

**Annual Report of  
the Virtual School  
Headteacher  
Academic Year  
2019/2020**

## **Contents Page**

**A summary of the key highlights is provided before the full report**

1. Purpose of the Report
2. Role of the Virtual School
3. Mission Statement
4. Guidance documents developed by the Virtual School
5. Corporate Parenting Committee
6. Current Contextual Data
  - Numbers of children by Year Group
  - Numbers of pupils attending alternative/specialist provision
  - Numbers of CLA with SEND
  - School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2020
7. Attendance of Children Looked After
8. Exclusions
9. Children Missing Education
10. Child Sexual Exploitation
11. Attainment and Analysis of Children Looked After Data – no data for 2020
12. Summary of Analysis for all Key Stages
13. Case studies of pupils
14. School Improvement Priorities
15. Allocation and Impact of Pupil Premium Plus
16. Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans
17. Post 16 update
18. Not in Education Employment or Training
19. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
20. Virtual School Governing Body
21. Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to the Lockdown
22. Additional strategies to support the educational progress of Thurrock Looked After
23. Professional Development of VS Staff
24. Report Author

## Summary of the Annual Report 2019-2020

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

The academic year can be separated into pre and post Covid and the report reflects this shift in the delivery of services and the change in the needs of our service users.

There certain key aspects to this report which can be highlighted. These being:

- Up until the pandemic the attendance rates for Children Looked After were 96.3%, this has seen another increase from previous years. The unauthorised absence rate has reduced to 1.2% from the previous year too.
- Fixed Term Exclusions have reduced from the previous year.
- The response of the Virtual School team to support the pupils affected by the closure of schools and the national lockdown, was swift and decisive.
- We maintained the tuition support that pupils were accessing and increased it for those that needed support. We provided extra support to those transitioning out of Years 6, 11 and 13.
- All tests and exams were cancelled. Therefore, the report does not contain 2019/20 testing and exam data.
- Data Analysis of the profile and needs of our children/young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability has enabled the Virtual School to provide more challenge and support to schools to meet the needs of our pupils.
- There were some real successes during the lockdown period where schools were able to admit our pupils who were in need of a school place. This helped to keep the Children Missing Education rate at a low number.
- Remote and virtual learning approaches enabled more Designated Teachers and Social Workers to attend the training sessions that were provided by the Virtual School. These were well attended. In one week alone, 60 teachers were trained in Trauma and Attachment.
- Despite the national lockdown, we were able to take advantage of there being more online meetings and communication with a range of people linked to our pupils. This saved travelling time and enabled the virtual school team to attend more meetings than they were usually able to. All professionals that were working with us, worked smarter.
- The format of the Personal Education Plan was changed within 2 weeks of the lockdown announcement. This meant that the document was flexible to meet the requirements of either home, remote or in school learning. This also ensured that PEP compliance and quality remained high.

The following report will now detail the work of the Virtual School during the academic year, both pre and post lockdown.

## 1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to detail the work of the Thurrock Virtual School for the academic year 2019-20.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown, all testing was cancelled for this academic year.

The annual report will be reflective of the unprecedented time that is reportable during this academic year. This report will be provided for the Governing Body to approve in the autumn term 2020 and will subsequently be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in January 2021.

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

A separate document is available named the Roles and Responsibilities of the Virtual School. For the purpose of this report a brief outline will be provided. The Department for Education document: Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children [February 2018] details the roles and responsibilities of Virtual School Heads (VSH). In summary it specifies that:

Parents want their children to have the best start in life and to reach their full potential. As corporate parents, local authorities should have equally high aspirations for the children they look after.

As leaders responsible for ensuring that the local authority discharges its duty to promote the educational achievement of their looked-after children, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services should ensure that:

- top priority is given to creating a culture of high educational aspirations and that the authority strives for accelerated progress and age-related attainment or better for looked-after children;
- looked-after children have access to a suitable range of high quality education placement options and that, when commissioning services for them, the authority takes account of the duty to promote their educational achievement;
- VSHs are in place and that they have the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively;
- VSHs have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children their authority looks after; and
- the authority's Children in Care Council [CiCC] regularly considers the educational experiences as reported by looked-after children and is able to respond effectively to any issues.

The VSH should be the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked-after children, including those placed out-of-authority.

VSHs should ensure the educational attainment and progress of children looked after by the local authority are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school.

The VSH should ensure that there are effective systems in place to:

- maintain an up-to-date roll of its looked-after children who are in school or college settings, and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress;
- ensure sufficient information about a child's mental health, SEN or disability is available to their education setting so that appropriate support can be provided;
- inform Headteachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is looked-after by the VSH's local authority.
- ensure social workers, designated teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's PEP and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP;
- ensure up-to-date, effective and high quality PEPs that focus on educational outcomes, and that all looked-after children, wherever they are placed, have such a PEP;
- avoid drift or delay in providing suitable educational provision, including special educational provision, and unplanned termination of educational arrangements through proactive, multi-agency co-operation. Where this requires negotiation with other authorities this should be completed in a timely manner and with the best interest of the child as paramount;
- ensure the educational achievement of children looked after by the authority is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare; and
- report regularly on the attainment, progress and school attendance of looked-after children through the authority's corporate parenting structures.

[Pages 8 and 9 of Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children DFE 2018]

The Virtual School has overall responsibility for monitoring, supporting and providing interventions to ensure that Children Looked After [CLA] achieve the best possible outcomes. We achieve this by:

- Coordinating and quality assuring all Personal Education Plans [PEP]
- Monitoring and challenging schools to make effective use of the Pupil Premium Plus grant
- Tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of CLA
- Using our tracking data to highlight individuals who are not on target to achieve their predicted outcomes and ensuring that the correct educational support is provided
- Ensuring that Special Educational Needs or Disability [SEND] needs are identified and supported appropriately
- Implementing a range of targeted interventions to raise academic standards
- Providing support and challenge to students, schools/colleges and carers
- Ensuring effective educational transition is in place between schools or specialist providers

- Encouraging our young people to high aspirations about their future and remove barriers to further education
- Leading training for Foster Carers, Designated Teachers, Social Workers, school governors and providing bespoke training where appropriate to educational staff
- Celebrating the achievement of our pupils

### **Staffing of the Virtual School**

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

### **Additional Services [commissioned by Virtual School in 2019-2020]**

Welfare Call – to monitor the attendance of our CLA

EGov Digital Solutions – an electronic platform for Personal Education Plans

TLC Live – provision of online tuition on a 1-1 basis

Fleet Tuition Service – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Prospero – for provision of 1-1 tuition

### 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
- 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 2019/2020 and 2020/2021
- Covid 19 Personal Education Plan and Guidance for Completion

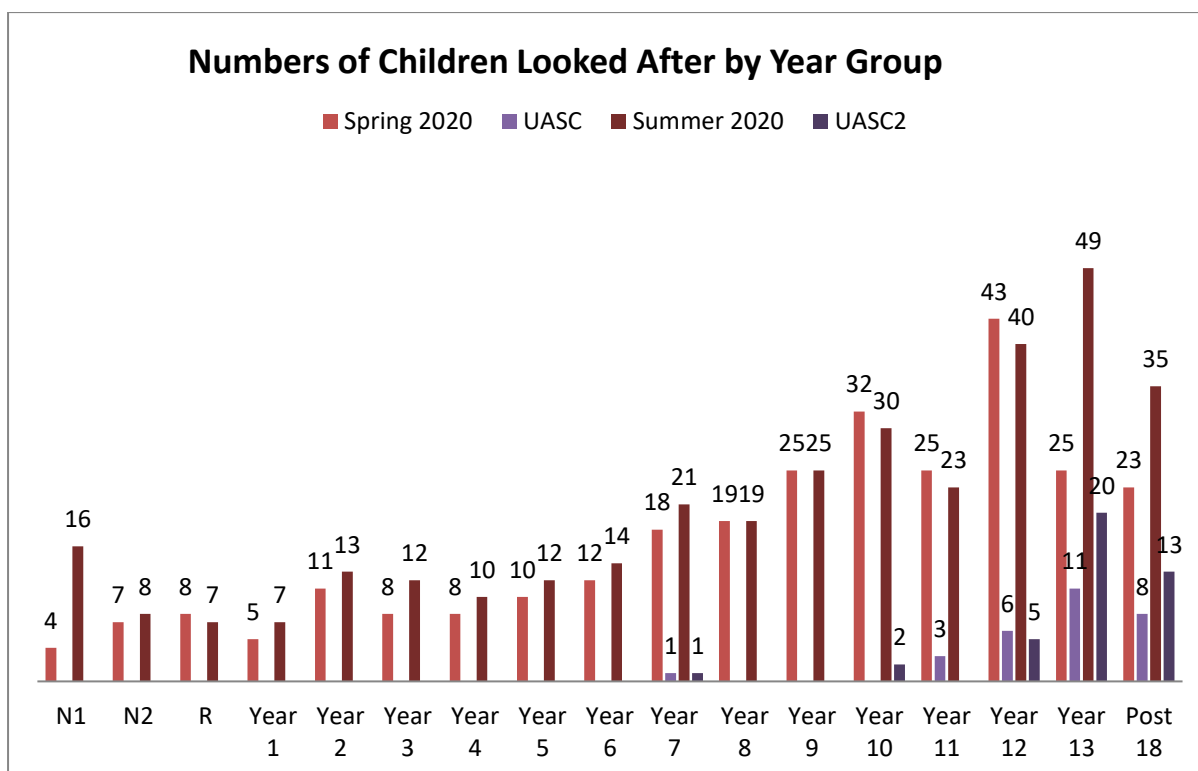
Additional Documents:

- School Improvement Plan 2019-2020
- Headteacher Termly Reports for Governors 2019-2020
- Phase Teacher Termly Reports for Governors 2019-2020

#### 5. **Corporate Parenting Committee**

The Virtual School Headteacher 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 2020]**

There are a total of 306 pupils aged 3-18 years old this is an increase from the previous term. Out of this 306 pupils the figure of UASC is 29 pupils which equates to 9.4%.

Covid 19 has not affected the duties of social care nor how they respond to children in crisis. This has meant that children are still being placed in care or leaving care as planned.

