

Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher Academic Year 2020-2021

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Summary of the Annual Report 2020-2021

During the course of this academic year the work of the Virtual School adapted to the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic.

There certain key aspects to this report which can be highlighted as part of this summary. These being:

- Attendance rates have been affected by the ongoing pandemic and as such overall attendance has declined. However, unauthorised absence has only increased by .4 which highlights that most absence was due to illness or periods of self-isolation in line with Covid 19 protocols
- Fixed term exclusions rates are steady and pupils and schools are being supported to reduce these. There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA
- The number of children in care for our cohort has increased as has the number of pupils identified as having a Special Educational Need
- There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children from 9.4% to 12% of the cohort
- Interventions have been targeted to maximize impact on learning and development for all age ranges
- Attainment data that has been shown in the report is using data from the Local Authority Interactive Tool. This is showing that Thurrock CLA continue to perform at a high standard compared to national CLA and have high rankings for our performance
- No testing data is available for 2021 due to the pandemic
- The Virtual School provided every support and challenge possible to promote the educational needs of our pupils in response to the ongoing challenges caused by the pandemic. This is reflected in our commitment to provide additional tuition and digital technology to support learning.
- As a result of the impact of Covid 19 we allocated £252,985 for additional tuition to cover April 2020 through to August 2021.
- The Virtual School team have taken advantage of the reduced need for travel and as such have been able to attend more meetings virtually and to support and challenge more settings and professionals
- There have been high expectations set for all professionals to support CLA in their educational progress. The pandemic has not been seen as an excuse to allow for poor provision. This has been challenged and supported throughout the year by the Virtual School team.

1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to detail the work of the Thurrock Virtual School for the academic year 2020-2021. It details the work of the Virtual School Head and the team and forms part of the statutory reporting processes. This document is used as part of Annex A documentation which is presented to OFSTED in times of inspection.

2. **The Role of the Thurrock Virtual School**

A separate document is available named the Roles and Responsibilities of the Virtual School. This details the roles and actions that are taken in line with our statutory duties. The specific duties can be found in the Department for Education document: Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children [February 2018].

Staffing of the Virtual School 2020-2021

Mrs Keeley Pullen – Virtual School Headteacher

Mrs Grace Page – Virtual School Operations Co-Ordinator

Ms Rebecca Prince – Early Years and Primary Education Adviser

Ms Gemma Lilley – Secondary Education Adviser

Miss Lee-Anne Jenkins – Post 16 Education Adviser

Mrs Tina McGuinness – Administrator for the Virtual School

3. **Mission Statement**

At the core, is the aspiration to ensure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to learn effectively and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding so they are able to make informed choices about their futures from a range of options. This range will be at its widest when children succeed in their schools and are provided with the ambition, resilience and opportunity to optimise their learning within and beyond the school.

The Virtual School believes that every child and young person has a right to a childhood and has the right to a first class education that enhances their life chances as an adult. We believe that Children Looked After and Young People should be given every opportunity to aspire to be the best they can.

The Virtual School provides additional support, advice and guidance over and above the universal services that all Thurrock children and young people can access, alongside direct support to the children themselves. We believe there should be no educational gaps between attainment and potential and there should be a narrowing of the gap between attainment and national standards.

The main outcomes we want for our children and young people accord with the Thurrock Children and Young People's Plan and are that CLA:

- ❖ value themselves and grow up to be fair, tolerant and supportive, learning to respect others and enjoy the respect of others;
- ❖ are engaged in and are challenged by high quality education and enjoyable learning experiences;
- ❖ are able to show resilience and cope with change;
- ❖ are not disadvantaged by circumstance, poverty, disability or race;
- ❖ seek out and engage in opportunities for self-improvement, with the guidance and support of multiagency teams;
- ❖ achieve recognised and appropriate qualifications in line with their academic potential, so they access a wide range of training, employment and further education opportunities when they leave school, allowing them to take an active and full role in society as adults.

To achieve this, The Virtual School will work in partnership with schools, educational settings and social care to create a high quality experience for Children Looked After and Young People.

4. **Guidance Documents Developed by the Virtual School**

- Thurrock Virtual School Pupil Premium Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Exclusion Guidance for Schools
- Thurrock Virtual School Exclusion Guidance for Colleges
- Thurrock Virtual School Attendance Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Anti-Bullying Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Safeguarding Policy
- PEP Protocol for Social Workers and Designated Teachers – Schools, Colleges and Early Years
- PEP Flowchart for Social Workers
- Quality Assurance Process Flowchart
- Quality Assurance Criteria for PEPs
- Completing Attainment on EPEP
- EPEP and Target Setting
- Roles and Functions of the Virtual School
- Phonics Resources Packs for Foster Carers
- Quality Assurance Process of Education Provision
- Social Worker guidance for high quality PEP minutes
- Child Missing Education Policy/Process
- Thurrock Virtual School Safeguarding Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Previously Looked After Children Policy
- Pupil Premium Spending Strategy Document 2020/2021

Additional Documents:

- School Improvement Plan 2020/2021
- Headteacher Termly Reports for Governors 2020/2021
- Phase Teacher Termly Reports for Governors 2020/2021
- 3 year Strategic Plan

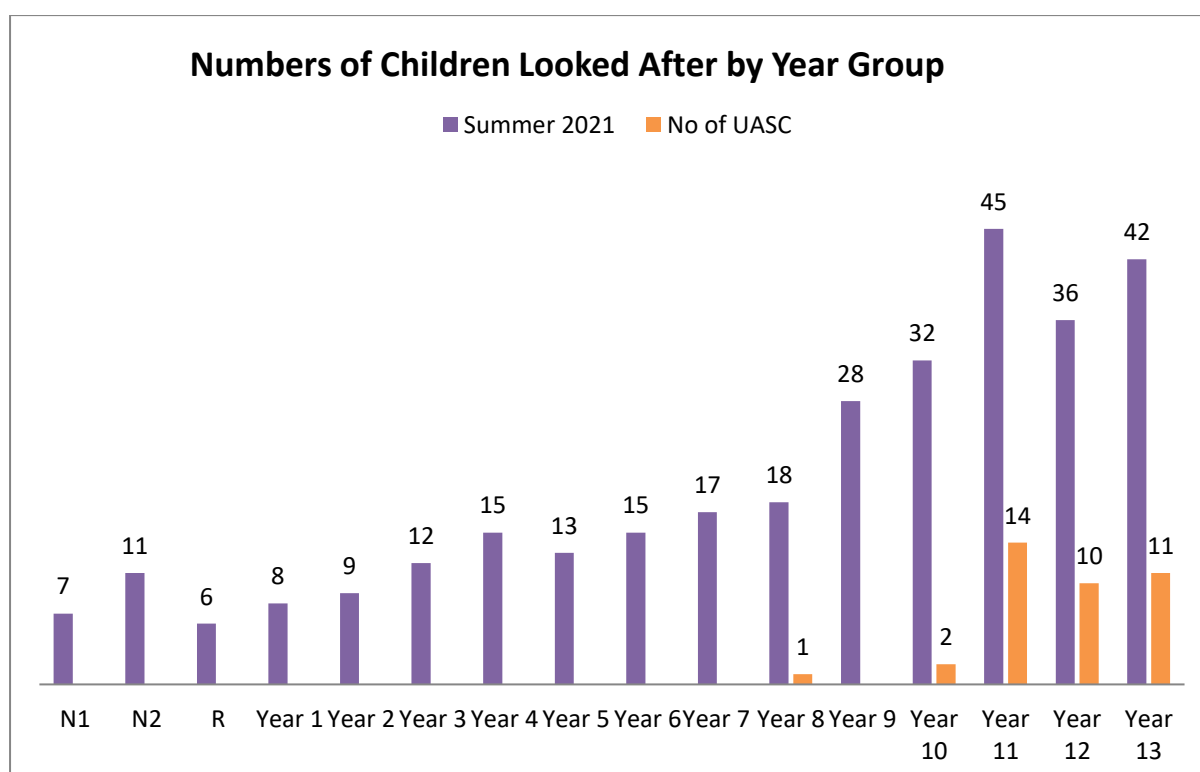
5. **Corporate Parenting Committee**

The Virtual School Headteacher [VSH] is accountable to the Corporate Parenting Committee for the educational achievement of Children Looked After [CLA]. The Committee exists to ensure that all elements of the Council work together to ensure that the children looked after by Thurrock get the best possible service that can be offered. The Committee promotes the role of all Councillors as corporate parents and provides the robust vehicle for their mandate to be exercised on behalf of young people. This committee meets quarterly and managers from different sectors of

social care and education present reports and recommendations as part of a cycle. This process acts as a measure of accountability and supports the development of strategy and policy for meeting the statutory requirements for children in care.

6. Current Contextual Data

Number of Looked After Children by Year Group [Updated July 2021]



At the end of the academic year 20/21, the number of pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School cohort were 314. This has seen an increase on the previous year. Of this total figure, 38 pupils were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. This equates to 12% of the cohort. This is an increase from 9.4% which was reported in the previous year. Many of the UASC in Year 11 joined in the summer term and were provided with home schooling due to the lack of education provision available at that time of the year.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

The data for this cohort of young people is increasing, see above. This is particularly the case for young people arriving in the spring and summer term who are in Year

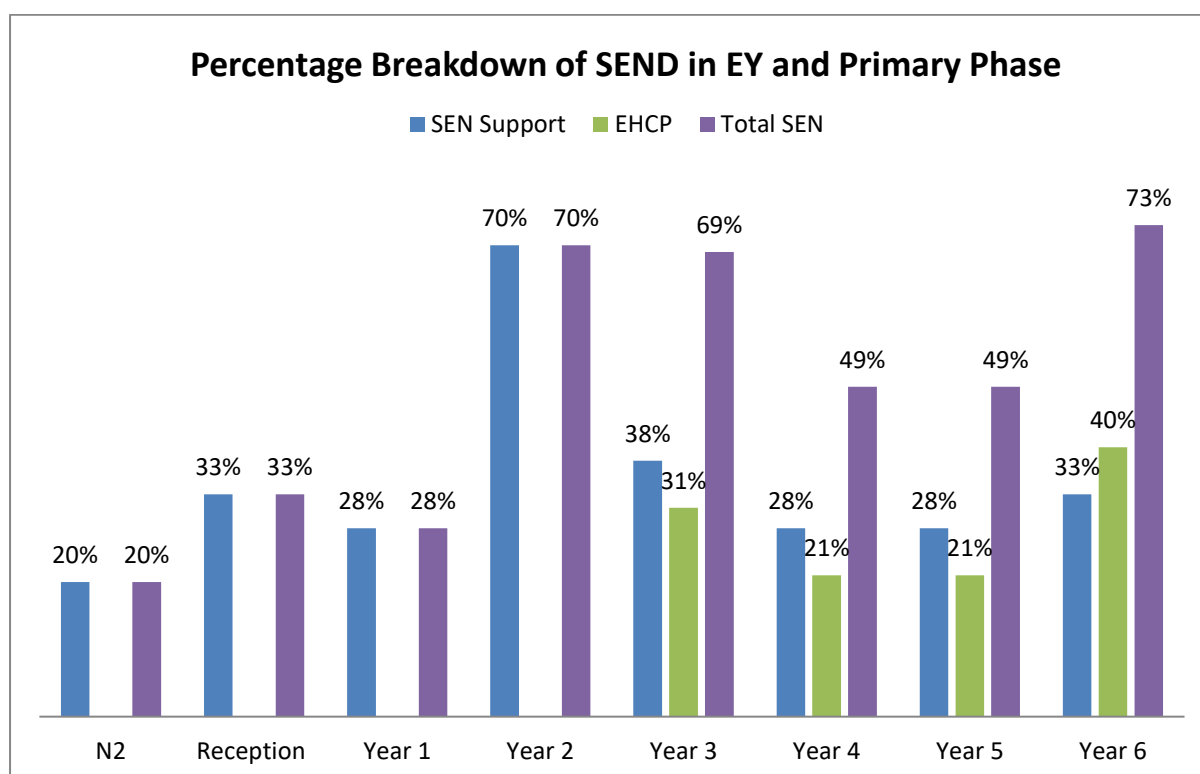
11. The later the young people arrive in the academic year, the more challenging it is to provide them with a school place.

As such we have provided them with an online English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], IT equipment and a 10 weeks 1-1 ESOL tuition package to support education. College applications have been made and all have places for September 2021. Further information is shown in section 18 of the report.

