

<b>4 January 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2021-2022</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> No	
<b>Report of:</b> Keeley Pullen – Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Children		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director for Education and Skills		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy - Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
<b>This report is public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

Every council must have a Virtual School Head to be responsible for ensuring that the statutory guidance ‘Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children’ (Department for Education February 2018) is implemented and adhered to.

The Virtual School monitors and supports the educational progress and outcomes for Children/Young People Looked After (C/YP LA) irrespective of where they are placed, in or out of borough. The responsibility covers pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and this includes those who have left care during an academic year. It is also required to provide information, advice and guidance to Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and their families when requested.

The annual report of the Virtual School Headteacher details the broad scope of services provided. The report is very detailed to enable the committee and Ofsted to be aware of our work and scrutinise the service. It is a statutory document which forms part of the Annex A documentation required by Ofsted during an Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services. This Corporate Parenting report details a summary of the content of the annual report and should be read in conjunction with Appendix 1.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 The Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2021-2022 and uses this information**

**to acknowledge, evaluate, scrutinise and, if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all C/YP LA.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

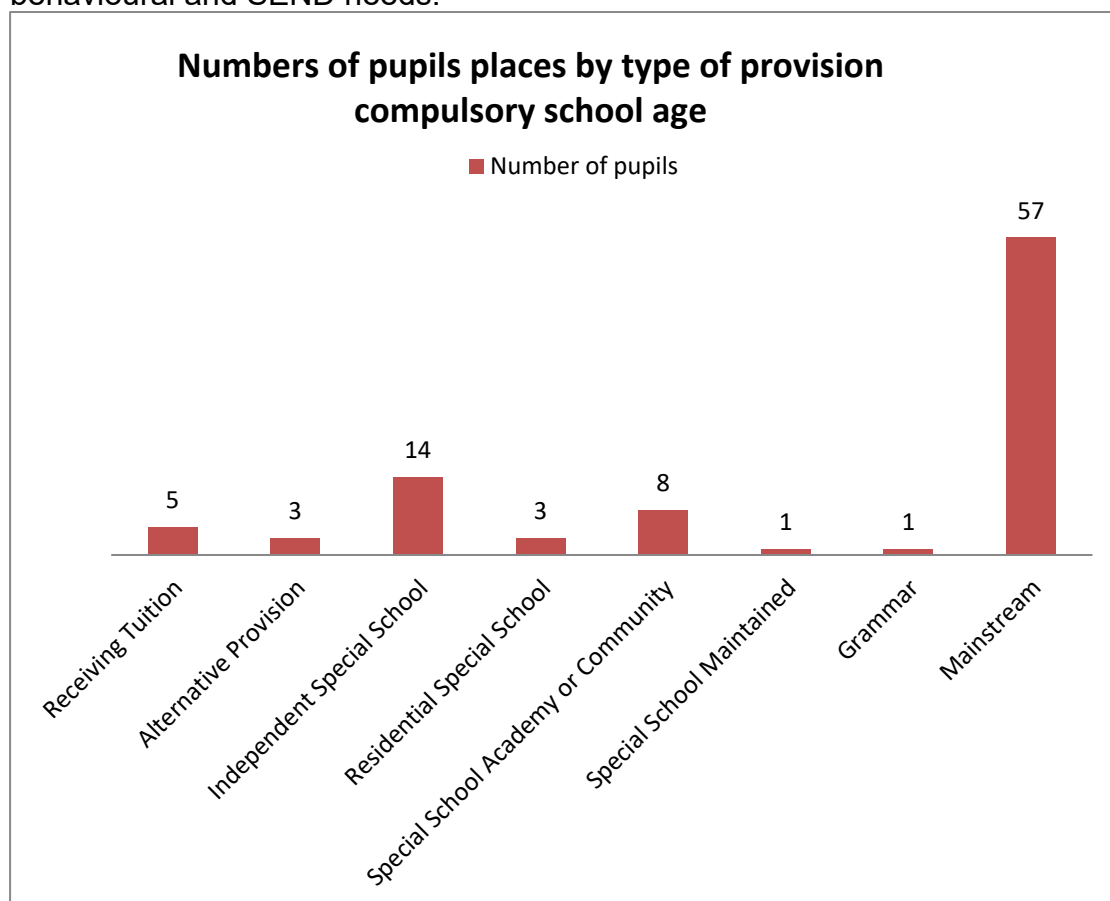
- 2.1 The annual report is a key document which summarises the wide variety of services that the virtual school team provides. It details the broad scope of information for corporate parents to consider how the council promotes good educational outcomes for our children and young people who are looked after.
- 2.2 The annual report is segregated into sections and a summary overview is provided for the report. This is the first time that pupils have undergone formal testing and exams since the pandemic and this updated attainment data is provided for 2022. There are also references to the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) which shows historical data for comparisons against other local authorities and national data sets. This enables corporate parents to compare our council's performance against others'.
- 2.3 In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Headteacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable and that the delivery of services is cost effective and efficient.