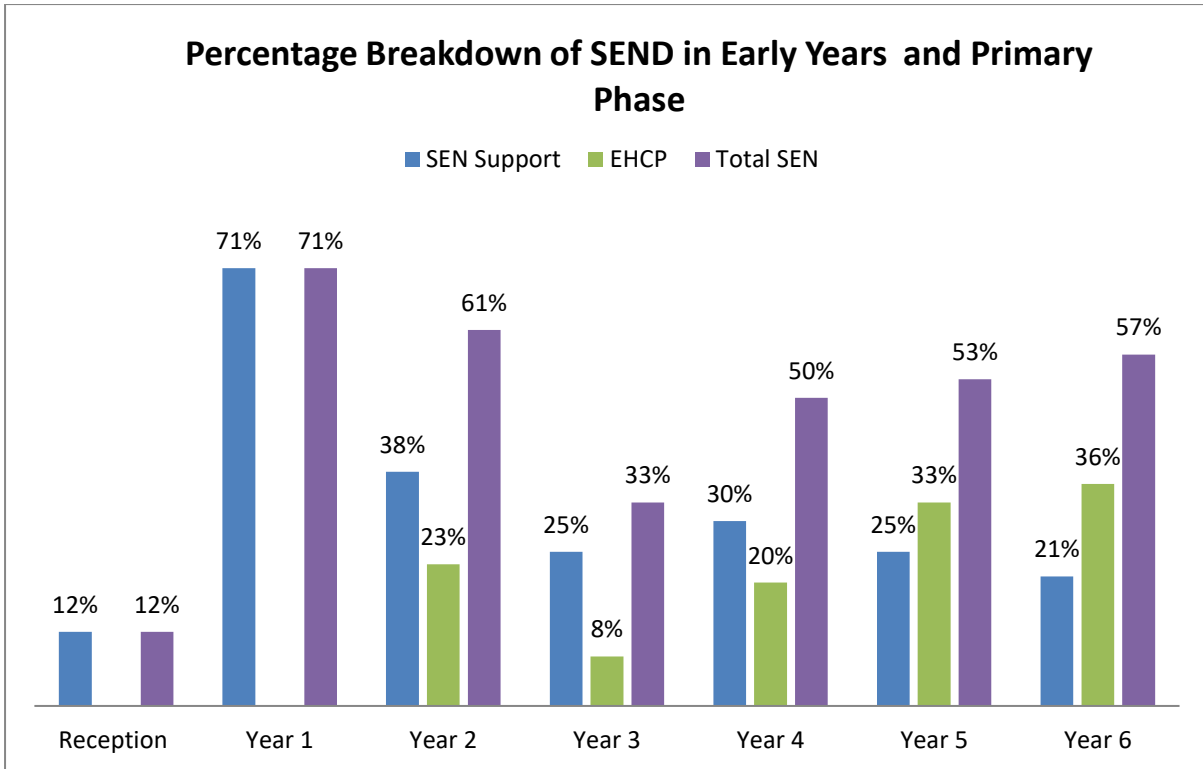
**Number of Pupils in Alternative Provision/SEND School/Specialist Provision  
by Year Group**

N1	N2	R	YR 1	YR 2	YR 3	YR 4	YR 5	YR 6	YR 7	YR 8	YR 9	YR 10	YR 11	YR 12	YR 13
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	3	5	0	7	10	5	5	0

**Number of CLA with a Special Educational Need or Disability**

**Early Years and Primary Phase Numbers**

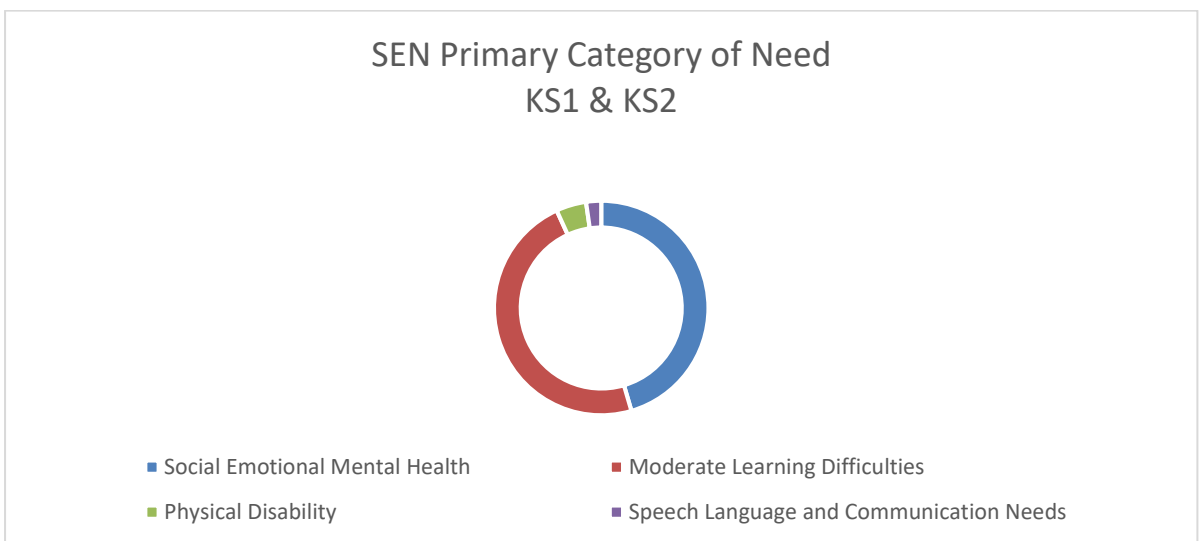
Yr R	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6
2	6	10	6	5	7	8



The diagram above illustrates the percentage of each year group that has CLA with SEND. This is above the national average for schools and year groups and represents the challenges faced by Children Looked After. Further comparative data against national averages will be detailed further in this report.

#### SEN Primary Category of Need

The information in the diagram and tables below details the primary areas of need that our Early Years and Primary CLA pupils have. It is important that these areas of need are tracked as this ensures that the appropriate interventions and support are provided by the professionals who work with them.

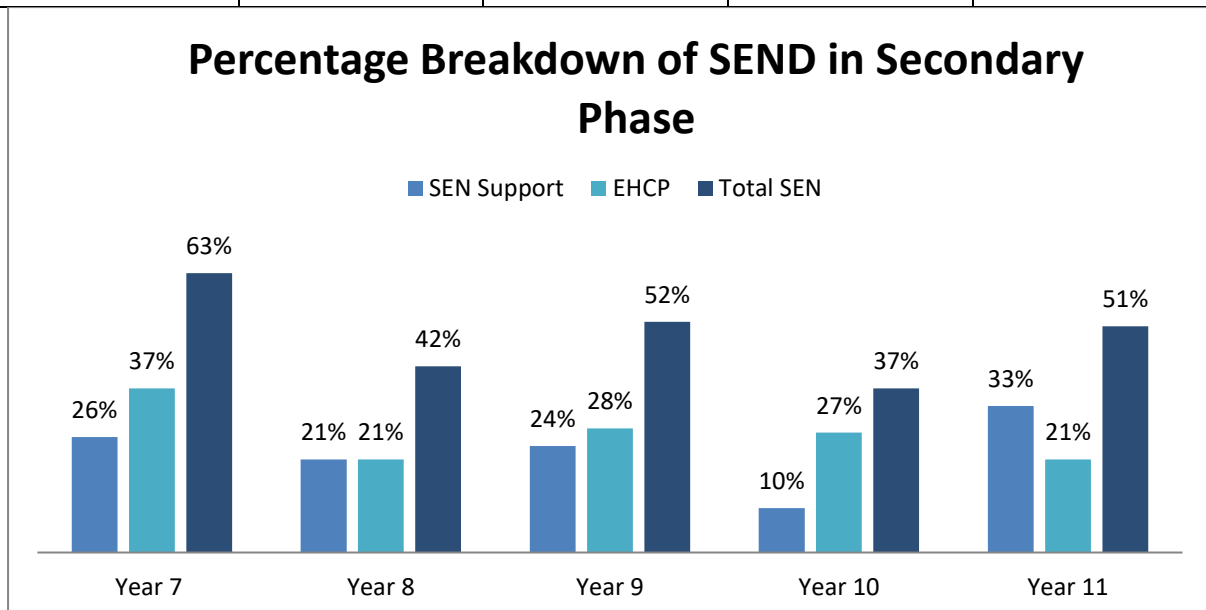


Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS1 and KS2	Social Emotional Mental Health	20
	Moderate Learning Difficulties	21
	Physical Disability	2
	Speech Language and Communication Needs	1

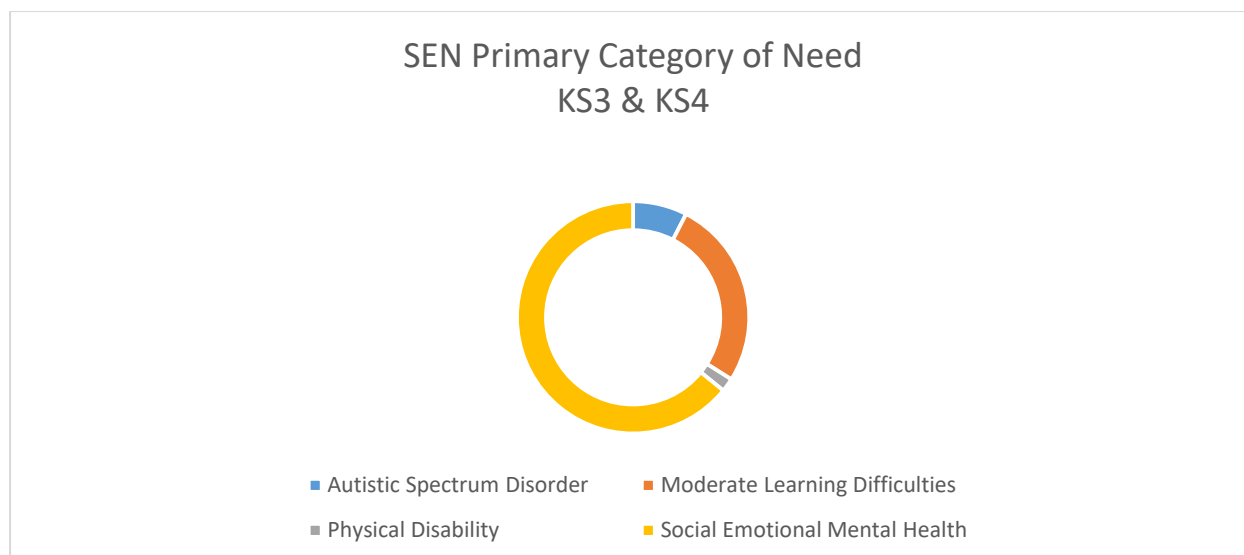
As can be seen in the diagram above there are two main areas of need, these being Social, Emotional and Mental Health [SEMH] and Moderate Learning Difficulties [MLD]. There are reasons that these areas may be prevalent in Children Looked After. It is quite common for Children Looked After to have experienced some form of trauma and attachment difficulties prior to becoming looked after. It is also quite common for children and young people to have missed schooling and so there are gaps in their learning. By identifying the areas of need, it is then more possible to provide support and interventions to enable progress and support learning and development.

