



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Children and Family Services: Education and Family Support

Virtual School for Cared for Children Annual Report 2023-2024

Draft

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Virtual School Annual Report

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Foreword

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Head Teacher sits with the Local Authority for the purpose of discharging the Local Authority's duty under The Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014, to promote the educational achievement of its looked-after children.

The Virtual School Head is the educational advocate ensuring that cared for children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential wherever they live or are educated in the country. The Virtual School is sited in Education and Family Support within Children and Family Services and has a strong partnership with Children's Social Care.

The following report highlights the work that the Virtual School is undertaking to support cared for children providing a summary of attainment and progress at all key stages of their academic journeys and comparisons with other Virtual Schools and outcomes for cared for children nationally.

During the duration of this academic year there was a change in local government so the Corporate Strategy changed from the 'Stronger Together' vision, to the new local government City Council Corporate Strategy of 'Our City, Our Wellbeing. Creating Shared Wealth, Reducing Inequality.

The Virtual School is also a source of information, advice and guidance for previously cared for children.



Our City, Our Wellbeing Priority	How your team contributes to the priorities
Healthier	The VS supports Cared for Children/ Previously Cared for Children/Children with a Social Worker accessing emotional coaching and pastoral support in their education settings. The Virtual School also supports Cared for Children, wherever they are placed to access Sports/Arts activities to help with their physical, social and mental well-being.
Wealthier	By overseeing, supporting, and advising the education settings that support our cohort of children the Virtual School contribute to greater opportunities for our children to access qualifications that can lead to greater opportunities to access higher education and work in their futures. The Virtual School will also have a Careers Advisor who will support our NEET young people to access Education, Employment and Training options.
Safer	The Virtual School, promotes attendance in education and supports in strategies and measures to help improve attendance as a protective factor to keep our children safe and visible. This also links with helping to reduce exclusions and suspensions where possible. With regards to community safety the Virtual School are members of the Safer Schools Alliance and link closely with Police, Safeguarding teams in the LA as well as the Youth Offending Service to put protective measures in place for our children.
Greener	Around 40% of the Pupil Premium+ funding allocated to schools is to support the Emotional Well-being of our children as this is a major factor regarding the engagement and progress our children make in their education. Some funding us utilised to create well-being areas in schools which our children benefit from greatly.
Fairer	The Virtual School work well with our schools to make their ability to access their learning as equitable and beneficial as possible. Our aim is to make sure our cohort of children and young people have the same opportunity to attain good exam results and access education just as easily as their peers and have the support mechanisms around them to support when needed. High aspirations from professionals is essential.

The purpose of this report is to improve readers’ knowledge and understanding of several key areas relating to Cared for Children and the role of the Virtual School. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher is required by Ofsted during their inspection of local authority children’s services (ILACS).

Background

Stoke-on-Trent is a city in the north of the County of Staffordshire in the West Midlands region of England. The city is a modern federation of six much older towns, forming a linear city almost twelve miles long with an area of 36 square miles. The city once famed for its pottery production has a changing profile in terms of commerce and there are some significant challenges regarding prosperity and deprivation.

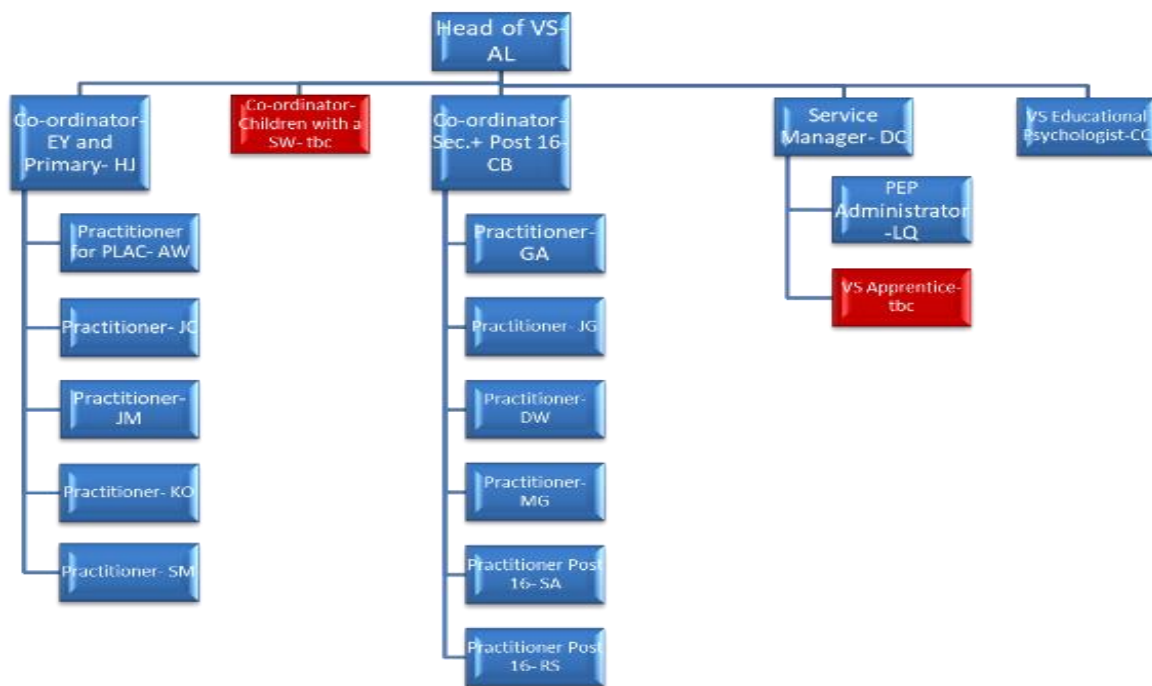
In terms of Health Deprivation, the city is ranked 11th most deprived nationally and Household Incomes are more than 15% below the national average. The mortality rate from Drug Misuse (2018-20) is more than double the national average (13.9 per 100,000 compared with 5.3) and hospital admissions for alcohol-related conditions are 50% above the national average. The number of families who are unable to safeguard their children and meet their needs is increasing, resulting in more children coming into care and staying in care longer than previously.

Executive Summary

Structure and further Expansion of the Virtual School

Over the 2023/2024 academic year, Stoke-on-Trent’s Virtual School (VS) has continued to evolve and develop to support Cared for Children and Previously Cared for Children both inside and outside the educational setting and has expanded to include the educational overview of all “Children with a Social Worker.” This includes all children who are on a Child Protection or Child in Need Plan in Stoke-on-Trent. As of September 2024 this will also include those children in Kinship Care.

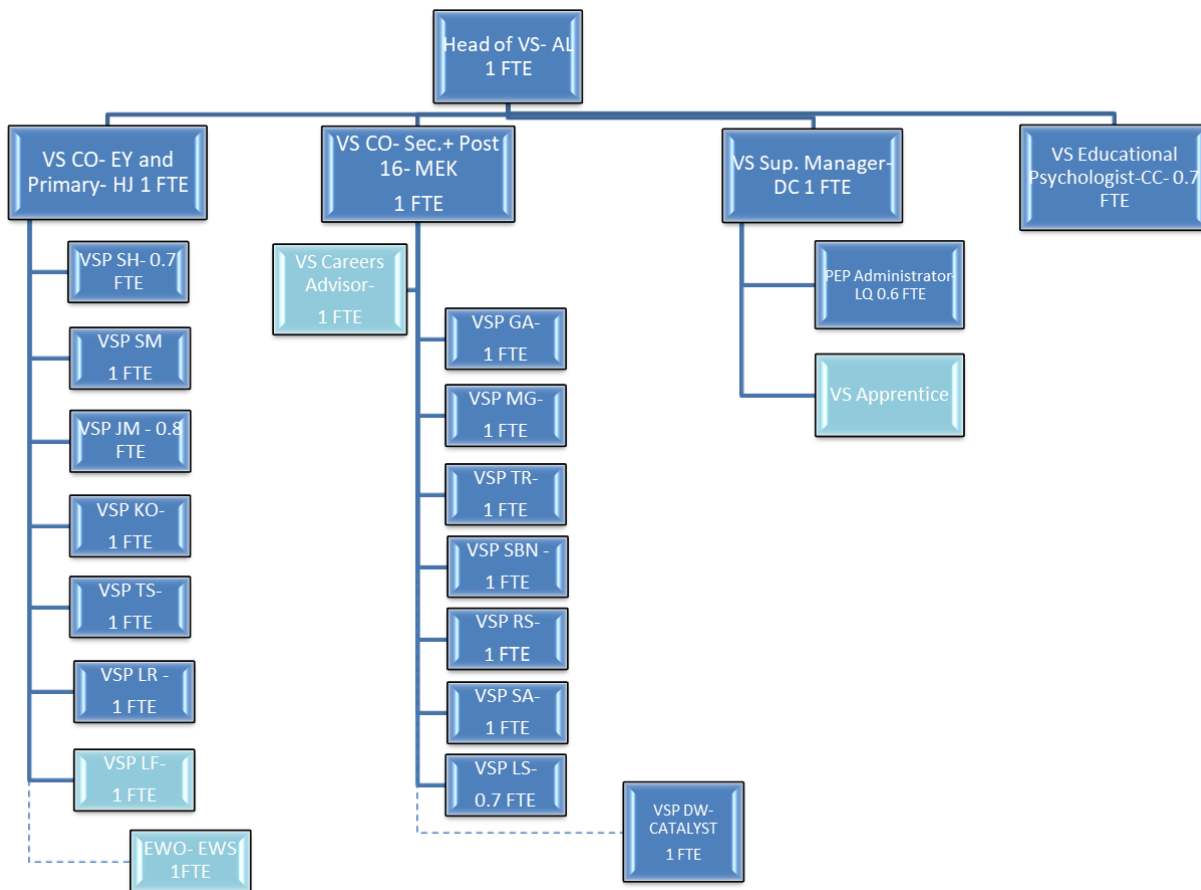
In January 2022 the team was launched in its new structure with 17.3 (FTE) members of staff. This structure was decided following the Peer Review that occurred in March 2021.



In May 2024 the team was restructured further, to increase the support for Stoke-on-Trent’s cohort of Children. Its new structure has 24 (FTE) members of staff. This structure was decided following a review of the new structure in October 2022. The additional posts were for an additional Virtual School Practitioner, a Virtual School Careers Advisor for cared for young people and care leavers aged 14-21.

In addition to this a Service Level Agreement was made with the Education Welfare Service for an full time Education Welfare Officer who would have a ringfenced responsibility to track, monitor and support to improve the attendance for Cared for Children and Children with a Social Worker.

The role of the Apprentice has also been adapted to meet the needs of the children we serve, instead of their role being an administrative one they will promote participation in sports and arts activities and represent the Virtual School at Fostering and Cared for Children Events.



A separate Annual Report will be released each year for Children with a Social Worker.

Virtual School Vision and Mission

2023-24 the Virtual School updated its Vision and Mission to the following-

- Ensuring our Cared for Children (CfC) have access to a high-quality, full-time education. That supports our children and young people (CYP) and raises their attainment and outcomes across a broad curriculum offer.
- Provide advice and guidance regarding the educational needs for Previously Cared for Children (PCfC), children with a social worker (CP/CIN) and as of Sept. 2024 children in Kinship care.
- Ensuring that our CYP's Social, Mental, Emotional Health and Well-being is supported and their voice is heard and acted upon.
- Building strong relationships with professionals, parents, and carers, offering training, guidance, and support using a restorative approach that develops skills to raise a young person's attainment, engagement, and participation in their education.
- Provide advice and guidance about our three-pronged approach; Raising Attainment; Positive Behaviour Support and Relational Approaches/Attachment and Trauma for our vulnerable children, their settings and professionals supporting them.
- Provide clear advice and guidance to promote the effective use of Pupil Premium+ funding and other grants available to support the educational needs of our CYP.
- Ensuring that our children have a detailed, up-to-date, ambitious and Personalised Education Plan (PEP) in place that supports the care plan and other education plans and needs of our CYP.
- To be readily available, innovative, ambitious and passionate to maximise the opportunities for all of our CYP's aspirations.

Stoke-on-Trent VS PEP Mission

Raising the profile of the PEP was one of the key ambitions for the virtual school. The PEP is not just a document to provide additional funding into schools/education settings- it has a far greater meaning and impact on the education and lives of our care-experienced children.

“A PEP tells the story of a Cared for Child’s journey through education.”

The PEP should identify the positives and challenges of a child’s journey and what strategies were implemented to support our Cared for Children, to overcome their adversities and early experiences. It is these strategies that will support them in their adult future, as they learn how to support themselves in early adulthood and beyond, and manage day-to-day in society when the support around them is not always present.

Virtual School Governing Board

The governing body has a wide range of representation, from key stakeholders including education and social care, as well as strategic and operational leads. It also has the representation of carers, and most importantly our Cared for Children. There is representation from the Corporate Parent Panel and Senior Leadership of the Local Authority. The terms of reference and membership are reviewed on an annual basis. The structure of this body has been developed to offer robust support and challenge on an ongoing basis, and this can be evidenced within the meeting minutes and associated reports.

During 2023-2024 there were four Virtual School Governing Board (VSGB) meetings. 3 were the traditional termly meetings and one was an extraordinary VS Governing Board Meeting to look over the 2022-23 Annual Report before it was published.

This board has been vital in establishing the new structure of the Virtual School, and its contributions across the wider Children and Families directorate. The membership is extensive and covers not only a range of areas within the Local Authority but also a number of leaders from schools/education settings and settings across the city.

This year the board has supported in the implementation of

- New policies and handbooks to support Schools, Social Workers, and Foster Carers in a united way for our CfC, PCfC and Children with a Social Worker (C.w.SW).
- Agreeing our new VS structure to meet our statutory duties and more.
- Developing new links with Foster Carers across the city.
- Agreeing our new VS Development Plan (VSDP) to plan, monitor and document our development to become an outstanding service.
- Quality Assure and agree the Annual Report for Cared for Children 2022-23.

In March 2022 the Virtual School Development Plan was created and agreed upon through the Virtual School Governing Board, as a working document that would track and monitor the progress that the Virtual School are making against their ambitions to become an outstanding service in a 2-3-year period.

This document includes the Virtual School self-evaluation and Virtual School Development Plan. The self-evaluation was based on the school's performance at the end of the academic year 2020-21 and is measured against the Children's Services Ofsted Inspection Framework (ILACS) and SEND Inspection Framework. The Virtual School Development Plan has been created with the Children and Families Improvement Plan and the West Midlands Virtual School Region Development Priorities in mind.

The table below shows the 9 key areas of development decided following the self-evaluation. It also indicates the Virtual School staff and Governing board member who oversees those areas.

Restructure and Recruitment to the Virtual School Team- Aaron Lawrence VSGB Member- Mark Connell	Systems and Processes- Aaron Lawrence VSGB Member- Lena Cottage	Communications and Co-ordination- Aaron Lawrence VSGB Member- Bob Yeo, Jason Palak
Leadership and Management- Aaron Lawrence VSGB Member- Claire Gaygan (Chair), Lee Pardy-McLaughlin	Virtual Schools Positive Impact on Pupils- Hannah Johnson + Mary-Ellen Krause VSBG Member- Emma Wickham (Primary)	Post 16- Mary-Ellen Krause VSGB Member- Dave Hopley
Early Years- Hannah Johnson VSGB Member- PRIMARY Head Rep- Lesley Brookes	Children with a Social Worker, PLAC, and Kinship Care- Hannah Johnson VSGB Member- Sara Banks + Karen Peters	SEND- Mary-Ellen Krause VSBG Member- Daniel Hill

Statutory Duty Check in on VSDP

Actions Required	Resource /Support	Monitoring		
		A 2023	Sp 2024	Su 2024
To promote the educational achievement of the LA's CfC.	MBR/ PEP data/ Annual Report			
Ensure that appropriate education provision is arranged at the same time as a care placement.	PEP/ Ed.S Panel/ VSP liaison/ LL			
All CfC have a PEP which is part of the child's care plan.	MBR/ PEP/ VSP Liaison/ LL			
To promote the educational achievement of previously cared for children in their area by providing information and advice.	Regional offer/ Training/ Data Annual Report			
The duties apply to children who are in early years provisions and continue throughout the compulsory years of education where the child is in provision funded in part or in full by the state.	Dashboard Data/ Team meetings on Transition			

Emotional Wellbeing

In Year 2 of the Attachment Aware Trauma Informed Project it was identified that in line with national trends there needed to be a greater focus on adopting relational approaches in schools as the key technique to support young people who suffer with attachment and trauma difficulties. In September 2023 the RAiE Project (Relational Approaches in Education) was launched as a rebrand of the previous years AATI pilot. The RAiE Project would also include greater training not only on Attachment Aware, Trauma Informed practice but also on how to include Relational Practice in education settings.

Aims and Objectives

1. To implement and embed Relational Approaches in Stoke-on-Trent Schools. To improve pupil and staff wellbeing, promote inclusion and improve educational outcomes
 - 1.1. Develop Staff Knowledge of attachment and trauma and relational approaches through intensive CPD
 - 1.2. Improve Pupil and staff wellbeing in schools
 - 1.3. Improve educational outcomes for children and young people: reduce permanent exclusions and improve attendance in Stoke-on-Trent schools.

Impact

2. What will be measured to assess the impact of the project?

2.1. ARC Matrix school ratings.

By the end of Year 2, seven of our schools have achieved their Bronze ARC accreditation and five of those seven schools have also achieved their Silver ARC accreditation.

2.2. Attendance rates.

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
AATI schools	94.4%	91.4%	92.0%	91.8%
RAiE schools	95.2%	95.2%	92.0%	92.0%
Stoke-on-Trent schools' average	94.6%	91.8%	91.9%	91.5%
National average	95.4%	92.4%	92.6%	92.8%

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

All groups show a significant decline in attendance during 21/22, possibly due to the after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. AATI school data shows an increase from the baseline year 21/22. There is limited data to infer trends for RAiE schools following their start on the project. AATI and RAiE schools show better attendance rates than Stoke-on-Trent schools' average but lower than the national average.

Persistent Absence

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
AATI schools	16.7%	31.4%	26.1%	26.5%
RAiE schools	13.8%	26.6%	26.2%	22.5%

Stoke-on-Trent schools' average	15.6%	26.2%	24.5%	26.5%
National average	12.1%	22.5%	21.2%	20.7%

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

AATI and RAiE schools show fluctuations in their data. AATI schools peaked at 31.4% in 2021/22 and then slightly decreased following Covid-19. RAiE schools also peaked in 2021/22 at 26.6% but showed a more significant decrease to 22.5% in 2023/24 when they commenced the RAiE project. Stoke-on-Trent schools' average closely follows the trends of AATI schools, peaking at 26.2% in 2021/22 and returning to 26.5% in 2023/24. This data indicates that AATI and RAiE schools are performing better than the local average but they still have room for improvement compared to the national average.

2.3. Suspension and Exclusion rates.

	20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances
AATI schools	0	42	1	82	0	98	1	111
RAiE schools	0	43	1	115	2	233	1	196

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

The number of FTE instances shows a consistent increase each year for AATI schools, with permanent exclusions remaining consistent. The number of permanent exclusions fluctuates slightly in RAiE schools, with no exclusions in 2020/21 and 2022/23, and one exclusion in 2021/22 and 2023/24. The number of FTE for RAiE schools has decreased since their start with the project. We do not have the Stoke-on-Trent schools and national average to compare these results against.

2.4. Staff wellbeing questionnaires.

The key link staff from each school involved in the AATI and RAiE projects were asked to complete a questionnaire to explore their views about the AATI/RAiE project's impact. The following are their responses:

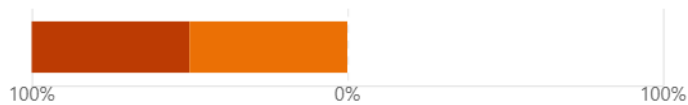
1. Being part of the AATI/RAiE project has, or is likely to, improve staff well-being.

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree



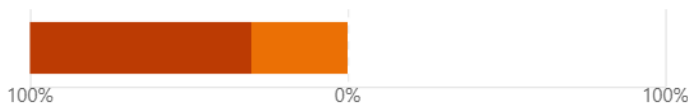
2. Being part of the AATI/RAiE project has, or is likely to, improve pupil well-being.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



3. Being part of the AATI/RAiE project has, or is likely to, improve staff knowledge of attachment, trauma and relational approaches.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



4. What impact have you seen, or expect to see, on outcomes such as attainment, exclusions, attendance etc.?

“Discussions with children are more productive.”

“The biggest impact has been on staff approaches to pupils with additional needs/difficult backgrounds. As a result, pupils feel connected to staff/school and feel supported. Exclusion data has always been low, however we have worked with some challenges and managed to support the children without exclusion.”

“Pupils are more able to articulate their feelings and talk about what to do in the event of a situation. Staff are more aware and understanding in their approaches.”

“Attendance is noticeably higher. Unfortunately, suspensions are higher but these have been for pupils that have demonstrated difficulties this year. Only 1 pupil has received multiple suspensions and as a result of our training, we have adapted our reintegration procedures and this pupil is now doing brilliantly.”

“We need to see an improvement in staff understanding and therefore a shift in their responses to situations/interactions with students. A further impact if this works is that the exclusion rate will decrease and attendance will improve.”

“The learning has enhanced the schools offer to prevent exclusion.”

“Hoping to see no exclusions in the future and better staff knowledge.”

“Expect to see improved attendance and fewer exclusions.”

“Improved engagement in lessons, improved attendance across school, no exclusions in the last academic year nor this academic year so far, suspensions this academic year are not as a result of behaviours displayed due to linked to attachment or trauma.”

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6. Any other comments/reflections?

“This is something that is valuable and we will continue to build on this.”

“Staff involved in the project have always been so supportive and on hand to address any queries we have. Personally, I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the project and it has opened up so many more opportunities to me and my team. For example, visiting other settings, including out of area. Thank you to all involved.”

“I think this project is vital at this moment in time. I feel that we have everyone agreeing that we need a consistent approach to dealing with pupils with attachment and trauma needs, however they sometimes find it difficult to respond to challenges in line with training given. This is improving.”

“Finding our way around the ARC development plan, adding more actions etc is proving to be difficult.”

“So far, I feel the RAiE project is really well organised and managed. We feel well-supported in school, every step of the way. Thank you.”

“Great to have additional opportunities to visit other schools/ access resources/training, which is then disseminated to staff. Benefit from check ins so progress and plans can be discussed with a key person.”

2.5. Ofsted Report Findings for RAiE and AATI Schools

School 1, May 2024

“Pupils enjoy attending this friendly school. It has a diverse community, and every member of the ...’s family is warmly welcomed and celebrated. The pastoral support the school provides to help the pupils feel secure and settled is effective. Pupils feel safe in school because of this and due to the strong team with responsibility for providing it...”

School 2, October 2024

“... school is a school that is at the heart of the community. It is a caring and inclusive school.

Pupils benefit from positive, caring relationships with the adults at the school. They know who they can talk to if they are worried about anything. As a result, pupils feel safe and happy in school. There is a sharp focus on supporting pupils’ wider well-being. The school provides highly effective pastoral support for pupils and families...

Staff, pupils and parents say that they are united by the school’s current vision and leadership. They are highly complimentary about the culture of the school, which has been galvanised over the last year. Staff feel valued and are proud to work at the school.”

School 3, October 2023

“This caring school has high aspirations for all its pupils. Pupils know that staff value them and expect them to do well. A small number of pupils struggle to manage their emotions, but they are supported effectively by specialist staff. Pupils say they feel safe in school...”

Pupils behave well in this school. Staff insist on high standards of behaviour from the early years onwards. They establish consistent routines in lessons. This helps pupils to concentrate and have positive

attitudes. Relationships in the school are respectful. The ambition that staff have for all pupils is palpable.”

School 4, November 2022

“Staff treat pupils kindly and act quickly if anyone is upset. In turn, they expect pupils to be kind, sensible, polite and friendly. Each week, staff and leaders notice and reward these qualities...”