## **3. Summary of Report Headlines**

- 3.1 Cohort Numbers (Page 7 Appendix 1)  
At the end of the academic year 21/22, the number of pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School cohort were 292. This has decreased compared to the previous year. During the academic year, 8 pupils left care and 40 entered care.
- 16 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) entered care during this academic year and in total there were 35 UASC. This equates to 11% of the cohort which was a decrease of 1% from the previous year.
- 3.2 Special Educational Needs (Page 9-13 Appendix 1)  
There were 196 school age pupils at the end of the academic year. In total 92 pupils (46.9%) were categorised as having a Special Educational Need or Disability. Of these 92 pupils, 56 pupils (61%) have an Education and Health Care Plan and 36 pupils (39%) have SEN support.
- It is important that the categories of primary and secondary need are ascertained during any Personal Education Plan meeting to ensure that the right targeted support is provided by their educational establishment or by additional services.
- Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) and Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) are prevalent categories of need. This can usually be attributed to being as a result of previous trauma and adverse childhood events that our pupils have experienced. It is essential that this is highlighted with the

professionals working with the children to ensure that provision matches need.

Below is a graph detailing the type of provision attended for the pupils with SEND. It can be seen that 57 pupils (61.9%) of this group are attending a mainstream school. There are some whose needs are very specific and require specialist support in a setting which is matched to these needs. These are either as part of a day school or residential special school. There is a mixture of pupils attending 52 week and 38 week per year education settings. In addition, there are some pupils receiving tuition whilst awaiting a school place and a small number are in alternative provision to support their behavioural and SEND needs.

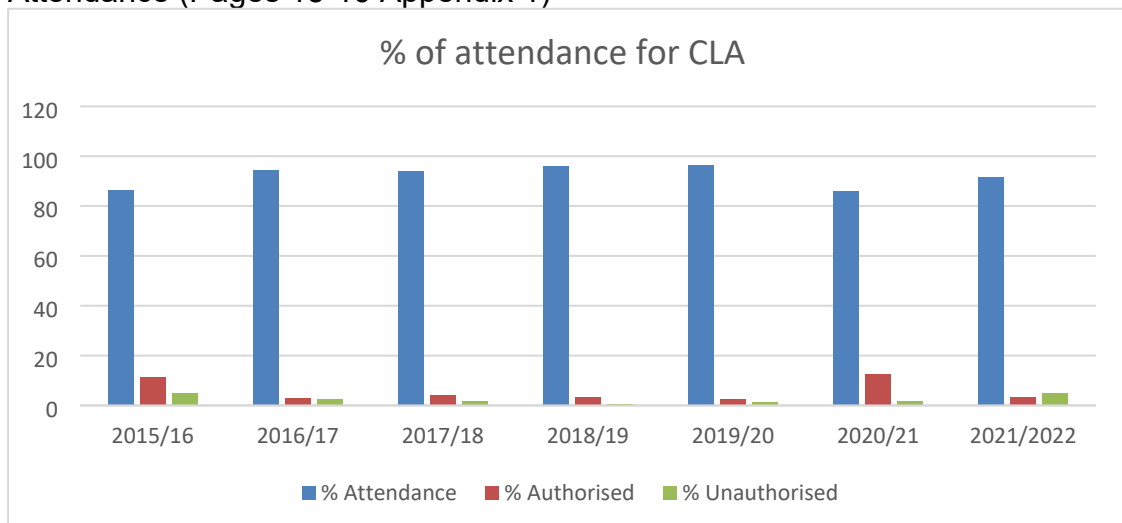


There are a number of actions we have taken during this year to support our SEND cohort:

- Our educational psychologist continues to work with the Virtual School for two days per week. This is to provide training, challenge, support and assessments where necessary to meet needs. This has led to more consultations with schools and social care where needs and strategies have been identified.
- Completion of provision maps for all pupils with SEND to check that interventions are meeting need. By doing this we are able to address any gaps in provision and look at ways to maximise progress.