Number of CLA with a Special Educational Need or Disability

This data is maintained throughout the year and is used to target specific actions, interventions, support and challenge. By strategically looking at this data, we are able to pinpoint areas of need and check that educational provision is supporting the individual needs of these pupils.

Primary Phase Data

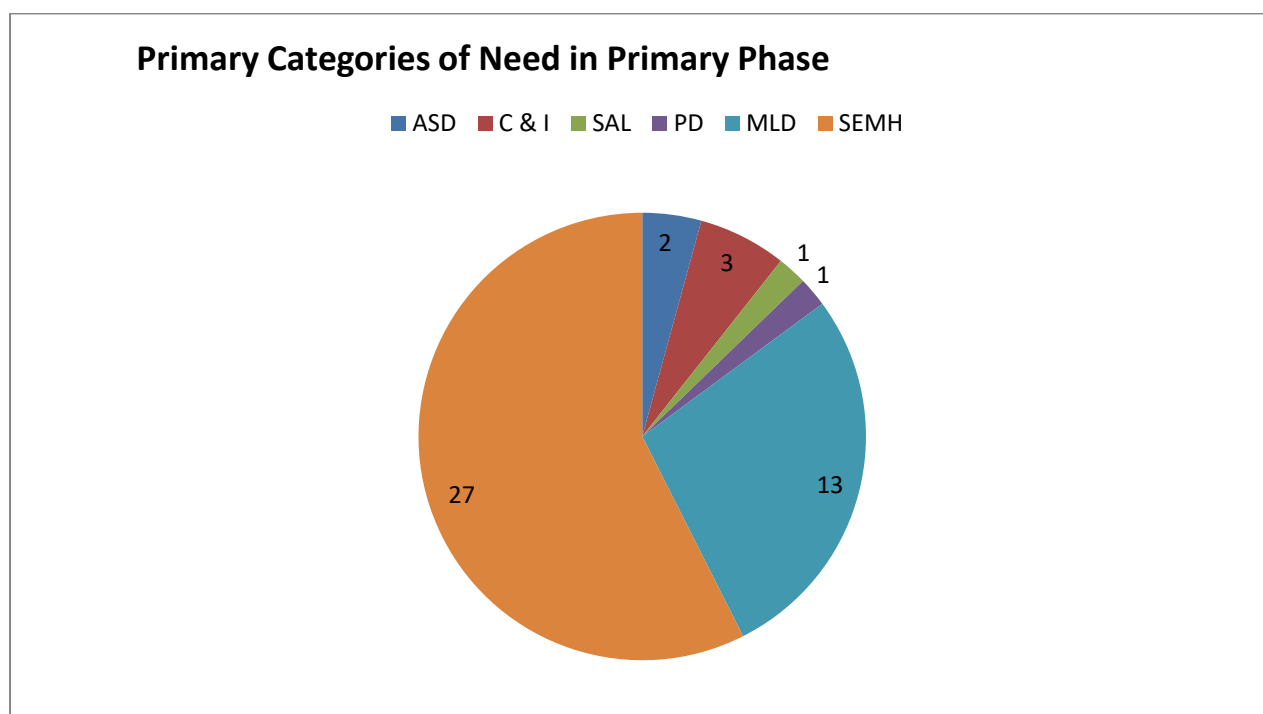


There are 89 pupils in Year N2 to Year 6. Of these there are 30 receiving SEN Support which equates to 33.7% of the primary cohort and 17 pupils (19%) have an education healthcare plan. In total 47 pupils or 52.8% of the primary cohort has currently been identified as having a special educational need. This figure has now increased and is close to the national CLA figure of 55.5%. There have been

increases in the Sen Support and EHCP status of our cohort. The highest proportion of SEN can be found at the end of KS1 and KS2. This means that these year groups will need particular help with transition into September 2021.

Categories of Need in Primary Pupils CLA Cohort

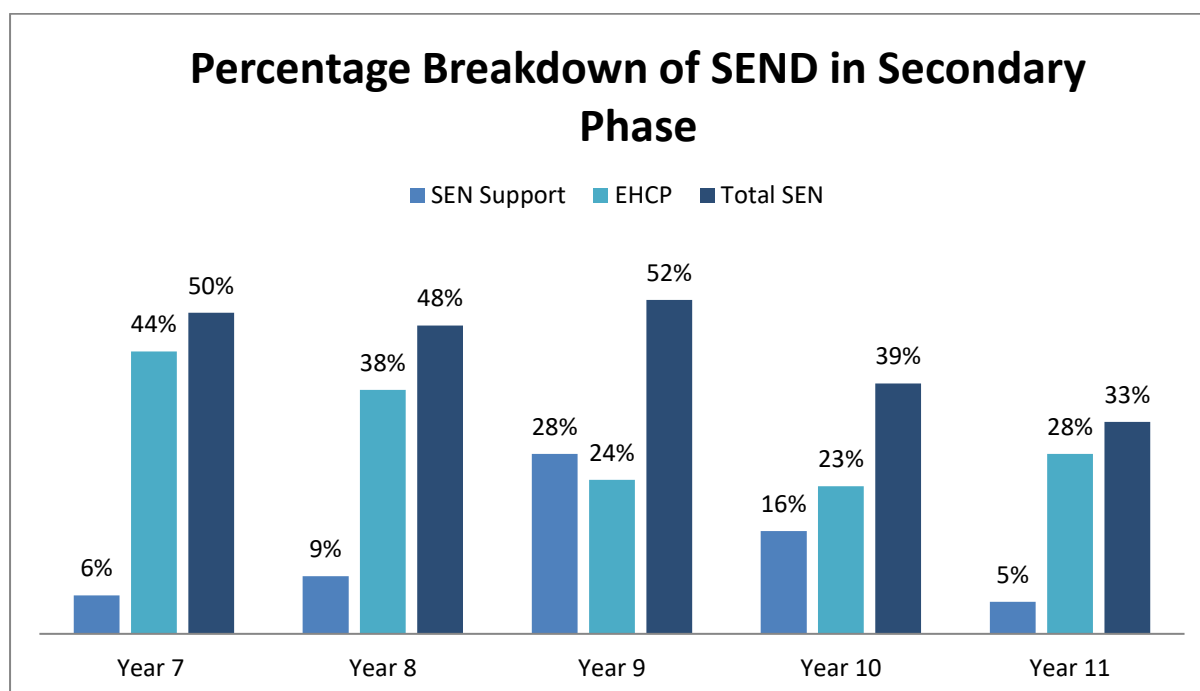
It is important that the categories of primary and secondary need is ascertained during any Personal Education Plan meeting to ensure that the right targeted support is provided by their educational establishment or by additional services. Social, Emotional Mental Health and Moderate Learning Difficulties are prevalent categories of need in this Primary age phase. 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.



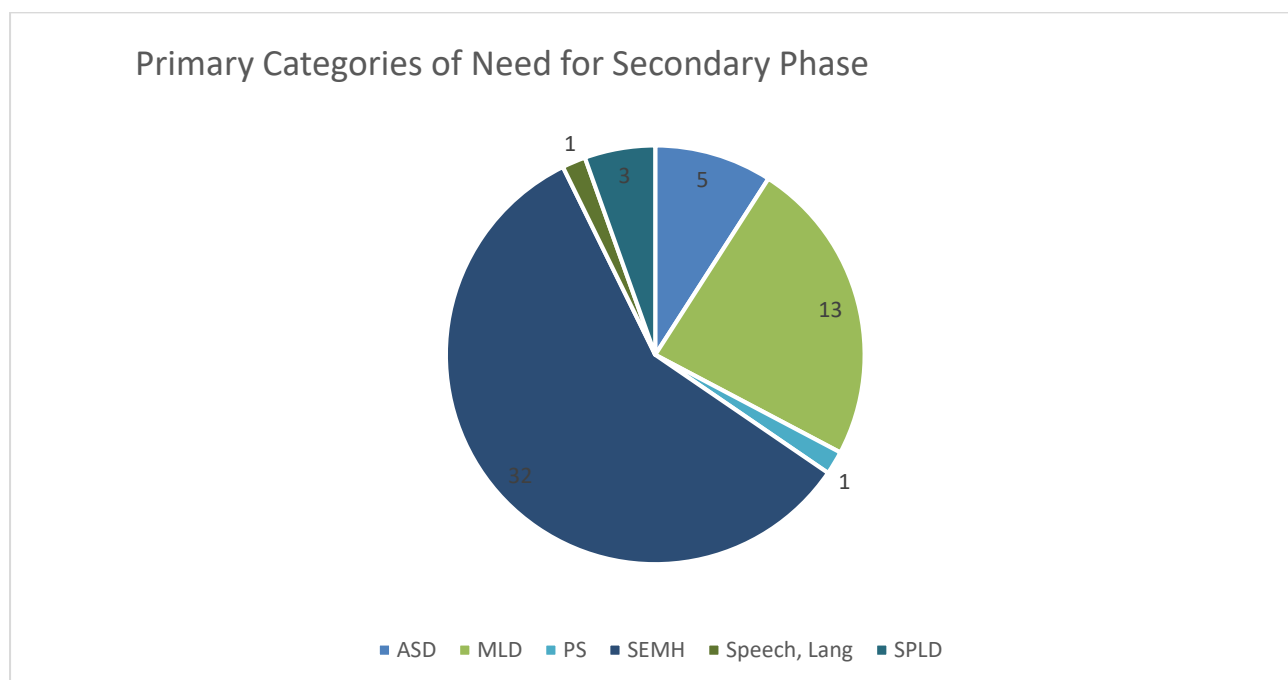
Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS1 and KS2	Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMh)	27
	Communication and Interaction (C & I)	3
	Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)	13
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	2
	Physical Disability (PD)	1
	Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)	1

Secondary Phase

There are 140 pupils in Year 7 to Year 11. Of these there are 16 receiving SEN Support in school which equates to 7% of the secondary cohort and 39 pupils (27.8%) have an EHC plan. In total 55 pupils or 39.3% of the secondary cohort has currently been identified as having a special educational need which requires support and intervention.



Secondary Phase Categories of Need



Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS2 and KS3	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	5
	Moderate Learning Difficulties	13
	Physical Sensory	1
	Social Emotional Mental Health	32
	Speech, Language and Communication	1
	Specific Learning Difficulties	3

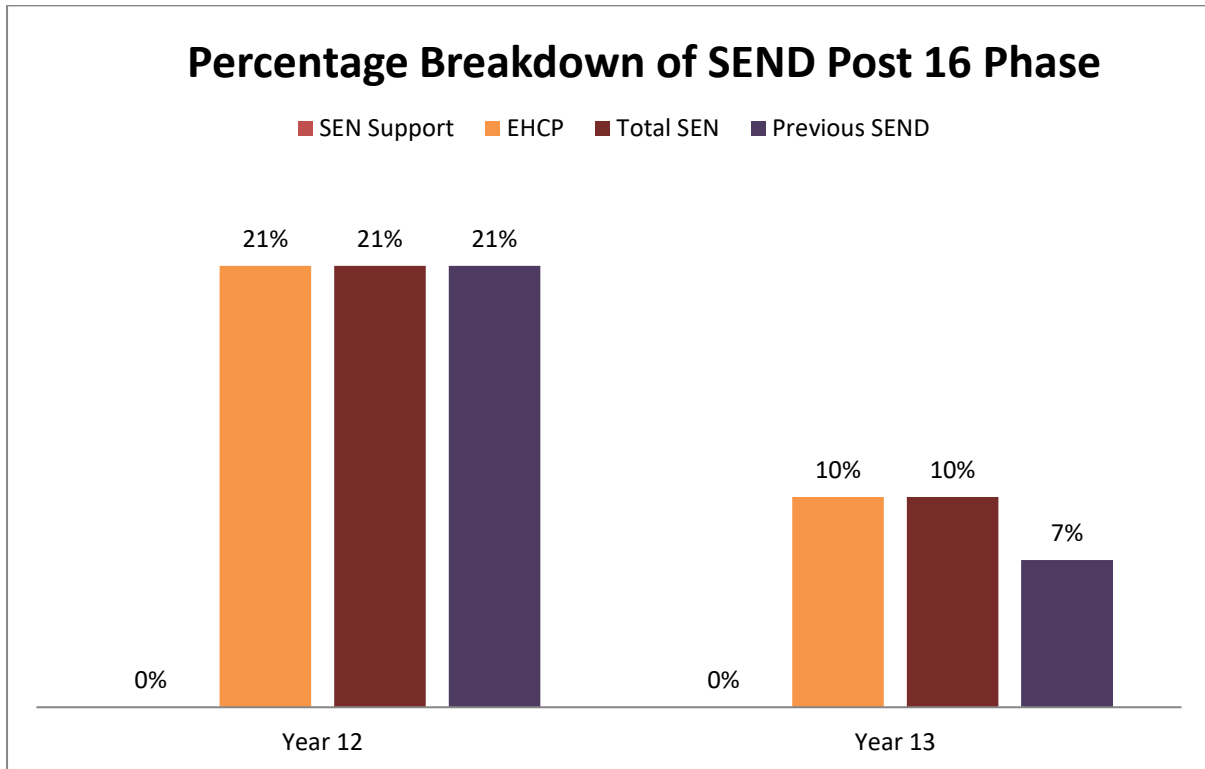
The prevalence of SEMH needs is very high for this phase. This shows how significant this area is for CLA pupils.