Leaders and staff work hard to support pupils and families in lots of different ways. They have created a safe, nurturing place where pupils feel happy, valued and secure. Pupils’ positive attitudes to school mean lessons run smoothly.”

School 5, November 2022

“Teachers and support staff feel valued and supported by leaders. Teachers say that leaders have an open-door policy, are always ready to listen and are considerate of their well-being.”

School 6, November 2023

“Pupils say they can ‘be who they want to be’ in this inclusive community. Staff support and encourage pupils’ well-being and mental health very well...”

The trust has invested time and resources to develop the school. Trustees and governors provide challenge and support. This has helped the academy to improve. The school and governors are mindful of staff workload and well-being.”

School 7, February 2023

“At the heart of the school is pupils’ safety and well-being. They have every confidence in adults to look after and care for them...”

Leaders, including trustees, are ambitious for all pupils to achieve both academically and personally. They offer a broad and balanced curriculum with a wealth of opportunities for pupils’ wider development...”

Staff appreciate leaders’ support for their mental health and well-being. While leaders set high expectations, they also provide staff with the support and care they need to carry out their roles. Leaders regularly check on staff and give them time to work on extra responsibilities if needed. This support helps staff to be effective in their roles and enjoy working at the school. One member of staff said, ‘Little things make a difference.’”

Future Plan

3. How will the project be expanded and what are the timescales?

3.1. Year 1- 11 schools (**completed as AATI**)

3.2. Year 2- 36 schools (25 new schools) (Yr 1 schools buddy with 1 or 2 new schools)

3.3. Year 3- 46 schools (20 new schools) each school buddies with 1 other

3.4. Year 4-6- (20 new schools each year) join the RaiE Project

Other Pilots led by the Virtual School this year include

RADY

- Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) Pilot with Challenging Education for 9 more schools (7 last year)

In October 2022, The Virtual School launched a RADY pilot with Challenging Education for an inner-City Trust with their 7 schools. The first RADY cohort completed their tutorials in April 2024, with a second RADY cohort of 9 schools starting in January 2024 and completing in October 2024. As with the first, the second cohort involved working with a group of Stoke-on-Trent Primary and Secondary Schools (different Trusts and Academies) to evaluate their data and the inclusion of equitable opportunities of disadvantaged young people. As with the previous cohort, each of the six tutorials linked with the TDFDL (Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners) Modules and focused on many areas including attendance, attainment, after school provisions/opportunities, school teams, school leader role, parents/carers attendance (i.e. parents evening, events) and parental/carer involvement. The tutorials allowed the school settings to work with direction and guidance from Challenging Education but also encouraged the professionals and settings to work collaboratively, sharing good practice of how to review and reflect how they currently support the needs of their disadvantaged children in their settings and to also challenge where appropriate.

The feedback received from many of the schools from both cohorts, is that the RADY Principles are something that they wish to now embed across the whole school with all staff and all year groups, focusing beyond the initial target cohort of children. It has been a change of mindset for schools and their staff members and the RADY Principles are able to support the needs of all children, not only those who are disadvantaged.

Specific examples of impact data from two Stoke-on-Trent Primary Schools.

September 2024, School 1 – Cohort 1:

“Yes, we saw some great results last year and we are about to launch- the uplift whole school this year. Our original uplift was trialled on Year 4 students in Reading:

- In July 100% of the children on the RADY uplift scored above 100 in their NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) reading test. 89% are on track.
- Compared to 55% above 100 in December and only 77% on track.”

October 2024, School 2 – Cohort 2:

Out of 16 children who were tracked (for Reading) and who were disadvantaged (PP (Pupil Premium), CfC, PCfC, children with a Social Worker, also those who could be greater depth):

- 10 children made positive and increased progress (points).
- 3 children had maintained progress.
- The remaining 3 children, from the information that had been tracked, could either ascertain as to why (i.e. attendance, home movement), or if no obvious reason. This was now a child of focus.

Feedback from schools has also noted the impact of RADY on the ‘soft data’ – children contributing more, increased school involvement, growing confidence.

RADY Reflection Meetings began in July 2024, and take place termly, for one year. Led by Challenging Education, school settings from both cohorts were invited to discuss how RADY was progressing, to share and support findings, ideas and practice, as well as linking up professionals from both cohorts, Primary and Secondary.

One of our VS Practitioners became the VS RADY Champion in the summer of 2023. As part of their role, they have attended the RADY Tutorials with Challenging Education, sharing key information, linking to the Virtual School and EPEP to ensure that the Virtual School team strives for equitable opportunities for our Cared for

Children. The impact of this is reflected in many areas of the PEP - Arts, attainment, targets and health and emotional well-being progress. Our VSP has also visited Primary and Secondary Schools who are further ahead on the RADY journey, to gain ideas to share with our schools and how this may also interlink with ePEP, our PEP meetings and our role as a Virtual School.

Our RADY VS Champion has met with key Leaders from a large Multi-Academy Trust, spanning across 4 Local Authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

The RADY VS Champion and other Stoke-on-Trent VS Practitioners have attended the #RadioRADY sessions as a part of their professional development and information sharing across a range of education settings on a national level. Jo also played an active role, attending #RadioRADY 19th March 2024 and sharing the Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School's journey so far, with some positive feedback received from Challenging Education*, "Your talk was a timely reminder of how the work of the VS contributes to equity for our most vulnerable pupils."

In June 2024, termly RADY Systems Leader Network meetings began. This was an opportunity for all RADY Champions and Leaders across the country to come together as a collaborative and supportive network, to share progress, successes, learning and next steps. Our RADY VS Champion also attends these, along with our VS Head or VS Co-ordinator to represent Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School and to review and reflect on our practice as a Virtual School in the RADY journey.

Positive Behaviour Support

- Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Pilot offering training to schools in PBS and how to understand and support challenging behaviour (3 schools last year).

The Virtual School Team have also been trained as PBS Practitioners and have supported over 30 schools to write PBS plans for a number of our children in and out of the city.

Headlines 2023-2024

Training offer from the Virtual School

The Virtual School have broadened their training offer and their presence in team meetings across the LA to raise the profile and importance of education. The VSH presented in the Children and Family Services Festival of Practice week to raise the awareness and importance of education for our cohort of Children and Young People. The VSH also delivered training at the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership- Autumn Conference regarding the importance of education as a safeguarding measure for our Cared for Children in November 2023.

The VS delivered training to a range of services, so they know how to access support from the Virtual School. The VS attend a range of panels on a weekly basis as the Education representative for CfC, PCfC and CIN/CP

This was the training offer for professionals from the Virtual School in 2023-24

- Designated Teacher whole-day training/ Termly Network meetings
- Post 16/ Early Years/ PCfC Termly Network meetings
- Headteacher Termly Network meetings- Primary/ Secondary + Post 16
- School Governor Training- Vulnerable Children/ CfC focussed

- Foster Care Termly Network meetings
- Social Worker training - PEPs, RADY, PBS, AATI in schools, CIN/CP support
- Emotion Coaching training (funded by the VS)
- Attachment Aware Trauma Informed training for Schools/education settings
- Schools- Introduction to Positive Behaviour Support and writing PBS plans
- Schools- RADY (funded by the VS, delivered by Challenging Education)
- Arts, Sports and Cultural opportunities Termly Network meetings
- Updates on the Virtual School and Annual Report to Corporate Parenting Panel (lead members)

Designated Teacher Training Days

Following the expansion of the Virtual School and post COVID pandemic, it was seen as an opportunity to relaunch the face-to-face DT training days, which were hosted at Port Vale Football Club. It has been positive to see 60 different designated teachers from all education settings from Stoke-on-Trent and other local authorities who attend the event, and the feedback has shown it has been a successful opportunity to learn about the needs of our young people, how to best support our young people and promote the VS Vision and expectations, as well as offer chances to network with other DTs and professionals. This year we had a care experienced guest speaker who runs his own carehomes, they provided an inspirational speech and great insight into the needs of our children and how education impacts their care experiences.

Children into Nursery Places

Since the expansion of the Virtual School in January 2022 we have been supporting children from 0-18 instead of school-aged only. In that time the VS has supported around 85 Cared for Children to go to Nursery, and this means that instead of around 20% being in settings the percentage is now around 85%. The VS also help by making sure they receive the appropriate funding. The Virtual School has also made sure each of these children have a PEP which comes with £100 per term to help the setting with interventions and help identify needs earlier than when only 20% of Cared for Children went to Nursery pre-January 2022.

It is clear from the early years data, to be obtained in further pages within this report, that this has had a positive impact on our children reaching their GLD (Good Level of Development) assessments in Early Years.

Dashboard

The Weekly VS dashboard meetings have evolved in 2023-24 allow us to review our Key Performance Indicators each Thursday morning looking at these areas.

- New Cared for Children
- Care Leavers
- School Attendance (Persistent Absence (Below 80%) and Severe Absence (below 50%))
- Pupils on Part-time tables
- Exclusions
- Children Not on a school role (NOSR)
- Changes to education/ care provision
- Pupils who attend RI & Inadequate Ofsted Schools

- Pupils who attend Alternative Provision/ Bespoke Education offers.

The dashboard also allows the VS team to be data literate and understand how the VS is measured as a VS Service and why it is important for our children and young people. Each week actions from the week before are reviewed and new actions are created accordingly. This allows us as a team to be fully informed regarding the Stoke-on-Trent cohort of CfC and their education but also to work as a team to use our expertise to resolve any education concerns the VS has for our children and young people and have an impact on improving their engagement and outcomes in school/education settings. In 2023-24 this has developed so each week commentary is added regarding those young people who are NOSR, this is shared with Directors and Heads of Service across the Children and Families Directorate.

Multi-Agency Approach -Children Missing Education or Part Time

As of May 2022, the Virtual School in partnership with social care and the SENMAS team, created the Education Solutions Panel. The purpose of the panel is to meet monthly to review the Cared for Children who are awaiting a school/education settings place to be found for them. Initially, this was for Cared for Children who had been out of education for more than 12 weeks, in January 2023 it was changed to those who had been out of education for more than 4 weeks. In 2023-24 there were 11 panels held.

The work of the panel links closely to the overarching Cared for Children and Corporate Parenting strategies and the Virtual School Development Plan. The aim of the panel is to escalate process of securing school/education settings places for Cared for Children, and to reduce the drift and delay that might occur. This is also a key action within the CAFS Improvement Plan.

The panel will act as a forum for discussions, actions and decisions that will support the Local Authority to;

- Fulfil its statutory duties as a Corporate Parent to achieve the highest educational outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers by securing good and outstanding school/education settings placements.
- Securing an appropriate school/education settings place for Cared for Children through the provision of advice and information to relevant parties in and out of the city.

Role and function

1. For all agencies to work collaboratively to source and secure Good and outstanding school placements for Cared for Children.
2. To discuss the reasons for the drift and delay of securing a school place for Cared for Children and for all parties to help to remove the barriers that are slowing the process down.
3. To act as Education Advocates for the Cared for Children who are awaiting a school place and challenge the reasons for the delay in finding an appropriate school placement.
4. To support the educational outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers by identifying and championing priorities and key actions of the Virtual School.
5. To ensure all key partners play their part so that combined resources and knowledge can be utilised to have a positive effect upon educational placements for our Cared for Children. E.g. Social Workers, Social Care Team Managers, VS Practitioners and Co-ordinators and SEND Caseworkers.

6. To have strategic oversight of the Cared for Children who are awaiting school placements. This will give the panel the opportunity to see patterns in why school places are hard to source and will lead to remedial action that can be repeated where appropriate.
7. A by-product of this work will also be that relationships with neighbouring Local Authorities should improve, which in turn should speed up finding school places in the future.

Key tasks are:

- Source and find appropriate school/education settings placements for Cared for Children who reside in and out of the city.
- Delegate actions to attendees of the panel to speed up the process of finding and securing a school/education settings place.
- Draw up an action plan that will be reviewed in a month's time.
- Follow an escalation process where needed to speed up drift and delay in sourcing suitable education for our children in care.
- Track the agreed actions to make sure they have taken place and had an effect, therefore holding all agencies to account for their part in this process.

Impact in 2023-24

Eighteen of the 22 children and young people taken to the Education and Solutions Panel were placed into a school/college by the end of the Summer Term 2024.

Children on a Part-Time Timetable

This information is recorded onto the PEP system and the Weekly Dashboard so all professionals supporting that child can see what the timetable is and what the transitional plan is to help them re-engage with education fully. VS Practitioners and Co-ordinators will regularly review these transition plans with schools/education settings to help oversee, advise and implement strategies to help the young people re-integrate into a full-time timetable. This is identified as one of the key indicators that the VS use to determine the level of support and intervention for a child to be judged as needing High Intervention and Support.

Summer Transition Program

Summer 2024 was the second transition program to support those young people in Years 11,12 and 13 in their transition to new settings for the Autumn 2023 term. The summer program was led by the YMCA youth service and involved:

- CV writing/ preparation for adulthood workshops
- Visits to local Colleges
- Teambuilding challenges
- Outward bounds day
- Beach visit day
- Alton towers resort day

10 young people took part across the 4-week program in August and of the ten, 9 transitioned smoothly into their education, employment or traineeship (EET) in the September 2024.

In September 2024 those young people who need more support to access their EET provision will be offered a YMCA mentor from the summer program who will help them with that transition.

The aim will be to increase the number of participants in the Summer of 2024-25 to around 25, supporting out most at risk of NEET (not in Education or Employment)

Children & Young People Now Award 2023 nomination

The Virtual School was also nominated for the Children and Young People Now Awards 2023, and got to the last five finalists nationally for the category 'Children in Care' in November 2023. This was a proud moment for the whole team and highlighted the quality work that takes place for our children.



Outcomes of Inspection Monitoring Visits

SEND and AP Inspection Jan 2024

Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.

The next full area SEND inspection will be within approximately three years.

Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

Collaborative Working

How the VS Restructure has assisted with Collaborative Working

Since the expansion of the VS Team, there is more capacity to make sure that we are working collaboratively for the benefit of our children and young people.

VS Practitioners and Co-ordinators have built excellent relationships with the schools and education settings that our children and young people attend, the Social Workers, who have corporate parenting responsibilities, and the Foster Carers and staff in the homes where our children and young people live. Throughout this report, there are several case studies detailing the impact of the Virtual School, and the collaborative working is evident in each exemplar.

From a strategic perspective, the VS has built stronger relationships through the Local Authority. The VS have increased our presence in several areas:

- Increased presence in panels across Childrens Social Care for Education, High Needs and Tripartite panels.
- Attending Brokerage meetings weekly to advise for Cared for Children.
- Increased training offer for Childrens Social Care, and teams in Education Directorate.
- Attending attendance panels as a form of advice.
- The VS are part of the Youth Offending Services Governing Board.
- The VS attend, advise and contribute evidence and opinion in Education Panel which is led by the SENMAS team.
- The VS have a strong relationship with a member of the Carers Service who is specifically in post to support Cared for Children and Care Leavers. We all work cohesively daily.
- As of May 2022, the VS chair our own Education Solutions Panel for CYP who have been out of education for several weeks, this is attended by Strategic Managers from Childrens Services the lead of the SENMAS team, VS Practitioners and Co-ordinators and Social Workers and their Team Managers.
- Another change due to the VS restructure and ability to casework children's educational needs means that the VS has had capacity to attend approximately 75% of all PEP meetings this academic year. PEPs are attended by Social Workers, Foster Carers, Designated Teachers, and VS Practitioners where possible.

Catalyst Project- Seconding of a Virtual School Practitioner

The Catalyst Project is a pilot of a multi-agency specialist adolescent support team, working with children on the edge of care to provide targeted support to children and their families to protect them from harm, while ensuring that they remain at home, where this is in their best interests. The team was created as part of a DFE funded 24-month pilot through the addition of partnership roles within our Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST).

The model is based on the best practice 'No Wrong Door' approach, adapted to suit the needs of young people in Stoke-on-Trent.

The Catalyst team is made up of two social workers, two FAST intervention workers, one part-time Police Officer, one Virtual School Practitioner, and one part-time Speech and Language Therapist, all working under a social worker Team Manager.

Impact

- 92% of children supported to remain living with their families.
- 16 children who were Permanently Excluded had this overturned due to the input of the education link worker from the Virtual school.
- Of the 40 children supported by the educational worker 14 had an educational placement at the time of being closed, for the 26 still being supported 77% have had improved attendance.

West Midlands Virtual School Head Teacher Network

There is a strong collaboration between Virtual School Head Teachers in the West Midlands. The collective meets on a termly basis either remotely or face-to-face. A charity has also been launched to support fundraising to benefit the cultural offer for the longer term, and to extend regional wider learning

opportunities. The key areas of focus have been on; developing the use of data, the regional arts and sports programme, and supporting the development of attachment-aware and trauma-informed schools.

Our VS Head has also had regular meetings with the Chair of the WMVSHT and other VS Heads, to learn about their structure and how they fulfil the statutory duties of the Virtual School. This has been most beneficial since the expansion of the Stoke-on-Trent VS team, and has provided many networking and development opportunities for the VS and all team members. It has also led to us adding a Careers and Participation Advisor, an Education Welfare Officer to the team structure.

Arts Connect Virtual Schools Partnership

This is a collaboration between West Midlands Virtual Schools, Arts Connect, and various arts organisations to enable Cared for Children across the region to engage in high-quality arts activities. In the last year there have been four arts and creative opportunities for Cared for Children, two of which were art specific, and one photography and one media event. However, attendance and engagement in these activities has not been as high as expected, so this is an area of development for the Virtual School in the next academic year. It has also been written into the VS Development Plan as a discrete action.

In 2023-24 some of our Cared for Children took part in-

School of Rock- a chance to try a range of instruments.

Trash to Treasure- an art event where children got the chance to upcycle items.

DJ Workshop- learning the basics of being a DJ and mixing music.

Diya Painting event (joint with Bollywood event)

Emma Bridgewater plate decorating

Nutcracker Christmas Panto competition and experience

Drumming workshop

The Explorers Club- workshops in storytelling, the world of musicals, mycelium map painting

Commercial Dance workshop with Emily Bellingham

Hamilton Trip- to Birmingham to watch the production and meet the cast and do a workshop

Women in Theatre- Summer Performance opportunity- a 3-day event to create and present your own performance. As well as a celebration event in November with video demonstrations of what was created.

Together Active

As part of the West Midlands Children in Care Foundation, there is a Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Virtual School Cluster. Together Active have been commissioned to plan, arrange, and deliver sporting events each term as of September 2022. In the Summer Term of 2023, there were regular meetings to decide how to utilise the £5000 grant to meet the requirements of the regional SLA agreement and provide the best sporting opportunities for Cared for Children to access across both local authorities.

Bollywood Dancing

Give it a Go x2 – Together Active Event - Tennis, Basketball, Dodgeball and Boxing

Stoke City Day - Stadium Tour and Multi-Skills Sports

Together Active Event – Boxing, Football, Climbing Wall, Park Run

Music Service

The VS have expanded its offer to fund music lessons arranged and coordinated by the Music Service for all Cared for Children beyond Year 4.

In 2023-24 there were a total of 99 pupils receiving instrument/ vocal lessons. There were 47 pupils in 22-23.

- 31 x Y4 pupils (24 last year)
- 32 x Y5 pupils (15 last year)
- 26 x Y6 pupils (9 last year)
- 5 x SoT pupil educated in Staffordshire (3 last year)
- 5 PCfC pupils

The VS has agreed to continue funding lessons through the SMART targets within PEP meetings for all children in secondary school or education settings- to keep this enrichment opportunity available to the pupils.

Together 4 Children

As part of the West Midlands PCfC/adoption network, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire have worked together to create a common offer of support for our regional children and families. Together 4 Children work in a partnership as our regional adoption agency and provides support across the adoption journey. Their website is being developed to include specific resources designed and created jointly by the 4 regional Virtual Schools including advice and guidance on all aspects of PCfC, including the Education Plan for PCfC. Schools, education settings, and families will be signposted to their website- to gather more information and guidance. Ongoing termly network meetings discuss the implementation of plans to develop our local offer that includes thresholds, pathways, commissioned workshops, and working with our post-adoption teams. This is a continual project alongside our development of a regional training offer for schools, education settings, and our families.

Challenging Education (TDFDL/ RADY)

Since September 2022 The Virtual School has worked with Challenging Education to change the whole school/education setting's thinking and processes around helping our most disadvantaged children to achieve their potential and to have greater opportunities in schools/education settings.

Challenging Education TDFDL- Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners

This is a resource that is free to all schools/education settings in Stoke-on-Trent for the next eight years (funded by the Virtual School). It is for as many staff in as many schools/education settings as possible, to access quality training in order to support disadvantaged learners to attain as highly as their non-disadvantaged peers.

Challenging Education have produced a Professional Learning Programme (PLP) based around six recorded training modules that are available to all staff to access at their convenience. Sessions have been researched and delivered by expert trainers (and experienced school leaders) who have a wealth of knowledge on leadership and teaching of disadvantaged young people.

Schools/education settings can use these as part of a CPD (Continuing Professional Development) programme, INSET day training or inductions can be accessed and covers all staff within a school, from

Senior Leadership to support and site staff. By the end of the first academic year, there were 58% of schools/education settings registered to use the resource.

Challenging Education RADY- Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters

In October 2022, The Virtual School launched a RADY pilot with Challenging Education for an inner-City Trust with their 7 schools. The first RADY cohort completed their tutorials in April 2024, with a second RADY cohort of 9 schools starting in January 2024 and completing in October 2024. As with the first, the second cohort involved working with a group of Stoke-on-Trent Primary and Secondary Schools (different Trusts and Academies) to evaluate their data and the inclusion of equitable opportunities of disadvantaged young people. As with the previous cohort, each of the six tutorials linked with the TDFDL (Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners) Modules and focused on many areas including attendance, attainment, after school provisions/opportunities, school teams, school leader role, parents/carers attendance (i.e. parents evening, events) and parental/carer involvement. The tutorials allowed the school settings to work with direction and guidance from Challenging Education but also encouraged the professionals and settings to work collaboratively, sharing good practice of how to review and reflect how they currently support the needs of their disadvantaged children in their settings and to also challenge where appropriate.

The feedback received from many of the schools from both cohorts, is that the RADY Principles are something that they wish to now embed across the whole school with all staff and all year groups, focusing beyond the initial target cohort of children. It has been a change of mindset for schools and their staff members and the RADY Principles are able to support the needs of all children, not only those who are disadvantaged.

Specific examples of impact data from two Stoke-on-Trent Primary Schools.

September 2024, School 1 – Cohort 1:

“Yes, we saw some great results last year and we are about to launch- the uplift whole school this year. Our original uplift was trialled on Year 4 students in Reading:

- In July 100% of the children on the RADY uplift scored above 100 in their NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) reading test. 89% are on track.
- Compared to 55% above 100 in December and only 77% on track.”

October 2024, School 2 – Cohort 2:

Out of 16 children who were tracked (for Reading) and who were disadvantaged (PP (Pupil Premium), CfC, PCfC, children with a Social Worker, also those who could be greater depth):

- 10 children made positive and increased progress (points).
- 3 children had maintained progress.
- The remaining 3 children, from the information that had been tracked, could either ascertain as to why (i.e. attendance, home movement), or if no obvious reason. This was now a child of focus.

Feedback from schools has also noted the impact of RADY on the ‘soft data’ – children contributing more, increased school involvement, growing confidence.

RADY Reflection Meetings began in July 2024, and take place termly, for one year. Led by Challenging Education, school settings from both cohorts were invited to discuss how RADY was progressing, to share and support findings, ideas and practice, as well as linking up professionals from both cohorts, Primary and Secondary.

One of our VS Practitioners became the VS RADY Champion in the summer of 2023. As part of their role, they have attended the RADY Tutorials with Challenging Education, sharing key information, linking to the Virtual School and EPEP to ensure that the Virtual School team strives for equitable opportunities for our Cared for Children. The impact of this is reflected in many areas of the PEP - Arts, attainment, targets and health and emotional well-being progress. Jo has also visited Primary and Secondary Schools who are further ahead on the RADY journey, to gain ideas to share with our schools and how this may also interlink with ePEP, our PEP meetings and our role as a Virtual School.