### **Secondary Phase Key Stage 3 and 4 Numbers**

Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11
11	8	12	8	12



The diagram above illustrates the percentage of each year group that has CLA with SEND. This is above the national average for schools. The diagram below further illustrates the categories of primary need for this cohort of pupils. In this cohort of young people, it is possible to see that SEMH and MLD are again take precedent as a primary category of need for these pupils.



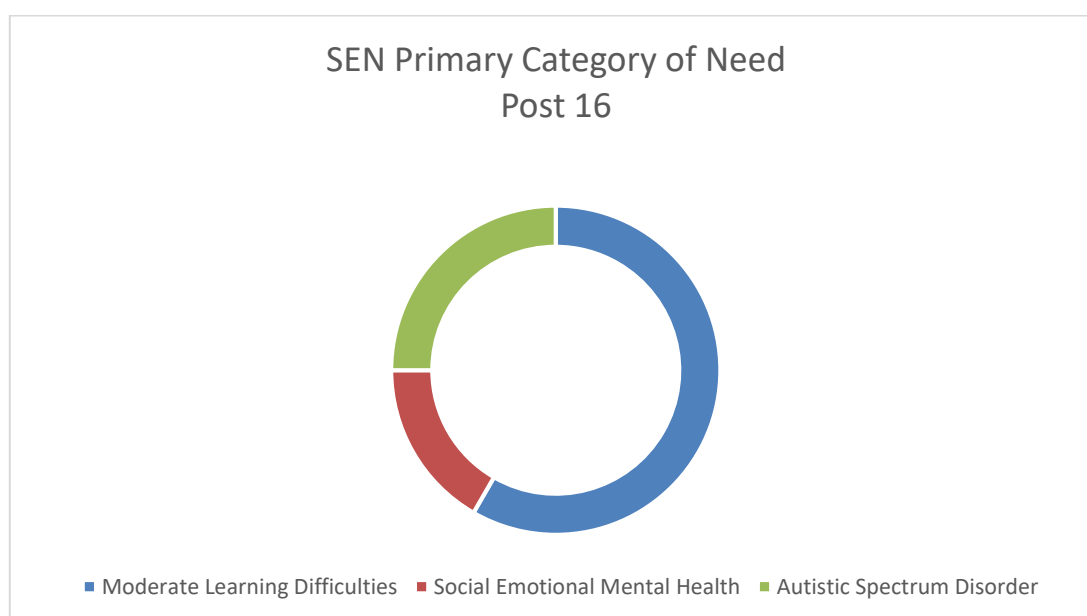
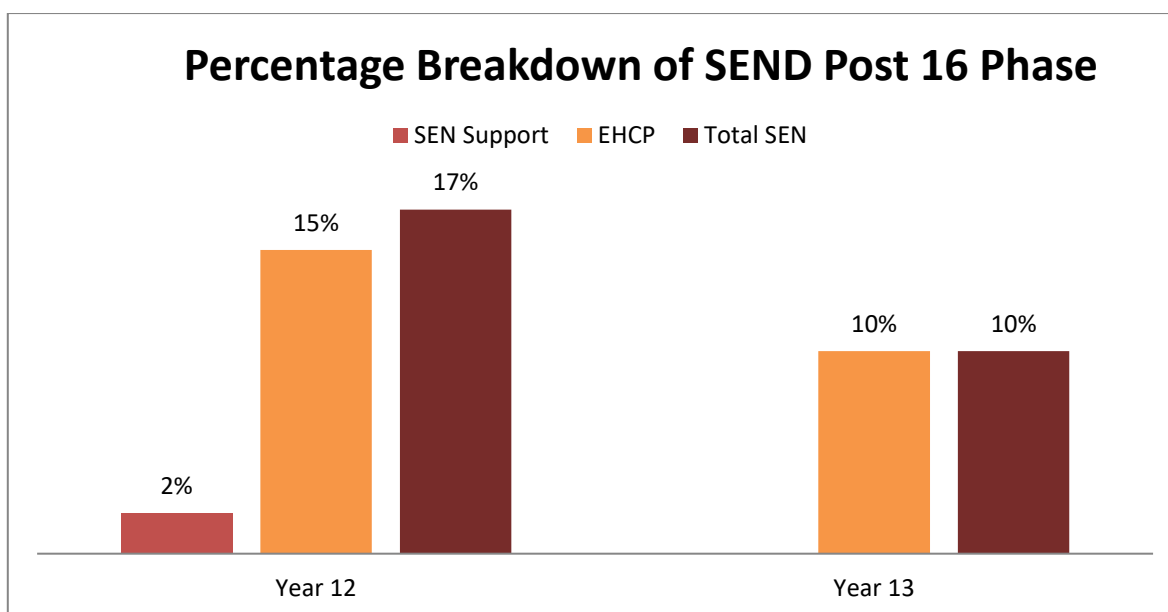
Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS2 and KS3	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	3
	Moderate Learning Difficulties	13
	Physical Disability	1
	Social Emotional Mental Health	31
	Specific Learning Difficulties	3

### **Post 16 Phase**

#### **Post 16 Phase Numbers**

Yr 12	Yr 13
7	5

As pupils progress into Post 16 education it is possible to see that fewer pupils are given additional SEN support in their post 16 provisions. It is usual to see that it is only the young people who have more significant needs continue to have this classification. Many of our pupils transition into post 16 education successfully. Those students with higher Education Health and Care Plan needs have specialised support. Effective transition into post 16 education is essential in ensuring that the right level of support is provided. Whether this be through specific teaching resources or deployment of adults or interventions.

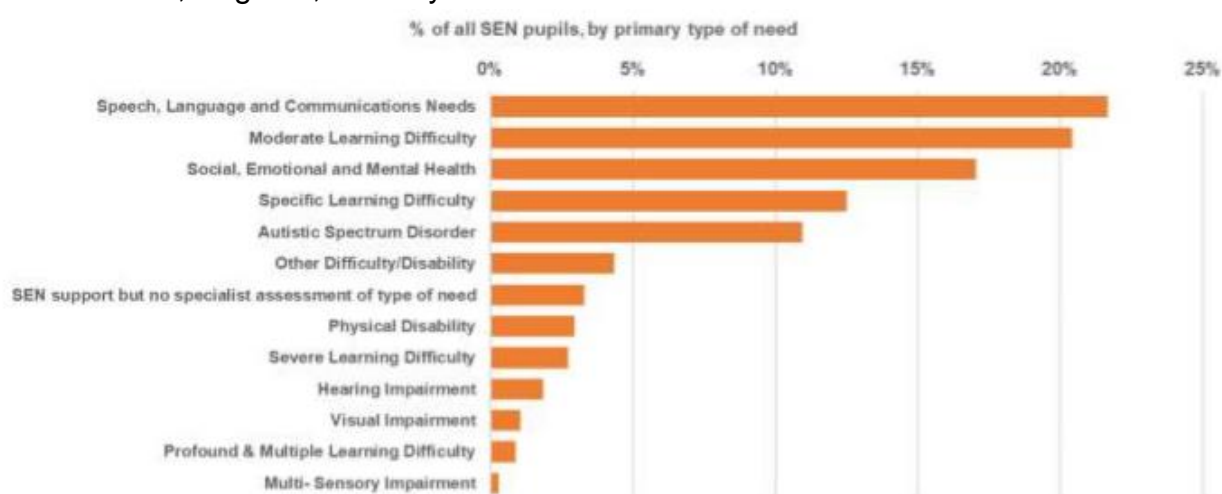


Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
Post 16	Moderate Learning Difficulties	7
	Social Emotional Mental Health	2
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	3

It would seem that as the students transition into post 16 the prevalence of SEMH needs diminishes. This could be for a number of reasons including that they are maturing in their development and more able to manage their emotions within a post 16 education context.

### **Comparison of Children Looked After Data with National Data Sets for SEND**

The following information provides details of all pupils in the country who have SEN. This data is collected nationally and forms part of the Statistical First Release. This data shows that across all pupils with SEN, Speech, Language and Communications Needs is the most common primary type of need at 22% of pupils. This had previously been Moderate Learning Difficulty, which has decreased to 20%. This varies dramatically from Thurrock Children Looked After data whose primary area of need is Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). As discussed above, this is most likely the case due to the impact of trauma and insecure attachments. In the figures below in Figure B: Speech, language and communication needs is the most common type of need among SEN pupils in State-funded primary, secondary and special schools, England, January 2019



Source: School census, January 2019

National statistics for all pupils show that, among pupils on SEN support, Speech, Language and Communications Needs is also the most common type of need, at 23%.

Of those with an EHC plan, Autistic Spectrum Disorder remains the most common primary type of need with 29% of pupils with an EHC plan having this primary type of need. This has increased from 28% in January 2018.