In summary there are 102 school age pupils who are on Virtual School SEND register. This has increased from 88 pupils in February 2021.

This equates to 44.5% of the school age cohort (Nursery 2-Year 11) which has increased from 39% for the previous academic year. This is high compared to all national pupils but still remains below the national average for CLA which for 19/20 was 55.5% according to the SFR (SEN Statistical First Release).

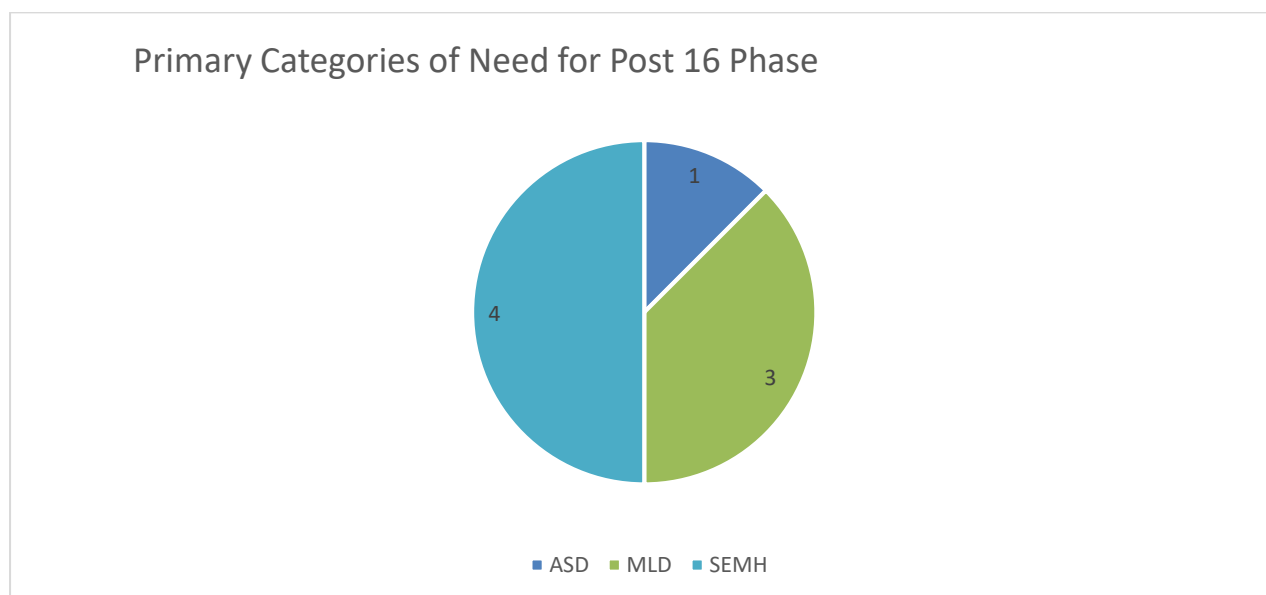
National published data for all children in 2020/21 shows that, 3.7% of school age children have an EHC Plan and 12.2% are identified as SEN Support. This provides a combined figure of 15.9% which is far lower than our Thurrock CLA data of 44.5%.

Post 16 Phase



In summary there are 8 post 16 young people (including those who are 18 years old) who are currently on the Virtual School SEND register. This equates to 10% of the post 16 cohort, all of whom have an EHCP. There are a number of young people who have previously had SEN support or an EHCP but are not currently using services.

Post 16 Phase Categories of Need



Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
Post 16	Moderate Learning Difficulties	3
	Social Emotional Mental Health	4
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	1

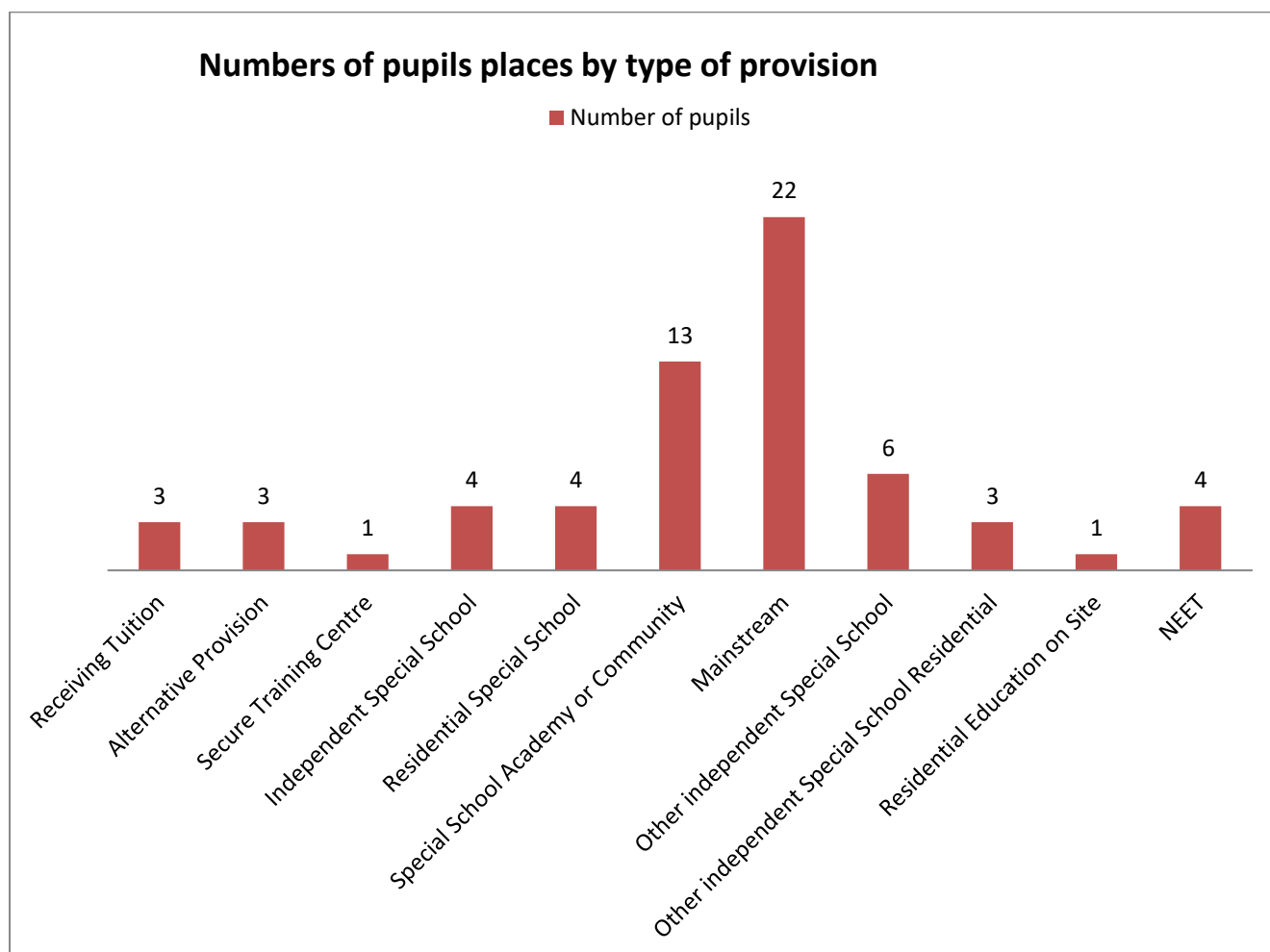
SEND Summary

In summary Virtual School whole cohort statistics for School and Post 16 pupils:

- 64 pupils (27.9%) with an EHC Plan.
- 46 pupils (20%) are on a SEN Support Plan
- In total 110 have been identified as having a current special education need
- This equates to 33% of the cohort from N2 to Year 13
- Nationally the most common primary type of need is Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with 30% of those having an EHC Plan having this need. However, the most common type of need of our CLA is Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

EHCP Education Provision for 64 EHCP pupils

Below is a table detailing the type of provision for the pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan. It can be seen that 22 pupils (34.3%) of this group are attending a mainstream school or college. 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.



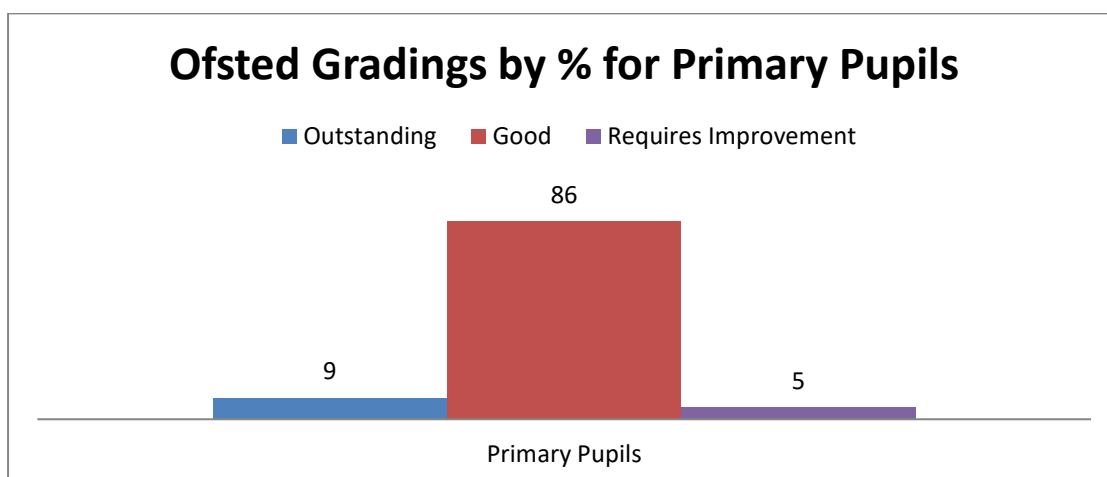
There are a number of actions we have taken during this year to support our SEN cohort:

- Recruitment of a senior educational psychologist 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.
- Using specific programmes to look at evidencing pupil progress in addition to the Personal Education. B Squared is a SEN programme which is used to track our pupils.
- Use of the Boxall profile system to provide an assessment tools 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 look at suggesting teaching strategies used by education practitioners to be more effective and to support pupils to overcome their barriers to learning.

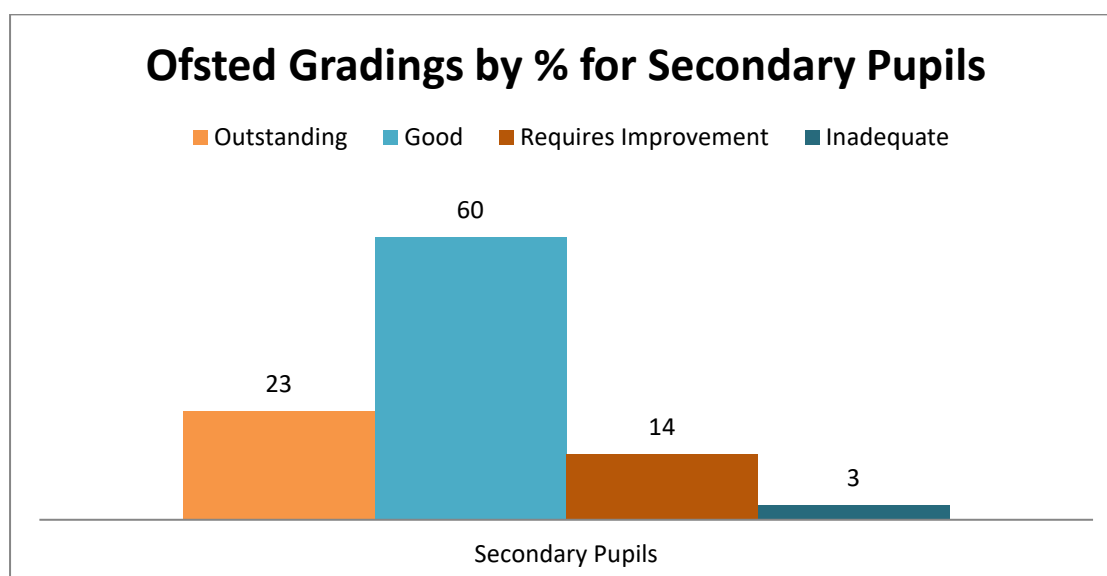
School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2020

It is important that our CLA attend a school that is graded by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding. Therefore, we track the grading of each school and educational establishment that our pupils attend. We only ever place a pupil into a school that has a grading of Requires Improvement if there are no other possible solutions. For example, if a child was placed into a stable care placement but schools in that local area were graded as below good. Although our first priority would always be to find a good school. Wherever possible, we seek places in good schools. There are situations where a pupil may be in a good school that then receives a poor Ofsted grading. We would not automatically move a pupil if they were happy and making good progress and if they were being well supported. However, we ensure that schools are closely monitored every term to check that pupil progress is good. The data below illustrates the gradings of schools our pupils attend.