Our RADY VS Champion has met with key Leaders from a large Multi-Academy Trust, spanning across 4 Local Authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

The RADY VS Champion and other Stoke-on-Trent VS Practitioners have attended the #RadioRADY sessions as a part of their professional development and information sharing across a range of education settings on a national level. Jo also played an active role, attending #RadioRADY 19th March 2024 and sharing the Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School's journey so far, with some positive feedback received from Challenging Education*, "Your talk was a timely reminder of how the work of the VS contributes to equity for our most vulnerable pupils."

In June 2024, termly RADY Systems Leader Network meetings began. This was an opportunity for all RADY Champions and Leaders across the country to come together as a collaborative and supportive network, to share progress, successes, learning and next steps. Our RADY VS Champion also attends these, along with our VS Head or VS Co-ordinator to represent Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School and to review and reflect on our practice as a Virtual School in the RADY journey.

BILD- PBS Training

In September 2022, the Virtual School team were trained in PBS- Positive Behaviour Support by BILD, one of the leading training providers in this area. It has been identified within the VS that one of the key areas in which our children need additional support within settings- is their behaviour and crucially the support that schools need to manage complex behaviour and needs. In September 2023 those staff who started since the last training occurred had the chance to complete this training, they were also joined by members of other teams in the Education Directorate for their own development.

From receiving the training, our team now understands and agrees with the ethos that "All behaviour happens for a reason... challenging behaviour is no different". This training has enabled them to understand the forms and functions of behaviour, why challenging behaviour occurs as well as strategies and ideas on how to help young people to regulate. The training has also given staff a toolkit to use when working with schools/education settings who may find the behaviours of our young people difficult to understand and manage- and we now have the skill set to help train staff in PBS as well as how to write a Positive Behaviour Support Plan. Therefore, there is a consistent, effective plan of support that can be evolved to best meet the needs of the child.

This academic year, the Virtual School has supported with the writing of over 30 PBS plans with schools/education settings, to help those children who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion. Also, eleven schools/education settings across the city have had staff trained in the PBS approach, and how to write an effective PBS plan.

PBS Awareness training- North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare (NHS Trust)

The Virtual School has also supported the Health initiative launch across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire in the planning and training resources for a 3 phase PBS Awareness training project. This ended in March 2024.

Phase 1 is for Parents and Carers of children with additional needs

Phase 2 is for Social Care Professionals

Phase 3 is for Special Schools/Education settings

Dolly Parton Reading Initiative

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library book scheme was launched in June 2022. All children under the age of 5 years old cared for by Stoke-on-Trent LA receive a book delivered monthly to their home address. All feedback received so far has been positive with children excited to receive their parcel and share stories with others. Along with the books, Activity Idea Sheets are shared with settings and carers to ensure a collective approach to engaging children in reading and literacy. Children have reported seeing the same books within their home and education settings which has increased their enthusiasm to explore the story. During the academic year 2023-2024 an average of 223 children each month have received a book with a total of 2686 books being published to order and delivered to our children

Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed (AATI) pilot project with the Education Psychology Service (EPS)- Now the RAiE Project- Relational Approaches in Education.

In Year 2 of the Attachment Aware Trauma Informed Project it was identified that in line with national trends there needed to be a greater focus on adopting relational approaches in schools as the key technique to support young people who suffer with attachment and trauma difficulties. In September 2023 the RAiE Project (Relational Approaches in Education) was launched as a rebrand of the previous years AATI pilot. The RAiE Project would also include greater training not only on Attachment Aware, Trauma Informed practice but also on how to include Relational Practice in education settings.

Aims and Objectives

4. To implement and embed Relational Approaches in Stoke-on-Trent Schools. To improve pupil and staff wellbeing, promote inclusion and improve educational outcomes
 - 4.1. Develop Staff Knowledge of attachment and trauma and relational approaches through intensive CPD
 - 4.2. Improve Pupil and staff wellbeing in schools
 - 4.3. Improve educational outcomes for children and young people: reduce permanent exclusions and improve attendance in Stoke-on-Trent schools.

Impact

5. What will be measured to assess the impact of the project?

5.1. ARC Matrix school ratings.

By the end of Year 2, seven of our schools have achieved their Bronze ARC accreditation and 5 of those seven schools have also achieved their Silver ARC accreditation.

5.2. Attendance rates.

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
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AATI schools	94.4%	91.4%	92.0%	91.8%
RAiE schools	95.2%	95.2%	92.0%	92.0%
Stoke-on-Trent schools' average	94.6%	91.8%	91.9%	91.5%
National average	95.4%	92.4%	92.6%	92.8%

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

All groups show a significant decline in attendance during 21/22, possibly due to the after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. AATI school data shows an increase from the baseline year 21/22. There is too limited data to infer trends for RAiE schools following their start on the project. AATI and RAiE schools show better attendance rates than Stoke-on-Trent schools' average but lower than the national average.

Persistent Absence

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
AATI schools	16.7%	31.4%	26.1%	26.5%
RAiE schools	13.8%	26.6%	26.2%	22.5%
Stoke-on-Trent schools' average	15.6%	26.2%	24.5%	26.5%
National average	12.1%	22.5%	21.2%	20.7%

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

AATI and RAiE schools show fluctuations in their data. AATI schools peaked at 31.4% in 2021/22 and then slightly decreased following Covid-19. RAiE schools also peaked in 2021/22 at 26.6% but showed a more significant decrease to 22.5% in 2023/24 when they commenced the RAiE project. Stoke-on-Trent schools' average closely follows the trends of AATI schools, peaking at 26.2% in 2021/22 and returning to 26.5% in 2023/24. This data indicates that AATI and RAiE schools are performing better than the local average but they still have room for improvement compared to the national average.

5.3. Suspension and Exclusion rates.

	20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances
AATI schools	0	42	1	82	0	98	1	111
RAiE schools	0	43	1	115	2	233	1	196

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

The number of FTE instances shows a consistent increase each year for AATI schools, with permanent exclusions remaining consistent. The number of permanent exclusions fluctuates slightly in RAiE schools, with no exclusions

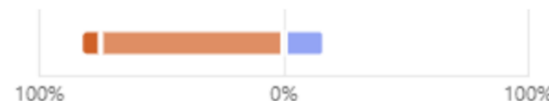
in 2020/21 and 2022/23, and one exclusion in 2021/22 and 2023/24. The number of FTE for RAiE schools has decreased since their start with the project. We did not have the Stoke-on-Trent schools and national average to compare these results against.

5.4. Staff wellbeing questionnaires.

The key link staff from each school involved in the AATI and RAiE projects were asked to complete a questionnaire to explore their views about the AATI/RAiE project’s impact. The following are their responses:

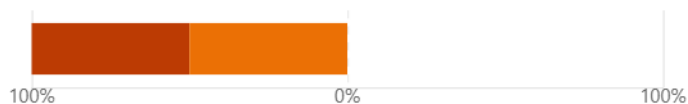
1. Being part of the AATI/RAiE project has, or is likely to, improve staff well-being.

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree



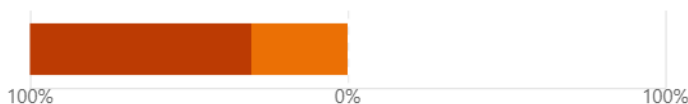
2. Being part of the AATI/RAiE project has, or is likely to, improve pupil well-being.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



3. Being part of the AATI/RAiE project has, or is likely to, improve staff knowledge of attachment, trauma and relational approaches.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



4. What impact have you seen, or expect to see, on outcomes such as attainment, exclusions, attendance etc.?

“Discussions with children are more productive.”

“The biggest impact has been on staff approaches to pupils with additional needs/difficult backgrounds. As a result, pupils feel connected to staff/school and feel supported. Exclusion data has always been low, however we have worked with some challenges and managed to support the children without exclusion.”

“Pupils are more able to articulate their feelings and talk about what to do in the event of a situation. Staff are more aware and understanding in their approaches.”

“Attendance is noticeably higher. Unfortunately, suspensions are higher but these have been for pupils that have demonstrated difficulties this year. Only 1 pupil has received multiple suspensions and as a result of our training, we have adapted our reintegration procedures and this pupil is now doing brilliantly.”

“We expect attendance to increase as well as attainment.”

"We need to see an improvement in staff understanding and therefore a shift in their responses to situations/ interactions with students. A further impact if this works is that the exclusion rate will decrease and attendance will improve."

"The learning has enhanced the schools offer to prevent exclusion."

"Hoping to see no exclusions in the future and better staff knowledge."

"Better staff knowledge."

"Expect to see improved attendance and fewer exclusions."

"Reduced suspensions, PEX's and after school corrections."

"Improved engagement in lessons, improved attendance across school, no exclusions in the last academic year nor this academic year so far, suspensions this academic year are not as a result of behaviours displayed due to linked to attachment or trauma."

5. What impact have you seen, or expect to see, on outcomes such as attainment, exclusions, attendance etc.?

"Discussions with children are more productive."

"The biggest impact has been on staff approaches to pupils with additional needs/difficult backgrounds. As a result, pupils feel connected to staff/school and feel supported. Exclusion data has always been low, however we have worked with some challenges and managed to support the children without exclusion."

"Pupils are more able to articulate their feelings and talk about what to do in the event of a situation. Staff are more aware and understanding in their approaches."

"Attendance is noticeably higher. Unfortunately, suspensions are higher but these have been for pupils that have demonstrated difficulties this year. Only 1 pupil has received multiple suspensions and as a result of our training, we have adapted our reintegration procedures and this pupil is now doing brilliantly."

"We expect attendance to increase as well as attainment."

"We need to see an improvement in staff understanding and therefore a shift in their responses to situations/ interactions with students. A further impact if this works is that the exclusion rate will decrease and attendance will improve."

"The learning has enhanced the schools offer to prevent exclusion."

"Hoping to see no exclusions in the future and better staff knowledge."

"Better staff knowledge."

"Expect to see improved attendance and fewer exclusions."

"Reduced suspensions, PEX's and after school corrections."

"Improved engagement in lessons, improved attendance across school, no exclusions in the last academic year nor this academic year so far, suspensions this academic year are not as a result of behaviours displayed due to linked to attachment or trauma."

6. Any other comments/reflections?

"This is something that is valuable and we will continue to build on this."

"Staff involved in the project have always been so supportive and on hand to address any queries we have. Personally, I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the project and it has opened up so many more opportunities to me and my team. For example, visiting other settings, including out of area. Thank you to all involved."

"I think this project is vital at this moment in time. I feel that we have everyone agreeing that we need a consistent approach to dealing with pupils with attachment and trauma needs, however they sometimes find it difficult to respond to challenges in line with training given. This is improving."

"I know I am being hopeful, I would like to see something to help schools and staff with children who are beyond our help. I know we cannot fix every child that comes through but where do we go when all has failed?"

"Finding our way around the ARC development plan, adding more actions etc is proving to be difficult."

“So far, I feel the RAiE project is really well organised and managed. We feel well-supported in school, every step of the way. Thank you.”

“Great to have additional opportunities to visit other schools/ access resources/training, which is then disseminated to staff. Benefit from check ins so progress and plans can be discussed with a key person.”

“Staff enjoyed the first training session and participated fully in the session.”

Collaborative Working Case Study Example

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

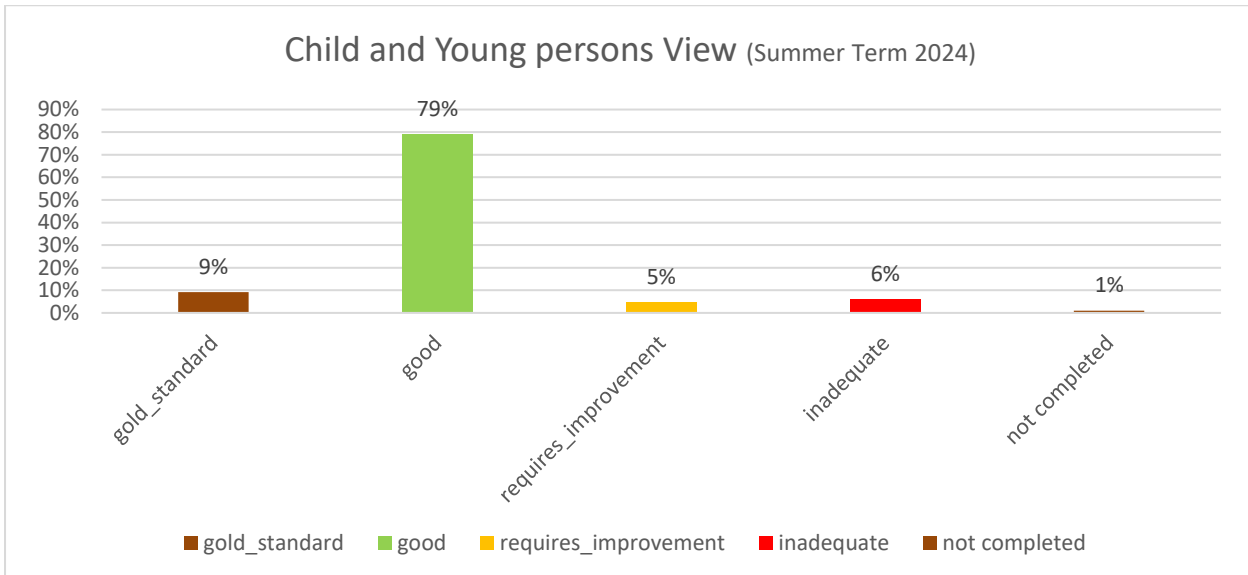
Service Area: Virtual School	Team:	Age of child:	15yrs
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handover from previous VSP made me aware of her concerns Challenging Education sent twice, not signed up to it PERMA and PBS sent and not utilised Number of suspensions from school; walking out of class, punctuality to lessons, failing to complete sanctions, running around the school, running into lessons and disrupting them, school saying he was showing inappropriate images to others, persistent disruption, refused to follow instructions, defiance, truanting and verbally abusive to staff. 		<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspensions Carer feeling school not supporting her or the pupil Carer feeling school not listening to her or the pupil 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More regular meetings held with all people involved in the pupil's care Carer feels listened to Pupil has had the opportunity to tell the school what works for him with VSP present. Plan for education in yr11 put into place which included a bespoke timetable. City College for College Links, Cadets, DT to teach English and named person to teach Maths, Mrs C to be T's safe adult. Pupil now attending Alternative Provision. DT has delivered Nurture training to the whole school to be used with all children especially T. DT has shared strategies to use when with T what works and what doesn't for him. DT and VSP regular face to face meetings to discuss T's progress and to use Challenging Education as a CPD tool for whole school staff. 		<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Meetings with carer, social worker and supervising social worker Education meeting with DT, replacement DT, pupil and carer Education meetings with DT and VSP Education meetings with DT, SSW, SW and VSP Challenging Education resource sent to school twice PERMA sent twice. PERMA completed by VSP at a meeting at school Liaised with DT and Inclusion Manager Inclusion Manager sent EHCP request- agreed to assess for EHCP during autumn term Discussed AP provision- part funded by Virtual School Discussed College Links Discussed Managed Move and Dual Registration Attended PEPs Meetings with VS manager, VSP and Inclusion Manager Now attending AP until end of the summer term- Created and NTAS 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging Education shared, school using this resource. Regular meetings between VS manager and school Inclusion Manager with DT to DT training days at Port Vale FC. Training providers shared by VSP with DT. Face to Face meetings with DT, Carer, SW and VSP 			<p>Date 21/12/2023</p>

stoke.gov.uk

City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Childs Voice

PEPs



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

During the Summer Term of 2023, the PEP was revised and the Young Persons Section was moved to the front of their PEP.

The rate for the summer 2023 was 88% (it had been 90% for the Autumn and Spring Terms). Since the changes, the % Good or above have remained in the 88-92% range but we have seen an increase during this year in the numbers that are rated gold standard. Gold Standard was added to the PEP quality assurance document as an example of best practice as agreed by the Virtual School team and affirmed by a couple of Virtual School Heads from other local authorities.

The Children and Young Persons (CYP) Views section now varies depending on the school year of the child, as well as the time of the year. Autumn Term PEPs focus on how they have transitioned into that new year and what their aspirations are for the year, whereas the Summer PEPs questions are more reflective on the year that has past and what the plans are going forward for the next academic year.

This will continue to be a key area of focus going into the next academic year, with the revamp of the questions for our children and young people we will review to see how they have been received and if the information we are receiving is having an impact on the support we are offering and the activities that we make available for our children and young people to engage with.

Case Study showing the impact of responding to CYP Views

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

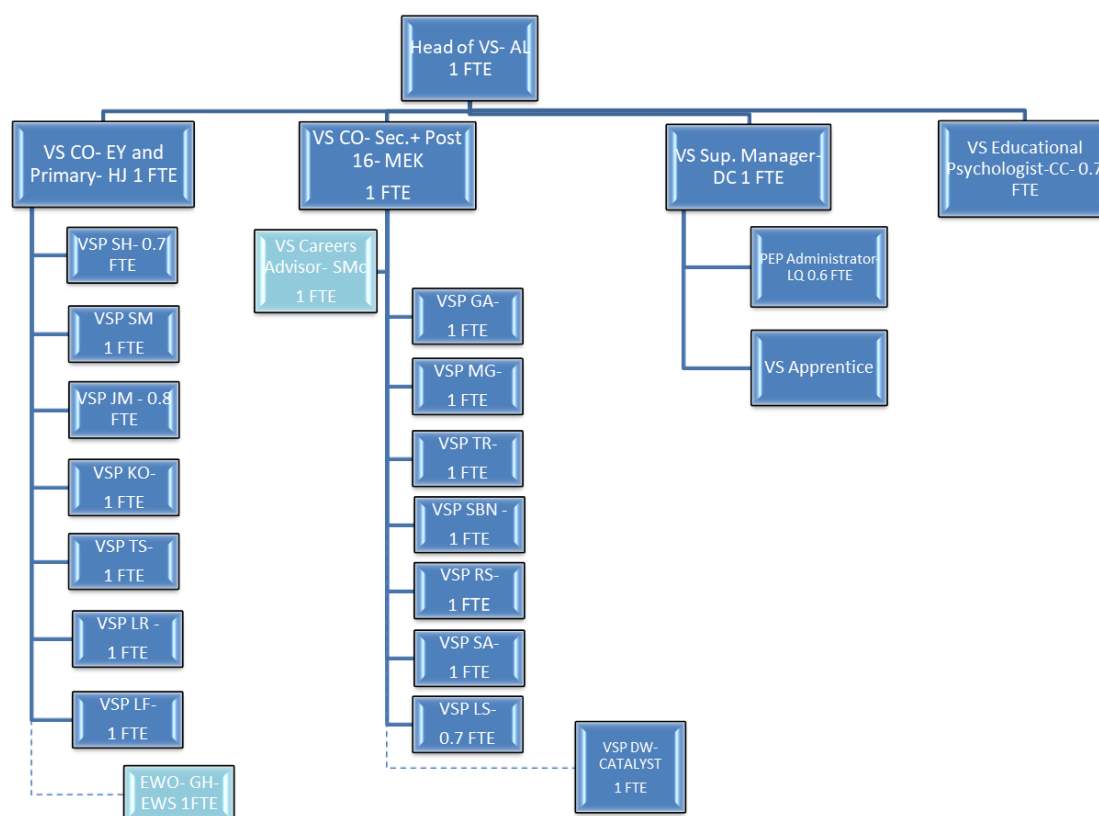
Service Area: Virtual School	Team: Secondary	Age of child:	16 yrs
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S is on roll at a Stoke-on-Trent Secondary Mainstream school. She refuses to attend this school and as such, they have provided her with 3 days provision at a local AP S's attendance at the provision has been sporadic, but when she attends, she works well and enjoys herself. S became pregnant during last academic year and gave birth in late July 2023. She had maternity leave for the first party of the Autumn Term 2023 and her return to education was planned in November 2023 after the half term holiday. Since her return from maternity leave, her attendance has declined as she doesn't want to come to school as she needs to be with her son. She states that she will start her education again in September 2024 when at college 	<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S is refusing to attend her mainstream setting on the two days that she would be there. Her attendance at the AP has also reduced. Consideration of S's needs as a mother also need to be taken into consideration alongside her educational needs – all professionals involved do not wish for her child to be taken into care. 		
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S has a customised educational offer that takes into account her situation and has allowed her to feel that her views have been listened to and taken into consideration. It is allowing her to get targeted support in in core subjects and the subject that she wishes to continue with in her post -16 education. It has helped to reduce her risk of being NEET both now and in year 12 	<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings are held outside the PEPs with school and social care S and mum are also invited but often do not attend. EWO referral made by the VS Advice given by VSP to SW and SB regarding government grant to young mother's that will provide funds to secure childcare whilst in education. However, S does not want to take this off up as she doesn't want anyone else looking after her child. AP arrangements have been changed to accommodate S as a mother with AP provision reduced to 1 day and 2 days at home 1:1 tutoring being used. Arrangements have been made with school to allow S to undertake her learning in the inclusion centre at school on the 2 days that she needs to attend there. 		
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listened to and acted upon the pupil voice she has expressed that she feels listened to. Multi agency approach with regular contact with all professionals involved in SN care 	<p>Date 31/01/2024</p>		



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Virtual School Staffing

VS Structure school year as of May 2024



Virtual School Governance

Purpose

To provide governance for the educational arrangements for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

The Board will report to the Director of Children and Family Services, the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children’s Improvement Board.

The work of the Board will link closely to the overarching Cared for Children and Corporate Parenting strategies and the future delivery model of the Virtual School, commissioned provision, PEP improvement and developing a Care Leaver’s guidance and employability plan are key actions within the CAFS Improvement Plan.

The governing board will act as a forum for discussions and decisions that will support the Local Authority to;

- fulfil its statutory duties as a Corporate Parent to achieve the highest educational outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.
- promote the educational achievement of previously cared for children through the provision of advice and information to relevant parties.

Role and function

- 1) To support the educational outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers by identifying and championing priorities and key actions of the Virtual School.
- 2) To ensure all key partners play their part so that combined resources and knowledge can be utilised to have a positive effect upon educational outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.
- 3) To develop strategic policies and practices that will enhance educational outcomes, including the development of links with other Local Authority policies e.g. education, admissions, SEND, care planning, etc.
- 4) To act as a critical, responsive analyst to enable monitoring, supporting, and challenging of educational targets and outcomes so that the achievement gap with other groups of children is closed.
- 5) To scrutinize educational arrangements in all schools and settings, to ensure continuous improvement so that our Cared for Children and Care Leavers achieve their capability.
- 6) To receive, consult, and act upon feedback from the Foster Carer's Association and other relevant carer groups.
- 7) To receive, consult, and act upon feedback from our Cared for Children and Care Leaver forums.
- 8) To act as the key Local Authority response source to national policy and research drivers that relate to the education of our Cared for Children, Care Leavers, and Previously Cared for Children.
- 9) To measure and analyse Virtual School data against performance indicators for both internal and external reporting requirements.
- 10) To review and ratify the financial position of the Virtual School.

Key Actions

As well as providing general support and challenge to the Virtual School, key tasks will be to:

- Receive and consider a range of data and key information about the performance of our Cared for Children including a new Virtual School dashboard and PEP quality assurance
- Monitor the implementation of the Virtual School Development plan
- Review staffing and budget arrangements, including the Pupil Premium Plus policy, and make recommendations about changes to the commissioning of services
- Monitor the education performance of post-16 Cared for Children and Care Leavers ensuring that preparation for adult pathways and employment is a focus of PEPs
- Identify best practices nationally in supporting the education of Cared for Children
- Establish a working group to consider the CAFS Improvement Plan actions relating Cared for Children and Sufficiency and consider any recommendations

Expectations of Governing Board Members

To actively identify opportunities to consult and engage with the groups they are representing, to support the achievement of excellent educational outcomes for Cared for Children and those Previously Cared for Children.

To work within their organisation to identify opportunities to promote the education of Cared for Children and those Previously Cared for Children and achieve the governing board priorities.