Figure C: The distribution of each primary type of need varies greatly between those who are identified as SEN Support, compared to those with an EHC plan State-funded primary, secondary and special schools, England, January 2019



Source: School census, January 2019

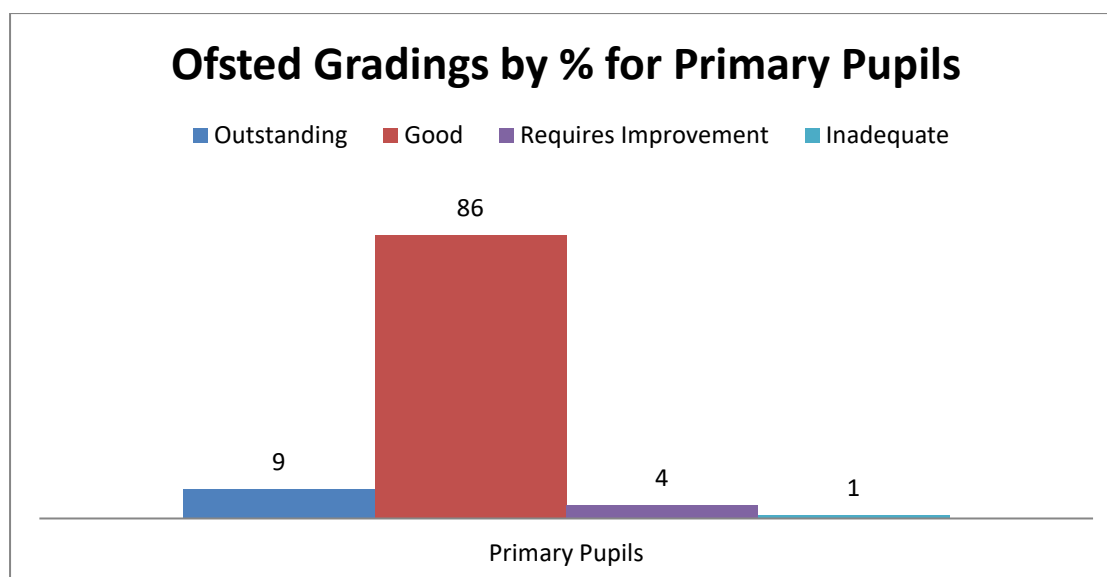
For CLA to Thurrock, the data for Children with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder [ASD] is very small compared to the national average. Thurrock CLA with a diagnosis of ASD is 12% compared to 29% nationally. Whereas, Thurrock CLA whose primary area of need is SEMH is 63% compared to 13.3% nationally of all children.

In total for Thurrock Children Looked After 39% of the whole cohort has been identified as having either an Education Health Care Plan or receiving additional help as SEN Support. The Statistical First Release data for the academic year 2019/20 for England showed that for all children 3.3% had an EHCP and 12.1% had SEN Support. This means that statistically, Thurrock CLA have a higher level of need compared to all children nationally. However, when we compare Thurrock CLA with all CLA nationally 9/20, there were 55.9% of children with a special educational need. Data shows that 27.2% had an EHCP and 28.7% had SEN Support. Therefore, compared to CLA nationally, Thurrock have fewer pupils with SEND.

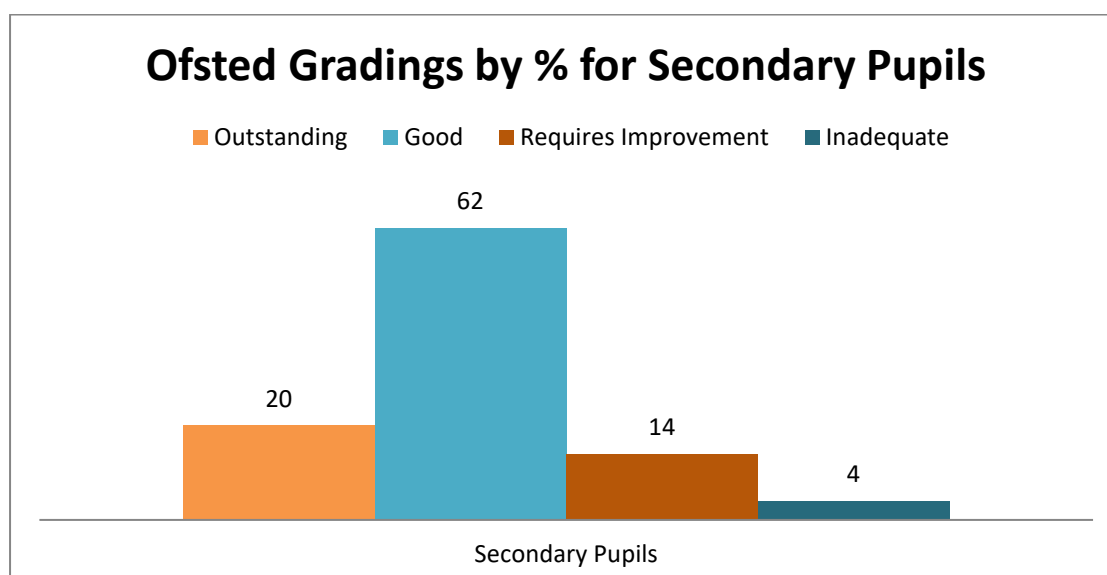
### **School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2020**

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 in a stable care placement but there were no good schools in the area. 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 succeeding and if they were being well supported. However, we ensure that schools are closely monitored every term to ensure that our children and young people were making progress. The data below illustrates the gradings of schools our pupils attend.

## Primary Phase



## Secondary Phase



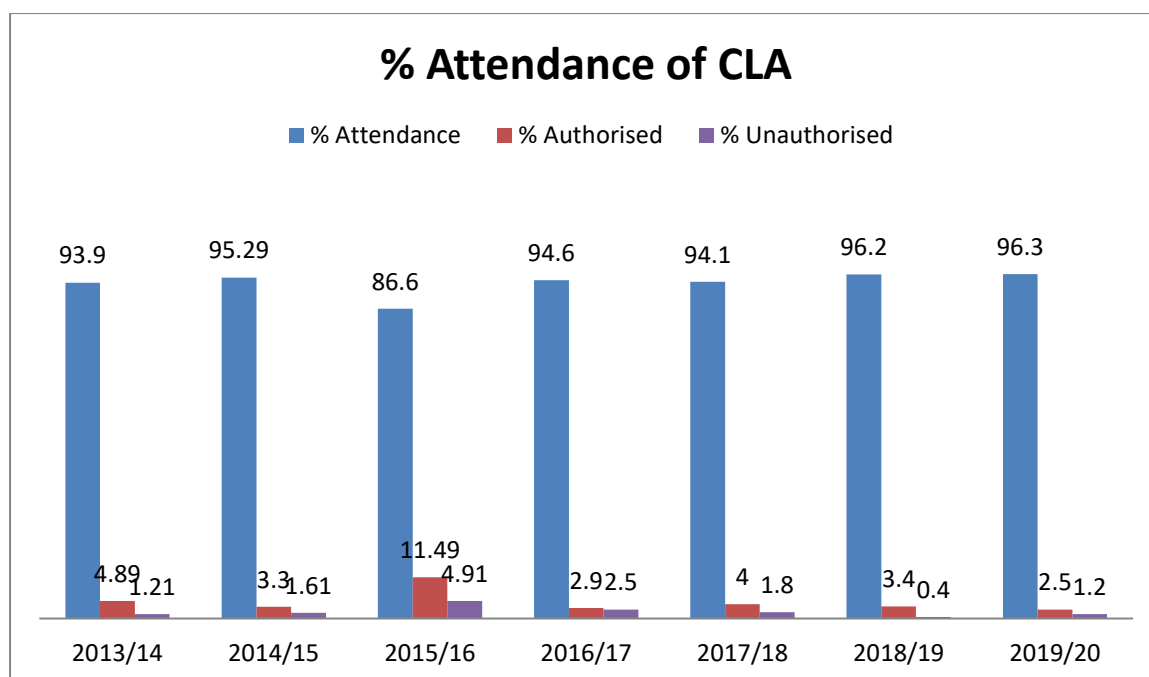
Overall School Ofsted Grading Year R to Year 11 is:

- 87% of pupils attend a school graded good or above this has increased on the previous year from 85.5%
- 71.6% attend a good school
- 15.3% attend an outstanding school
- 10% attend a school that requires improvement
- 3.1% attend an inadequate school

**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.**



## 7. Attendance



The attendance figure of 96.3% represents attendance of school age pupils up until the national lockdown. There was a steady increase in attendance during the first part of the academic year up until national lockdown. There was also an increase in unauthorised attendance. This was due to some pupils who came into care with existing unauthorised attendance.

As a matter of course, the Virtual School track attendance through the collection of daily attendance data via an external provider called Welfare Call and through every pupils' Personal Education Plan. Any pupil who has attendance which is below 90% is classed as having persistent absence. Our attendance data is favourable compared to all schools nationally. Termly attendance data is reported to governors and the key stages are represented individually and then overall attendance rates are also reported.

In the academic year 2019-2020 up until the national lockdown there were 12 pupils who had persistent absence below 90% this equates to 6.3% of school age pupils, which is below the national average for CLA which is 10%. There are a number of pupils who had poor attendance prior to coming into care and they entered care in the late autumn term of 2019 and early spring term of 2020. A pastoral support programme is always put in place for students who are refusing to attend school and the Virtual School works closely with foster carers, social workers and their schools to support the child/young person. Attendance is also discussed at the PEP meetings and action plans of support are put in place.

Attendance is monitored daily through the use of Welfare Call. The Virtual School team monitors the attendance of priority CLA as identified by the Virtual School on a

weekly basis. Attendance monitoring for all pupils is conducted by the Virtual School Headteacher on a weekly basis to identify any concerns. The Virtual School receives daily updates from Welfare Call for any pupil who is absent or excluded. If a pupil is absent and this is unauthorised the social worker and foster carer is contacted by Welfare Call to find out the reason why s/he is not at school. This system compliments the safeguarding measures that are in place for individual schools and prevents delay when a student may be missing.

The Virtual School is supportive of the DFE Absence protocols and only supports holiday or absence in term time in extenuating circumstances and supports the school of the particular pupil if they are given an unauthorised absence if planned absence is taken without the school's consent. An attendance policy is in place and this is reviewed by the Headteacher annually and put forward to the Governing Body to approve.

During the national lockdown the virtual school quickly ascertained who would be participating with their school/college offer if it was provided. We maintained fortnightly or weekly contact with care placements to ensure that we were able to track the level of educational offer that was being provided. For those school age children who could access their school, we commissioned Welfare Call to check attendance. This was also in addition to the schools providing weekly data to the local authority and the DFE.

## 8. **Exclusions**

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over a seven 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 continued to increase.