Primary Phase



Secondary Phase

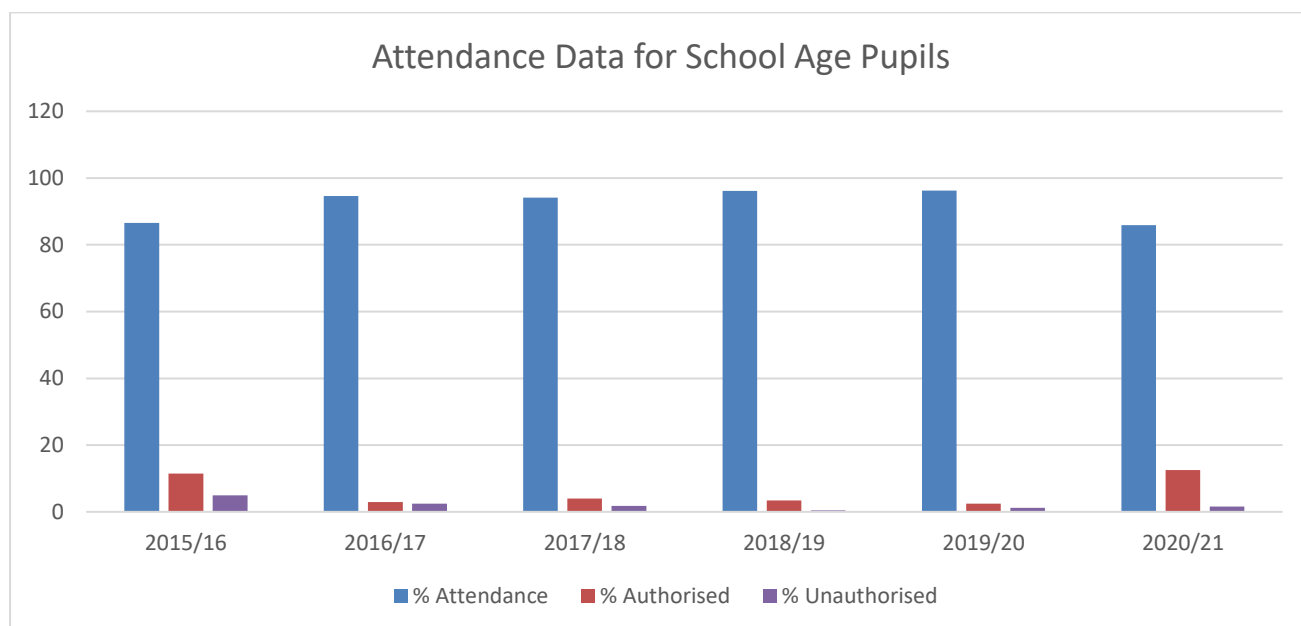


Overall School Ofsted Grading Year R to Year 11 is:

- 87.6% of pupils attend a school graded good or above. This has remained static from last year's 87%
- 70% attend a good school, slight reduction from last year's 71.6%
- 17.6% attend an outstanding school, an increase from 15.3% last year
- 10.6% attend a school that requires improvement, static data compared to last year
- 2% attend an inadequate school, a reduction from 3.1% last year

Schools graded less than good are visited by the Virtual School every term. This activity was still in place up until the point when schools were closed and we were in a national lockdown due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. The Virtual School attend the PEPs for all pupils placed in schools less than good.

7. Attendance



	% Attendance	% Authorised	% Unauthorised
2015/16	86.6	11.49	4.91
2016/17	94.6	2.9	2.5
2017/18	94.1	4	1.8
2018/19	96.2	3.4	0.4
2019/20	96.3	2.5	1.2
2020/21	85.9	12.48	1.62

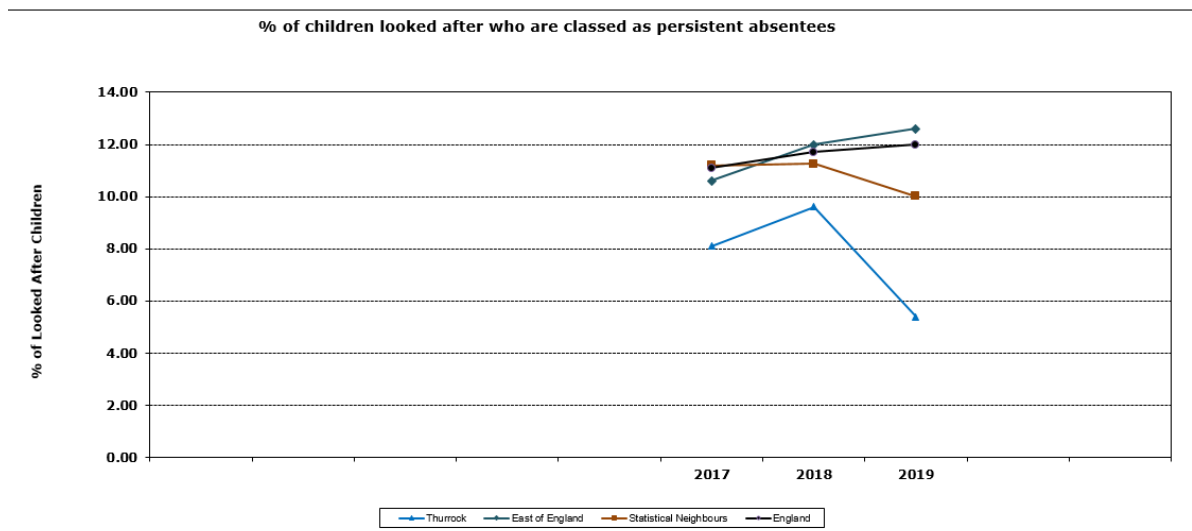
The attendance figure of 85.9% represents attendance of school age pupils across the academic year. This includes periods of lockdown and school closures due to the pandemic. Attendance rates have been affected by school closures and illness with 12.47% of absences being authorised. In total for all pupils in the academic year, there were 9,077.5 days lost due to closures or self-isolation of year groups. The impact of the pandemic has been significant. Unauthorised absence has remained fairly static but there has been a slight increase from 1.4% in 19/20 to 1.6% in 20/21.

Across the school year (including lockdowns and other Covid 19 measures) 86 pupils had attendance that was below 90%, this is known as persistent absenteeism. However, 15 (8.1%) of these 86 pupils were school refusers which affected their attendance. The remaining pupils were absent due to other mitigating circumstances such as illness.

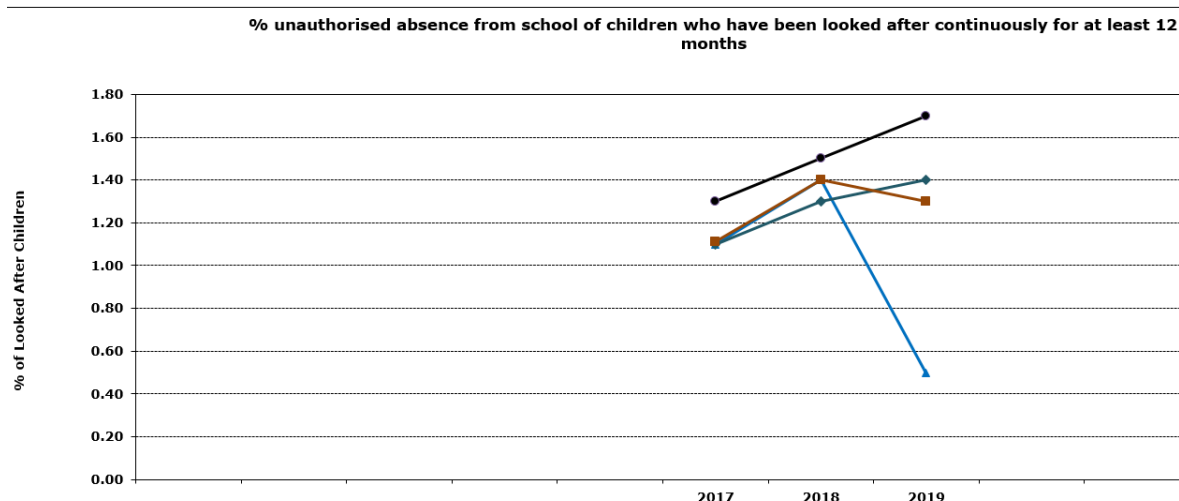
The impact of the pandemic has led to pupils not wanting to return to school when they were able to. They preferred to remain at home and needed additional support and challenge to attend school. For those pupils, actions plans were put in place and mentors were assigned. Not all pupils took up the offer of a mentor, but those that did and who worked with their schools to overcome anxieties, were able to return to school successfully.

There are specific actions which have taken place and which are planned for the next academic year to mitigate the impact of Covid 19. These are evidenced in the School Improvement Plans and Head Teacher reports to the Virtual School Governing Body.

The Virtual School Head has very high expectations and standards relating to school attendance and this can be evidenced through our past performance compared to other local authorities. The published data in the Local Authority Interactive Toolkit shows that Thurrock Children Looked After are ranked as second in the country for the lowest overall absence rates against all other Local Authorities with 5.4% of pupils being classed as a persistent absentee. The national average for CLA being 12%.



Published data from the LAIT for unauthorised absence in 2019 shows Thurrock as ranked number 1 in the country for the lowest rate of unauthorised absence for children in care as this was 0.50%. This is illustrated in the graph taken from the LAIT.



8. Exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over an eight year period. Wherever possible we encourage schools to avoid fixed term exclusions [FTE]. After managing to reduce the FTE rate to the lowest it had been over a five year period in 2017/18 it has remained above that low figure.

21 school age pupils out of the CLA cohort have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 10.6% of the cohort. This is above the national figure 3.76% of all pupils in England for data 2019/2020. There is currently no comparative data of CLA exclusion rates or a rate for 2020/2021. The DFE recommends that the published data for 2019/20 is treated with caution due to the pandemic. More national statistical updates will be available in July 2022.