- Promoting greater aspiration for our pupils. This enable schools to be focused on ensuring that our pupils are striving for accelerated progress.
- Focusing on academic and social, emotional and physical progress. This means we can celebrate all aspects of our children/young people’s development.
- Using specific assessment programmes to look at evidencing pupil progress in addition to the Personal Education Plan.
- Use of the Boxall profile system (where appropriate) to provide an assessment tool for SEMH needs and to provide strategies for interventions
- Use of the Access to Inclusion toolkit with schools to support those children and young people who have behavioural difficulties and/or trauma and attachment needs which may be a barrier to learning and engagement. This system enables practitioners to use strategies to support our children and young people in their education setting.
- The impact of these systems has been that the Virtual School has been able to provide teaching strategies used by education practitioners to be more effective and to support pupils to overcome their barriers to learning.

### 3.3 Attendance (Pages 15-16 Appendix 1)



The attendance figure of 91.8% represents attendance of school age pupils across the academic year. Authorised absence decreased from the previous year which indicates that less time was taken for sickness and there were no forced school closures due to Covid 19. However, unauthorised absence has increased due to increased persistent absence of 35 pupils. Persistent absence is counted when a pupil has an attendance rate of less than 90%. Nationally there are more incidences of persistent absence. In addition to this, national attendance rates have declined and so we are in line with national trends. The impact of Covid 19 has meant that pupils are now refusing to go to school and some are preferring to learn at home. As a result of this the Virtual School have been working intensively with our pupils who have had persistent absence and worked creatively with social

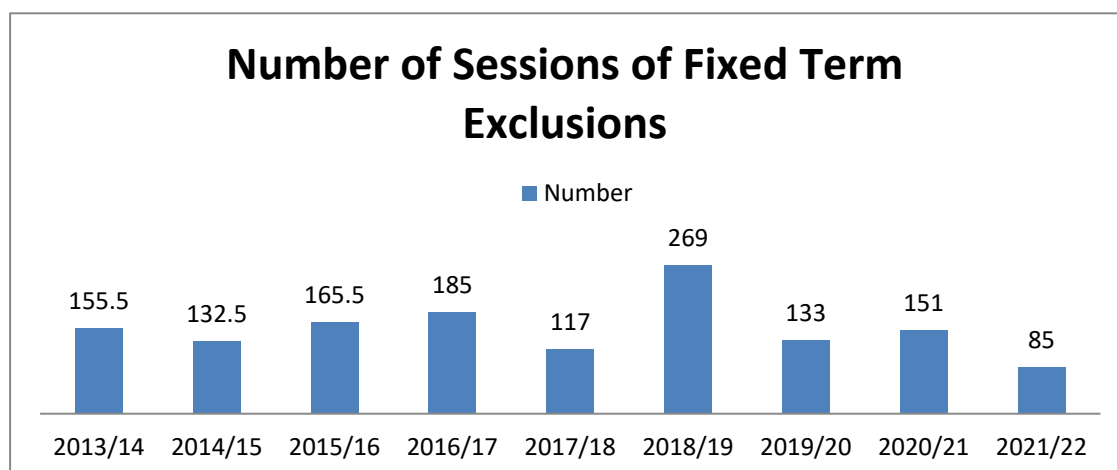
workers to try to encourage better attendance. For example, by commissioning specialist provision and vocational learning experiences for pupils who are refusing academic/more conventional schooling.

### 3.4 Exclusion (Pages 16-17)

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over a ten year period. Wherever possible we encourage schools to avoid fixed term exclusions [FTE]. In the academic year 2021/22 FTE has reduced. Data shows that we had 42.5 days of exclusion for school age pupils. This equates to 85 sessions compared to 151 the previous year. There were 12 school age pupils out of the CLA cohort that have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 6.1% of the total school age cohort and has decreased by 4% the previous year. This is a positive sign that behaviour interventions and Trauma and Attachment training for schools is beginning to make an impact.