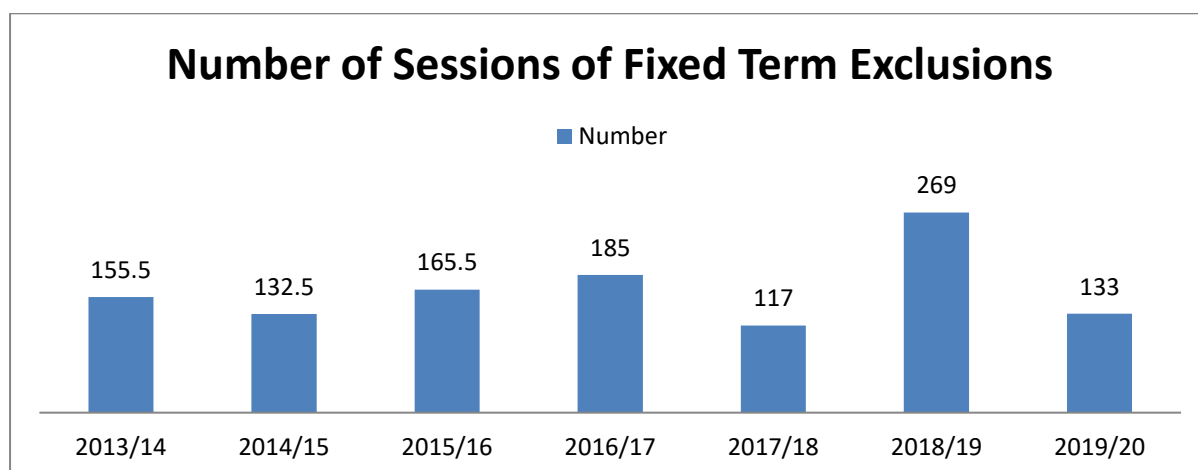
16 school age pupils out of the cohort of school age pupils have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 7.9% of the cohort. This had increased from the previous 3.8% in the autumn term 2019. When comparing this to national exclusion data, secondary school fixed term exclusions in the Statistical First release of August 2019 stands at 10.13%. The 7.9% is still below this national figure, however, we are always aiming to reduce the number. 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

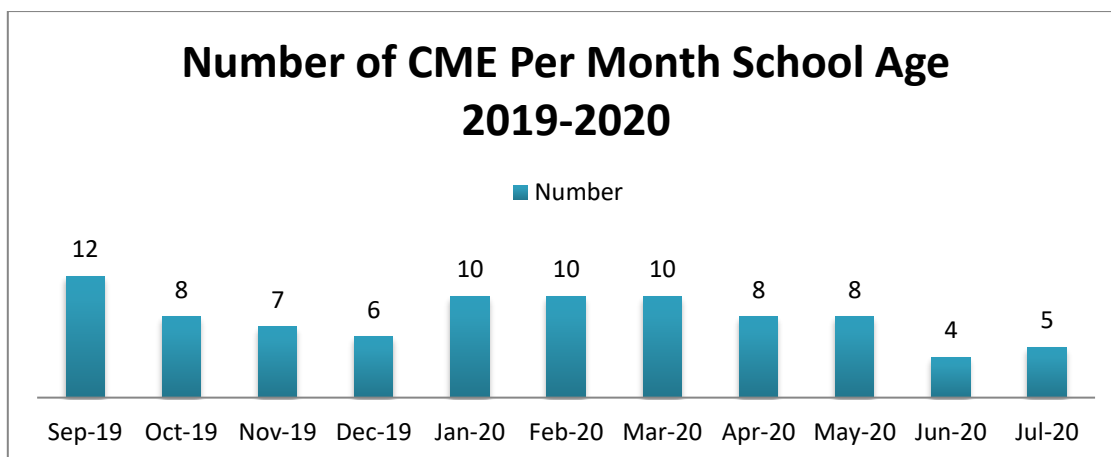
As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

- 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.



## 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. In the academic year 2018/2019 a procedure was written to detail the specific process for the steps taken by all professionals to support the placement of CME in appropriate provision. This is in place and we use this to ensure that we can provide a timely response to supporting those pupils who may be CME.



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 figures are relatively low, however, 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 lockdown. However, he had some very positive cases which were a success as some out of borough schools enrolled our pupils onto their school roll and then provided home learning for them during the lockdown period. The Virtual School were very supportive of this excellent practice that was pupil focussed and these schools were proactive in supporting our pupils.

#### 10. **Child Sexual Exploitation [CSE]**

Particular attention is paid to Children Missing Education through lack of school place or poor attendance as this is a potential factor for making a pupil vulnerable and higher risk of CSE. The Virtual School works very closely with all services to minimise the risk of child sexual exploitation for our children/young people in and out of borough. The authority holds a fortnightly meeting where a range of partners from health, youth offending services, WIZE Up, the police, mental health, education welfare and education attend. In this meeting all vulnerable pupils are discussed and actions are directed to provide the necessary support. The Virtual School attend Strategy Meetings when required to discuss pupils at risk of CSE and when they are missing from placement. Separate data is available through the social care liquid logic children's system which details every child/young person's CSE risk assessment and actions taken to support them. This data is held and reported separately from this document. The Virtual School is not responsible for collating this data but can access it if required. The Virtual School has a clear Safeguarding Policy which considers CSE as part of this in line with Thurrock processes and policy.

## 11. Attainment Data of CLA

During to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the year 2020, 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, the progress and outcomes of our pupils was still monitored very closely for this academic year and particular support has been provided for those transition from year 6-7 and year 11-12. We have worked with schools and colleges to support our pupils as they move to a new education establishment.

We have also worked with Designated Teachers to ensure that pupils who were affected by the cancellation of exams were supported and assessed fairly to provide a positive next step pathway. We contacted each school and discussed how they were going to be approaching the teacher assessment process and asked the Designated Teachers in that school to advocate for our looked after pupil. We did this to ensure that those who were making the decisions, were also reflective of the uniqueness of the situation and the challenges that our CLA face.

### **Planned interventions as a result of 2020**

The Virtual School will continue with key actions that were begun last year and some additional measures are being taken.

We are continuing to:

- Attend Year 10 and Year 11 PEP meetings
- Ensure that schools provide robust Pupil Premium Plus information
- Link the quality of the PEP with release of Pupil Premium Plus funding
- Provide additional home tuition from the April 2020 for our Year 10 and Year 5 pupils
- Triangulate data predictions with further evidence such as work sampling
- Access exam stress counselling where necessary
- Provide support for Post 16 pathways
- Targeting tuition for particular students who are on the cusp of 4/5/C grades which will be additional to that received by the Pupil Premium Plus in school
- Complete home visits for particularly vulnerable students
- Provide intensive pastoral support alongside their school for high priority cases for those at risk of poor performance due to social and emotional difficulties.
- Provide Year 11 with revision stationary packs for the autumn term
- Continue to provide tuition support for those requesting this for resits in year 12
- Use Pupil Premium Plus funding from the summer term 2020 to be carried over to the autumn term 2020 to support post 16 pathways and enable the provision of resources to aide post 16 study

- Look at what additional support may be needed for KS4 to support English in particular to support progress and attainment in this area.

In addition we are:

- Providing termly Designated Teacher Forums and social worker forums to promote the educational outcomes of pupils by communicating key messages and training and to provide information advice and guidance for individual cases
- Supporting social care to minimise the change of school or college when there are placement changes

## 12. Summary of Actions for all Key Stages to improve 2021 data

### Key Headlines of Actions for Supporting Testing in 2021

What are we doing to improve academic performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-13 years
- Provision of tuition for year 11 which started in the summer term 2020 of year 10
- Provision of tuition for year 6s over the summer term and in the summer holidays for those who requested this to support the transition into year 7
- 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
- Creation of a specific section of the Personal Education plan
- 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 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

## 13. Case Studies

**Case studies provide some insight into the individual work that is complete by members of the Virtual School to improve outcomes for children and young people.**

## **Primary Phase Case Study**

### **Background to case**

This looked after child became CLA approximately 2 years ago. He had huge gaps in early developmental learning and milestones. He had virtually no early learning experiences and had experienced horrific trauma before coming into the care of the local authority. He started school in Thurrock in Reception and was extremely below the recognised developmental milestones by at least 2 years.

The Virtual School provided support to the school and social care to check how he was being supported in school through Personal Education Plans. We also supported with the application of an Education Health Care Plan [EHCP] to further support his learning and development needs. This was in the Spring of 2019.

Despite very high levels of support, the child was finding it difficult to cope in a mainstream environment and was at risk being excluded from the school. The Virtual School education adviser attended an emergency annual review of the Education and Health Care plan [EHCP] to prevent exclusion.

In the autumn term a place was secured at a specialist resource provision in Thurrock however the social care plan had changed and he was moved to a long term foster care placement in Sussex. Once he moved placements, applications for specialist school placements began. This process proved to be very difficult. Tuition was secured for him whilst he waited for a specialist school place.

This child was out of school for some months but just before Easter 2020 a place was found and the adviser worked with the Headteacher of the new school to secure a start date and transition plan.

### **Key Actions Taken By the Virtual School Adviser**

- Liaised with school teams, foster care, and social care by attending PEPs, LAC reviews, annual reviews and professionals meeting.
- Wrote a letter of support for the school to help with the EHCP application.
- Supported the school with the collation of EHCP application materials and evidence.
- Attended school meetings and provided staff with resources and strategies to help them support the child in the classroom and around the school.
- Supported social care with specialist school choices once child had moved.
- Liaised with Sussex Special Educational Needs department on a weekly basis to keep in communication with progress of specialist school searches.
- Tuition was organised and the tuition reports were monitored each week and the carer was spoken to regarding progress or concerns.
- Liaised with fostering agency and supervising social workers keeping communication open and informing them of progress.
- Liaised with specialist schools in the Sussex area.

- Supported Sussex SEN with communicating with Thurrock SEN.
- Supported social care in finding a school for the child that would match needs.
- Liaised with the new school for starting dates, enrollment and transition arrangements.

### **Outcomes**

- An appropriate specialist provision was found.
- The child is now attending school full time.
- Transport was also secured for this school placement for the child as it is some distance from the home.
- The care placement is now a lot more settled.
- The child is very, very happy in the new school and his needs are being supported appropriately.
- The new school, at his first PEP, commented on how he has adapted, settled and is developing relationships and trust with members in the school.

### **Impact**

- Settled care provision where the young man is happy and secure.
- A very happy child who is engaging in school activities and is trying really hard.

## **Secondary Phase Case Study**

### **Background to case**

This young person is an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child who has been in care for 5 years. The Home Office queried the age assessment and ruled that the young man was a year younger than was first presented. This meant that at the end of secondary school, the young person was told that the Year 11 year had to be re-taken. He had planned to leave school this year to go to post 16 education. However, as his age had now changed. These post 16 options were no longer available until 2021.

### **Key Actions Taken By the Virtual School Adviser**

- Met with the young person to gain views, opinions and long term goals.
- Extended tuition offer to include additional support for English.
- Purchased English as an Additional Language App to support English development.
- Contacted many post-16 and bespoke education offers to learn what could be made available for this young person.
- Organised meetings with all professionals to discuss what a provision could look like for this young man for the forthcoming academic year.
- Presented costings of various scenarios to the existing school and social care.