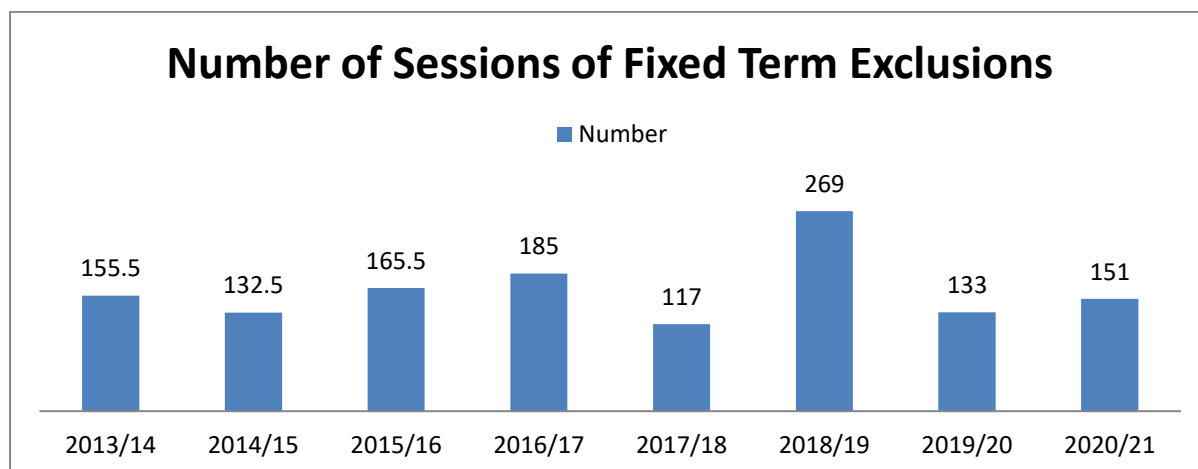
There were some incidences this academic year of some new into care having a FTE both before and after becoming looked after. It would seem that this behaviour could have been communicating a more significant need relating to their home life and then responding when becoming looked after. The Virtual School work with schools to reduce fixed term exclusions, however, some of our pupils are participating in activities that would warrant the need for exclusion. We have managed to negotiate alternatives to exclusion off site through measures such as:

- Internal support
- Action plan meetings when excluded
- Alternative provision
- Managed moved

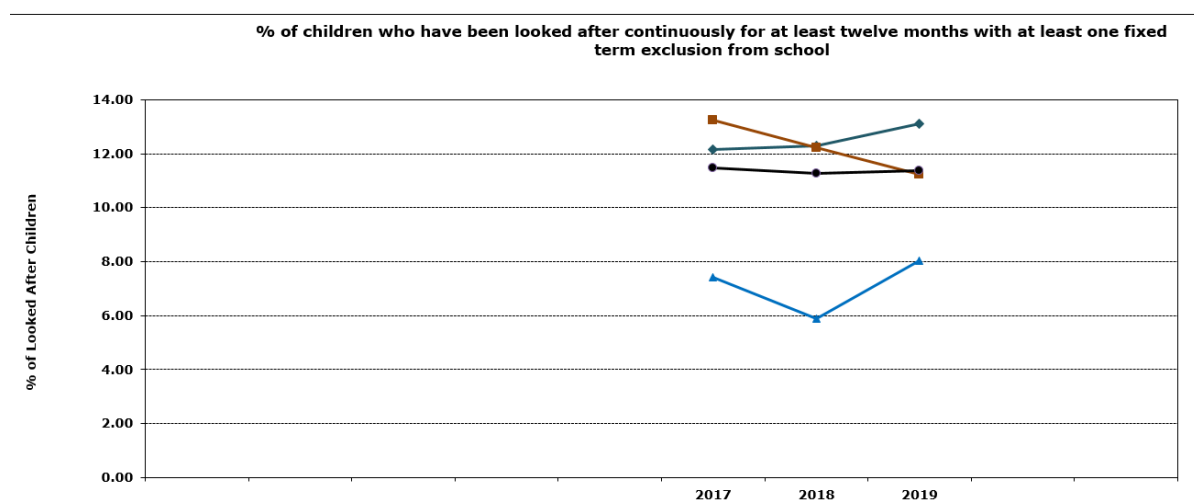
As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

- 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 behavioral difficulties with our pupils.



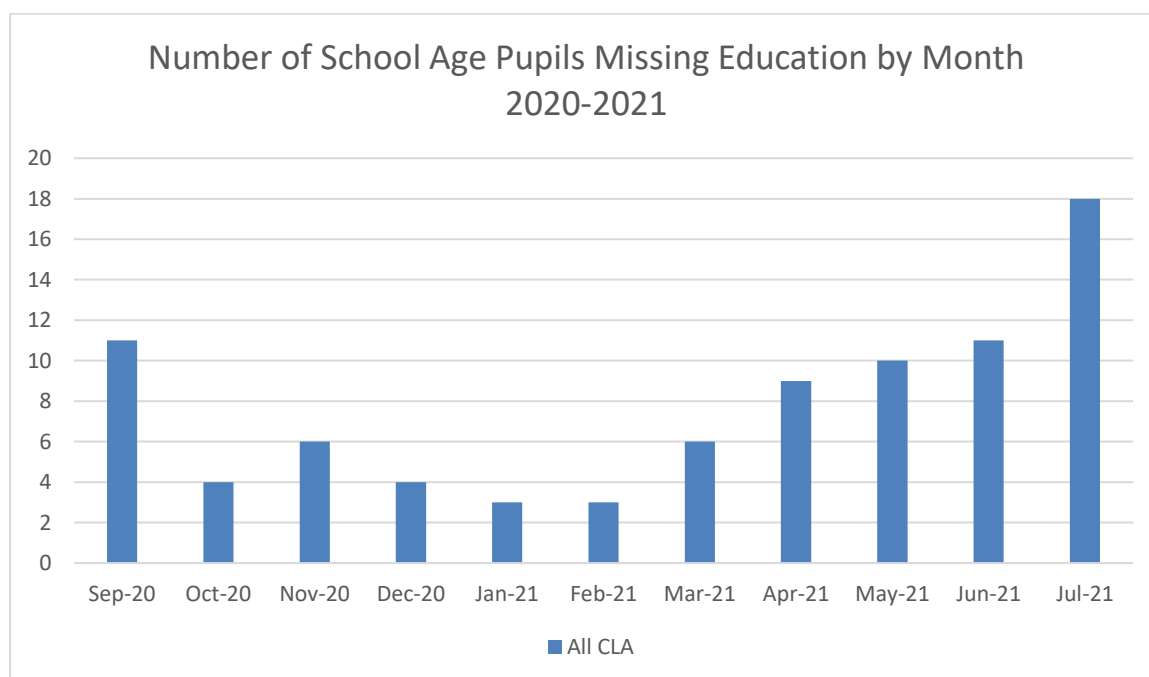
The LAIT tool data for the 3 year period 2016-2019 (the latest set of published data) shows that Thurrock CLA for 12+ months continued to have exclusion rates below the national averages for CLA. This is illustrated in the LAIT graph below. It also ranked Thurrock as 15th in the Country for lowest FTE rates.



9. Children Missing Education [CME]

The Local Authority carefully monitors any child missing education for those CLA placed in and out of borough. The Virtual School produces weekly data for any child who is missing education due to lack of a school place or through extended absence. This data is shared and discussed in Directors Management Team monthly. Monthly CME data is available and provided to Governors on a termly basis. The Virtual School takes action which is individualised to meet the needs of the pupils and where necessary, works with the Admissions Team, Inclusion Manager and SEN Service teams in Thurrock and other boroughs to secure school places or alternative provision. For pupils who are without an educational placement, a Personal

Education Plan [PEP] meeting is held to plan actions for how to secure education provision. Wherever possible the Virtual School provides tuition through commissioned tuition services whilst a student is between educational placements. The increase in CME in July was mainly attributable to 8 UASC entering care into the summer term. The biggest challenge for securing education is when those pupils with an EHC Plan move out of borough and an alternative provision is sought. The processes within the SEND Code of Practice, do not enable action to be completed in a timely manner. This matter is discussed weekly at SEN Priority Panel.

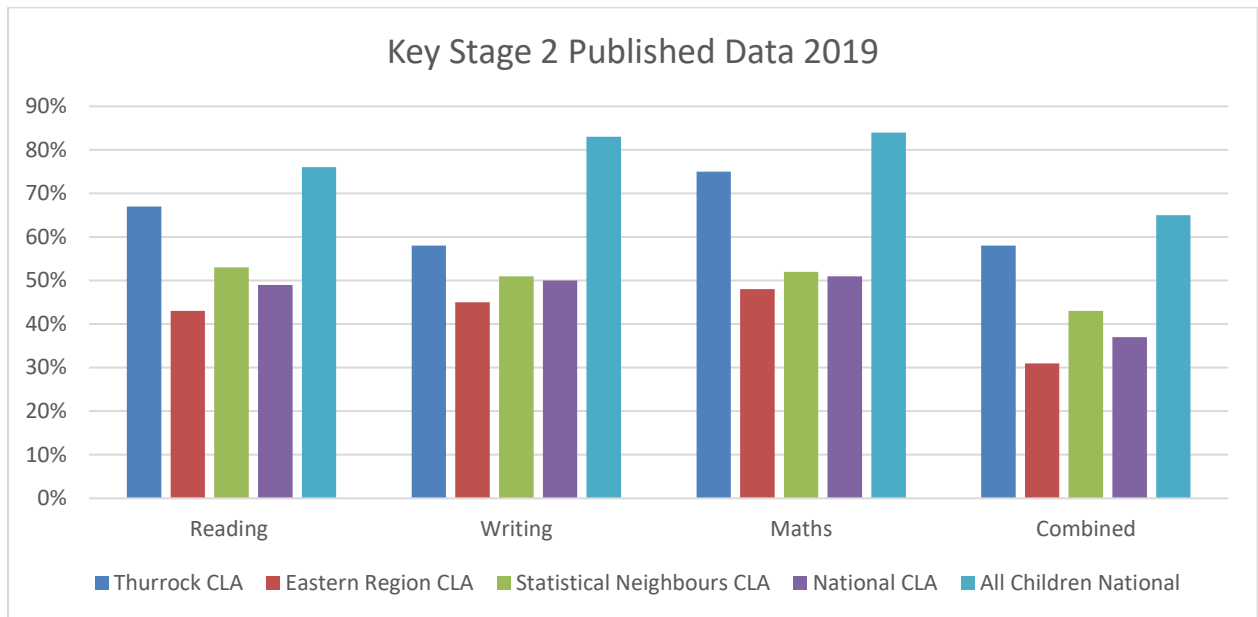


The table highlights a fluctuation of figures and this very much depends on the profile of pupils coming into care and whether they have education prior to becoming looked after or if they have to move away from their school due to placement availability in borough. The virtual school staff work very hard to access education as soon as they are made aware that there is a child missing education. It is more difficult to access education if a child/young person has Special Educational Needs because due to the consultation process. Covid 19 presented a further challenge because many schools suspended their admissions processes during the national lockdowns.

10. Attainment Data of CLA

During to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the year 2020 and 2021, there is no attainment data to report. In line with Department for Education guidance, the Virtual School will not be publishing any data linked to testing or exams. However, some data has been made available on the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) based upon 2019 tests for Key Stage 2 and Teacher Assessment data for Key Stage 4 in 2020. This data can be classed as validated and can therefore be shared with Governors and the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Key Stage 2 Data from the LAIT

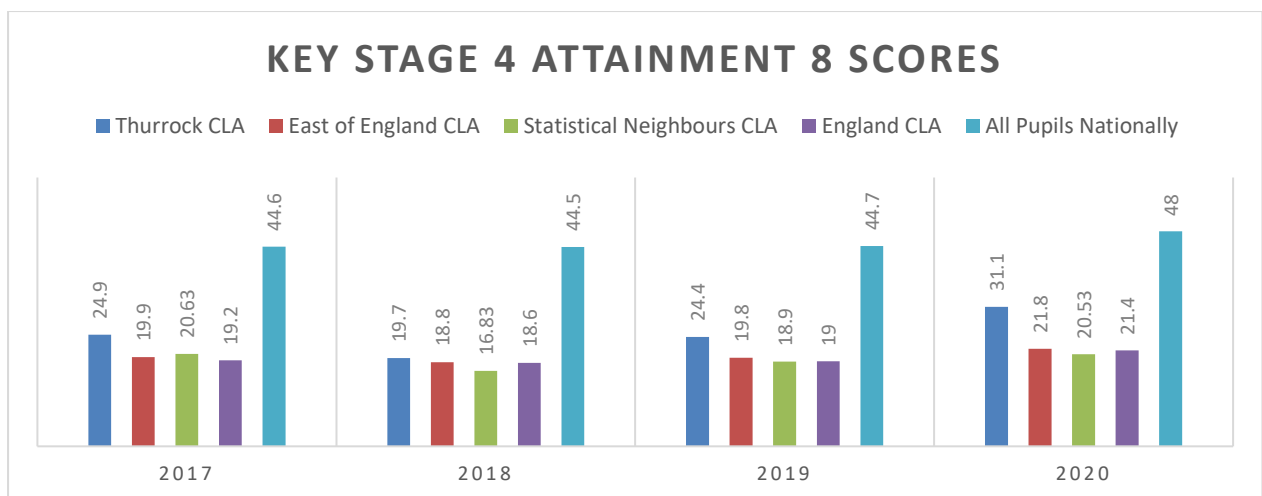


For the last set of published data for pupils in care for 12+ months the Key Stage 2 attainment data is shown the above chart (2019). Thurrock CLA have outperformed all other CLA comparators and attainment is better than eastern region, statistical neighbour and all CLA in England. **Thurrock Local Authority CLA was ranked 3rd in the country for the best combined results for reading, writing and math and was only 7% below the national average combined score for all children.**