Frequency

- The Governing Board will meet twice termly as of September 2022. (Once in subgroups regarding the VSDP, the second a full GB meeting)
- These terms of reference shall be reviewed annually.

Chair and Support Arrangements

- Claire Gaygan will chair the Board.
- Support and clerking will be provided by the Local Authority Governor Services Team.

Virtual School Governing Board Working Group

Given the range of development activities, it would support the Governing Board to establish a working group of key officers and partners to bring together a wider range of experience, skills, and knowledge. The group will focus on the key actions within the CAFS Improvement Plan relating to Cared for Children and Sufficiency. This will ensure that there is a thorough consideration of the key issues on behalf of the Governing Board.

In considering each key action within the plan, the group will:

- identify the best practice from other Virtual Schools to support improvements;
- liaise with schools and colleges to better understand the needs of Cared for Children particularly those with special educational needs or at risk of exclusion or underperformance.
- consider the joint arrangements with social care and health.
- look for opportunities for wider curriculum and learning opportunities.

Membership to Include

Virtual School Headteacher

Head of Service for Cared for Children

Director for Education

Careers Representative

HR & Finance Representatives

Commissioning Representative

SENMAS Representative

Health Representative

Housing Representative

CYP Representative

Children’s Social Care Representative

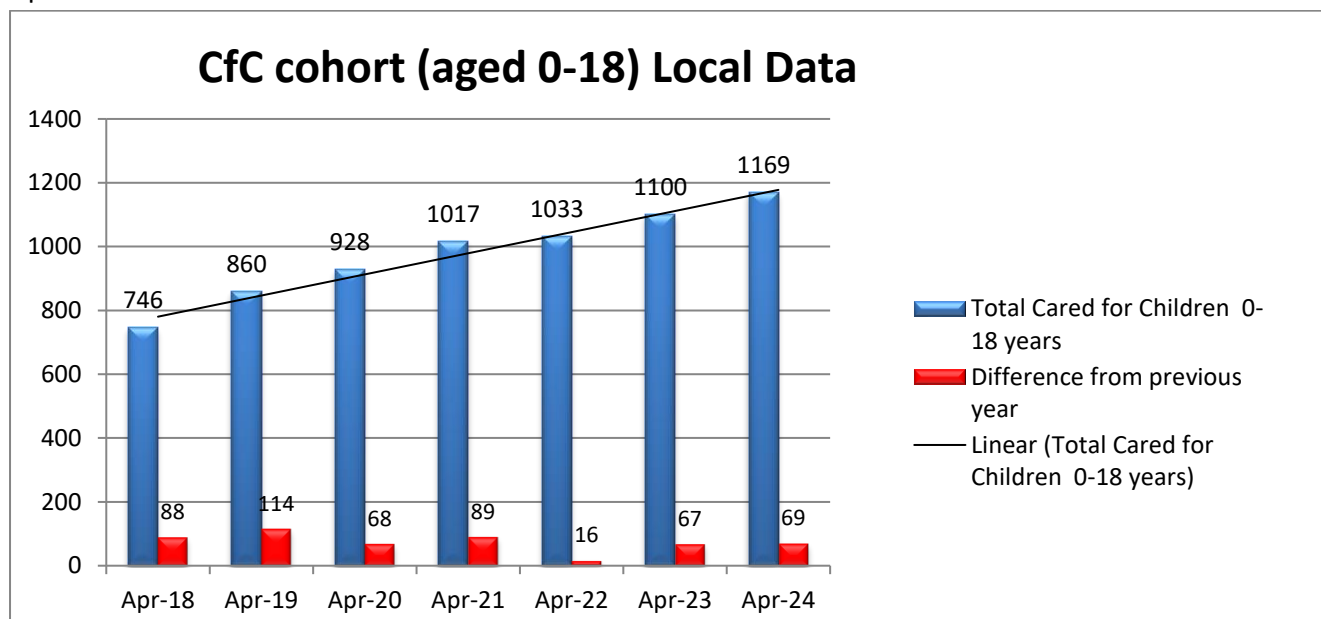
Key tasks will be:

- Improve the quality of PEPs for all Cared for Children and Care Leavers by:
 - developing and implementing a new PEP Quality Assurance Policy which is embedded into the full CAFS audit process.
 - developing a new school PEP guide and training programme.
 - reviewing the Child’s Views Section with the Cared for Children Council.
 - Reviewing the careers/adult pathways section within the PEP document and consider developing a new post 16 PEP document.

- Support the production of an overarching Cared for Children Strategy, and Corporate Parenting Strategy, setting the strategic direction for Cared for Children.
- Review and implement an updated performance process relating to Care Leavers including new guidance for careers and employability
- Review and develop the Virtual School dashboard and ensure that termly progress scores and other key data is collected from schools, PEPs and Looked After Call.
- Ensure that the framework for writing EHC plans and special educational needs provision reflects the needs of Cared for Children.

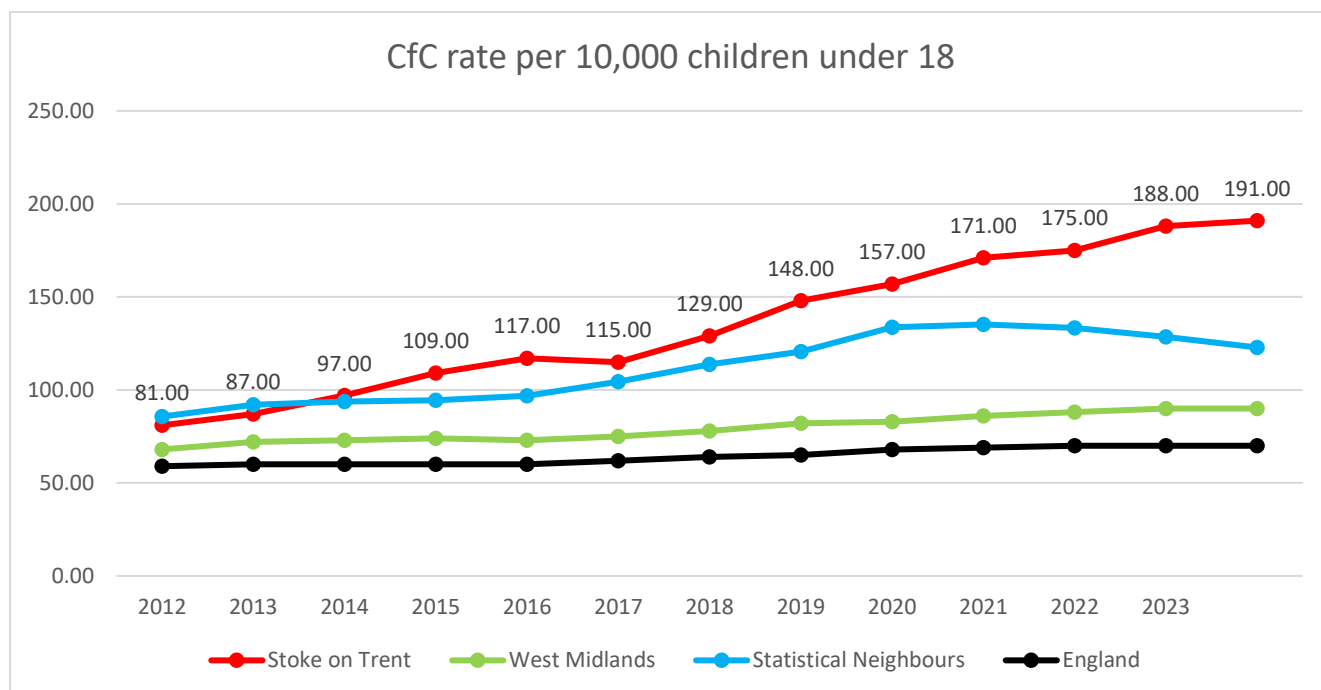
Cared for Children Population Characteristics

The number of Cared for Children in Stoke-on-Trent has risen again this year from 1100 April 2023 to 1169 April 2024 a rise of 6.3%



Source: Internal data MBR

The total number of Cared for Children of Stoke-on-Trent has demonstrated a steady increase since 2010. The chart below shows the 'children looked after' rate per 10,000 compared to West Midlands, Statistical Neighbours, and England. It shows that the rate of increase in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 was significantly larger than the comparators. The current rate per 10,000 for Stoke-on-Trent for 2024 is 191 and is the highest nationally and Blackpool is second highest at 181 per 10,000.



Source: Children looked after in England including adoptions, reporting year 2023 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

During 2024 Stoke-on-Trent reported the highest rate per 10,000 in its comparative group.

Statistical Neighbours rates of per 10,000 of Cared for Children.

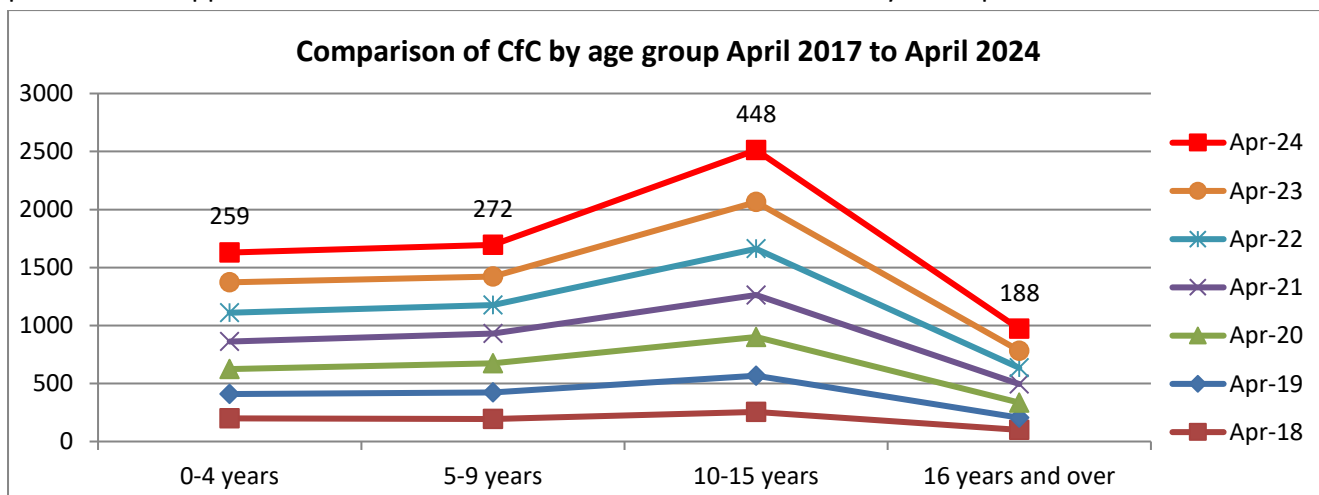
	2024	Rank 2024
Stoke-on-Trent	191	1
Blackpool	181	2
Middlesborough	147	3
North East Lincolnshire	141	4
Tameside	124	5
Kingston-upon- Hull	122	6
Rochdale	107	7
Walsall	95	8
Rotherham	86	9
Doncaster	79	10
Barnsley	79	10

Source: Children looked after in England including adoptions, reporting year 2024 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

The continuous increase in this Cared for Children population, has led to a review of the Virtual School’s resources to effectively meet the needs of the increasing cohort and the associated demand.

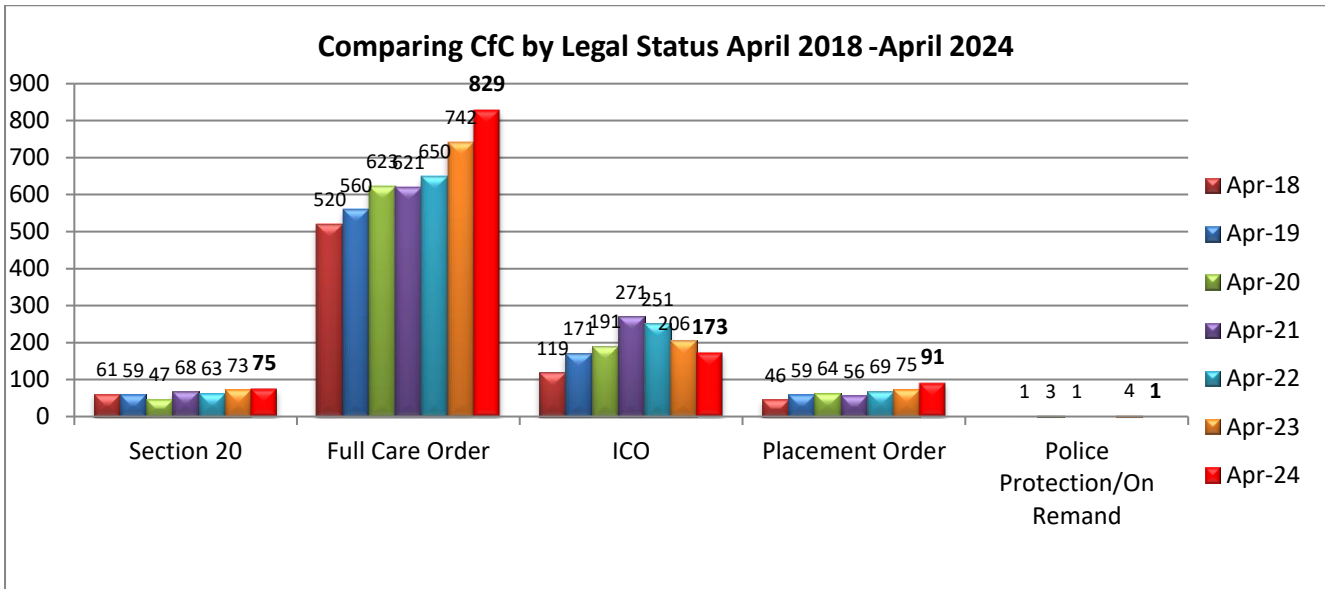
Cohort by Age

The chart below shows that the age group of children and young people 10-15 years old continues to be the largest growing cohort. The number of Cared for Children in this age group has increased by 76% since 2018. Given that this age group has lived for longer periods of time with parents who are unable to meet their needs, followed by a high rate of placement instability and the pressure of attainment at GCSE level, there are significant demands on these young people and the Virtual School and educational provision to support children to achieve the educational outcomes they are capable of.



Source: Internal data MBR

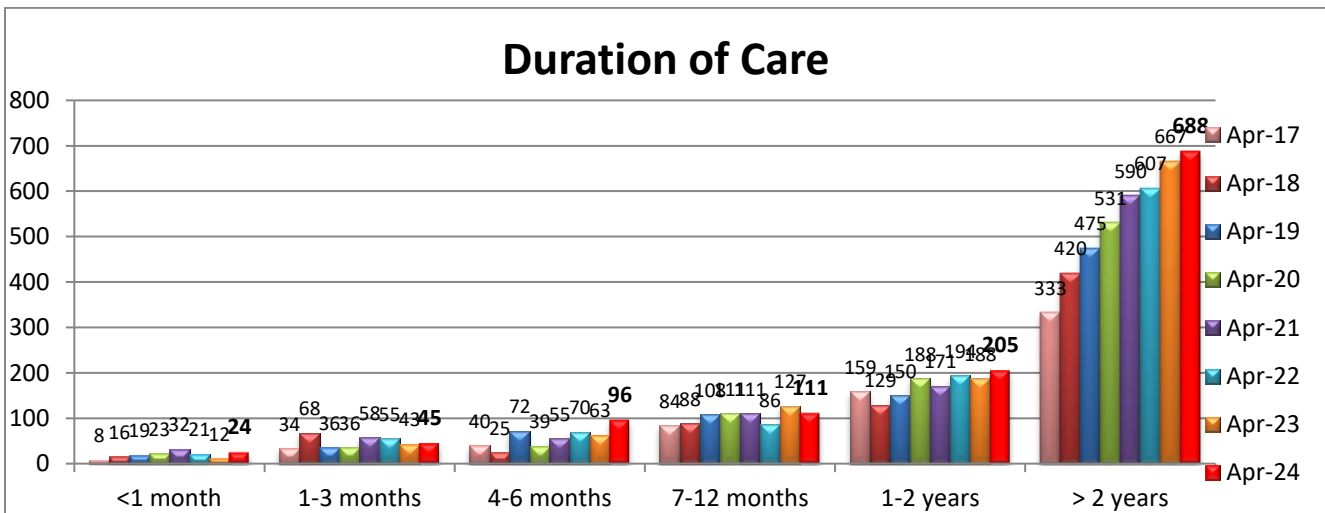
Cohort by Legal Status



Source: Internal data MBR

The chart above shows that a greater number of children are now subject to either a Full or Interim Care Order. The number of Interim Care Orders has decreased again in 2023 following its spike to 271 in 2021. The impact of care proceedings can add further pressure on young people, and disrupt their learning with impending court dates and uncertain futures, therefore, this is a positive decline for our Cared for Children.

Cohort by Duration of time in Care



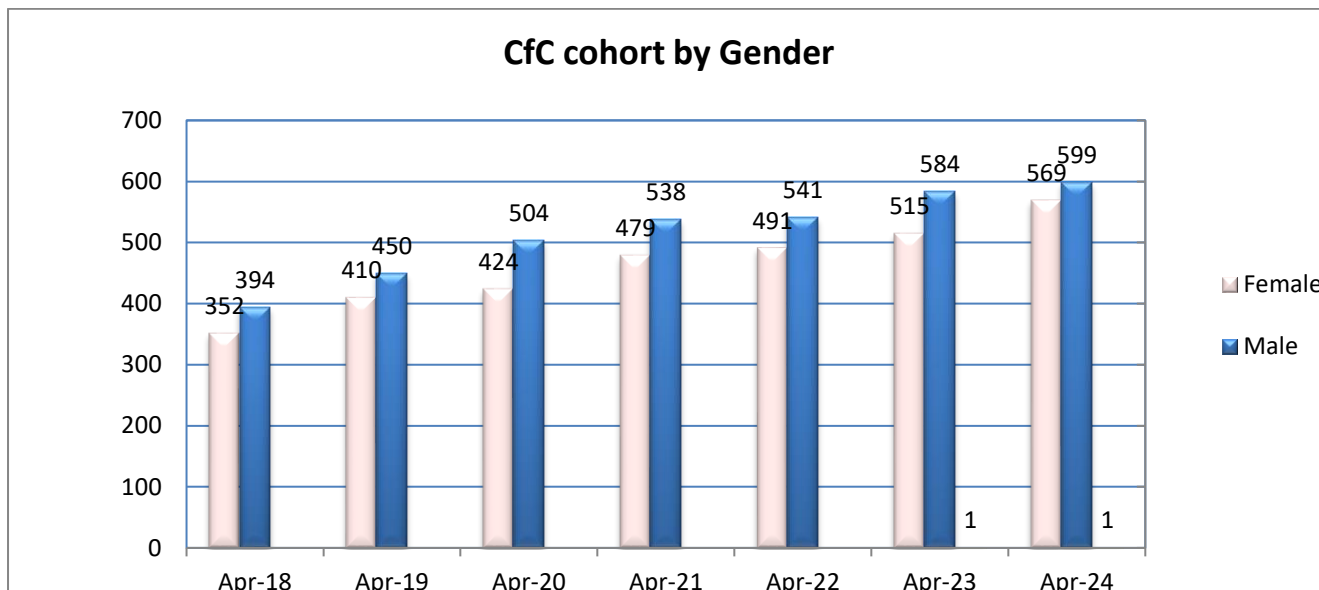
Source: Internal data MBR

The above chart shows that most of the Cared for Children cohort as at April 2024 (59%) have been in care for 2 years or more compared to April 2017 when 50% had been in care for 2 years or more. Whilst the rate of admissions has increased in recent years the rate of discharges from care has reduced with the net impact being an increase in numbers. This means that the Virtual School is involved with each young person for a prolonged period.

This increase in numbers has shown since 2017 that it has been complex for the Virtual School, especially in its previous structure to support the Cared for Children’s educational needs. This was a key factor in

expanding the Virtual School structure in January 2022, to a case working model and so far, this is having a positive impact on knowing our children well and supporting them to achieve the best outcomes possible.

Cohort by Gender



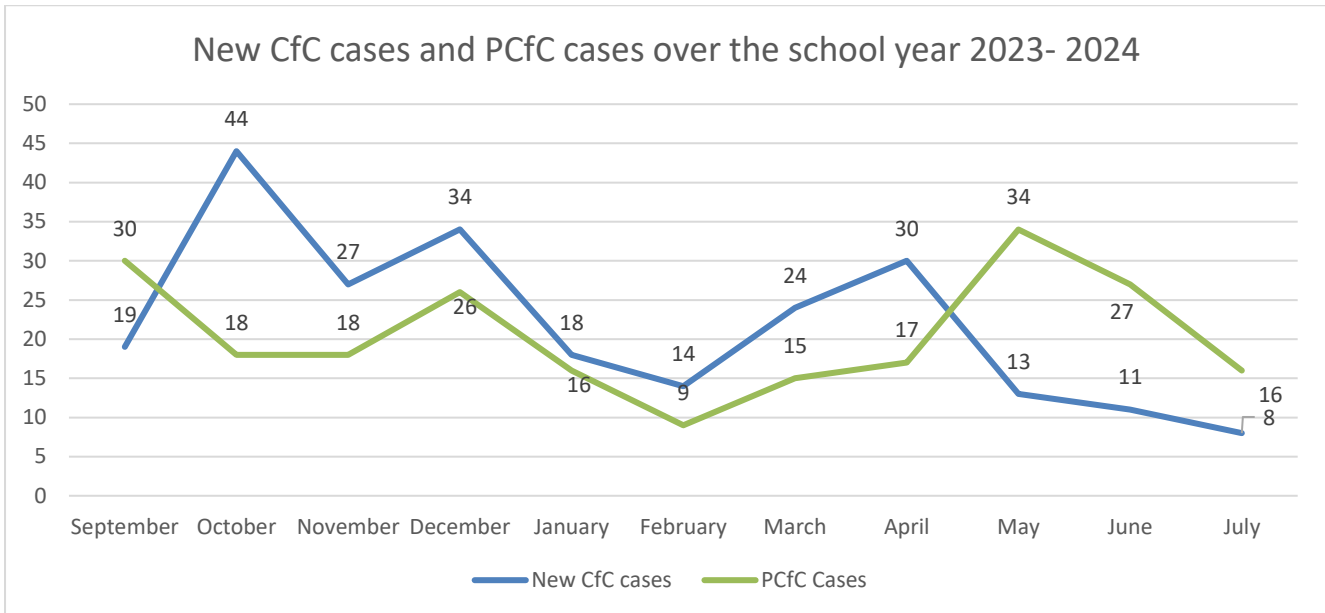
Source: Internal data MBR

The chart above shows that there are slightly more males than females currently in care and this has been the pattern for the last seven years. There is one Indeterminate pupil.

Virtual School Population Characteristics

The population of the Virtual School has seen its population increase slowly compared to other years with a net increase of 16 over the 2023/2024 school year. However, as the chart below shows there has been an average of 22 new Cared for Children each month requiring PEPs to be arranged and, in some cases, new school or education settings places need to be found. The largest increase was in October with 44 additional pupils.