As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

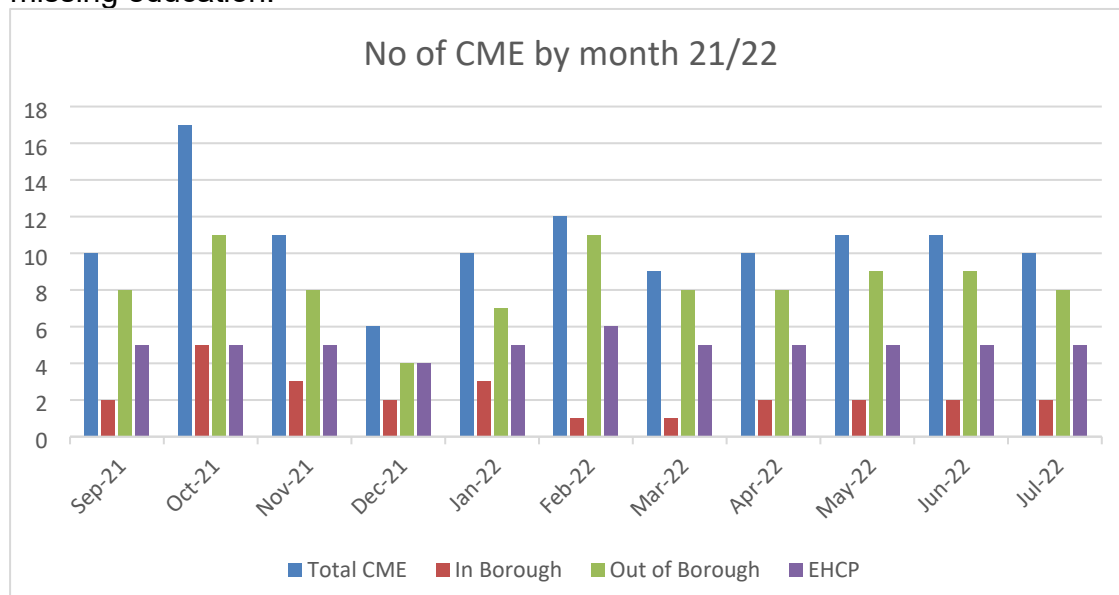
- Continue to monitor FTE and continue to actively reduce the amount through support and challenge
- Offer Trauma and Attachment training to key staff who are experiencing behavioural difficulties with our pupils
- Use of the Access to Inclusion Toolkit to enable schools to better understand the underlying cause of the behaviour
- Provision of intensive Trauma and Attachment training to key schools that has experienced high levels of exclusion. This has led to a significant reduction in excluding behaviour and a re-framing of their behaviour policies.



### 3.5 Children Missing Education (CME) (Pages 18-19 Appendix 1)

A child is deemed as missing education if they are not in receipt of a full-time educational provision. As outlined in the data our Children Missing Education was impacted by placement moves. We recognise that as a Virtual School change in placements do occur and work hard with our social work colleagues to minimise the impact this has on the child or young person's learning opportunities.

The diagram highlights a fluctuation of figures and this very much depends on the profile of pupils coming into care and whether they have education prior to becoming looked after or if they have to move away from their school due to placement availability in borough. The virtual school staff work very hard to access education as soon as they are made aware that there is a child missing education.