Key Stage 4 Data from the LAIT

Attainment 8 Scores

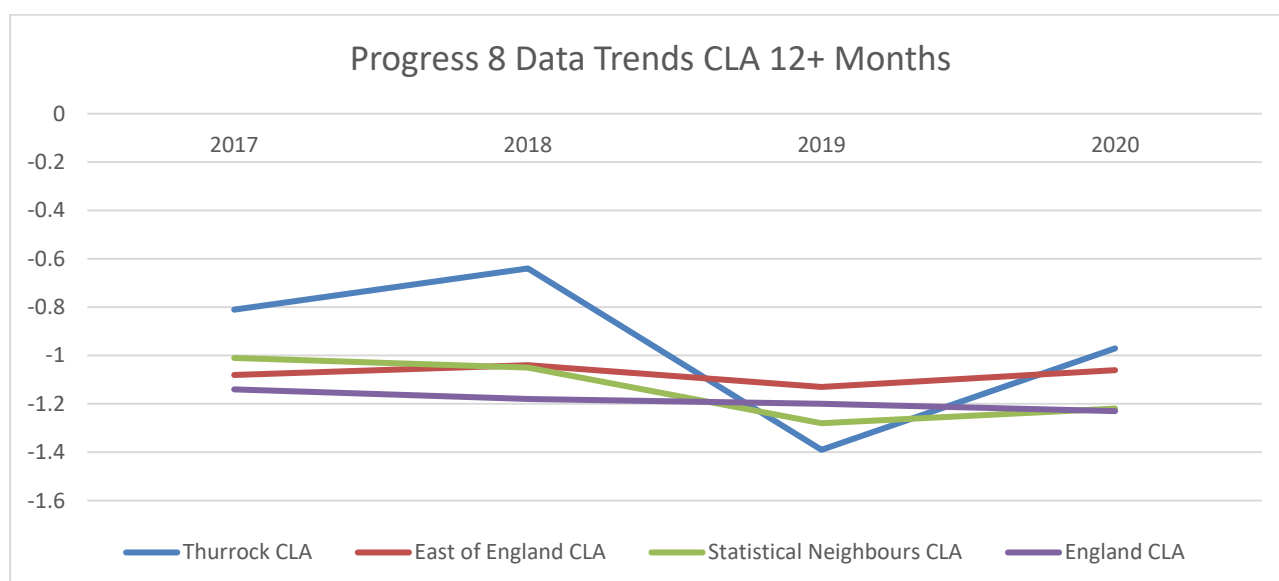
In Key Stage 4 there has been some data made available for 2020 from the LAIT. **Attainment 8 scores have been ranked as being ranked 5th in the country for Attainment 8 scores for CLA compared to all other Local Authorities.**



The above chart shows the improved performance of Thurrock CLA over a 3 year period using data for CLA in care 12+ months. This data shows that Thurrock CLA are closing the gap over non-looked after peers as well as performing above other CLAs in comparative criteria.

Progress 8 Scores

Progress 8 would be an area for development for **Thurrock CLA as we are ranked 35th in the country out of LAs for performance in this area.** Our performance in Progress 8 measures is better than our statistical neighbours, eastern region and England CLA but we would still like to do better. Performance is illustrated below. For context in this report, the closer the lines are to zero, the better.

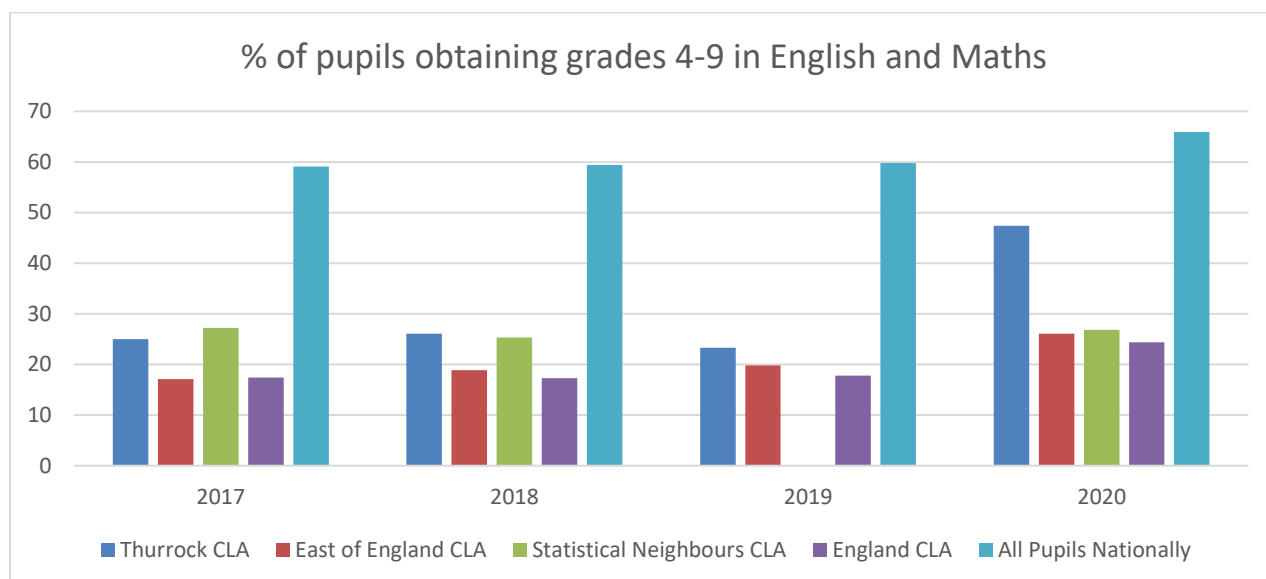


Key Stage 4 English and Maths Combined

In 2020 Thurrock CLA performed particularly well in obtaining Maths and English grades 4+ combined. **The LAIT data for pupils in care for 12+ months ranks us as Number 1 out of all local authorities in the country for CLA pupils.**

We have consistently performed better than the East of England, our statistical neighbours and all CLA across a 3 year period. We must note however, that this data is very cohort specific and is affected by the contextual make-up of the Year 11 cohort for each year.

The chart below details the comparative data over a 4 year period.



Data for 2021

As yet there is no reportable data for 2021. In line with the DFE guidance and the publication of national data, the Virtual School Head Teacher will report further data when available. There was no testing in 2021, however, pupil progress and attainment was still monitored very carefully throughout the year for all pupils.

Due to the effects of the pandemic and subsequent disruption to education this has caused. The Virtual school continues to work closely with schools/colleges to ensure that our pupils make progress and barriers to learning are identified and addressed.

11. **Summary of Actions for all Key Stages to improve 2022 data**

Key Headlines of Actions for Supporting Testing in 2022

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 summer term of year 10
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for year 5 starting in the summer term of year 5
- Provision of 1-1 tuition in maths and English throughout year 6 for this year group
- Conducting termly school visits [due to Covid these may be virtual] 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 notes
- Development of SEND support materials to further improve the outcomes for this group of children
- Development of a range of interventions for certain year groups and needs
- Continuing the interventions and key actions developed over the previous years to build upon good practice and successful outcomes
- Embedding the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires [SDQ] for every pupil from year R to 17 years old and triangulating scores with other professionals to identify specific intervention

12. Case Studies

Case studies provide some insight into the individual work that is completed by members of the Virtual School to improve outcomes for children and young people. Each phase leader provides a case study for the Governing Body every term as part of our reporting and accountability mechanisms. These can be seen in reports to Governors.

13. School Improvement Priorities

These are detailed in the Virtual School Improvement Plan which is updated at the start of every academic year. Priorities are identified and actions are detailed related to targets and actions which form the basis of the Virtual School's work across the academic year. The aim of this document is to promote the raising of educational outcomes for all of our Children Looked After. This is reviewed every half term and reports to the Governing Body detail progress towards each priority. These can be found in additional documents which are produced termly for the Governing Body.

Key Priorities for 2020-2021 were

To improve achievement of all pupils by:

[KP 1] Improving the attainment and progress of Children Looked After (CLA) to be in line with or above the national average outcomes for CLA for all Key Stages

Due to Covid 19 and the lack of national testing. It is not possible to measure this target due to lack of data. However, in the attainment section above the published data that we have available is showing a very positive picture in terms of meeting this improvement priority. Data for 2021 is not yet available and this will be limited due to testing being cancelled for 2021.

Our past 3 years of historical national data shows an improving picture year on year and we our children perform better at national testing compared to CLA nationally. The gap against non-CLA is also closing over this 3 year period.

What Next?

- *Plan for academic year 2021-2022 will continue to focus on progress and intervention.*
- *Use of Pupil Premium Plus to support any gaps in provision*
- *Continue with Virtual School 1-1 tuition offer for key year groups of pupils to support testing in 2022*

[KP 2] Reduce the number of fixed term exclusions across the academic year to maximise educational outcomes

Our exclusion rates remain low compared to the national average and this years' data is a more realistic view of the cohort and their behaviour profile. We are continuously looking at pupil behaviour and supporting schools to reduce the number of fixed term episodes. The use of the Access to Inclusion Toolkit has supported schools to be able to look at the behaviours of our pupils and develop strategies to support certain behaviours in class.

What Next?

- *Monitor the rate of exclusion and reasons for exclusion in forthcoming year*
- *Provide challenge and support where exclusions are taking place*
- *Continue to develop strategies and possible interventions to support behaviour*
- *Provide trauma and attachment training to schools/colleges in order to provide a more trauma informed approach*

[KP 3] Further embedding processes of measuring the progress of CLA pupils in each cohort as evidenced through quantitative data and soft outcomes data so that poor progress can be supported

A range of data is produced which measures attainment and progress data from starting points and this is tracked using quantifiable data as well as individual pupil progress against their personal targets. For SEN pupils, schools are providing reports which detail all elements of progress and these are used to inform personal education plans and EHC plans. B Squared is used for pupils that require this measurement. The Personal Education Plan data section was changed to meet the different assessment recording methods used by schools. An extra support section to the PEP has also enabled the creation of provision plans for pupils which details interventions and the impact of these on pupil progress.

What Next?

- *Ensuring that support and resources are targeted appropriately by individual schools to maximize pupil progress, particularly in light of addressing any gaps in learning caused by the impact of Covid 19.*

[KP 4] Continuing to raise the profile of mental health and interventions to support the outcomes of CLA

The detailed tracking of emotional health and well-being and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ] are now fully embedded as part of the termly Personal Education Plan [PEP] process. Pupils who are needing extra support for mental health are accessing this in a variety of ways including in school counselling, play therapies or access to external therapeutic support which is commissioned by social care. Where appropriate schools are using the PP+ grant to support needs. There is a dedicated section within the PEP which provides the opportunities to discuss mental health needs using the signs of safety approach. This has enabled there to be a focussed conversation about this and enable plans for support to be made.

What Next?

- *Continue to collect and track SDQ data for all pupils*
- *Continued attendance at monthly SDQ panel to discuss concerns, needs and support for pupils with high scores*
- *Continue to provide Trauma and Attachment training for educational professionals*

[KP 5] Developing interventions which will impact pupil progress

There has been a focus on interventions that could be provided virtually in order to ensure that Covid 19 and the associated measures were not a barrier to intervention. When educational establishments were closed, there was an increased focus on blended and online learning. Levels of engagement with this were carefully tracked each week. When pupils were in schools an approach which supported a creative approach interventions was suggested. Schools were able to keep the PP+ money and Primary schools received more PP+ to support an increased focus on interventions, once Covid restrictions were lifted.

As a virtual school our interventions used digital technology such as laptops and kindles to support learning as well as the trials of some reading interventions that were online such as Zookeeper. Our Unaccompanied Asylum seekers were provided with 1-1 tuition for ESOL, especially those without schooling as well as access to an online language tool called Flashacademy.

[KP 6] Continue to embed processes of quality assurance of educational provision - particularly relating to remote/virtual working

Due to the Covid 19 restrictions and Thurrock policy of Agile Working the Quality Assurance work has been conducted virtually. Educational establishments were not in a position to welcome external visitors and so the Virtual School team attended all meetings online. The positive aspect of this was that we were able to attend more meetings due to not having to travel. The Virtual School rate each educational establishment according to various criteria and support and challenge is targeted to ensure that education provision is matching the needs of our pupils.