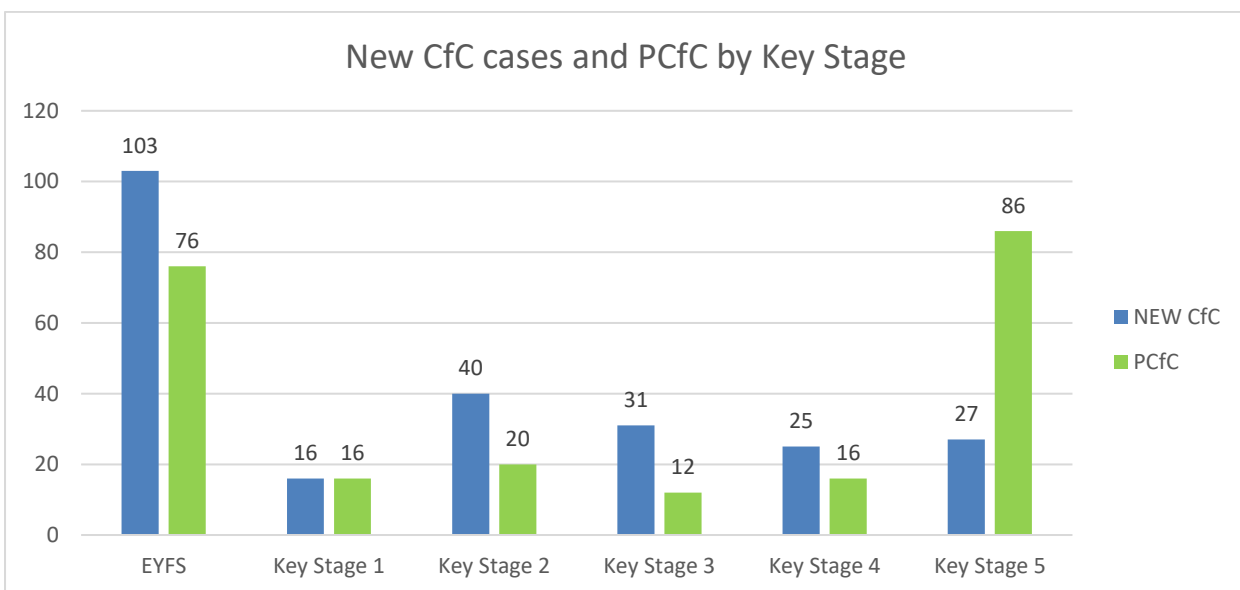
The Virtual School works hard to maintain the education placements of Cared for Children and those new to care. The stability that education provides for all children is vital, as they build strong relationships with peers and staff, which enables them to feel safe and secure and then able to focus on their learning. From the school's perspective, if they know a child well- it is easier for them to safeguard effectively, and see signs of change in their character which they can act upon promptly. In addition, they follow curriculums that are sequenced specifically to that school or education setting. Therefore, they will cover all the relevant learning according to the syllabus the school/education settings follow. Finally, The Virtual School is informed of any potential Care placement changes, and we share our perspective which can influence if a placement change takes place. The Virtual School will always question and oppose any children in examination years e.g. year 6, 10, 11, 12 or 13 from moving school or college- as we appreciate that this will have a significant impact on their results, or ability to finish key qualifications.



Source: Internal data MBR

There has been an increase in the number becoming PCfC (Previously Cared for Children) from 169 last year to 226 this year. May saw the largest PCfC number at 34 these pupils had been in care for most of the school year by then.

The chart below shows the majority of New Cared for Children are in the EYFS (N1-Reception group) and the majority of the PCfC are in Key Stage 5 as Care Leavers turning 18 or in the EYFS group.



Source: Internal data MBR

Many of our previously cared for children and young people were neglected as children and or suffered trauma in their birth families and became cared for children before their final move to join care or adoptive families. Parents/carers emphasise the need to make school/early years provisions fully aware that their children continue to have the same needs as they had as a cared for child. Indeed, these issues may have been exacerbated as their adoption or SGO is yet another move in their journey. There is also a

need to make lasting relationships within their family. This can cause anxiety for children who have had difficulties with relationships and attachments in the past.

During 2023 we introduced a PCfC version of the PEP for all care leavers (Education Plan for Previously Cared for Children- EP for PCfC). The mindset behind this is to maintain a focus on supporting these children in their education and to make sure all professionals around that child continue to monitor their progress and give additional assistance for them to achieve their potential. The PCfC PEP also identifies what professionals will lead each action so there is responsibility and ownership identified and taken and funding from the Pupil Plus budget is allocated against targets in the Autumn Term £1000, Spring term £500 and Summer Term £1500.

During 2023-2024, 79 pupils became PCfC NCY years R to 11.

The table below shows the end of care reason and the NCY year that the pupil left care.

End of Care Reason	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Grand Total
E11 - Adopted - application unopposed	6		1	1	1								9
E12 - Adopted, consent dispensed with	1		1										2
E2 - Died											1		1
E41 - Residence order/Child Arrangement Order		1	1		1	2	2		1				8
E45 Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	3	1	3	1	4	1				2	1	1	17
E46 Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)				1						2			3
E47 Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)		1								1	1		3
E4A - Planned return home to live with parents (no order)	4	4	3	1	3	1		1	3	3	2	4	29
E4B - Unplanned return home to live with parents (no order)												1	1
E8 - CfC ceased for any other reason						1					1	4	6
Grand Total	14	7	9	4	9	5	2	1	4	8	6	10	79

Exit PEP	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Grand Total
Exit PEP recorded	12	5	6	4	6	3	1		2	2	2	6	49
Total PCfC	14	7	9	4	9	5	2	1	4	8	6	10	79
% with an exit PEP	86%	71%	67%	100%	67%	60%	50%	0%	50%	25%	33%	60%	62%

The above chart shows that 62% (49) of PCfC had an exit PEP during the year and for the remaining pupils, 32% (25) had a PEP during the year but the timing of their leaving care meant that discussions were not held regarding closure and further PEP has been arranged. And the remaining 6% (5) had not had a PEP previously but a PEP has been opened on the system awaiting action.

For 45% of the PCfC PEP's parents/foster carers attended the PCfC meeting.

During 2023/2024 our focus has been on developing working relationships with other services in the local authority (namely the Post Adoption Support Service), embedding our strategic offer. The closure PEP for when our children leave care and the Education Plan for PCfC (EP for PCfC) are invaluable resources that support the progress of previously cared for children. Our Virtual School team have worked hard to

establish strong relationships with education settings and parents/carers/guardians to make sure that when children leave care, they have the recognition they need to be successful now and in the future and so they can fulfil their true potential as the effects of their pre-care experiences are life long and need to be continually recognised and supported.

Children who leave care with no official court order in place are identified as out most in need previously cared for children as they are not currently eligible for Pupil Premium Plus as a previously cared for child. Our practitioners ensure that these children’s education settings receive the full amount of Pupil Premium Plus before the end of the financial year so that they can provide them with some support moving forwards.

The 4 local authorities linked by Together 4 Children (Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin) had a pause in networking due to the Head of Together 4 Children role being vacant. Parents and carers who support previously cared for children benefited from the training offer that was established in September 2023 and it is hoped that this will continue from September 2024.

Our plan for next year 2024/2025 is to maintain this strong strategic offer, linking even more so with the Post Adoption Service to cross reference children who we are supporting and to continue to proactively promote the needs of previously cared for children with families and education professionals alike, providing training, advice, guidance and support as requested.

PCfC case study

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School Team: Primary Age of child: 7 yrs	
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S had been adopted following a period of being in care S was struggling to regulate her emotions in school and her behaviour deteriorated resulting in a fixed term exclusion. 	<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S was hurting staff and other children and refusing to complete her work. There was no EHC in place. Support was put in place by the school, but this had little impact resulting in a 2 -day exclusion. The relationship between mum and school had broken down.
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S now has an EHC in place. Mum knows which schools she would like to be consulted. S is accessing school on a reduced timetable and this is going well. The relationship between mum and school has improved. School have improved knowledge of trauma informed practice. 	<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings with Mum, school and SW adoption team. Supported with EHC progress and this was done more quickly due to collaboration with Virtual School. Guided mum through the EHC process. Provided Trauma informed classroom practice resources and advice. Supported the part time timetable process. Supported mum to look for Special School. Supported school with relationship building with mum.
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative working with all professionals to achieve the best possible outcomes for S. School say they will use trauma informed classroom resources for other children who need this support. Mum has S’s younger sibling who may need an EHC, mum feels more confident to support him with this now. 	
<p>Date 5.12.23</p>	



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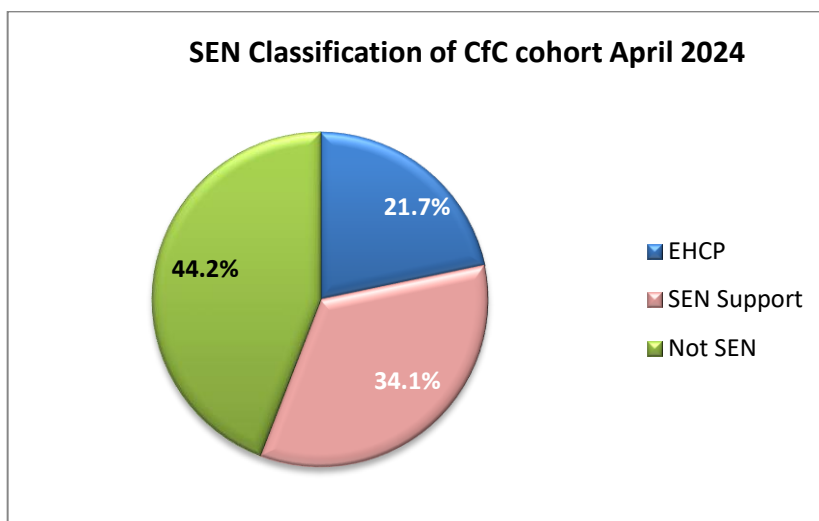
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Where there is clearly a difference between the Virtual School cohort and the wider city school cohort is the percentage of children with (SEN) Special Educational Needs classification. Cared for Children have much higher levels of identified SEND.

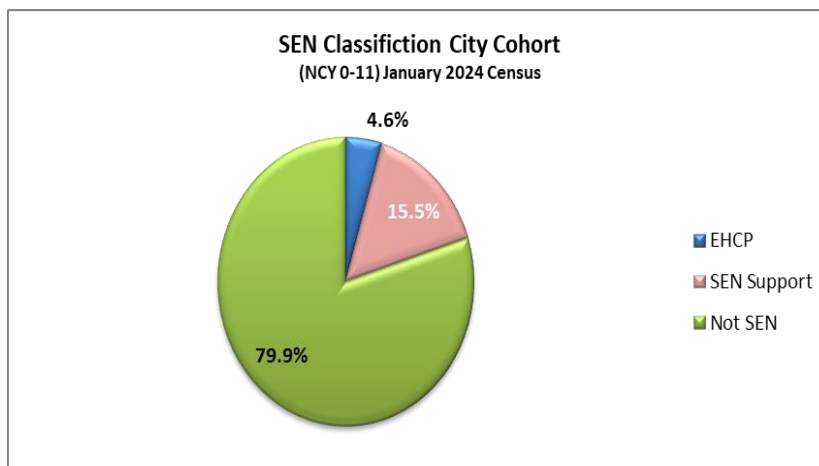
The charts below show the breakdown by Special Educational Needs (SEN) classification from internal data. The percentage of school-aged Cared for Children cohort with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan has increased by 0.5% last year to 21.7%. The Cohort with an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) is 17.1% higher than the City Cohort in January 2024 where 4.6% have an EHC plan.

The percentage of the school-aged Cared for Children cohort with SEN support is 34.1% which is now 18.6% higher than the City Cohort where 15.5% receive SEN support.

The SEN section of this report analyses this cohort in more detail.



Source: Internal data MBR



Source: School Census Data January 2024

This shows that the Cared for Children cohort has significantly higher percentages of identified special educational needs, with 56% requiring some level of SEN support compared to 20% for the wider City school cohort. This adds additional complexity for the Virtual School and SENMAS to secure suitable provision near

where the child is placed, that can effectively meet the needs and provide the extra support required for these children.

In reference to the children who have been heard in our Education Solutions Panel, 15 of the 22 have an EHCP and one is going through the EHCP needs assessment process. In addition to this, 18 of those children are living out of the city. This clearly shows that there is great difficulty when sourcing and placing our Children with EHCPs or additional SEN needs into schools/education settings in the city, and this becomes increasingly difficult when this is occurring out of the city.

Case Study showing collaborative working to support a child to transition into a new setting out of area

Stoke-on-Trent Early Intervention & Children’s Social Care Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School Team: EY and Primary Age of child: 9

What were the concerns?

A and her 5 siblings become Looked After in 2022 due to neglectful parenting. A was separated from 4 of her sisters and moved to live with one brother together in a foster placement in Out of Area OOA LA. During her time at primary school in OOA, A was awarded an EHCP to support her cognition and learning needs.

Where we were?

- Foster carers gave advance notice on placement to end once A broke up from school for summer holidays.
- A was separated from her brother and moved to another LA.
- EHCP SENMAS in new LA made search for appropriate school for A. They named a new school in October with a view to A starting after October half term. As school was a distance from home and foster parent was unable to drive
- Transport funding became an issue due to processes with Stoke-on-Trent transport team and setting up purchase numbers.
- LA directed a school to take A despite them saying they could not meet her needs.
- PEP meeting held 2 weeks after A started new school. School focussed on settling A and making her feel safe.

What difference have we made

- VSP has been able to oversee transfers and chase relevant professionals as needed.
- In this case multiple moves increased timescales and frustrations that were only eradicated once A moved to her current home.

What did we do?

- Repetitive emails to LA SENMAS asking for updates.
- Sharing contact details of transport team / team managers to escalate concerns to.
- Emails prompts to try and set up home tuition while school search took place
- Meetings with social worker to discuss ways to speed up getting A in a school.
- Requested LA to consider an early EHCP review due to concerns raised by school. Agreed 2 months after starting

What have we done to embed good practice more widely

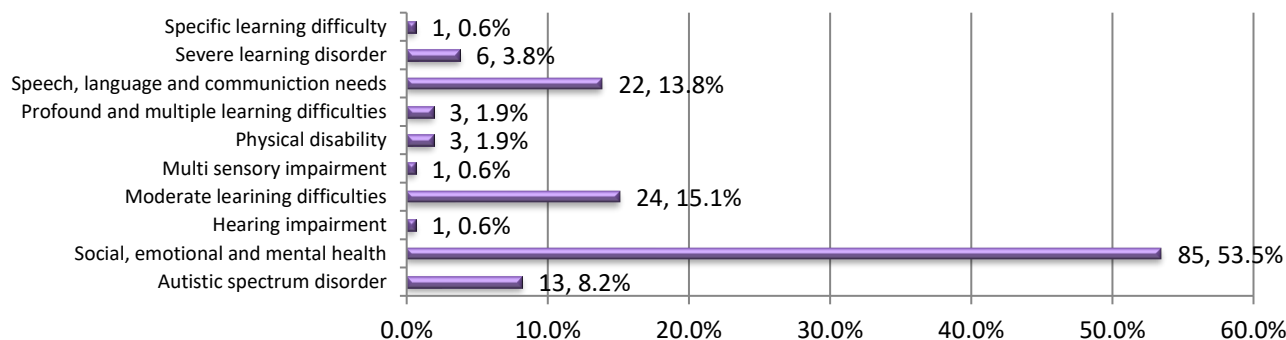
- Collaborative working with educational settings, carers, Social Workers and Out of Area SEND and Transport Teams to reduce drift and delay as child moved between 3 LAs.

Date
14/07/2024

stoke.gov.uk

City of
Stoke-on-Trent

CfC SEN pupils by SEN primary need April 2024



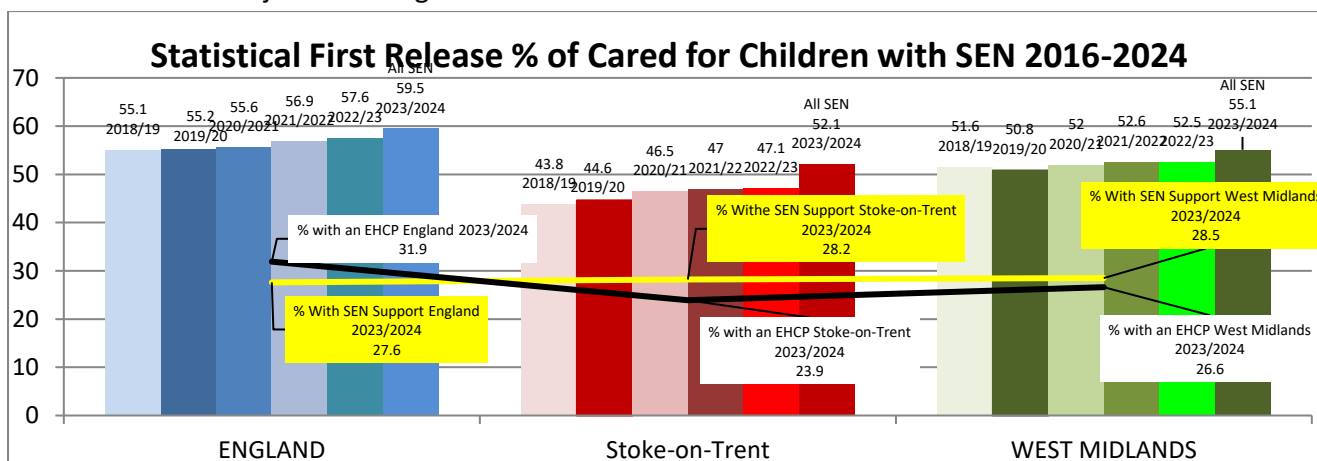
Source: Internal data MBR

The greatest SEN Primary Need recorded for the Cared for Children cohort is Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs, it has remained high with 53.5% of the cohort in this category.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs often result in presenting behaviours that are more complex, and schools/education settings are increasingly finding it difficult to manage and support children effectively. Added to this, several schools implement zero-tolerance behaviour policies and formal learning environments that are not always inclusive enough to meet the needs of our children who have this as their primary need. Disruption to their learning requires intensive support and coordination of services, referrals to panels, often in different departments and local authorities. This causes drift and delay in appropriate education for children, as professionals navigate their way around organisations that may not operate in a common way.

In response to the this need of understanding and good practice supporting SEMH needs it is a golden thread that runs through all our training opportunities for professionals. It is delivered in-

- DT training days/ network meetings
- Governor Training sessions
- Foster Carer Training sessions
- Introduction to Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Plans
- Writing a PBS Plan
- Attachment, Trauma and Resilience Part 1+2
- Reframing Discipline: A trauma-informed response
- Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners
- The RADY Projects Training offer
- The RAiE Projects Training offer



Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.2025

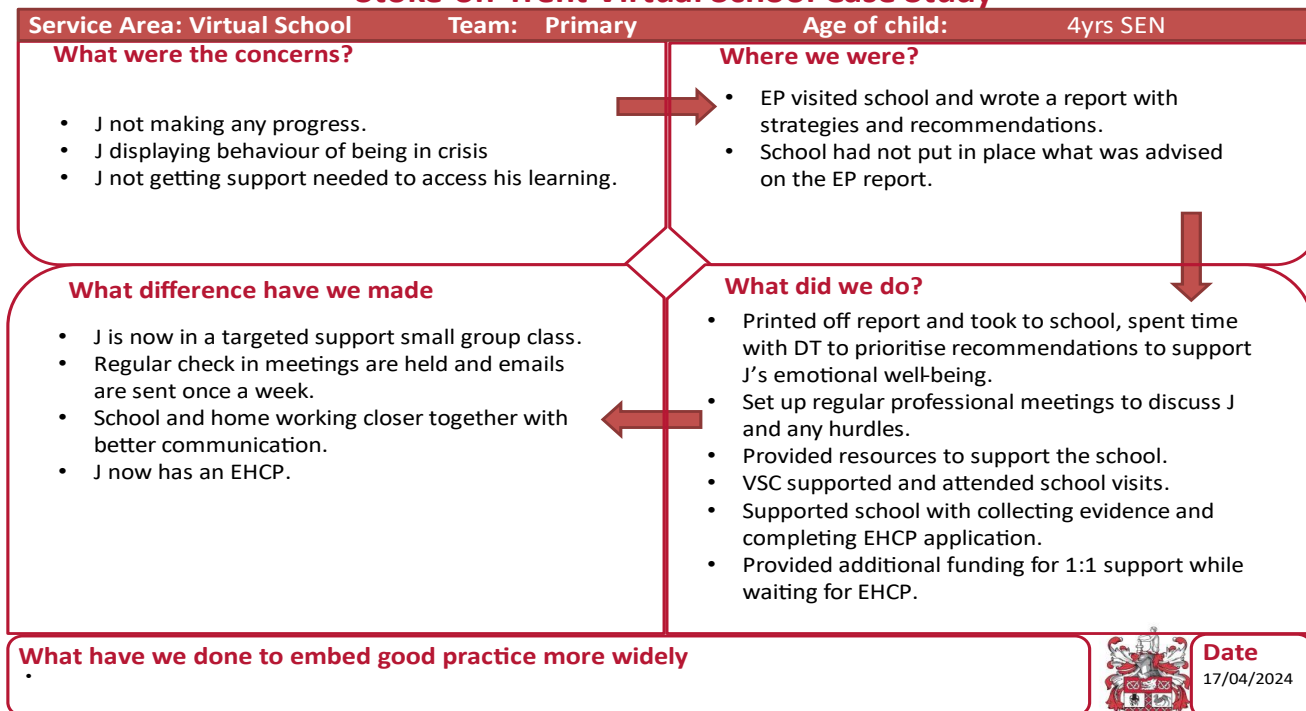
The Cared for Children data released for 2016 to 2024 shows that compared to national and regional comparator groups. Stoke-on-Trent had a lower percentage cohort of children with a SEN classification at 52.1%, compared to the West Midlands at 55.1% and England at 59.5%. The percentage of children with an EHC plan is lower in Stoke-on-Trent at 23.9% compared to the West Midlands 26.6% and England at 31.9%. This may be an indication that our children are not having their SEN needs identified as effectively as the West Midlands or England and this adds extra pressure on our children to flourish in schools/education settings that may not be providing adequate support for them. In addition to this, as our children are underrepresented in the SEN cohort if they move school/education settings or out of the local authority

following placement disruption, this causes significant drift and delay in securing assessment, identification of SEN and requests for EHC plans.

The Virtual School has a part-time Senior Educational Psychologist who has joined the Team in July 2022 part of their role is to target children outside of the city to support schools/education settings with strategies and complete cognitive assessments. This has helped to break down the barrier of our children waiting for an Educational Psychologist to be allocated. In 2023-24 Our Education Psychologist supported with completing EHC Assessments or reassessments for 6 of our Cared for Children.