- Plans were put in place to facilitate a bespoke curriculum around the needs, abilities and wishes of the young person

### **Outcomes**

- Virtual school signposted foster carer and school to some options for next year, this included a construction course which met young person's requirements to take construction after school. Young person is to retake year in current school and taking part in 2 days of construction level 1 and 2 at another site.
- Tuition provided by the Virtual School will continue to ensure language needs continue to be supported.

### **Impact**

- Re-entering GCSEs and functional skills will provide the young person with the opportunity to retake courses that he otherwise would not have passed. This will improve his post 16 options and outcomes. The construction course is accredited and will allow him to move on to higher level construction course at post 16.

## **Post 16 Phase Case Study**

### **Background to case**

The young person had experienced difficulties during her secondary education. The young person had very low attendance and following being placed into care in year 9, she became a school refuser. Before completing year 11, the young person had experienced two manager moves and attendance and engagement improved. However, despite this progress, she did not achieve the grades she was predicted in her GCSE exams.

For post 16, the young person enrolled at a local college and started a level 1 course. Unfortunately she was not able to access her first choice of course. Due to low numbers for enrolment on this chosen course of study, the college were not able to facilitate this course running. This meant our young person had to start studying for her second choice subject and was required to re-sit GCSE maths and English alongside this. As a result of this, the college started to raise concerns quite early on in the term that attendance and punctuality were poor. This then led to a number of behaviour concerns and our young person was placed on stage 1 behaviour plan.

Despite an initial improvement, our young person began to miss lessons again and stopped completing work in class and missed all deadlines on assignments and modules. As a result she, was eventually put on a stage 2 behaviour plan. This threatened her place at college and her chance of going back to the same college the following academic year.

## Key Actions Taken By the Virtual School Adviser

- Organised meeting with the college to discuss current concerns.
- Attendance at PEP meeting for the young person
- Discussion with young person about the current situation and to gain her views. In this conversation she became very upset and felt the concerns were not justified.
- Gathered evidence from the college to show the young person to reaffirm concerns as to why things have escalated and then discussed possible reasons as to why.
- Attendance at a stage 1 behaviour meeting and supported the college and young person to set realistic targets for her.
- Shared information about our young person with her class tutors and discussed strategies regarding engagement that had been previously successful.
- Organised and attended a collaborative review meeting with the carer, Designated Teacher, the head of faculty and the young person.
- Text messages sent to our young person to stay in touch and ensure attendance at classes.
- Regular contact with the Designated Teacher and teaching staff to check on attendance and completion of work.
- Attendance at stage 2 disciplinary meeting and stage 2 review.
- Advocated for our young person at all meetings to prevent further suspensions or an exclusion from the college altogether.

## Outcomes

- The young person had her voice heard and had been a part of all meetings.
- Concerns were discussed and a pro-active approach was taken, particularly once relevant information has been shared with tutors.
- A collaborative approach to working with the young person and adapting new strategies to promote engagement were taken.
- Realistic targets were set on the stage 1 plan and subsequently when moved to a stage 2 plan.
- Regular communication between the adviser and the teaching staff in place.
- Outcomes of recent review meetings were very positive, tutors have been more positive and attendance and punctuality improved.

## Impact

- Young person avoided an escalation to a stage 3 behaviour plan and potential withdrawal from college.
- Young person has a realistic plan in place to follow to ensure successful terms at college.
- Achievable targets were in place and young person was aware of, and has been a part of, the process and target setting.
- Professional network for the young person remains in place and communication is robust.
- Young person has now completed all work which has been submitted for assessment. Anticipated progression to next level at this college.

#### 14. **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 2019-2020 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. 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.*

*Using the Key Stage 4 results that have been provided to us by schools, our CLAs in Year 11 in 2020 have also improved their performance compared to previous years.*

#### *What Next?*

- *Plan for academic year 2020-2021 in relation to supporting transition back to education, improving attendance and supporting progress.*
- *Monitoring and implementing interventions for the academic year.*
- *Monitoring how schools are using the 'Catch Up' funding to support pupil progress*
- *Use of Pupil Premium Plus to support any gaps in provision*

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

*Our attendance rates have improved again this year up until the national lockdown period. The rate of fixed term exclusions was also reducing from the previous year and the amount of CLA excluded is below the national figure.*

#### *What Next?*

- *Monitor the rate of exclusion and reasons for exclusion in forthcoming year*
- *Provide challenge and support where exclusions are taking place*
- *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] Continue to embed 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

*This is now fully embedded into the work plan of the virtual school. A range of data is produced which measures attainment and progress data from schools. Additionally individual progress towards the achievement of PEP education targets is in place. The Virtual School have purchased a programme called B Squared for SEN pupils which measures small steps of progress. This was purchased in February 2020 and we had just started using this with some schools when the lockdown occurred. However, we have plotted all of our pupils onto this system and we are using this programme to monitor the small steps of progress made by SEN pupils.*

*What Next?*

- *Embedding B Squared as a form of assessment to use alongside existing measures used by schools*
- *Change the attainment and achievement section of the PEP to enable schools/colleges to have a more cohesive approach to recording this data onto the PEP*
- *Adapt the extra support section of the PEP to create a provision map of interventions for all our pupils in order that we can identify gaps, challenge these gaps and then work at developing support to address them.*
- *Create phase data packs each term which detail a range of data to evidence progress and identify gaps*

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

*The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ] score is now fully embedded in the practice for schools and colleges to record every term as part of the PEP. Social care have requested for this to become standard practice for social workers and carers too so that there is a triangulation of up to date scores every term. We share our data with social care and this is used to aide discussions at the monthly SDQ panel meeting. The Virtual School attend this meeting to discuss pupils in need of the most help.*

*During Covid 19 the PEP was amended to include specific questions relating to the impact of the lockdown on mental health and well-being. There were also sections about physical health as these can have a direct correlation. The virtual school worked closely with carers to support any areas they or their children/young people needed support with.*

*The Virtual School also made contact with the School Emotional Well-Being Team to access any resources they were providing. The Virtual School provided a list of resources and ideas to carers to do at home with their children and young people to promote positive emotional well-being.*

*We also provided Trauma and Attachment training to over 60 school and college practitioners to enable them to have a more trauma informed approach when their students returned to school.*

*The impact of lockdown was also considered in terms of the provision of enhanced transition plans for those pupils that needed this.*

#### **What Next?**

- *Continue to collect and track SDQ data for all pupils*
- *Attendance at monthly SDQ panel*
- *Creation of a new section on the PEP to include a signs of safety approach where the PEP minutes reflect discussions about mental health and well-being and where support is needed.*

[KP 5] Continue to embed processes to support the provision of educational duties linked to Previously Looked After Children [PLAC]

*The Virtual School has a personalised approach to this for the families that may require our support. This is on a case work basis where we can offer information, advice and guidance in line with our statutory duties.*

#### **What Next?**

- *Need to continue to develop ways of sharing information to a broader audience*
- *VS team need to attend specific PLAC training e.g. with adoption agencies or BAAF – this did not happen last year due to Covid 19*

[KP 6] Continue to embed process of quality assurance of educational provision

*In the academic year 2019-2020 the Virtual School commissioned an independent adviser to quality assure all of the alternative provision that our pupils attended. This was in order to ensure that these provisions were providing a good quality of education. As a virtual school we conducted a range of visits to schools/colleges to monitor provision and we evidenced this challenge and support in visit notes. We also RAG rated every establishment that our pupils attended.*

*When Covid 19 occurred the Quality Assurance was maintained in a virtual format and the Virtual School attended over 90% of all PEP meetings to monitor provision during the lockdown period.*

*Where appropriate the Virtual School team provided direct challenge to schools in order to ensure that they had provision which our most vulnerable young people could attend. This prevented care placements from ending due to pressures caused by children and young people not attending school.*

#### **What Next?**

- *Continue school/college based visits (this may be virtually due to Covid)*
- *Track schools/colleges that need to have more formal contact*
- *RAG rate settings according to quality of provision and provide challenge and support for those causing concern.*

## 16. **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 2019 to 2020: 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 centres on how this money is raising 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 centre 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].

In June 2020 the Virtual School Headteacher presented a detailed Corporate Parenting report which showed the individual spending for each year group. It also shared the detailed spending of the pupils premium plus top slice and provided a strategy for the spending 2020/2021

### **Overview of Spending by the Virtual School**

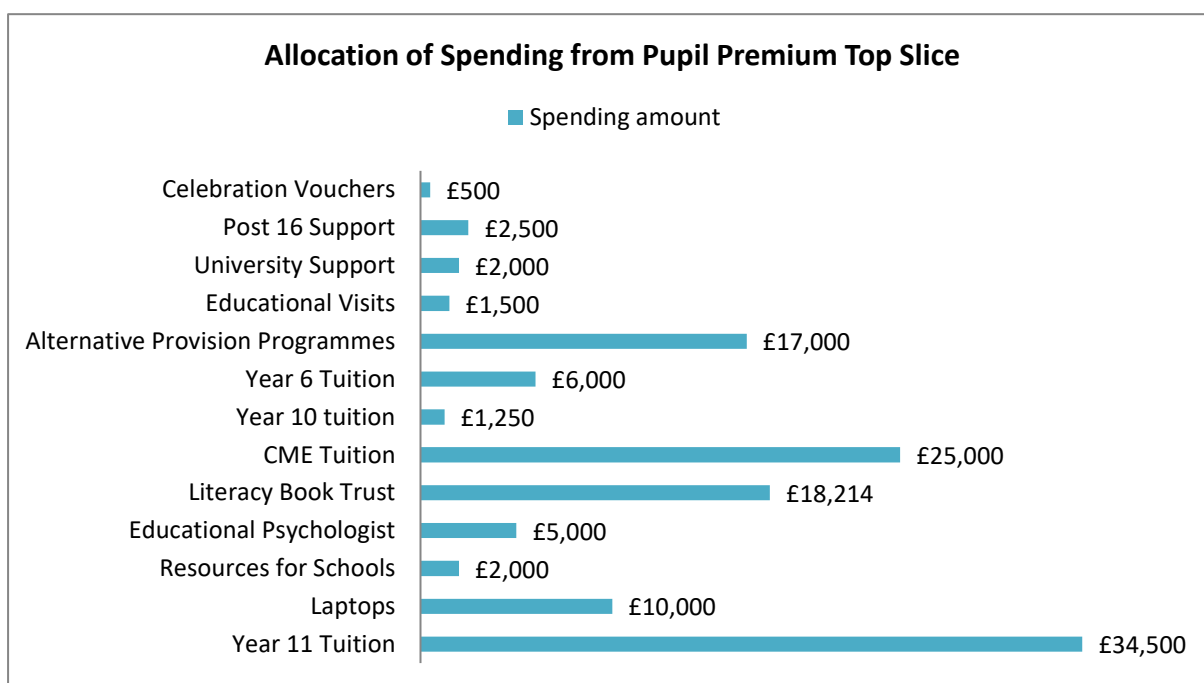
The Virtual School top sliced £500 per pupil for the academic year and used this to provide resources to support the most vulnerable in the cohort. In the financial year 2019-2020 this has amounted to £125,500. Of this £125,464 has been spent at the close of the financial year.