[KP 7] Provision of support and challenge to all professionals to minimise the impact of Covid 19 on our students

We achieved this through changing processes and policies within the Virtual School. For example, by changing certain aspects of the Personal Education Plan. One major action was relating to the second and third national lockdowns. Every school and college had to provide a weekly report about their pupils. This report was used to gauge the frequency and quality of educational provision as well as the level of engagement or our pupils. This enabled us to target challenge and support appropriately, as well as providing additional resources if necessary. This was in the form of tuition or electronic equipment to support learning. Any barriers to learning were identified and actions were taken to address these.

What next?

- *Continue to monitor any effects of the pandemic on pupils' academic progress or emotional well-being*
- *Hold educational establishments to account to ensure they have robust recovery plans for our pupils.*

14. **Allocation and Impact of the Pupil Premium**

The management of the Pupil Premium Plus grant for Children Looked After is detailed in the DFE guidance [Pupil premium grant 2020 to 2021: conditions of grant](#) and [Pupil premium: virtual school heads' responsibilities](#).

The Pupil Premium Plus Policy details the rationale and method behind the allocation of this funding.

Settings receive £1,800 which is released in three equal installments of £600 every term. The Virtual School Headteacher tracks spending on a termly basis in line with the quality assurance process of PEPS. This tracking centers on how this money is used to raise the achievement of the child/young person and assesses if funds are being used appropriately. This process, alongside the PEP process is supporting the pupil to have targeted support and intervention which directly affects and plans for his/her academic and overall school achievement with a personalised approach. It is enabling the Virtual School to be updated on progress data and enables discussion with the school to center on appropriate intervention. This system promotes accountability and improved dialogue in how to raise attainment and achievement and narrow the gap. [Separate Pupil Premium documentation is available on request].

Overview of Spending by the Virtual School

The Virtual School received PP+ funding for 251 pupils aged from Year Reception to Year 11. This figure is based upon the SDA903 census return by social care. 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 £136,795.

When a pupil enters care at any point in the academic year, the educational setting immediately starts to receive PP+ funding for the term the pupil entered care. In some cases, the pupil may require additional funding for specific needs and to support the transition into care. This is allocated from the top slice. When a pupil moves school, the PP+ funding follows that child/young person to ensure that needs are met in their new setting.

When a pupil leaves care during an academic year the school/educational placement receives the remaining amount of PP+ up to the sum of £2,345. This is to cover any shortfall in funding in the interim between leaving care and being eligible for PP+ funding for being Previously Looked After [PLAC].

In line with our Pupil Premium Plus Policy, schools are able to claim for additional funding to meet the needs of the pupil in excess of the allocated £1,800. This is used to support those pupils who have high needs and need significant intervention to remain in school. This has proved to be a very successful use of the top slice as this has ensured that we have had zero permanent exclusions.

The majority of funding this academic year was spent on 1-1 tuition for pupils. This is funded at £55 per hour of tuition. During the course of the academic year we have commissioned maths and English tuition for all year 6 pupils to support with testing and then continued this through to the end of year 6 to support transition into Year 7. Year 5 tuition was started early to mitigate the potential disruption to education caused by Covid 19. Year 11 were provided with tuition in maths, English and science (if requested) and this continued through to the end of the year to support with year 12. Additionally, year 10s started their tuition early. Some year 12s maintained the tuition that was provided throughout Year 11 (2019/2020) to support them with GCSEs. As a result of the impact of Covid 19 we allocated £252,985 for additional tuition to cover April 2020 through to August 2021. Funds for this were taken from our core budget and pupil premium plus top slice.

Funding was also directed at providing digital technology to any pupil that needed this. All pupils were assessed to see if they needed a laptop to support them with their studies and home tuition packages. We provided laptops costing a total of £16,918 to support those needing access to devices to support learning.

Kindles were purchased for pupils from year 4 upwards. A kindle for primary pupils has been pre-loaded with a subscription to Kindle reading programme. Additionally

kindles and reading vouchers have been purchased to support reading for key stages 3,4 and 5. This set of resources was £7,500

The Letterbox Booktrust home learning resources were also provided to all pupils in year groups Nursery 2 to Year 9. We allocated £11, 263 for this resource.

Additionally we commissioned mentoring services from Open Door which has provided 1-1 mentoring support for an identified group of pupils who needed additional support. This resource was £7,897.

For post 16 we also commissioned tutoring to support students who were Not in Education, Employment or Training. This was for fifteen 1-1 sessions to support with confidence building, CV writing, interview techniques etc. These pupils were out of borough and so were not able to access Inspire in Thurrock and were reluctant engagers with the services. This mentoring has provided a good outcome for and supported these young people into employment.

As parting of reporting process, The Virtual School Head submits spending overviews to the Governing Body of the Virtual School to detail the planned intent of top slice spending.

15. Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans

The Personal Education Plan [PEP] is a key document to support the child's/young person's education. Where possible the Virtual School attends specific PEP meetings. It is also important that the Virtual School attends PEP meetings for particularly vulnerable students or when a potential issue has been identified. For example, concern with progress. The Virtual School team is responsible for Quality Assuring [QA] every PEP. Compliance data is shown in the table below. This shows that PEP compliance remained above 90% throughout the year. Some PEPs were out of timescale due to absence of staff in schools or in social care.

PEP Compliance Data for Academic Year 2020-2021

Month	Overall Compliance	Early Years - N2	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Sep-20	98.40%	N/A	100%	100%	94%
Oct-20	95%	100%	100%	97%	85%
Nov-20	90%	60%	91%	97%	78%
Dec-20	92%		88%	97%	90%
Jan-21	96%	67%	95%	98%	96%
Feb-21	98%	94%	97%	99%	96%
Mar-21	97%	100%	100%	98%	92%
Apr-21	94%	100%	97%	95%	86%
May-21	96%	100%	97%	94%	93%

Jun-21	93%	89%	90%	96%	95%
Jul-21	96.00%	100%	100%	97%	93%
Aug-21	No data as all completed				

Quality of Personal Education Plans

In addition to the PEP compliance data the Virtual School track the quality of PEPs. Every Personal Education Plan document is quality assured for each pupil for each term. We have a clear quality assurance framework which is shared with social workers and the schools/colleges.

PEP quality has been affected by Covid 19 which has caused staff absence in schools and within the social care team. This has meant that certain parts of the PEP were not completed within timeframe which led to a grading of poor quality. The Virtual School have continued to provide training to professionals throughout the academic year to support with completing a good PEP.

Month	Overall Good Quality %	% Amber	% RED	Not graded
Sep-20	81%	5%	4%	10%
Oct-20	76%	5%	8%	11%
Nov-20	76%	6%	11%	7%
Dec-20	70%	8%	13%	8%
Jan-21	69%	8%	15%	8%
Feb-21	70%	7%	15%	7%
Mar-21	70%	6%	16%	8%
Apr-21	72%	7%	15%	6%
May-21	69%	8%	15%	8%
Jun-21	72%	9%	15%	4%
Jul-21	62%	12%	24%	2%
Aug-21	No data as all completed			

Where a PEP has not been graded, this means it is waiting to be closed by the team before officially graded.

What Next?

- Quality of PEPs remains a focal point for improvement. In the forthcoming year the VS will continue to provide PEP training and support to social workers, schools and colleges

- Pupil Premium Plus funding will be withheld from schools if the education section is not to a high standard.

16. **Post 16 Update**

The Virtual School supports pupils who have left Year 11 and are moving onto the next stage of their education. Pupils take a variety of paths either through level 1, 2 or 3, FE or HE qualifications. Others combine apprenticeships with obtaining qualifications. Every pupil is supported appropriately to create the next step that is suitable for them. Conversations regarding post 16 pathways are discussed in Year 10. Transition is discussed before the student leaves Year 11 and students are supported with applying for college positions and courses. After the students receive their qualifications they are further supported to apply for places again if they were unsuccessful with their original choice and all can access support from the Virtual School 16+ Education Adviser if necessary with activities such as applying for a bursary, receiving additional tuition, interventions and attendance at disruption meeting with colleges and employers. Further Education Personal Education Plans are put in place for every student, even those without an educational placement. The Virtual School works closely with the aftercare team to support pupils in Year 13 and beyond.

University Students

Although the Virtual School does not hold responsibility for these students we still like to support our young people as they leave care and head off to university. This is in the form of IT resources and vouchers for their living costs as they leave Year 13. There are currently 19 care leavers aged 18-21 years at university with a further 9 students aged 22-25. It remains the aspiration of Thurrock Council that as many care leavers as possible can access higher education if they choose to.

17. **Not in Education Employment or Training [NEET]**

The Virtual School closely monitors any post 16 young person who has CLA status and who is NEET. They are monitored at least fortnightly and the Post 16+ Education Adviser works with the young person, social care, personal advisors and local colleges and businesses to create the best possible opportunity for the young person to be placed in education, employment or training. NEET data is provided to the Virtual School Governing Body every term as part of the Headteacher's report.

Not in Employment Education or Training [NEET] Strategy Meeting

Each month the virtual school team meet with social workers for NEET young people to discuss the cases. There is an action matrix which is created to detail all actions planned and then evaluate the impact of these. A representative from Inspire Youth Hub attends this meeting so there is a co-ordinated approach wherever possible. The aftercare team manager is also invited as well as the service manager of CLA.

This approach enables discussion and actions to be prioritised to support the young person back into EET.

Barefoot E Learning for NEET Young People

This is an online course package which is used in addition to the offers provided by Inspire. Our young people are given this as an option to access a variety of academic and vocational courses which they can choose depending upon interests and their chosen next steps. Feedback from our young people has been that they have found this interesting and manageable to do. It has given them the confidence to try new things and to access this learning at their own pace. The total cost for this was £1,200 for the year and this has already proven to be beneficial.

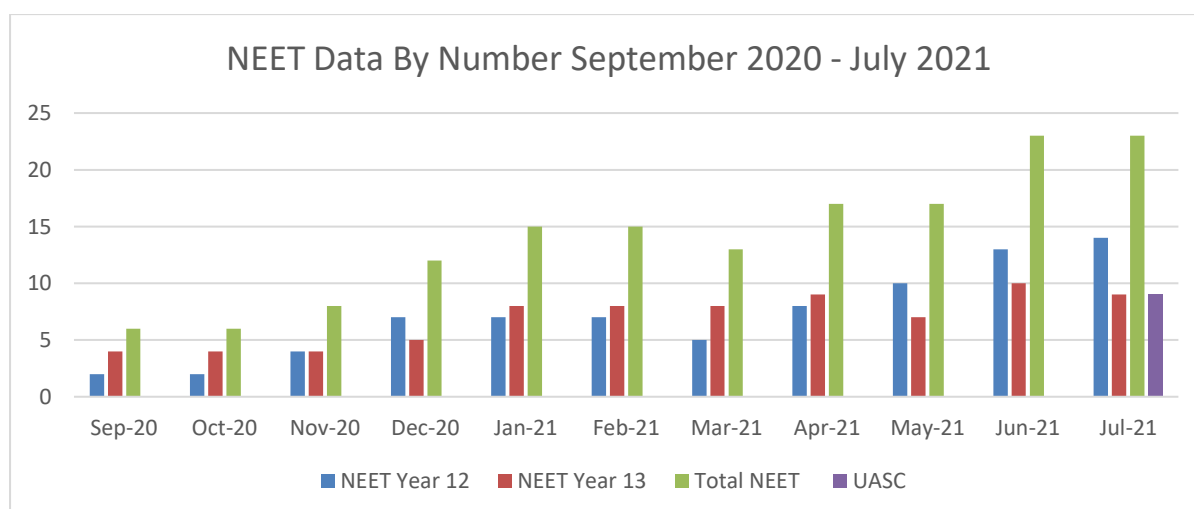
Contact with NEET Young People

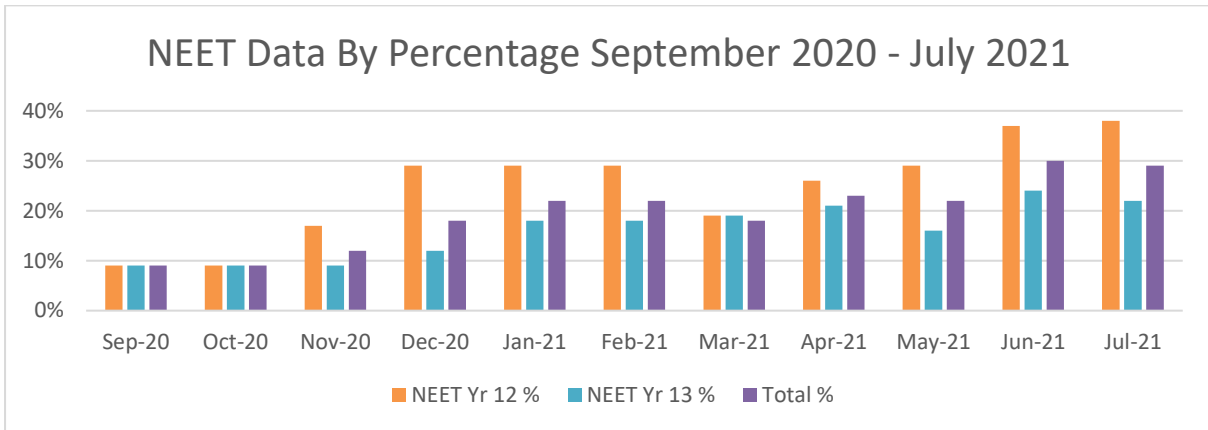
The post 16 adviser contacts every NEET young person every week/fortnight. Some young people require more contact than others and so this could be several times per week.