Collaborative working with Social care to get EHCP case study

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study




City of Stoke-on-Trent

stoke.gov.uk

Collaborative working SENMAS on difficult cases case study

Stoke-on-Trent Early Intervention & Children's Social Care Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: EY and Primary	EYFS PVI setting
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <p>OS Y3 boy moved schools a number of times. OS struggling with his learning in all areas. Not in any school long enough to assess adequately. Latest 2 schools concerns around SEN and meeting his needs. Latest school concerned around transition. School new to SOT epeps</p>	<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New school unsure of needs and how to support. • New school wanting to apply for and EHC. • OS not making progress. 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OS has EHC in place and now has a bespoke curriculum. • All professional's child focused and prepared for the meeting. • Gold standard PEP. DT now secure with PEP process. • Sensory and ADHD referrals made. • Grief encounter will soon be supporting OS and peers. 	<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranged transition meeting with both DT's. Excellent transition planned • VS paid additional £500 for transition support. • VS funded a private EP assessment. • Supported with EHC application and discussed and provided advice around needs and support. • EHC granted – provided advice for SOT SENMAS – funding agreed. • Worked with SW to get Griefcounselling in place. • Very positive PEP meeting with lots of actions to further support OS and siblings. • Advised school to complete sensory and ADHD referral following discussions around how he presented in school. 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DT now better able to support all 3 siblings. Social worker now more aware of EHC process. 		<p>Date 24.3.24</p>



Multi Agency meetings get bespoke education plan & support case study

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: Secondary	Age of child: 16 yrs
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A's attendance dropped in school at the end of Year 9 and he hasn't attended school consistently since for the last two years • A's projected grades were 4-5s but his drop in attendance has meant that he has significant gaps in his learning. • When A is in school - he can engage well with his learning but struggles to get himself to school most days. 	<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School staff put in transport to reduce barriers for A getting into school this didn't have impact. • Construction Pathway in additional education was offered as an incentive in Y10-A didn't attend this and this wasn't successful. • A wasn't in school to attend any mock exams or required amount of GCSE learning so teachers didn't have accurate levels for A and were concerned about his predicted grades. • Behaviour was an issue in classes. • A displayed levels of anxiety in school and required targeted support. 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good relationships have been built with care home, social care and school to encourage regular communication and a proactive approach in offering A support • When he has accessed school - a bespoke timetable has been offered that offers A targeted support and times to suit him better. • Following an incident in school last term, we supported DT in finding A a placement at a local registered AP provider close to home to avoid an exclusion and to ensure he has the opportunity to continue his learning and sit his GCSEs at the end of the year. 	<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VS and SW communicated A's needs and required support with DT who overtime has offered more flexible approaches and a more specific, personalised approach to support A. i.e. home visits, phone calls home to check in, relationship building practice. • Professionals have met fortnightly to assess and review A's attendance levels, his engagement in school when present and to offer various strategies to support A back into school. • PP+ in place to support with extra tuition and careers support whilst A was attending the onsite AP at school on a reduced timetable to ensure he could access his learning in a way that suits him and to bridge existing gaps. 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenged A's school to offer a more flexible and personalised approach to our most vulnerable children to achieve the possible outcomes where our children feel safe, supported and encouraged. 		<p>Date 31/01/2024</p>

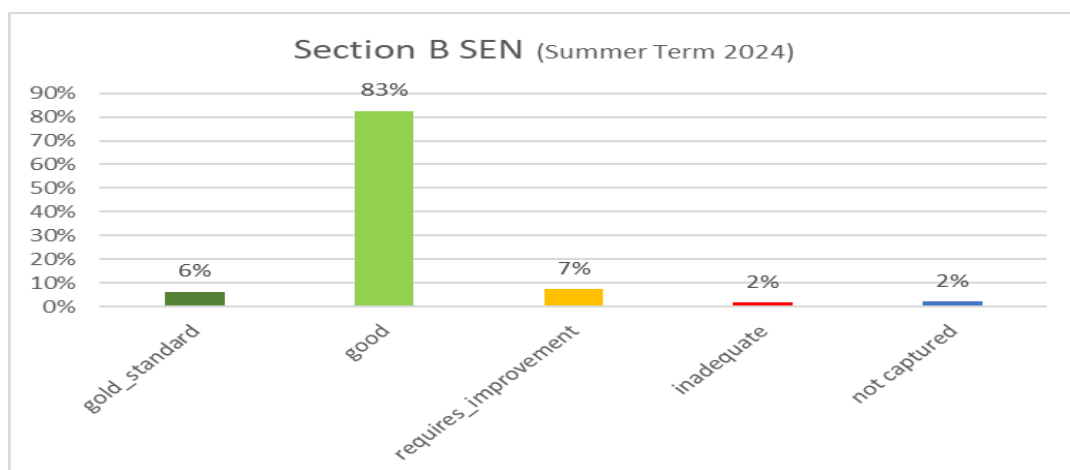
VS working with Designated Teachers (DTs) for Cared for Children with or who need EHCPs

With the new VS structure, there is far greater capacity to support our DTs with attaining Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) for our Cared for Children. Many of the Virtual School Practitioners have experience of working with children with Special Educational Needs and EHCPs, and a few specialists in going through the EHCP graduated response process.

To complement this support- the VS Practitioners have also worked hard to make sure the VS have detailed records of our children’s EHCPs and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support plans on the Personal Education Plan (PEP) system. The VS has also taken responsibility to make sure copies of EHCPs and Annual Reviews of EHCPs are on Liquid Logic for all our children whether they live in or out of the city, making them available for all professionals in the Local Authority supporting that child.

Another change due to the VS restructure and ability to casework children’s educational needs means that the VS had the capacity to attend approximately 75% of all PEP meetings each academic year. For all children with an EHCP VS Practitioners try and align the Annual Review of the EHCP with the terms PEP. The significance of this is to make sure both plans work cohesively, and targets set in the PEP complement the targets set in the EHCP.

In 2023-24 the Virtual School managed to align the EHCP Annual Review and Termly PEP around 50% of the time.



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

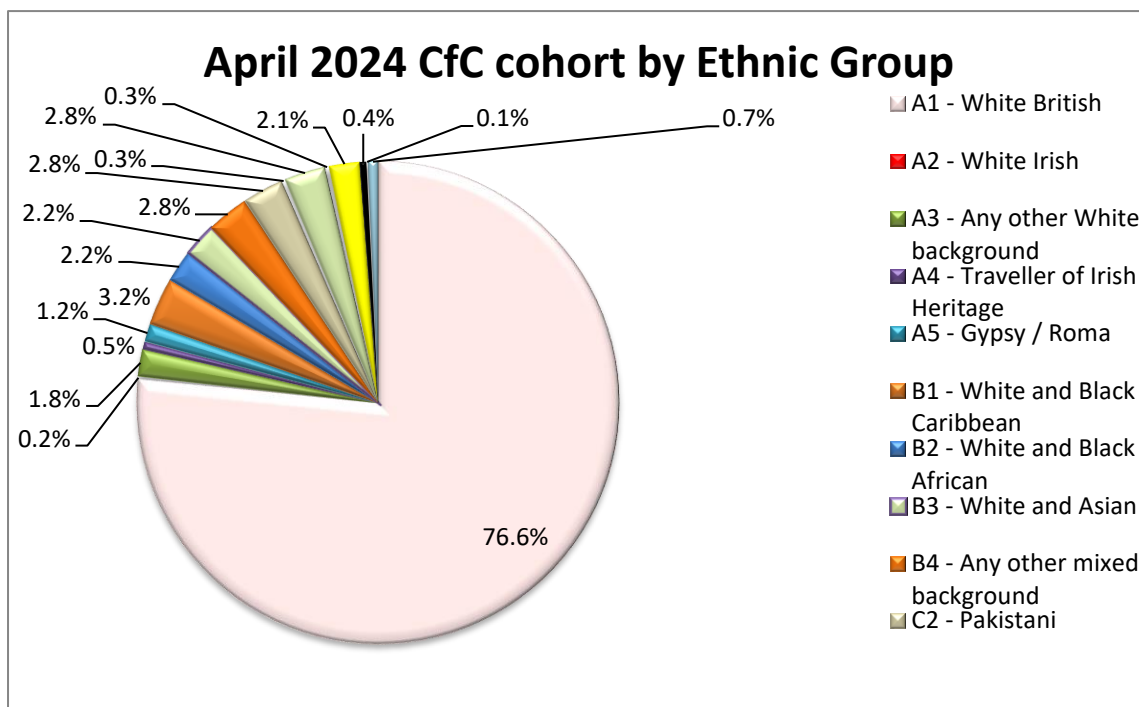
A key area of focus in the last academic year was to improve the quality of the information the VS have gathered on the PEP and one important section is regarding the SEND information being documented throughout the meeting. Summer 2023 60% of PEP’s were rated Good with regard to the SEND information this rose in the Autumn 2023 to 73% and 76% Spring 2024 to 89% in Summer 2024 with 6% now making Gold Standard.

The cohort attending the Virtual School compared to the wider city school cohort.

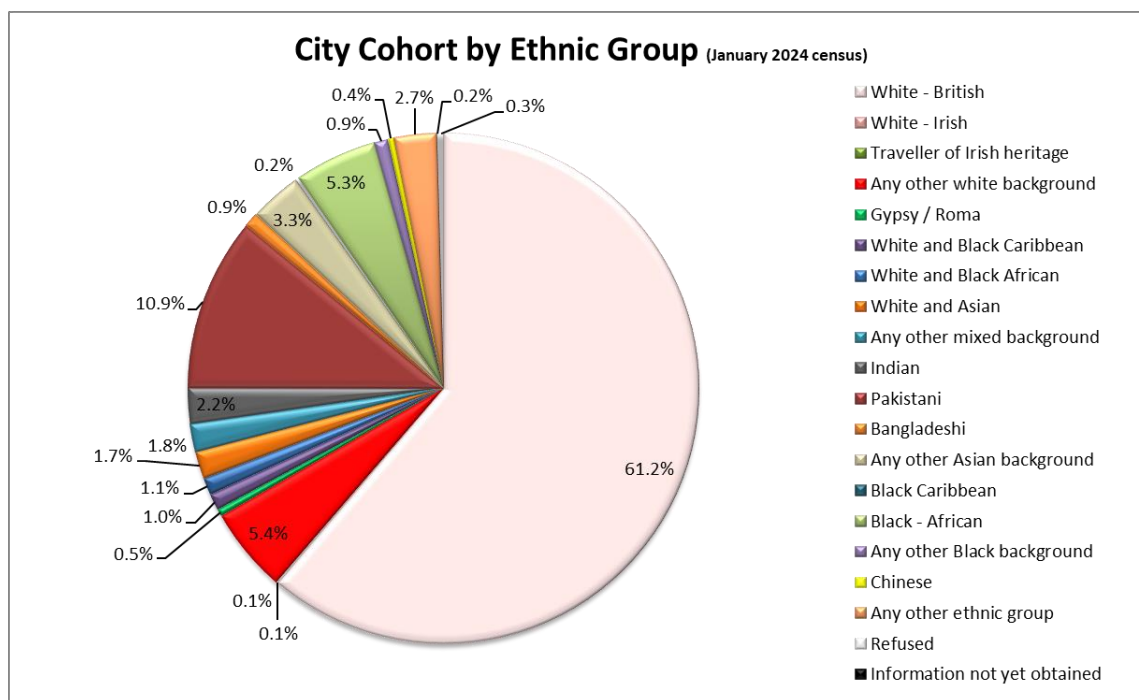
Cohort by Ethnicity

When comparing the cohort of the Virtual School compared to the wider city school cohort, the Virtual School cohort has a higher percentage of white British children than the city average by 15.4% and a smaller

cohort of Pakistani children by 8.3%. Therefore, the ethnicity of the Cared for Children cohort does not exactly mirror the ethnicity of the city's children.



Source: Internal data MBR



Source: School Census Data January 2024

The VS supports all children in an equitable manner, accounting for all cultural backgrounds, by acknowledging birth families and pre-care contexts which may have cultural implications for current education and emotional well-being. Children's ethnicity is valued and supported through their education and with the increase of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), provide teaching and learning alongside first languages through Flash Academy, an online tuition service that supports learning through a myriad of languages.

School/education settings Placements

Cared for Children are placed in several different educational establishments throughout the country based on several presenting issues relating to both the complexity of their needs and the availability and capacity of placements to meet their needs.

There are times when the Virtual School has very little influence on these decisions as the care placement decision to safeguard, combined with the availability of placements can take precedence over educational placements. However, the Virtual School will support Social Workers when it comes to exploring suitable education settings for our children and we do this in a number of ways

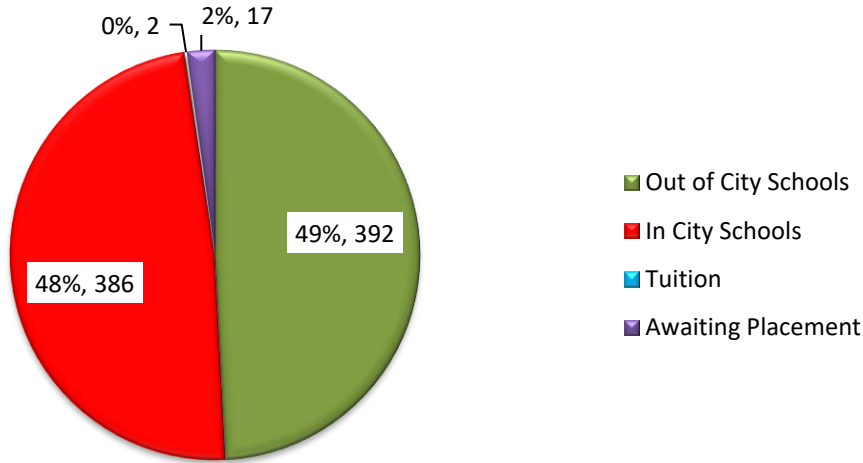
- 1- The VS will review the website and Ofsted rating of a school and its ability to support vulnerable children and those with additional needs.
- 2- The VS will liaise with other Virtual Schools in the area our child or young person has moved to, so we can capture an accurate picture of the schools ability to support our child's individual needs.
- 3- The Initial PEP meeting is also a great way to get an idea as to how that school is structured to support our child's needs and regular liaison with the DT in the school will help us track their progress and engagement.
- 4- As of 2023-24 the Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School has started to Quality Assure provisions that our children attend, with a focus on Independent Schools and those with Ofsted ratings below Good.

During the year 2023-2024 (data as of April 2024) there were 1087 Children in Care NCY N1 to 13. These were educated in 498 different schools and colleges and nursery provisions from 64 different Local Authorities. This brings many challenges, liaising with schools/education settings to adopt our PEP (Personal Education Plan) system and embrace our policies and procedures around completion, participation, SMART targets, and the allocation of Pupil Premium. Further details on changes made and future plans are outlined in the PEP section of this document.

The cohort of Cared for Children NCY Reception to Year 11 – ages 4 to 16 is 797 children. 48% were placed in education establishments in Stoke-on-Trent and 49% were in out-of-city schools and 2% of children (17) were awaiting placement at the data capture time and (2) of children were receiving tuition.

In response to this challenge, the VS restructure was designed so each VS Practitioner has an even split of children on their caseload that live in and out of the city. For those children living out of the city, the practitioner has been allocated a region of the UK to oversee all our children who live in that area. The strength of this is that the VS Practitioners have built relationships with other LA teams and schools/education settings in those areas and, therefore are better informed to support the education of our children in these areas. It also means when a child moves into that area, we can suggest schools/education settings that have been successful in supporting our children previously.

CfC (April 2024) Placed in or out of Stoke-on-Trent Schools



Source: Internal data MBR

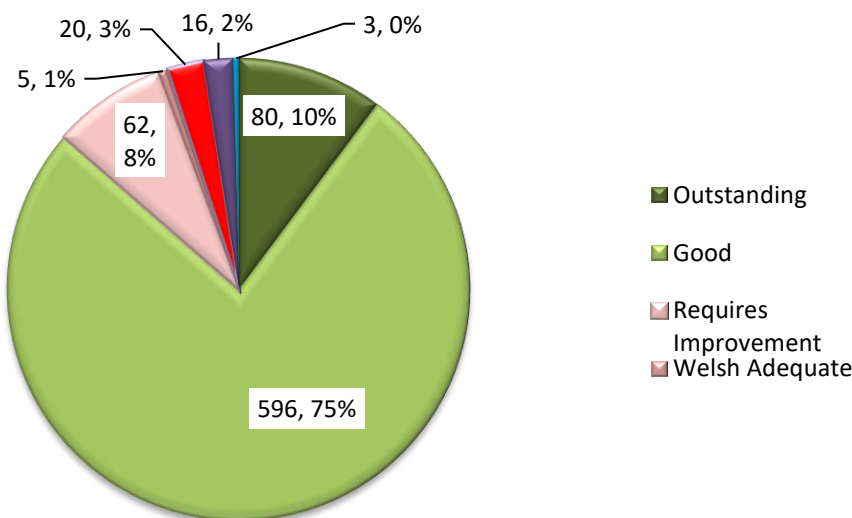
Quality of all provision by Ofsted rating

It is imperative to place cared for children in the highest quality provision to suit their needs and ensure that they are not disadvantaged by being placed in poorly performing educational establishments.

Of the 797 school-aged cared for children cohort in April 2024; 676 children (85%) were placed in Good or Outstanding schools, 5 children (1%) were in Welsh Schools rated Adequate, 62 children (8%) in schools Requiring Improvement, and 20 (3%) children were in an Inadequate school. (See Pie chart below) 3 (1%) children were receiving tuition and 16 (2%) were awaiting placement in a school/education setting. 15 of the schools were either not Ofsted's and were awaiting an assessment.

Compared to last year this shows a 3.5% increase in cared for children attending Good or Outstanding schools.

Ofsted rating for CfC cohort April 2024



Source: Internal data MBR

Of the 20 children placed in the Inadequate rated schools, 18 were attending the school before the school became Inadequate.

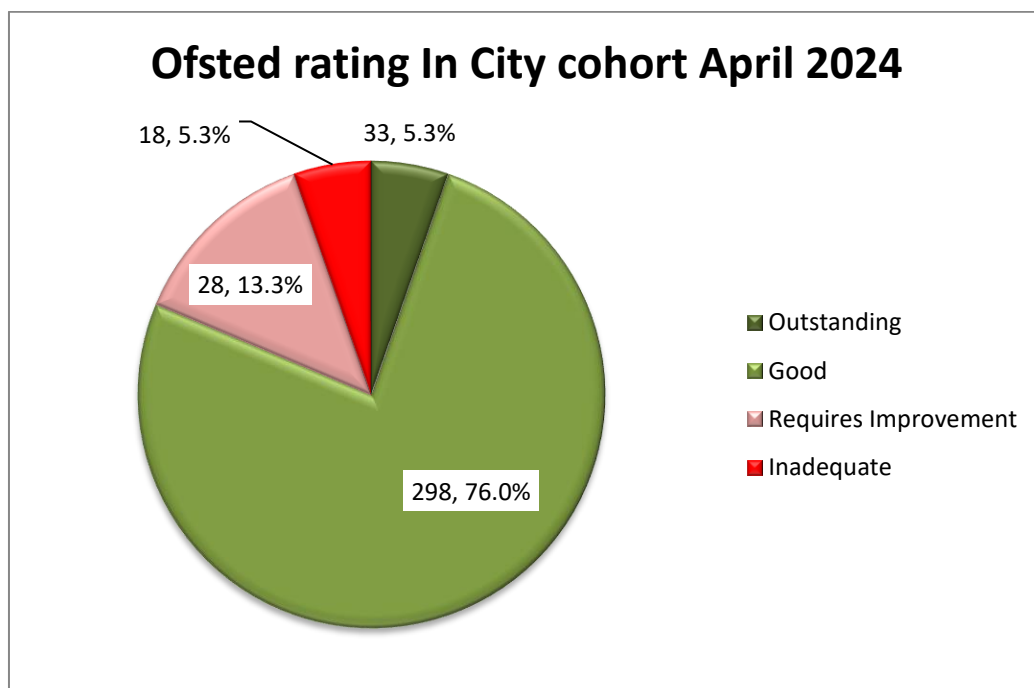
The other 2 moved into the schools when they were in Inadequate. One had to move due to an incident at his previous school, and for the other pupil the school was placed at a school that had been Inadequate in 2019 but was judged as Good in April 2024.

The Virtual School reviews and collates this data weekly basis in the Virtual School dashboard meeting so the whole team and wider services have up-to-date information regarding the school placements for our CfC. The Virtual School team then reviews the educational engagement and progress for those attending Inadequate and RI schools on a termly basis. If it is deemed appropriate and in the best interests of the child, then the VS would support sourcing an alternative school/establishment.

The Virtual School does get requests regarding placing CfC into RI schools, as a rule, our first stance is no, however, it is important to understand there may be extenuating factors that have led to this request. At this stage, the Virtual School will review the Ofsted report and reports from monitoring visits to see how Ofsted has judged that school in its ability to support disadvantaged children and those with SEN. The progress our other CfC in the school are making in the school via their PEP meeting reports is also explored. To strengthen the decision the school may be contacted to explore their progress with the Head of the school and a copy of their improvement plan requested.

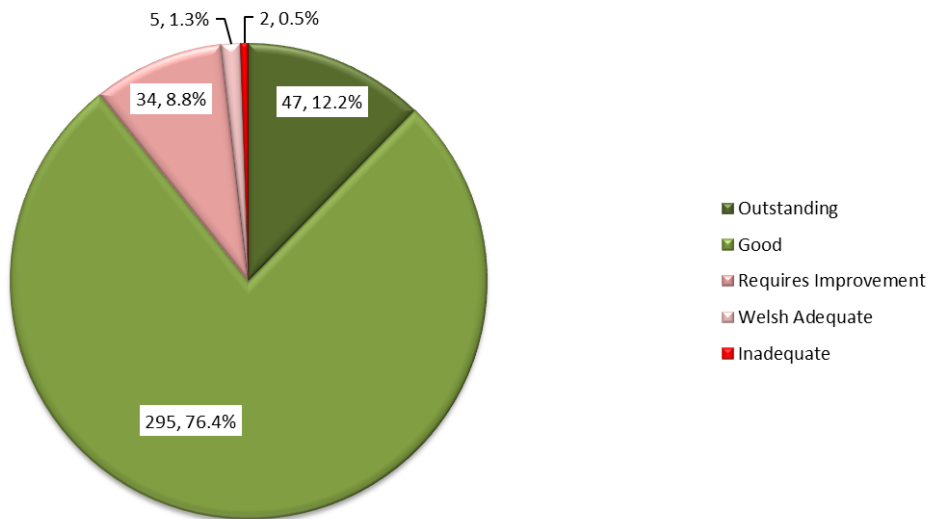
Quality of Provision in Stoke-on-Trent-on-Trent schools compared to Out of City schools

As detailed in the following two pie charts, within the city 81.3% of children were placed in Good/Outstanding schools compared to 88.6% outside of the city. Therefore, the Virtual School is continuing to successfully implement the government guidelines to place children in good or outstanding schools as far as reasonably possible.



Source: Internal data MBR

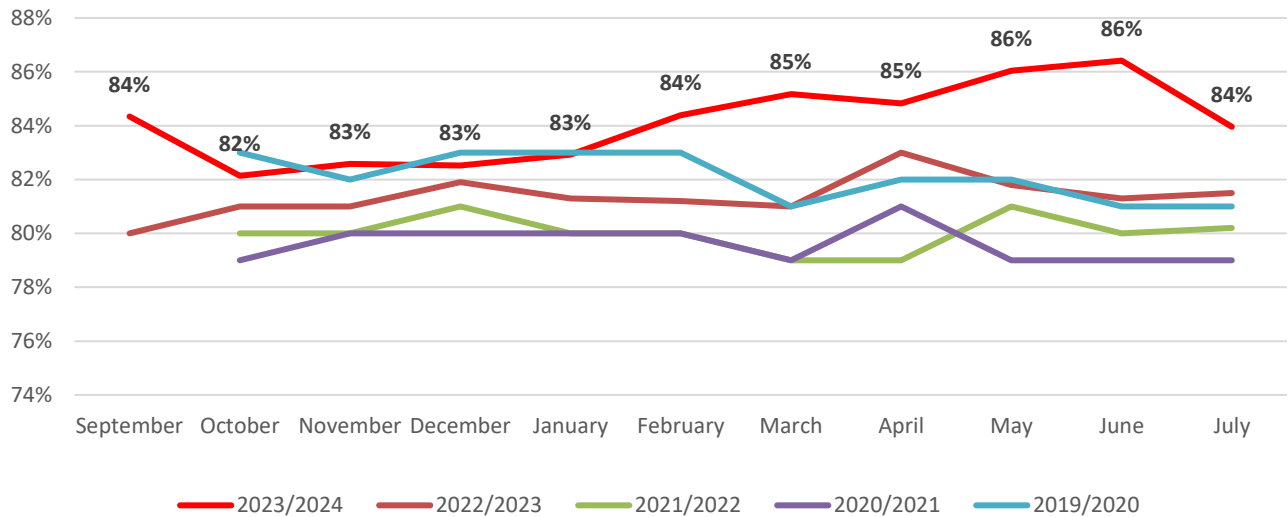
Ofsted rating for Out of City cohort April 2024



Source: Internal data MBR

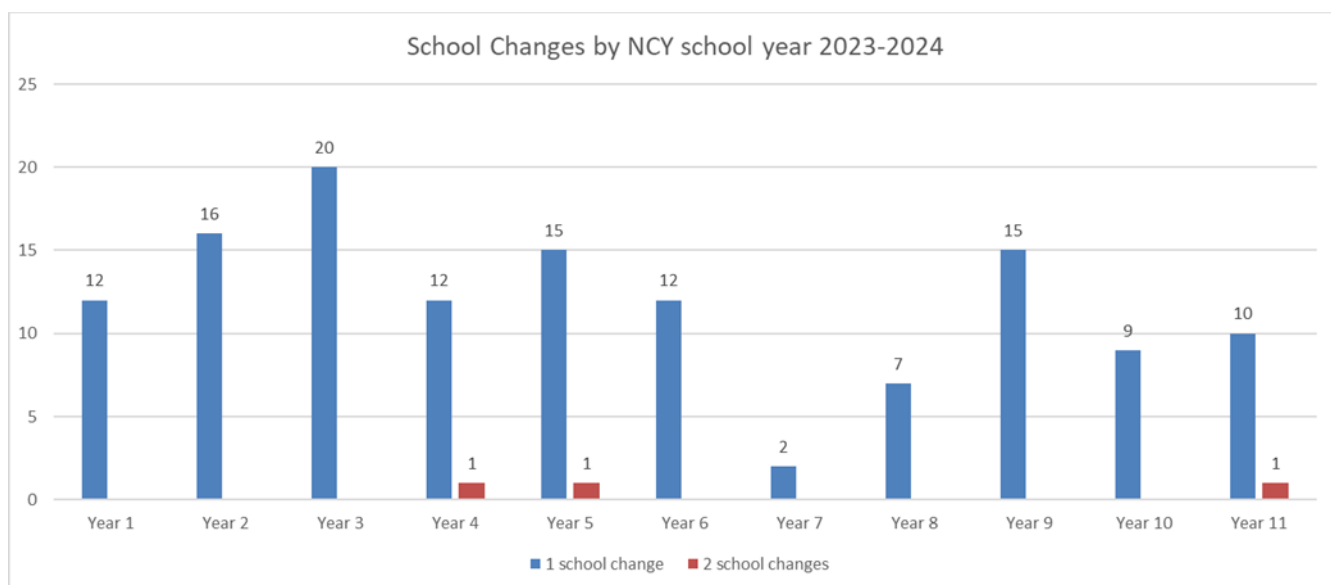
The chart below shows that in 2023/24 the percentage of children attending schools/education settings rated Good or Outstanding has continued to improve and has consistently been above 80% reaching 86% in June 2024 before falling to 84% in July 2024.

