHC Needs Assessment was ongoing.
- Extra support for a Teaching Assistant was provided by the Virtual School.
- Through our Service Level Agreement, the Virtual School commissioned Senior Educational Psychologist to undertake observations and assessments of Child C within an immediate timeframe.
- The sessions with the Senior Educational Psychologist recognised positive attributes of Child C, and these were utilised to provide the school with strategies for throughout the school day.
- Child C's permanence plan involved a move to another part of the country. The Virtual School, educational setting and Educational Psychology Service worked collaboratively to support with this transition.

Impact

- From advice and guidance provided by the Virtual School and Educational Psychology Service, as well as the inclusive environment and ethos in school, Child C became much more emotionally regulated.
- Child C is now able to recognise their emotions and utilise key people around them to gain support when needed.
- Child C's carers commented "school have made everything wonderful".
- The school showed such a trauma informed response to Child C, that the Virtual School have nominated them for the ARC Award, which they have been shortlisted for.
- Child C had a positive transition to their forever home thanks to the support provided by partners.
- Child C has settled well into their new school setting

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
- Foster Carer (VACANT)
- Care Leaver (VACANT)
- Designated Early Years Lead
- Designated Headteacher – Primary
- Designated Secondary Lead (x2) (1x Vice Chair)
- Head of Service, Children we Look After
- Designated Principal – Secondary (VACANT)
- 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
- Team manager: Children Programme Coordinator

There is always ongoing work to try and fill any Governor vacancies within the Virtual School.

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 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.

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

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.

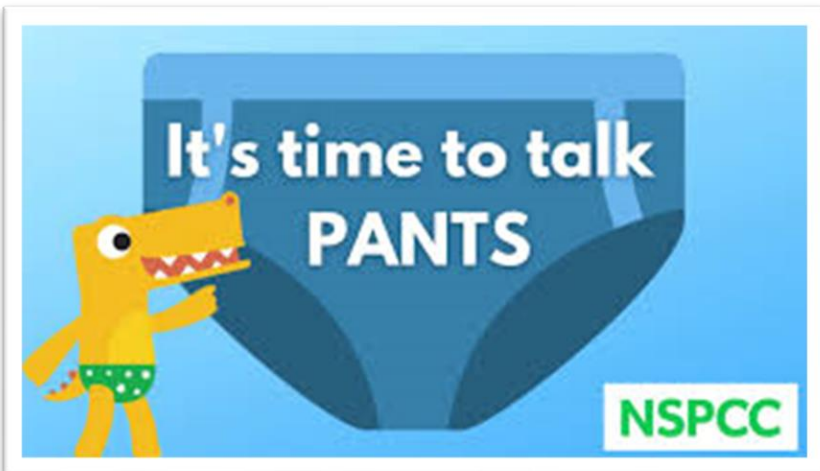
MARAC – the SCIE coordinator also attend MARAC on a fortnightly basis. This provides additional safeguarding not only for statutory school aged children, but also to our Early Years cohort. Communication is held with the relevant setting to ensure a joined-up approach and effective planning for children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



NSPCC Talk PANTS Initiative

Talk PANTS is here to help children understand that their body belongs to them, and they should tell a safe adult they trust if anything makes them feel upset or worried.

In order to ensure this important message is communicated and utilised across the borough, libraries across St Helens launched open sessions on Let's Talk PANTS in February 2025. This was completed in conjunction with Early Years colleagues.

Education Safeguarding

Education Safeguarding

Section 175 Audit – the Section 175 Audit is a comprehensive statutory safeguarding audit which is carried out under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002. The purpose of this audit is to quality assure the safeguarding practice that occurs across our schools and educational settings. The audit is operated on a 2-year cycle in St Helens, with the first year seeing settings completing the tool, and the second year containing a series of front-line visits to schools. Main findings from the 2023-2024 Audit were:

- The responses to the s175 audit suggested that in most areas, schools are fulfilling their safeguarding duties to a high level.
- There were 4% where either the DSL or Deputy DSL(s) were not members of the school's senior leadership team (4%). This is a statutory requirement as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- There were a proportion of governors and trustees who have not received appropriate safeguarding training. (16%)
- Although the picture seems to be improving, not all frontline safeguarding staff had access to supervision. (11%)
- Seven percent of schools require additional action to ensure that appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place on all school devices.
- Whilst most schools have indicated that staff have received training in neglect, the responses indicated that some schools still required this.
- At the time of audit completion there were a 25% of schools who did not have a representative who had attended Graded Care Profile 2 training. There have been several training sessions delivered since this time, with school representatives attending, so this figure would be expected to be lower.
- The number of schools completing GCP2's where there are concerns around neglect would be expected to rise following attendance at training. Some respondents advised that whilst they had not completed a GCP2, they worked in collaboration with others to do this.
- The number of Headteachers or Designated Safeguarding Leads quality assuring the use GCP2's where there are concerns around neglect would be expected to rise following attendance at training.
- Whilst schools reported that they are embedding robust safeguarding curriculums to prevent abuse, 10% stated that they were not ensuring the safeguarding curriculum is relevant to diverse groups.
- Settings appear to lack confidence when it comes to implementing measures to support and protect unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This was also a theme which was raised during the previous cycle of the Section 175 audit.
- Training and identification of sexual assault and violence and harmful sexual behaviour is still an issue for some settings.

A series of recommendations and next steps has been established to support schools in continuing to improve their Safeguarding Practice. Audits for the academic year 2024-2025 are front line visits to schools and carried out by local authority staff and volunteers from education establishments in St Helens. Audits have been undertaken and a report will be written in the summer term 2025.

Priorities moving forward

Our future journey

1. To improve Key Stage 2 outcomes for Children we Look After.
2. To improve Key Stage 4 outcomes for Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker.
3. To improve the attendance of both Children we Look After and Children with a Social Worker.
4. To reduce Persistent Absenteeism and Severe Persistent Absenteeism of both Children we Look After and Children with a Social Worker.
5. To stop the ongoing increase of suspensions for Children we Look After.
6. To significantly reduce the suspensions of Children with a Social Worker.
7. To reduce NEET figures for Children we Look After and improve access to high quality provision.
8. To continue to develop and integrate the new National Kinship Strategy into the Virtual School offer.
9. To finalise the development of the new Virtual School website so that there is an array of information and guidance for children and young people, families and professionals.
10. To roll out the TIME Pilot in the 2025-2026 academic year.
11. To continue with the Nurture Pilot in the 2025-2026 academic year.
12. To continue with the 'Count me In' project in the 2025-2026 academic year.