The NEET and EET figures supplied in the graph below are specifically only for the children in the Virtual School cohort and would therefore see high in comparison with the national figures. In the summer term, data for those who are NEET but taking part in engagement activities, as defined by the DFE, have been included.

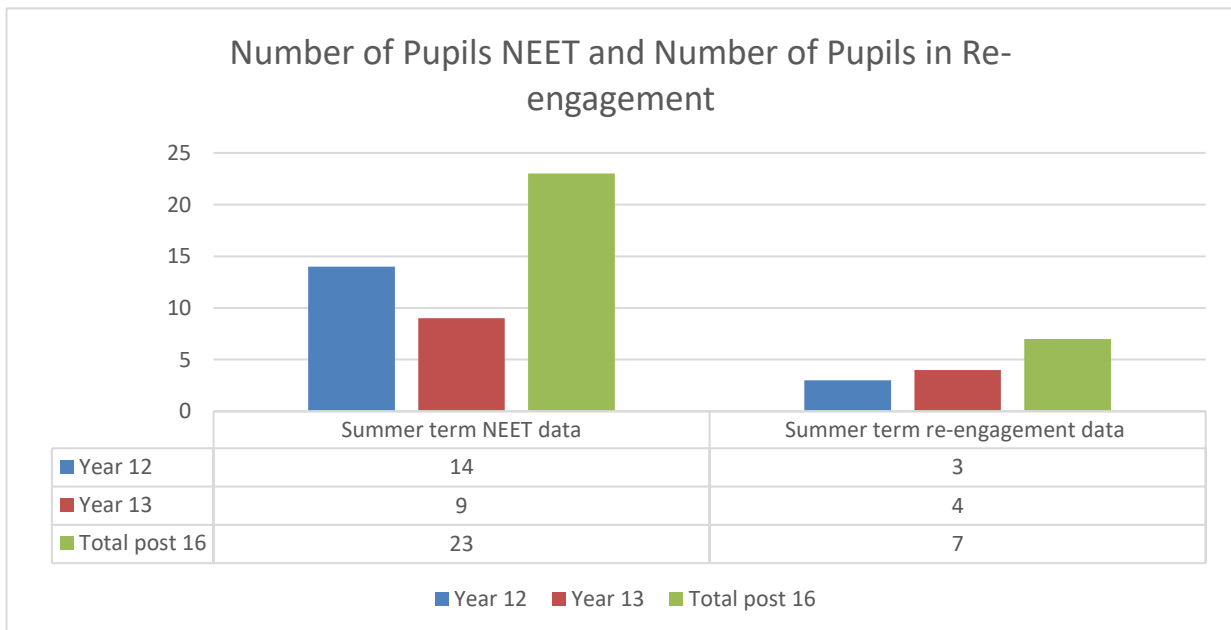
Not in Education, Employment or Training Data

These figures include those who have recently come into care and those who have recently left care due to being 18 years old. If a pupil becomes 18 during Year 13, the Virtual School still monitors and supports alongside the aftercare team.





The NEET figures increase towards the end of the year has reflected that 9 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people came into the country and could not access a college placement due to the time of year. These young people were supported with online learning packages until a college provision was found. Strategies for NEET support are noted above in this report. Some NEET young people have been involved with re-engagement activities. This is summarised for the summer term 2021 below.



What Next?

- Ensure that all NEET pupils have a NEET action plan which is reviewed every month
- Provide challenge to semi-supported accommodation key workers to ensure they are promoting EET to our young people
- Liaise with social care to check that mental health and well-being is being supported

18. Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

This year has seen an increased demand for the Virtual School team to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. We currently have 12% of our cohort classified as UASC. This was an increase from 9.4% the previous year. The regional sharing protocol arrangements have enabled young people to be transferred to boroughs with fewer numbers than Thurrock. The number of UASC coming into Thurrock has not reduced and as some of our previous UASC have left care, Thurrock Local Authority are distributing fewer young people to other boroughs. This year we have created a set protocol to support the educational needs of these young people. Including 1-1 tuition if of school age and the provision of online learning packages to all young people. The priority with all is to obtain school or colleges placements as soon as possible to promote the learning of English. We have also created stationary packs and are purchasing dictionaries to support language. Our older UASC pupils continue to do well in their colleges and schools and those who have been with us for over 12 months are making good progress with their English. One of our UASCs will be starting Oxford University in October 2021. We have provided him with English support since he first came to us aged 15 years old. With hard work and high aspirations, our young people can achieve a great deal.

19. Virtual School Governing Body

The Virtual School Governing Body [GB] was formed in the autumn term 2016. Meetings are held once per term. The Governing Body is used to hold the Virtual School to account and ensure that the team are maximising positive outcomes for CLA.

The members of this GB 2020/2021 were:

Chair: M Lucas [Assistant Director of Learning, Skills and Inclusion]

Headteacher: K Pullen [Virtual School]

In Borough School Representative Secondary: Dr S Asong [CEO Ortu Academy Trust]

In Borough School Representative Primary: N Shadbolt [HT Aveley Primary School]

Out of Borough School Representative Designated Teacher: J Leamon [Dartford Grammar School for Girls]

Out of Borough School Representative: Vacancy

Education Representative: A Winstone [Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and SEND]

Post 16 Education Representative: K Kozlova-Boran – Service Manager Learning and Careers

Social Care Representative: L Froment – Service Manager Children Looked After Services

Staff Governor: G Page [Operations Co-Ordinator for the Virtual School]

The purpose of the Governing Body [GB] is to hold the VSHT to account and to ensure that clear and regular lines of reporting are in place. The VSHT prepares a range of documentation for the GB to approve and to question the strategy and decisions made by the VSHT.

In addition the VSHT reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee on a regular basis.

20. Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to Covid 19

It was essential that the Virtual School were able to maintain support, advice and challenge to ensure that our Children Looked After were supported educationally during the national lockdown period. The Virtual School took certain measures to meet the changing demands of the service during this time. A brief summary of key actions is below:

- Every pupil was monitored for their education offer during the national lockdown periods. This covered our pupils from Nursery 2 through to year 13 who were placed both in and out of borough
- Support for transition back into face to face education was provided
- Attendance was monitored during the academic year and where ever possible, attendance in an educational building was maintained
- Guidance was provided to all carers and social workers to advise on the Local Authorities' position regarding education for our children in care. This guidance advised that the ideal situation would be for all of our Children Looked After (CLA) to access a face to face education offer if provided. However, it took into consideration that we needed to make decisions based on a case by case basis which meets the needs of pupils and the current home situations. For example, if their foster carer was shielding
- There was a clear expectation that every CLA was provided with an education offer, whether face to face, or online. If teachers requested that pupils attend school/college we were supportive of this decision
- Every school/college Designated Teacher was required to complete a 1 page summary sheet every week which informed the Virtual School team of the situation and assessed the levels of attendance and engagement in learning
- For those who attended school, Welfare Call attendance monitoring continued to contact the schools on a daily basis to obtain live attendance data

- Foster carers and social workers were required to provide us with updates around their children and young people. This was in order to triangulate a range of perspectives and information around provision and engagement in learning
- Each week, the VS team members RAG rated their cohort based upon offer, engagement, quality of work, concerns raised etc. This approach enabled us to provide support and challenge in the appropriate manner and target resources accordingly
- In terms of monitoring mental health, we continued to request for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to be completed as part of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process to ensure that conversations and actions are taking place to support emotional well-being.
- The Virtual School attended a monthly SDQ meeting which takes places with social care, the virtual school and EWMHS to discuss distribution of support for mental health
- Personal Education Plan meetings continued throughout the year (i.e. every term for every pupil) to ensure that this statutory part of the care plan is maintained and that education is formally monitored through this process
- All tuition offers were maintained and increased for pupils in key year groups. A total of £252,985 was spent on tuition from April 2020-August 2021 thereby demonstrating our commitment to addressing any negative effects that the pandemic has had on educational progress
- We provided our carers with a range of resources, tips, website links and guidance for our different phases of education to provide additional learning activities whilst at home
- Maintained the Letterbox distribution of books and home learning packs for Years Nursery 2 to Year 9
- Provided all professionals with regular updates to promote a good level of communication with schools, colleges, carers and social workers
- Up until March 2020 we had spent £21,000 on digital technology to support learning with a further £16,918 until the end of the year in July 2021
- Where pupils needed to be accessing face to face education, we challenged the relevant professionals to ensure that an offer was provided
- Allowed for schools to be creative in how they managed Pupil Premium Plus to support the needs of our pupils on an academic and social level.

Staffing

In terms of staffing we maintained existing levels of staffing for the academic year 2020/21. All Virtual School staff remained working from home in line with Thurrock policy.

Virtual School Service

We considered this to be business as usual in all aspects of our work and we have worked creatively to achieve this. Personal Education Plan meetings took place and Virtual School staff led on these. The team were able to attend key meetings using conference calls or Microsoft teams so strategy meetings, LAC reviews, EHCP

reviews, Risk Management Panel, Placement Panel, SDQ panel and LAC Health Steering group were attended. With less travel, the staff have had more capacity to attend more meetings.

Usual processes were maintained including the quality assurance of PEPs, tracking pupils, supporting admissions and ensuring that individual needs are being met. A key aspect of the work has also been to challenge and support when we have found that needs are not being met.

21. **Additional Strategies to support the educational progress of Thurrock Children in Care**

Working in Partnership with other Teams in Thurrock Council and out of borough councils. Since the national lockdown these working relationships are managed through virtual means.

The Virtual School works with a range of teams within Thurrock to enable the best possible outcomes for our CLA. These include School Effectiveness, Social Care, Special Educational Needs including Educational Psychologists, Fostering, Health, Admissions and Education Welfare. This cohesive approach works together around the child/young person to create a supportive, knowledgeable level of service aimed at serving the best interest of the CLA.

The Virtual School also works with the relevant teams in other boroughs for our CLA who are placed out of borough. Actions to work with a range of partners included:

- Provision of training to Designated Teachers
- Provision of training to social workers
- Phone call support for foster carers, social workers and teachers
- Frequent liaison with educational establishments
- Provision of training, information advice and guidance for professionals and parents linked to Previously Looked After Children
- Attendance at the Children in Care Council when invited

Additional Services [commissioned by Virtual School in 2020-2021]

Welfare Call – to monitor the attendance of our CLA

EGov Digital Solutions – an electronic platform for Personal Education Plans

Fleet Tuition Service – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Prospero – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Teaching Personnel – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Open Door – Provision of 1-1 mentoring for pupils

Currys PC World – Provision of Digital Technology to support learners

22. **Professional Development of VS Staff**

As a Virtual School we take professional development very seriously as it enables us to reflect on our practice and improve our service. Our team have continued to access a range of online courses during the academic year. The VSHT is continuing to complete a masters degree relating to professional practice and care experienced children. Her dissertation is based upon student perspectives linked to the impact of 1-1 tuition. Our Early Years and Primary adviser has successfully completed a course to become an attachment lead teacher.

23. **Author of this report**

Keeley Pullen BA [Hons] PGCE NPQH

Headteacher of the Virtual School for Thurrock Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Children

Submission date for Governors Thursday 11th November 2021

Submission date to Corporate Parenting Committee 4th January 2022