Percentage of CfC Cohort in Good or Outstanding Schools



Source: Internal data MBR

Number of School Changes -last 12 months (excludes routine phase changes)



Source: Internal data MBR

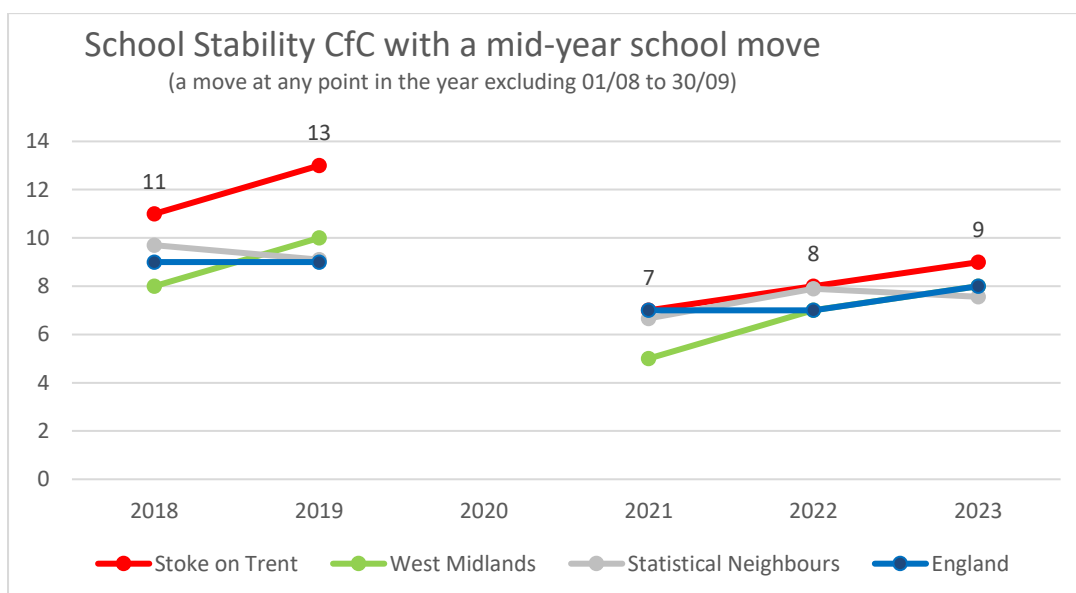
Moving into care can be extremely traumatic for children and often involves a change of school/education settings which can impact on both their learning and social, emotional, and well-being. The graph above shows that 17% of the cohort (139 pupils) experienced a school/education settings change (this excludes the routine phase changes e.g. Primary to Secondary School). There has been an increase of 3% compared to the same time last year, which is significant. Three of the cohort experienced 2 school/education setting changes in the school year.

In response to this, the VS firstly challenges any placement moves which will mean the CfC will have to change the education setting through the Funding Request Form process. Ideally, the CfC would remain at their current school setting and live at a commutable distance. For those where this is not possible and when a child needs to move school/education settings for other reasons, the VS promotes and attends transitional PEP meetings with the DTs of both the new and previous school present. The VS would also make sure the Pupil Premium+ funding was utilised to help support the transition for the pupil and in some cases advise when a transition timetable is appropriate. The VS are fully aware that any changes in setting be it care, or education could have a detrimental impact on the child's well-being in the first instance, so it is vital that all professionals are well informed of the needs and personalities of the pupil and a detailed plan is in place to make it as successful as possible.

Initially, the Virtual School has placed all pupils who have to move school into the 'High Intervention and Support' category which means the VS Practitioners would be in touch with the Designated Teachers for Cared for Children in the school, Social Workers, and Foster Carers on a fortnightly basis and any concerns regarding the transition of that child to their new school is explored and actions are agreed amongst all professionals supporting that child. This is reviewed monthly and where appropriate the Child will be de-escalated to 'Medium Intervention and Support' and eventually 'Low Intervention and Support'

Our Offer to Children Who Need EXTREME HIGH LEVEL	Our Offer to Children Who Need HIGH LEVEL	Our Offer to Children Who Need MEDIUM LEVEL	Our Offer to Children Who Need LOW LEVEL
Every PEP meeting attended by VS	Every PEP meeting attended by VS	At least 2 PEP meetings attended by VS every academic year	Every PEP meeting attended by VS by Autumn 2022
Continual liaison with professionals dependent upon heightened need	Regular contact with DT/SW/FC when requested or due to follow up of actions	Liaise with DT/SW/FC at least once a term	Liaise with DT/SW/FC at least once a year
Extreme High Level of Support	High Support and Intervention	Medium Support and Intervention	Low Support and Intervention
Not on a School Roll	New to care (look at after initial PEP)		well-established care and education placement
EHCP transferring	Recent change/multiples changes to care or education placement		good attitudes to education
EHCP pending - issues present	YP is hospitalised/in custody	School avoidance including difficulty engaging with setting	Attainment at or above ARE and at least good progress
Risk of permanent exclusion	Risk of NEET		No exclusions
In need of Alternative Provision	Progress declining, despite intervention		Attendance above 95%
Continued non engagement/school refusal	Increased patterns of exclusion	Small amount of short exclusions	Established SW and DT
NEET	Attendance below 80% with no acceptable reason	Attendance 90% - 95%	Full EHCP but settled
	Number of recent changes in SW and/or DT		Good or Outstanding Setting
	Changes in need - EHCP/SEND	Ofsted Rating changed	
	DOLS Order		
	UASC-until placed then reassess	YOT prevention	
	Supported by the Catalyst Team	Emotional Wellbeing and mental health need is rated amber on the PEP	
	Current CSE/CCE If at MACE level	Current CSE/CCE-Unless MACE then HS&I	
	Significant change in circumstances		
	YOT order		
	Attending alternative provision		
	Post 16 Disciplinaries		
	Mental Health Need High SDQ	Ofsted rating has declined	

There were 11, year 11 pupils (an increase of 5 on last year) who experienced a school move in 2023-24. 5 of the 11 these took qualifications in English and Maths, 3 were UASC pupils who were waiting for ESOL courses 3 did not take any qualifications' those that took no qualifications 1 NEET had tried to engage with NACRO but stopped engaging. 1 is expecting a child and currently NEET. 1 was subject to a DOLS order at the time open to education possibilities.



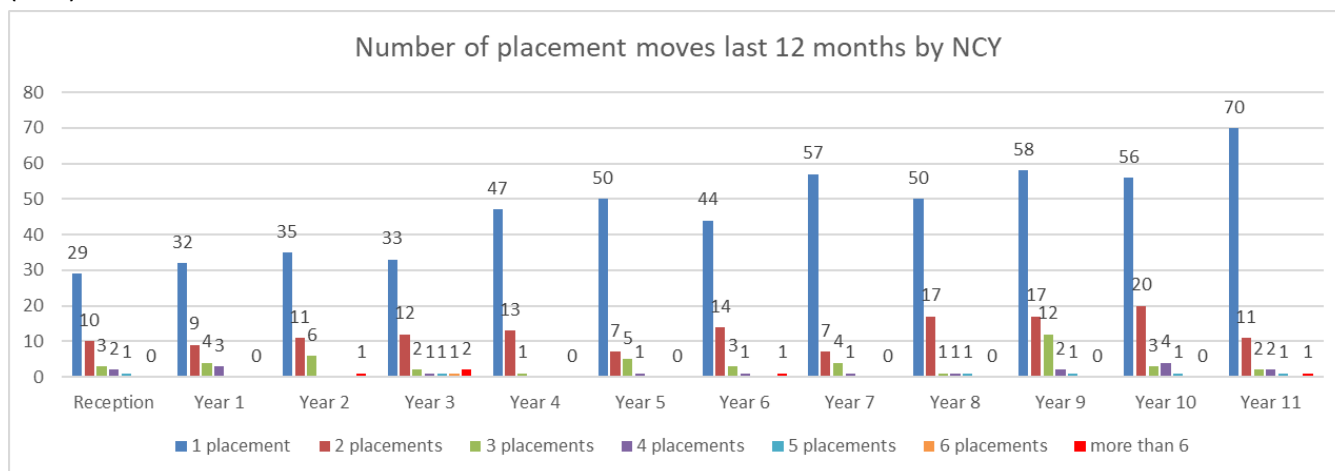
Source :LAIT oct 2024

The above chart shows the school stability for the Stoke-on-Trent CfC cohort compared with West Midlands and our Statistical Neighbours. And shows Stoke-on-Trent have higher levels of school moves.

Stoke-on-Trent are ranked 89 and are in quartile C for this measure. There is no further update on this measure.

Number of Care Placements

Unfortunately, Cared for Children may have several changes to their placements. This can be for many reasons including the Foster Carer’s personal circumstances, placement breakdown, or a move for safety, amongst other reasons. The graph below shows the number of placements by National Curriculum Year (NCY) for the Cared for Children cohort 2023-2024.



Source: Internal data MBR

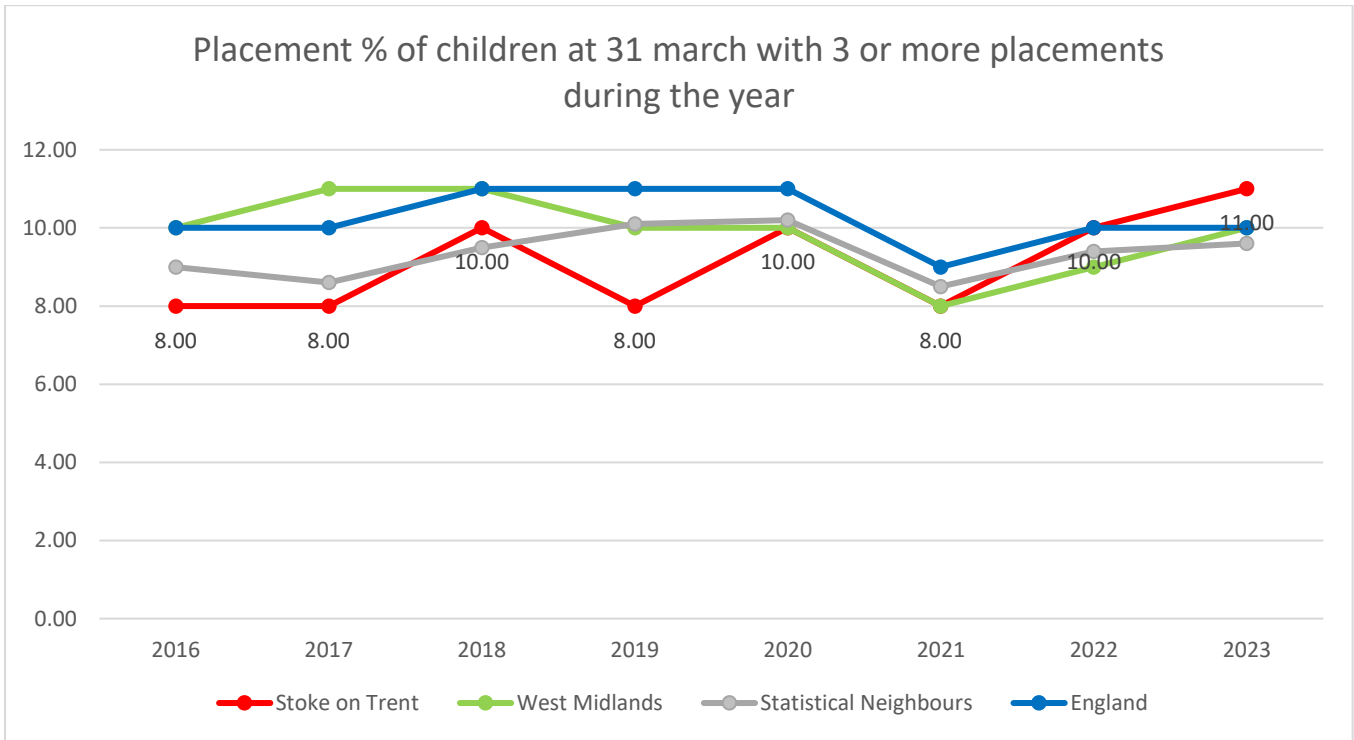
The majority of children, 90% (709) have had less than 3 placement moves in the last 12 months 5.9% (46) of children have had 3 placement moves 2.3% (18) of children have had 4 placement moves. 1.5% (12) children had 5 or more placement moves. It is documented in research that placement changes disrupt the continuity of learning and impact negatively on outcomes for children. This increases the demands on the Virtual School to try to support children to reach their potential.

Actions that the VS takes when a child changes care placement

- The VSH continues to attend the admission-to-care meetings.
- The VSH attends weekly catch up and brokerage case overview meetings for Cared for Children.
- The VSH completes Funding Request Forms if they agree or not regarding the move of placement.
- The VS Team are informed via Liquid Logic of any Placement Request Forms completed and this is shared with the VS Practitioner who supports that child.

Initially, the Virtual School has placed all pupils who have to move care placements into the ‘High Intervention and Support’ category which means the VS Practitioners would be in touch with the Designated Teachers for Cared for Children in the school, Social Workers and Foster Carers on a fortnightly basis and any concerns regarding the transition of that child to their new care placement. This is reviewed monthly and where appropriate the child will be de-escalated to ‘Medium Intervention and Support’ and eventually ‘Low Intervention and Support’ (See VS offer of Support on page 45 for further explanation)

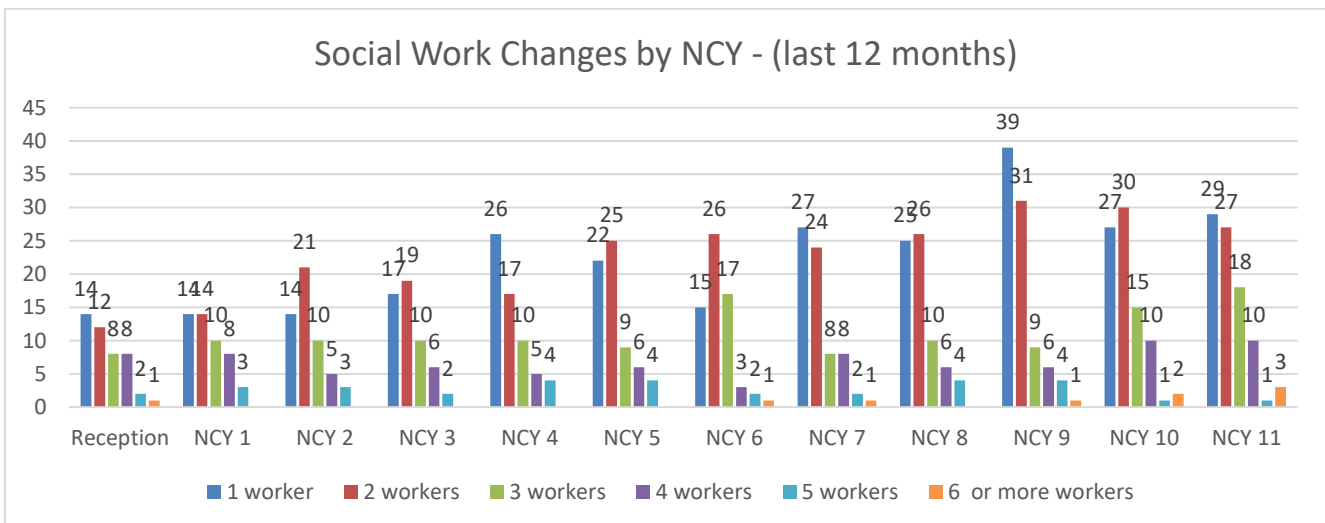
- Moving to case management working in VS to improve joint working and impact on the suitability and stability of education placement.



Source :LAIT oct 2024

The above chart is looking at the children who are cared for at 31/03/2023 that had 3 or more placement changes during the year with comparative data from our Statistical Neighbours. This shows that Children in Stoke-on-Trent experienced have seen an increase in placement moves since 2021 and are the highest at 11% compared to the Statistical Neighbours at 9.6%. Stoke-on-Trent are ranked 77th for this measure and are in Quartile C.

Number of Social Worker Changes



Source: Internal data MBR

The above graph shows that most children (66%) have experienced a change in Social Workers in the last 12 months with 34% of the cohort having the same Social Worker for the full 12-month period or time in care. In the previous year, 73% had experienced a change in Social Worker so this has improved

For 34% of the cohort, they have experienced 2 changes, 17% experienced 3 changes, 10% experienced 4 changes and 5% (39) young people have had 5 changes of Social Worker in the last 12 months.



The impact this has on a young person can be significant, as they then must build a relationship with a new Social Worker, this can mean they find it hard to disclose concerns and ask for support when they need it. Several of our young people struggle with attachment so forming new relationships can be difficult and take time. Also, a new social worker may not be able to recognise changes in character, which is a key indicator that the young person needs support.

To support with the transition to a new social worker the Virtual School are doing the following: -

- Provision of guidance to new Social Workers
- Training sessions for new Social Workers and ASYEs (Assessment Year/ Newly qualified)
- Moving towards case management in VS intention to give more resources to SW and improve joint working and the profile and importance of Education

Case study demonstrating the close working with Social

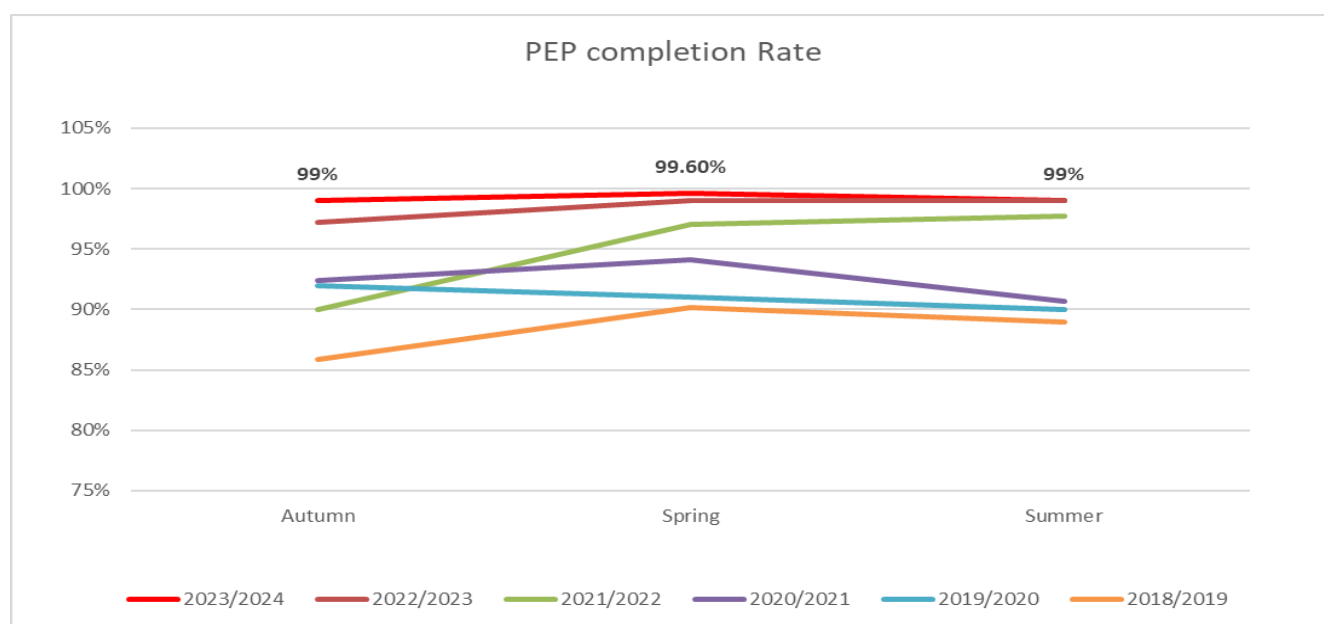
Stoke-on-Trent Early Intervention & Children’s Social Care Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: EY and Primary	EYFS PVI setting
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O Y3 boy moved schools a number of times. O struggling with his learning in all areas. Not in any school long enough to assess adequately. Latest 2 schools concerns around SEN and meeting his needs. • Latest school concerned around transition. • School new to SOT ePEPs 	<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New school unsure of needs and how to support. • New school wanting to apply for and EHC. • O not making progress. 	
		
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O has EHC in place and now has a bespoke curriculum. • All professional's child focused and prepared for the meeting. • Gold standard PEP. DT now secure with PEP process. • Sensory and ADHD referrals made. • Grief encounter will soon be supporting O and peers. 	<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranged transition meeting with both DT's. Excellent transition planned • VS paid additional funding for transition support. • VS funded a private EP assessment. • Supported with EHC application and discussed and provided advice around needs and support. • EHC granted – provided advice for SOT SENMAS – funding agreed. • Worked with SW to get Griefcounselling in place. • Very positive PEP meeting with lots of actions to further support OS and siblings. • Advised school to complete sensory and ADHD referral following discussions around how he presented in school. 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DT now better able to support all 3 siblings. Social worker now more aware of EHC process. 	<p>Date 24.3.24</p>	
<p>stoke.gov.uk</p> <p style="text-align: right;">  City of Stoke-on-Trent </p>		

Personal Education Plans (PEP)

All Cared for Children of statutory school age, are required to have a Personal Education Plan that is updated termly and records their strengths, achievements and targets outlining strategies to be employed by the school/education setting to ensure children reach their best outcomes.

The aim of the Virtual School is to ensure that all pupils receive a PEP each term. The percentage of PEPs completed during the year 2023-2024 has remained high at 99% or above. The high completion rates show the positive impact the VS staffing structure has had on PEP completions.



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

Since the summer term of 2020/2021 dip sample of PEPs over 6,500 individual PEP's have taken place for pupils in NYC 0-11 and RAG rated by the Virtual School. As the PEP's have evolved, the quality expectation has also risen.