It is important to note that the allocations from the DFE are based upon the number of looked after children during the period of the census. It does not take into consideration the number of pupils who leave care during a year, or who come into care. All of these pupils are eligible for PP+, even if they are in care for 1 day. As mentioned above we were allocated funding for 251 pupils. This figure was based upon the census return.

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 £2,300. 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]. 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.

Additional funding from the PP+ top slice has also been used to provide a range of specific interventions detailed in the next section and further plans for this are shown in the spending strategy plan for 2020-2021 which was shared with the Governing Body.



Further information is available in the Corporate Parenting Report and subsequent appendices dated 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

It is relevant to note that during the national lockdown. Schools were advised that if our pupils were attending the establishment or that the school needed PP+ for additional support, they could apply for the £600 for the summer term. However, schools were also advised that they could decide to defer the summer term payment and apply for £1200 in the autumn term. The rationale for this is to provide additional resources at the time they will be needed to support transition back into school and additional educational interventions if necessary to support progress.

## 17. 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. This is further detailed in the Roles and Functions of the Virtual School document. 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. We have introduced a specific protocol around PEP quality assurance and this has been shared with those who have joint responsibility for the PEP. PEP compliance rates have improved and now are consistently operating at 95% and above compliance for every child aged 3 to 18 years. A range of documents have been produced to aid the completion of high quality paperwork and the robust procedures have enabled to quality of PEP to improve.

### PEP Compliance Data – Autumn Term

Month	Overall Compliance	Early Years - N2	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Sep-19	96%	50%	94%	97%	93%
Oct-19	99%	90%	98%	100%	99%
Nov-19	94%	85%	100%	98%	71%
Dec-19	93%	100%	100%	96%	80%
Jan-20	93%	67%	95%	97%	85%
Feb-20	97%	50%	100%	97%	96%
Mar-20	91%	50%	84%	90%	90%
Apr-20	93%	71%	99%	91%	88%
May-20	93%	87%	99%	94%	85%
Jun-20	98%	100%	100%	97%	100%
Jul-20	93%	100%	96%	91%	91%
Aug-20	99%	100%	100%	100%	99%

The data in the table above represents the percentage of pupils aged between 3-18 who had a Personal Education Plan in time frame. As of the end of the academic year there was 1 pupil who did not have a PEP that had been reviewed in timescale.

### Quality of Personal Education Plans

Month	Overall Good Quality %	% Amber	% RED	Not graded
Sep-19	75%	13.00%	8%	4%
Oct-19	71%	11%	14%	4.00%
Nov-19	68%	11%	11%	9.80%
Dec-19	64%	12%	17.50%	6%
Jan-20	64%	12%	11%	13%



Feb-20	67%	9%	17%	7.00%
Mar-20	67%	9%	17%	7.00%
Apr-20	74%	5%	16%	5%
May-20	79%	4%	11%	6%
Jun-20	81%	2%	6%	9%
Jul-20	86%	4%	5%	5%
Aug-20	86%	4%	5%	5%

In addition to the PEP compliance data we also 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.

At the end of August 2020, there were 21 children/young people who had a poorly graded PEP. The reason for this is due to not meeting the criteria standards that are in our Quality Assurance Guidelines. A PEP is rated as red if there are no minutes or if the PEP lacks the child's views. This is an issue which needs to be addressed in the forthcoming academic year.

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.

## 18. **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. In the Year 2018/19, 12 pupils are currently in university with a further 5 who started in 2019/2020. We are expecting that for the academic year 2020-2021, 3 pupils will be starting university.

During Covid 19 we supported our year 11s who were transitioning into year 12 with tuition if they requested this. This was to support their re-sits and preparation for year 12 study. Our Year 11's did not access school during the national lockdown so the pupil premium plus funding has been carried over so that the £600 can support them in their Post 16 studies.

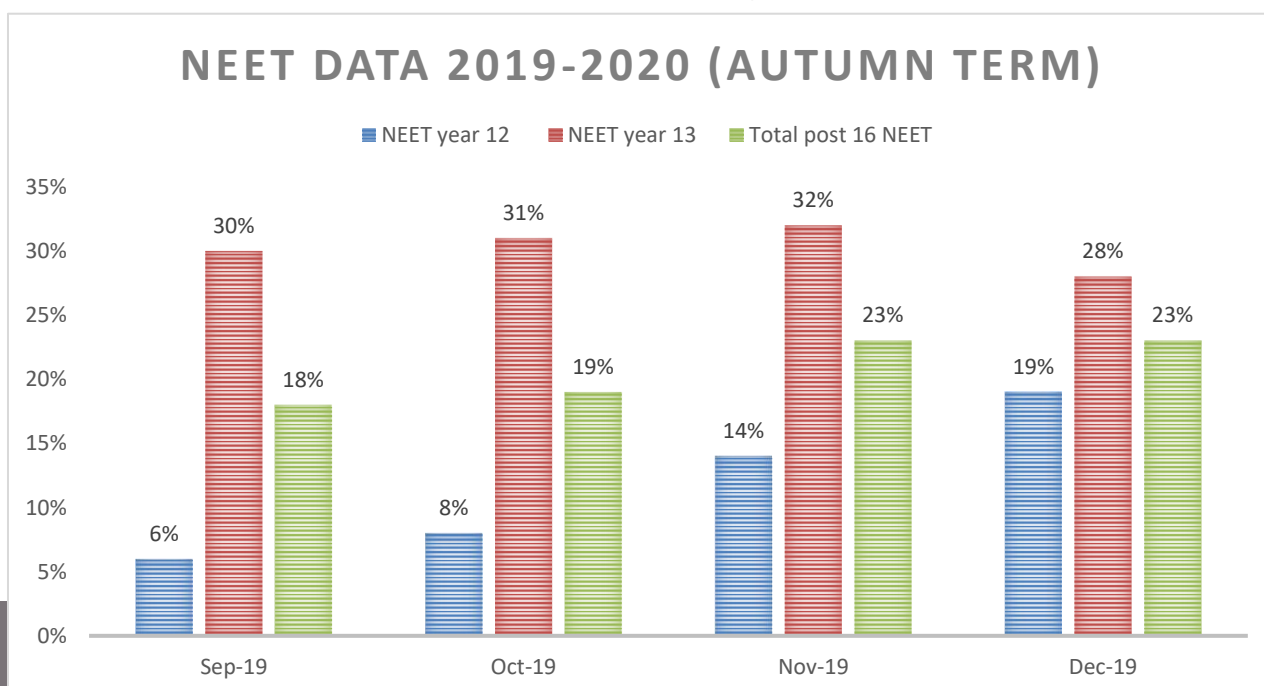
Extensive transition work took place over the summer period to ensure that our Year 11s who were transitioning into Year 12 were supported and that they had the opportunity to discuss their plans moving forward. The Virtual School Headteacher wrote to every Year 11 to explain what the cancellation of their exams really meant and how we would be supporting them moving forward. Our Year 12s and 13s were also supported in terms of their next steps and how they could complete their college courses during lockdown.

### 19. **Not in Education Employment or Training [NEET]**

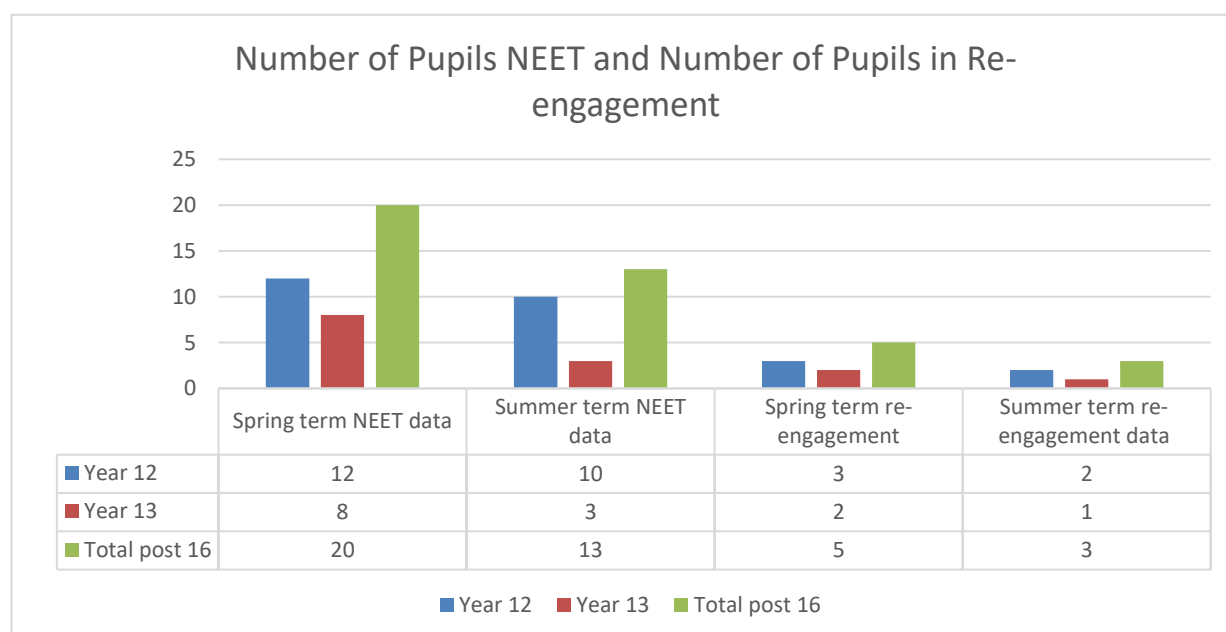
The Virtual School closely monitors any post 16 young person who has CLA status and who is NEET. They are monitored fortnightly and the Post 16+ Education Adviser works with the young person, social care, personal advisors and local colleges and businesses to create the best possible opportunity for 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. 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.