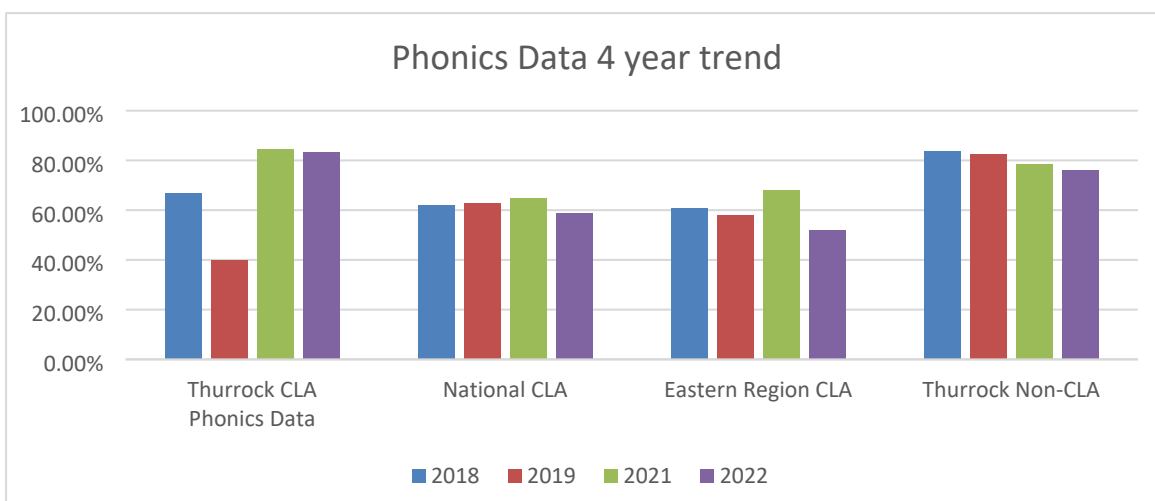


The Virtual School has a clear policy that we should make every effort to ensure that children are receiving a good education at a school which meets their needs. Whenever a child is missing education, 1-1 tuition is provided for 10-15 hours per week, this intervention is monitored by the staff within the Virtual School.

### 3.6 Attainment of Children Looked After (Pages 19-24)

Our Year 1 pupils were formally tested using the Phonics screen. 83% of the Year 1 cohort reached the expected standard. This is shown in the table below.

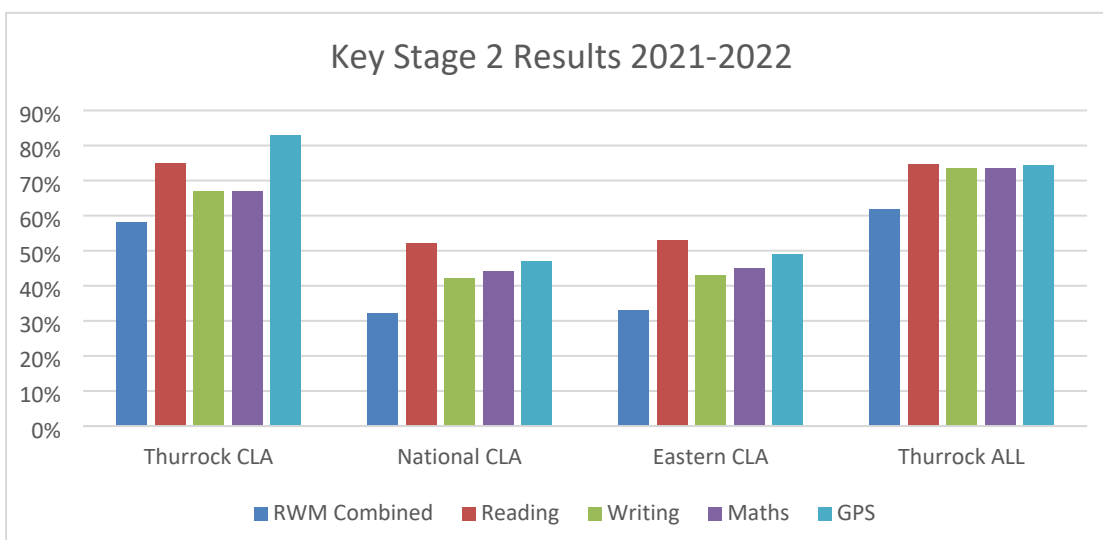
Phonics Data				
	Thurrock CLA	National CLA	Eastern Region CLA	Thurrock Non-CLA
2018	66.70%	62%	61%	83.90%
2019	40%	63%	58%	82.70%
2021	84.60%	65%	68%	78.40%
2022	83.30%	59%	52%	76.20%



In 2019 we started to expand our offer of phonics resources and advice to Nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils. We also used PP+ top slice to purchase additional resources for pupils in the early years and KS1. These included phonemes, diagraphs, trigraphs etc which would help to boost what they could do in the home.

The vast improvements in data are beginning to show. We believe that this is a direct result from using the resources we provided as well as asking schools to track phonics scores and school based interventions within the Personal Education Plans of these key year groups.

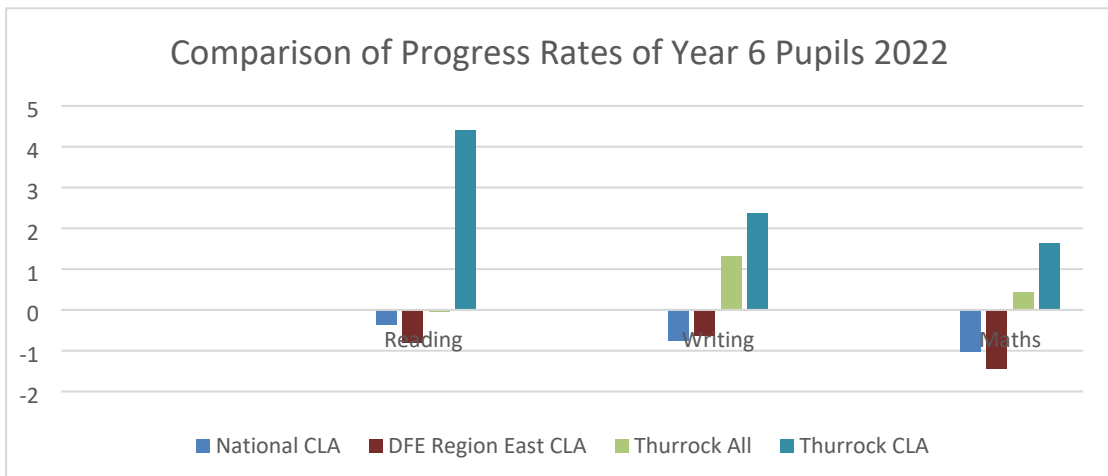
### Key Stage 2 Standardised Tests



The graph shows how well our Thurrock CLA have performed compared to CLA across the country. They have also closed the gap in reading and GPS against all Thurrock pupils and are only 3% away from all Thurrock pupils for RWM combined.

Our CLA also accomplished very good rates of progress. Progress is measured against their previous attainment when in Key Stage 1 and then

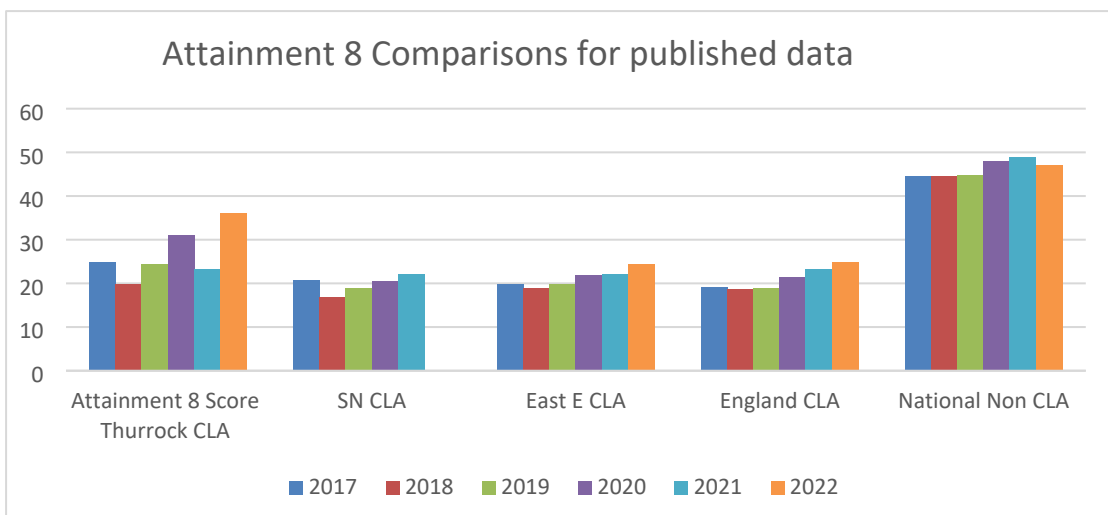
measured against the attainment achieved in Key Stage 2. Good rates of progress are above the baseline which is 0 points. This is illustrated in the graph below.



Thurrock CLA made better rates of progress than National and Eastern region CLA and better progress than that of all Thurrock children. The Virtual School team commissioned the use of extra tuition for our pupils. We used government tuition grants which enabled us to extend the amount of tuition we would usually provide with the Pupil Premium Plus top slice money. This tuition has enabled our pupils to make accelerated progress and provide them with a good footing to starting secondary school.