		Number of Young People	%
Year 12 NEET Spring Term		12	30
Year 13 NEET Spring Term		8	16
Total Cohort NEET Spring Term		20	23
Year 12 Re-engagement Spring Term		3	7.5
Year 13 Re-engagement Spring Term		2	4
Total Cohort Re-engagement Spring Term		5	6
Year 12 NEET Summer Term		10	25
Year 13 NEET Summer Term		3	6
Total Cohort NEET Summer Term		13	15
Year 12 Re-engagement Summer Term		2	5
Year 13 Re-engagement Summer Term		1	2
Total Cohort Re-engagement Summer Term		3	3



Across the course of the academic year 2019-2020 there was a reduction in NEET data by 5% for Year 12 and by 10% in Year 13.

#### 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
- Create a monthly NEET strategy meeting where cases can be discussed and problem solved to support the young person

## 20. **Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

This year has seen a decreased demand for the Virtual School team to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. We currently have 9.4% of our cohort classified as UASC. The Eastern Region 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, however, they now move to other boroughs. Our existing 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 UASC has started university this year and achieved high teacher assessed grades.

## 20. **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 2019/2020 were:

Chair: S Murphy [Director of Children's Services]

Vice 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: Vacancy

Out of Borough School Representative: Vacancy

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.

## 21. **Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to the Lockdown**

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.

### **Staffing**

In terms of staffing we maintained existing levels of staffing. There were 2 members of staff and their families who were showing Covid symptoms very early on the lockdown period. These staff and their families were diagnosed with and treated for chest infections. The staff were able to work through their period of isolation and were not reported as needing to take sickness leave.

All Virtual School staff have remained working from home since the period of lockdown began. This has been in line with Thurrock Council policy. Before lockdown commenced, we had all performed a trial run in working from home to check that the systems could support this. We have provided our admin assistant with a work mobile to ensure that all calls to the work phone in the office can be redirected.

### **Arrangements for Home Working**

All staff in the Virtual School were provided with the necessary equipment to continue to perform their roles in a virtual environment. They continued to attend meetings virtually and this was very beneficial to the work of the team. They were managing to complete more contacts with children and schools. This was due to the virtual nature of meetings which meant they did not spend time travelling to destinations.

Within the first week of lockdown, the VSHT completed a workstation assessment with staff and requested that they purchase a separate keyboard, a laptop stand and a separate mouse. Staff well-being and health and safety during this time has been addressed through formal 1-1 monthly sessions and weekly phone calls or group virtual meetings.

All team, pupil progress and strategic planning meetings have taken place virtually and this has been business as usual.

Emotional and physical health and well-being has been discussed and supported in order that staff are using available resources and planning their diaries to ensure that there are taking the relevant well-being breaks. They have been accessing the Thurrock resources and training that has been offered.

### **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.

### **Covid 19 Strategy and Virtual School Response**

There were a number of actions that the Virtual School took as the result of schools closing and lockdown being imposed.

For example:

- A letter of guidance was sent to social care and the carers to decide whether or not children and young people would be accessing an educational offer.
- Every family and social worker was contacted to check the status of children/young people.
- Every pupil was RAG rated to gauge the level of concern we would have and highlight where our initial support/challenge needed to be focus on.
- Carers were asked to provide daily or weekly updates to inform the VS as to the progress that was being made as pupils stayed at home,
- The team created a COVID 19 PEP which catered for pupils being educated at home.
- The team created a suggested list of activities and online learning sites to access for each phase.
- The team created a set of mental health activities and access to support to provide carers and pupils with information.
- The carers have been contacted to provide SDQ data to the Virtual School as part of the termly PEP so that we can then highlight those pupils needing the most emotional well-being support.
- Year 11 and Year 13 pupils were written to regarding the assessment arrangements as exams were cancelled. Tuition support remained in place for those who requested it.

- Year 6 pupils have maintained their tuition offer for those requesting it to support transition into year 7.
- Current Year 5 and Year 10 pupils started their tuition offer to support assessments taking place in 2021.
- Those children who were CME have had their tuition offer continued until a school place was found.
- For some pupils, they needed to access school and so the VSHT challenged schools to extend provision in order to alleviate pressure on the care placement.
- Some of our CME who were allocated school places during lockdown were supported by the school they joined.
- The VSHT delivered laptops to those assessed as most needed (this was prior to the government laptop announcement).
- The team maintained telephone contact with those children needing support or to support their carers on educational matters.
- The Virtual School Headteacher provided a range of virtual Designated Teacher forum training
- The Virtual School Headteacher spoke with Councilor Holden regarding safeguarding the mental health of our children and he was also very interested to find out about the actions we were taking during the lockdown period.
- Supported transition back into schools/colleges where an educational offer is present to encourage our pupils to access their educational environment.

The VSHT attended a variety of Eastern region and National meetings to look at strategic responses since the Covid outbreak and was also able to share elements of our good practice with the Her Majesty's Inspector who inspected Children's Services.

The majority of our carers worked with their children and young people really effectively and were able to support them at home.

Additionally some schools were able to provide an excellent service of support and access to 'in-school experiences'.

The Virtual School priorities changed during lockdown to meet the unprecedented event that the Covid 19 Pandemic presented. These changed to reflect the needs at the time. These were to:

- Ensure that every pupil had an up to date PEP for the summer term
- Ensure that where an educational offer was in place, for as many pupils as possible to attend.
- Ensure that transition plans were in place for all key transition groups across the school.
- Focus on transition support for those pupils who may be experiencing difficulties.
- Ensure that key SEND actions are still in place during this time. E.g. EHCP reviews, appeals, consultations.

- Reduce the number of Children Missing Education.
- Be there for any carer, child or young person who needed our help.

22. **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 Improvement and Inclusion, 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.

### **Foster Carer Forums**

These provide opportunities to share good practice, provide key messages and obtain valuable feedback and insight into the factors affecting the CLA. The VSHT has been meeting at Foster Carer support groups to provide key information about Pupil Premium Plus and Electronic Personal Education Plans. Foster carer forum meetings started in Spring Term 16 and will continue to happen once per term. These covered a range of topics including using EPEP. In addition the VSHT attends new foster carer forums and provides induction training. Moving forward, most training opportunities will be held virtually.

### **Designated Teacher Forums**

As with the Foster Carer forums, the aim of this is to disseminate key messages, improve lines of communication, foster good partnership working and discuss issues affecting our CLA in schools. These are held every half term by the Virtual School Head. Moving forward, all training is provided virtually.

### **General Support for Foster Carers and Designated Teachers**

The Virtual School provides a range of telephone and face to face advice and support and prides itself on being able to deliver a good level of service. Our approachable manner enables us to have good relationships with these key professionals to enable us to work together for the best outcomes of our pupils.



## **Social Worker Training and Support**

The Virtual School adopts a flexible and responsive approach to the support and training needs of our social workers. The Virtual School Head attends briefings and team meetings with social care to disseminate good practice.

## **Liaison with Schools**

This is a vital part in supporting the CLA as the Virtual School works closely with in and out of borough schools to ensure that pupils are supported within their educational placement. We offer support and advice on a range of areas such as behaviour, raising attainment and narrowing the gap. The Virtual School provides challenge and makes schools accountable to their statutory duties to ensure that pupils are treated and supported appropriately to meet their varying needs. Part of this also includes providing training to school governors if requested.

## **Book Trust Letterbox**

In order to promote enjoyment and pleasure in reading and improve reading outcomes the Virtual School works in partnership with the Letterbox Club. The Letterbox Club is an award-winning programme managed by Book Trust, in partnership with the University of Leicester, which aims to provide enjoyable educational support for Looked After Children aged 3-13 years. Children and young people in care to Thurrock are enrolled onto the programme which entitles them to a colourful parcel of books, maths activities, stationery and other complementary materials once every month for six months, from May to October. All of the books in the parcels have been carefully selected by the panel at Book Trust for the children in the programme. The distribution of these was postponed during lockdown and the resources will start to be sent home in September 2020.

## **Advice and Guidance for previously looked after children**

The Virtual School also provides advice and guidance for those pupils who were previously looked after. This would be particularly relevant for adopted children and their schools and families to ensure that their needs are appropriately supported. In line with the statutory guidance, the team have met with schools and parents to support the needs of their child/young person.

## **Attendance at PEP Meetings**

Wherever possible and if appropriate, the Virtual School attends PEP meetings to model good practice, raise accountability, monitor the pupils' education and provision and ensure that the PEP process is thorough in supporting the CLA's education. We endeavour to attend the first PEP for every new CLA pupil and attend PEP meetings for those pupils who may be experiencing difficulties in their learning. PEPs are now being held virtually which provides the team with more capacity to attend more meetings due to less travel.

## **Tuition Services**

Many schools use tuition as part of their pupil premium spend. There are occasions when additional tuition is needed. The Virtual School commissions the services of Fleet Tuition, Equal Education and Prospero. The One to One Tuition Programme for CLA was created to provide additional academic support for children who are not currently reaching their potential or may be missing school. Generally one-one tuition is used to help pupils who face academic barriers in any subject and the Virtual School works closely with schools, foster carers, social workers and the pupil to ensure that the right tuition is matched to needs. It is not possible to provide one-one tuition for every pupil and so this resource is targeted to suit needs and support requirements.

## **Attendance Monitoring**

Thurrock Virtual School commissions the services of an external provider called Welfare Call to monitor the attendance of all of our Children Looked After in and out of borough attending schools and colleges. All pupils are monitored on a daily basis. If pupils are not attending school an alert is created to ascertain where the pupil is and why they are not at school. This promotes the safeguarding of our pupils and promotes good attendance. It also enables the Virtual School to monitor any exclusions, attendance or punctuality issues. The Virtual School has a clear Attendance Policy which provides a rationale behind why attendance is given high priority and this can be read in conjunction with this report.

### 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. Our Early Years and Primary adviser has started a course to become an attachment lead teacher. Additionally all staff have accessed training linked to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, PREVENT and Fraud Awareness.

### 23. **Author of this report**

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Headteacher of the Virtual School for Thurrock Children Looked After

**Submission date for Governors** Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

**Submission date to Corporate Parenting Committee** January 2021