## Key Stage 4 GCSE Results

### Attainment 8



The above chart shows the improved performance of Thurrock CLA since 2017. We need to recognise that the size of the cohort fluctuates and we have seen an increase of UASC entering Year 11 and the majority of these young people are not able to sit GCSEs.

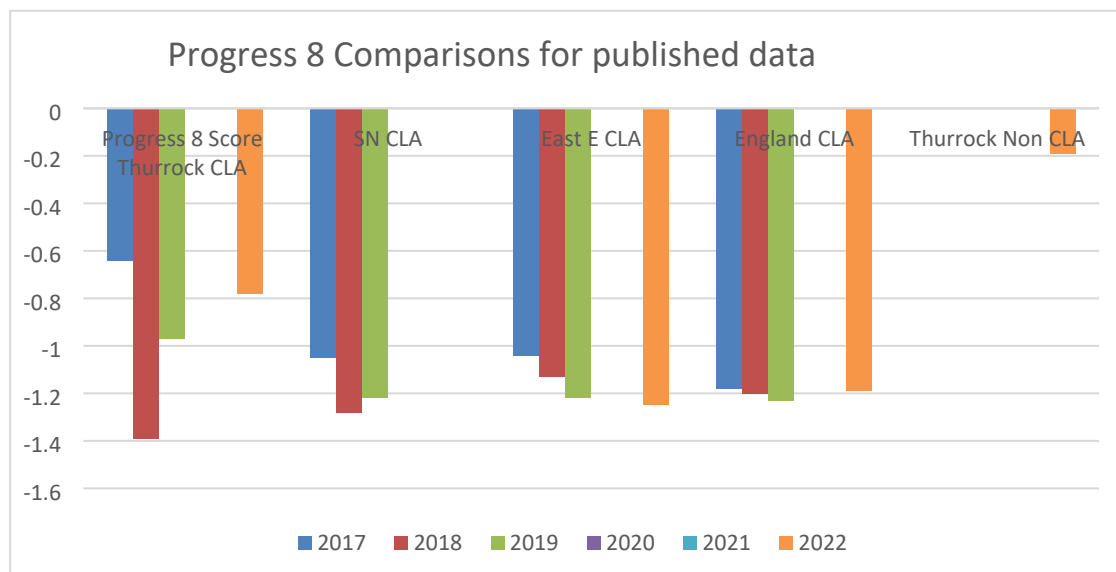


However, we have achieved our highest attainment 8 score since 2017 and for 2022 it was 36.1. Attainment 8 data would suggest that we are doing better than our statistical neighbours and nationally against CLA cohorts. We are also starting to close the gap against non-looked after pupils.

### Progress 8 Scores

	Thurrock CLA	Statistical Neighbours CLA	Eastern Region CLA	England CLA	Thurrock Non-CLA
2017	-0.64	-1.05	-1.04	-1.18	-0.07
2018	-1.39	-1.28	-1.13	-1.2	-0.19
2019	-0.97	-1.22	-1.22	-1.23	-0.03
2020					
2021					
2022	-0.78		-1.25	-1.19	-0.19

There is no data for 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. However, the data that is represented for 2022 would show that our Progress 8 score is improving since 2018.



In 2022 - Of those pupils in care for 12+ months who were eligible to take GCSEs  
 80% passed English Grade 4 or above, 45% Passed English Grade 5 or above  
 45% passed Maths Grade 4 or above, 30% passed Maths Grade 5 or above  
 45% passed Maths and English combined at Grade 4 or above, 25 % passed Maths and English combined grade 5 or above

More comparative data will be made available using the LAIT document and further published data.

### **Key Headlines of Actions for Supporting Testing in 2023**

What are we doing to improve academic performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-9 years old
- Provision of 1-1 tuition throughout Year 11 in maths, English and science
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for Year 10 pupils starting in the spring term of year 10
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for year 5 starting in the spring term of year 5
- Provision of 1-1 tuition in maths and English throughout year 6 for this year group
- Conducting termly school visits for key year groups of children and those who are not making expected progress
- Creation of action plans for those pupils who are not making progress
- Provision of tuition for those requesting it in Year 12 to support the transition into post 16 learning
- Evidencing the work of the Virtual School through PEPS, visit notes and case studies
- Development of SEND support materials to further improve the outcomes for this group of children
- Provision of phonics resources for N2 through to Year 2 pupils
- Provision of kindles to promote reading
- Provision of maths resources for Years 4 and 5 to support the testing of multiplication knowledge.

#### 3.7 Allocation and Impact of the Pupil Premium (Pages 30-34 Appendix 1)

The Virtual School received PP+ funding for 231 pupils aged from Year Reception to Year 11. This figure is based upon the SDA903 census return by social care. This was 20 pupils fewer than the previous year. The Virtual School top sliced £545 per pupil for the academic year and used this to provide resources to support the most vulnerable in the cohort. This equates to the top slice being £125,895 for the year 21/22.

In total £499,055 was distributed to schools based upon the number of eligible pupils and extra funded support (including pupils who left care in the year). This left a further sum of £88,840 to support pupils in the virtual school and schools that needed extra funding (see breakdown of funding below). Of the pupils who were without a school place, they were provided with additional tuition which exceeded the £2545 per pupil. We also ensured that once they had a school place, pupil premium plus was paid to the new school.

In total interventions that were used to raise educational outcomes were £207,495. The breakdown of spending can be viewed on pages 32/33 of Appendix 1.

### 3.8 Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

In June 2021 the Department for Education published non-statutory guidance which extends the role of the Virtual School Head to support educational outcomes for CWSW. A grant of £100,000 was allocated for the academic year starting in September 2021. We have used this funding to recruit a project manager to lead on developing a Thurrock wide strategy for supporting and challenging schools and social care to improve the educational outcomes for this vulnerable group. We have also used the additional funding to provide Thurrock schools with intensive trauma and attachment training and consultancy to support all pupils in schools. In addition to this, books and licences to the Access to Inclusion software have been purchased for all Thurrock schools to enable them to plot behaviours of pupils in their school and support them using the suggested strategies. This has proved very successful with our CLA and we have extended this to all schools to use as they require. We have just employed an additional staff member within the team to provide greater capacity and support the opportunity for greater impact. The DFE grant has continued into the academic year 22/23. It is hoped that this guidance will become statutory so that we can continue the project.

## 4. Overall Comment on the Annual Report

- 4.1 The annual report provides an overview of the broad range of services and responsibilities undertaken by the Virtual School team. This is challenging and immensely rewarding and our work focusses on obtaining the best possible outcomes for our pupils.
- 4.2 This particular Corporate Parenting Report has provided key headlines to the main body of detail that is contained in the annual report.

## 5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and uses the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of the Virtual School on behalf of Children Looked After, Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker.

## 6. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance And Community Impact

- 6.1 This report relates to the council priority to create a great place for learning and opportunity.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance**

This report asks that the Committee notes the increasing demand of services for Children Looked After and the range of services provided as detailed in the annual report. The scope of work has expanded for the Virtual School Head. The number of professionals needed to enact the new non-statutory duties and support the Virtual School Head are DFE funded. This funding could cease and therefore, the role/impact would have to be paired down.

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Daniel Longe**  
**Principal Solicitor for Children, Adult and Education (LBB) on behalf of Thurrock**

This report asks that the Committee scrutinises the duties and responsibilities of the Virtual School as detailed in the annual report. No decision is required. The Council is required by s22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and S22(3B) of the Children Act 1989 further imposes a duty on local authorities to appoint an officer to ensure that the duty is properly discharged. There is statutory guidance "Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children" (2018) that must be followed in meeting this duty. For the forthcoming year 2022-2023, the Committee will need to continue to monitor the work linked to the extension of the Virtual School Head role for children with a social worker.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer**

Supporting the improved educational attainment of Children Looked After targets Thurrock's most vulnerable young people. Data is collated to understand the profile of young people supported. Individual plans are informed by each young person's personal needs, including equality and diversity as well SEND and emotional health needs.

7.4. **Other implications (where significant)** – i.e., Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**8. Conclusion**

8.1 In summary, the above report details the variety of actions and impact of the work of the Virtual School team. It provides an account of the key data and narrative that council members should be informed of in order to judge the quality of the work of the Virtual School.

**9. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- 'The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data' ADCS
- 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children' DFE February 2018
- 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker. Virtual School Head role extension' DFE (June 2021)
- 'Local Authority Interactive Tool' – last updated [Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

**10. Appendices to the report**

- Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher Academic Year 2021-2022

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