Summer Term 2024			Spring Term 2024			Autumn Term 2023		
Rag Rate	Total	%	Rag Rate	Total	%	Rag Rate	Total	%
Green	587	75%	Green	613	78%	Green	608	79%
Amber	147	19%	Amber	138	17%	Amber	113	15%
Red	44	6%	Red	35	4%	Red	40	5%
		0.0%	Not rated			Not rated		
Not Complete	8	1.0%	Not Complete	3	0.4%	Not Complete	11	1%
Grand Total	786	100%	Grand Total	789	100%	Grand Total	772	100%

Summer Term 2023			Spring Term 2023			Autumn Term 2022	
Rag Rate	Total	%	Rag Rate	Total	%	Total	%
Green	620	79%	Green	663	87%	646	87%
Amber	124	16%	Amber	64	8%	49	6.4%
Red	31	4%	Red	25	3%	23	3%
Not rated			Not rated				
Not Complete	10	1%	Not Complete	11	1%	21	
Grand Total	785	100%	Grand Total	763	100%	739	100%

Summer Term 2022		Spring Term 2022		Autumn Term 2021		Summer 2021 Dip Sample	
Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
583	82%	598	87%	455	69%	20	33%
75	11%	61	9%	95	14%	18	30%
34	5%	12	2%	41	6%	23	38%
		1	0%	3	1%		
16	2%	19	3%	63	10%		
708	100%	691	100%	657	100%	61	100%

Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

The percentage rated Green “Good” has remained between 75% to 79% during the current year and even though this is lower than previous years the expectations are now set higher with the stricter Quality Assurance descriptors.

Using the PEP Audit Data the Virtual School identifies those rated as Requires Improvement or Inadequate and offers training and guidance to those Designated Teachers (DTs) in schools or the Social Workers who need the additional support to complete their section of the PEP to Good or Gold standard. In 2024-25 the Virtual School will focus on the three lowest sections rated Good on the PEP and offer targeted additional training for DTs in the areas of

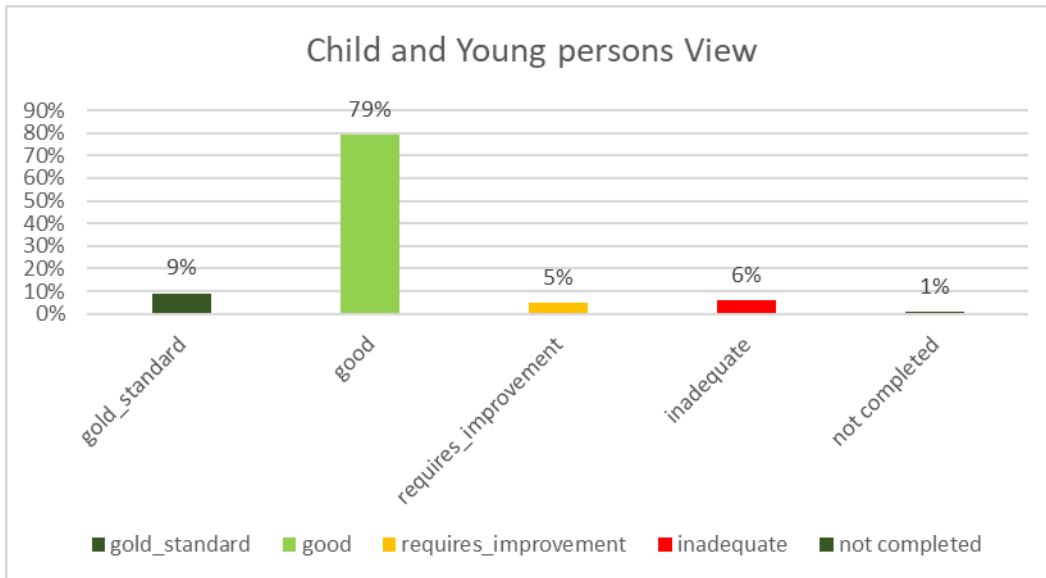
- 1- Attainment data,
- 2- SMART target writing,
- 3- Summary section writing.

The aim is that at least 90% of PEPs are rated Good (green) by September 2025.

The PEP audit also rated each section of the PEP to inform the action plan, training requirements to ensure improvement in consistency and completion of all sections of the PEP.

During 2023-2024 the PEP was amended so that the Young Persons Views were more prominent by placing this section at the front of the PEP. The section was also amended to involve the young person more in their PEP.

Child and Young Persons View



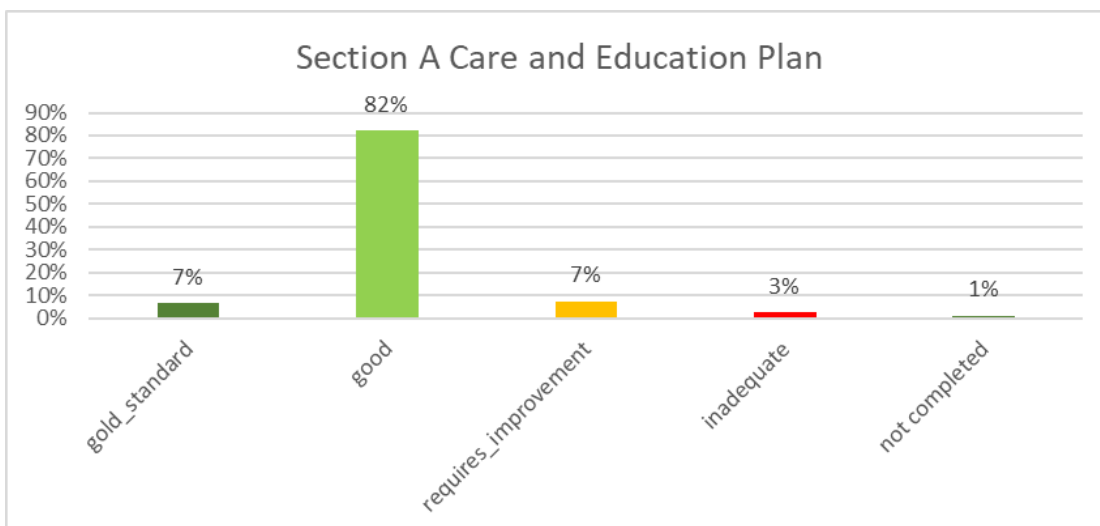
Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

The above chart shows that 88% of the PEP’s were rated as Good or above for this Section, 5% Requiring Improvement and 6% Inadequate.

Previously this area was mid-point in the PEP and in the Summer of 2023 88% of PEP’s had been rated good and 6% Requiring Improvement and 3% Inadequate.

In 2024-25 the Virtual School is looking to appoint an Apprentice with the responsibility to raise participation. Part of their responsibility will be to utilise the information gained from the CYP Views Section in the PEP to improve our cross curricular offer. Part of their remit will also be to get the voice of our Children and young people regarding the CYP Views section of the PEP and help improve it so it is used more and more informative.

Section A Care and Education Plan completed by Social Care.



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

This percentage has dropped slightly this year, mainly because our expectations have risen drastically, if this section is not completed before the meeting and by the Social Worker it is graded as requires Improvement.

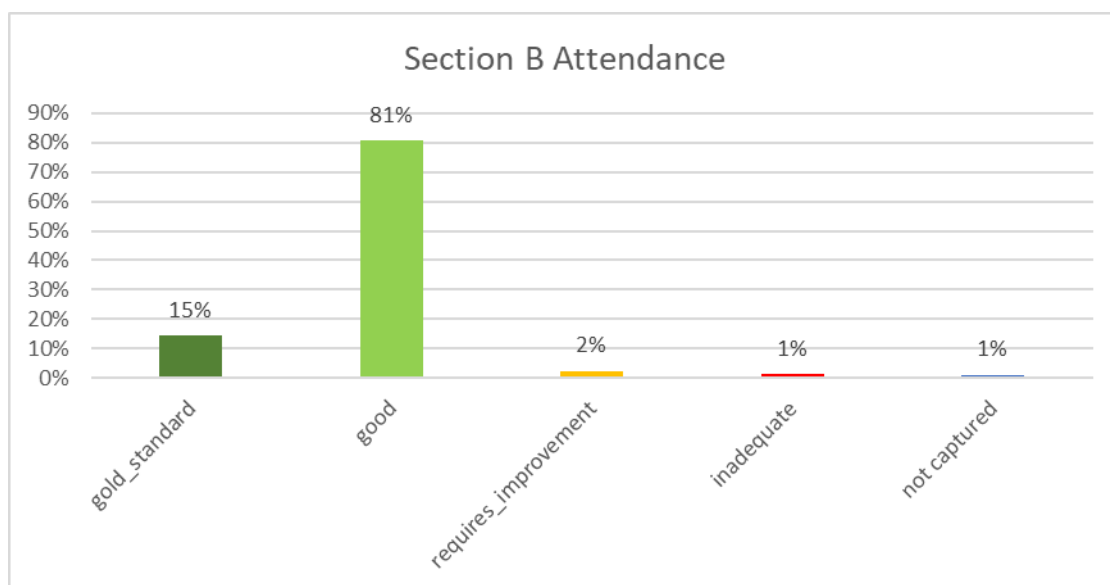
We are working closely with the Learning and Development Team in Children’s Social Care to share the new expectations regarding Section A of the PEP and we are sharing this in training with social care colleagues.

In response to this decrease in the quality of PEPs in summer term 2022, the VS put in additional procedures to support SWs in completing Section A.

- Training for SWs and support to complete Section A to a good standard and prior to the PEP meeting takes place regularly, as well as sharing Section A data on a termly basis with Childrens Social Care Senior leaders and managers.
- PEP deadlines and reminders are being shared with SWs to help with the administration of PEPs so the VS can decrease the length of time for sign-off (should be below 14 days for children new to care).
- ASYEs (Newly Qualified Social Workers) and SWs new to Stoke-on-Trent will be offered shadowing opportunities with the VS Practitioners to help them get used to the PEP system and expectations.

Section B (Completed by the Designated Teacher)

Attendance



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

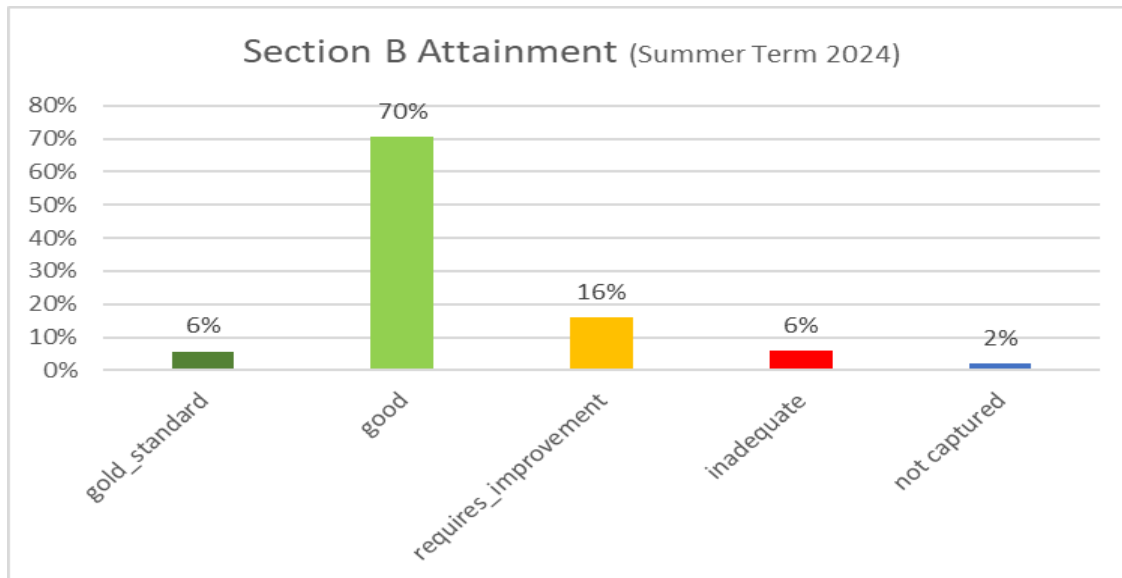
In response to this decrease in the quality of PEPs in the summer term 2023, the VS put in additional procedures to support DTs in completing Section B. This happened through DT training days, network meetings and advice and guidance from the VS Practitioners allocated to those schools/education settings.

- Training for DTs and support to complete Section B to a good standard will take place in face-to-face training sessions that all DTs will be invited to. They will be asked to attend at least once a year and there will be 3 offered, once a term.
- The VS have developed its Quality Assurance document to include a ‘Gold Standard’ description, so all professionals involved in completing the PEP document know what best practice looks like for each section

- New DTs will get a direct invite to the next face-to-face training event and the VS Practitioner will offer to lead their first Stoke-on-Trent PEP to familiarise them with the PEP system and expectations.
- SMART Target training will be offered in all face-to-face training sessions as well as the termly network meetings with DTs to improve the quality of SMART target writing. To coincide with this the VS will research a range of interventions and strategies on the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) website which shows success rates of nationally recognised interventions to help support our learners to make accelerated progress in school.

This section of the PEP has improved from 89% in the Summer Term 2023 to 96% in the Summer Term 2024.

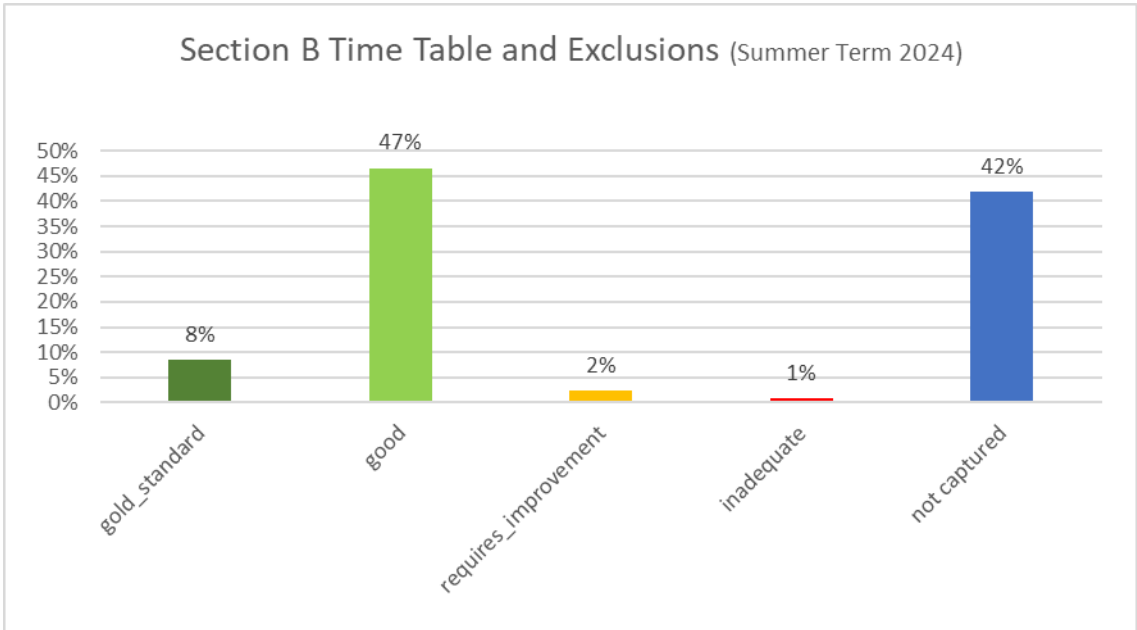
Attainment



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

The Attainment Section of the PEP shows 86% were rated good or above, this is lower than last year when consistently 85% + were rated good. For the Summer Term 2024 this reduced to 76% with many comments stating they were awaiting the outcome of the assessments rather than adding the teacher’s own judgement. Additional training will be offered in the Autumn 2024 term for targeted DTs who have gained Requires Improvement or Inadequate judgements in this area. Also, each VSP will offer coaching and guidance before, during and after the PEP meeting to help raise the quality of data received in this section of the PEP.

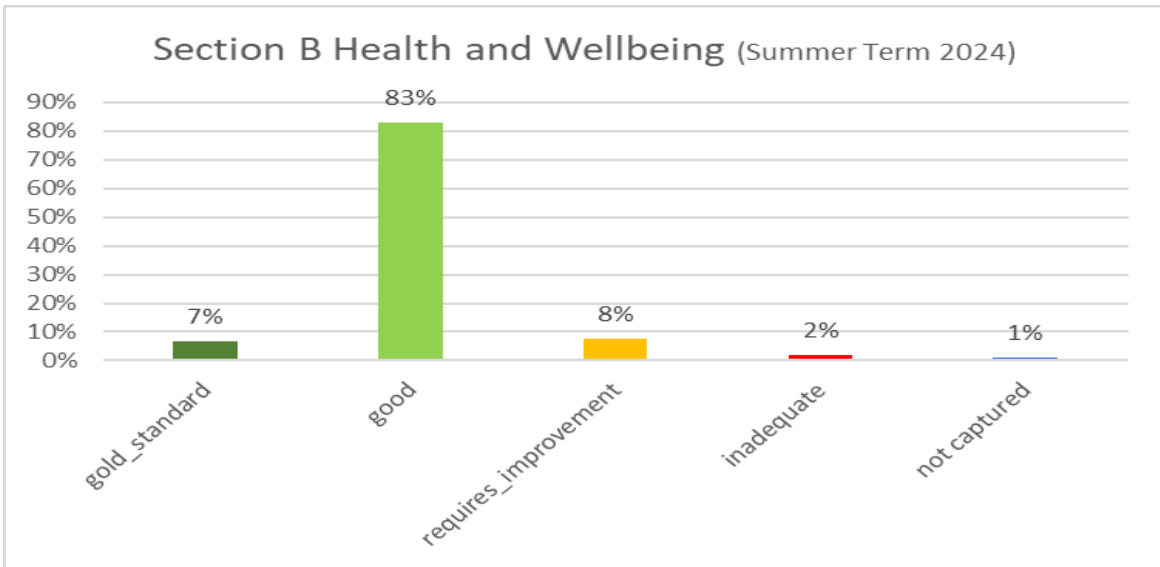
Time Table and Exclusions



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

This is not applicable to all PEP's where it is applicable 94.5% were rated Good or above.

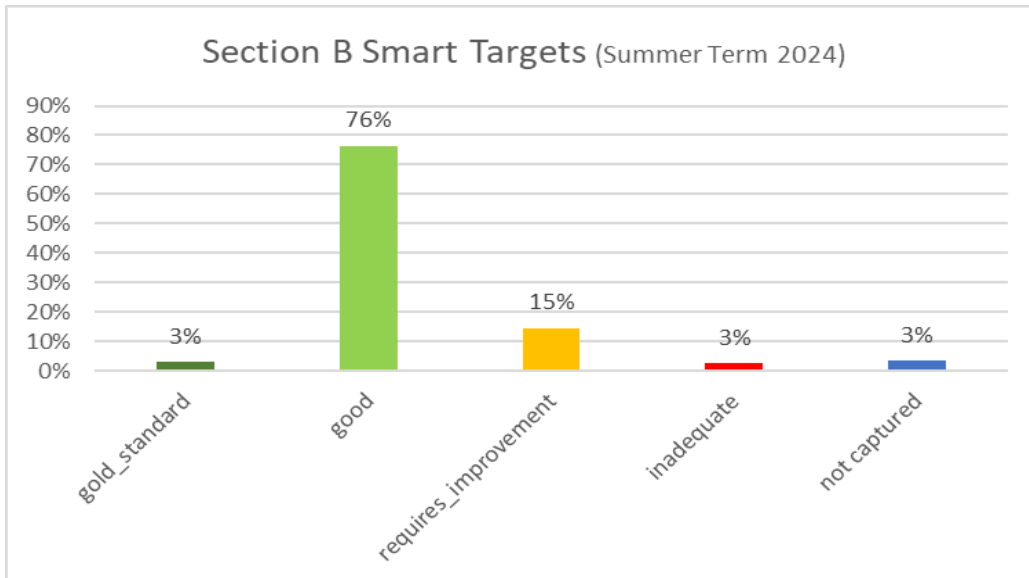
Health and Well-being



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

This section of the PEP is now 90% good or above, compared to Summer 2023 when 79% were rated good.

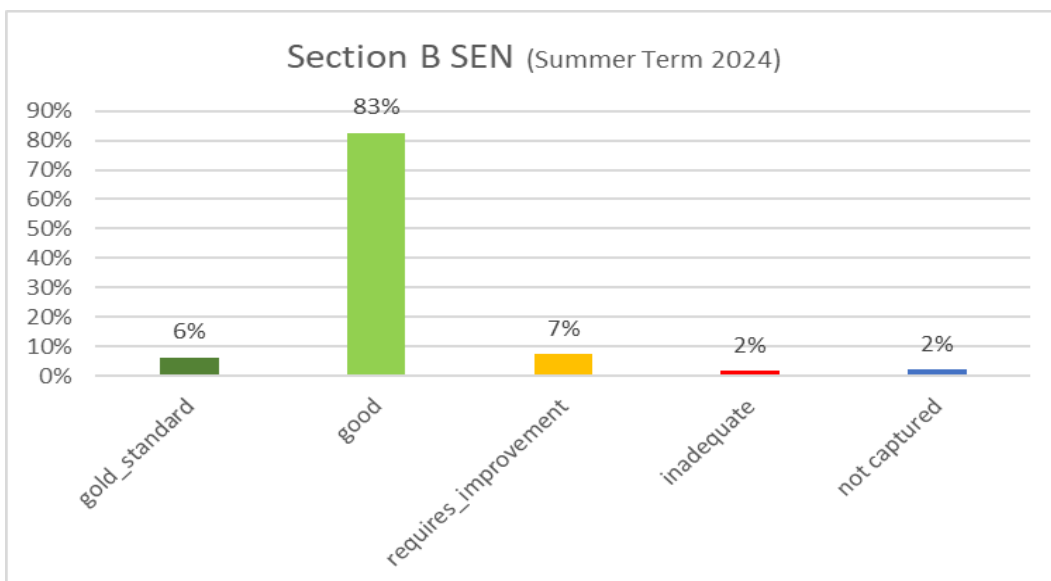
SMART Targets



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

Compared to Summer 2023 there has been a decrease of 9% in PEP's rated Good or above. As stated earlier, in the Spring Term 2025 additional, targeted training will be delivered for those DTs who gained Requires Improvement or Inadequate judgements for this section, it will also be covered in DT training sessions and our VS Practitioners will also offer coaching regarding improving the quality of these SMART targets.

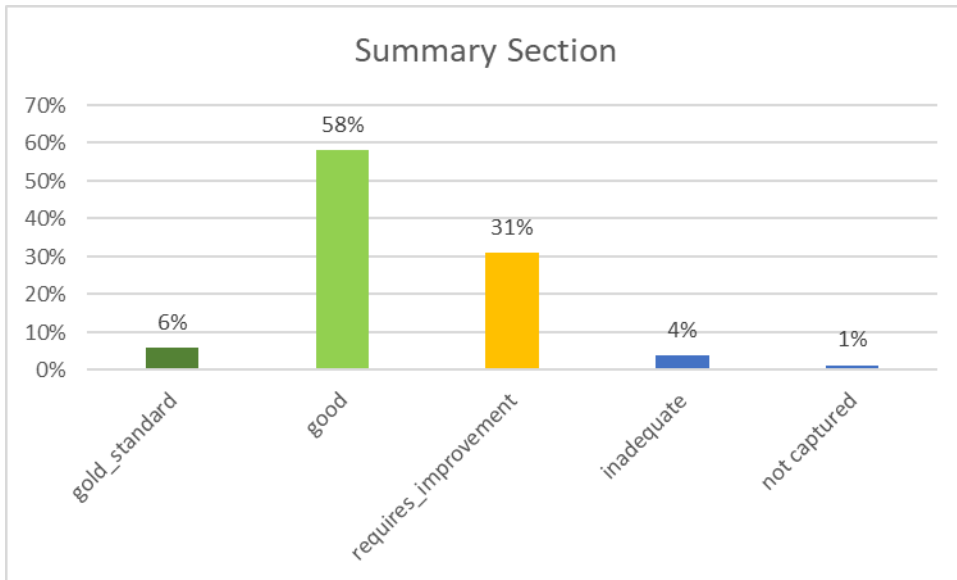
SEND



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

This area of the PEP has seen an improvement from 60% rated Good in Summer 2023 to 89% now rated Good or above.

Summary Section



Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

The Summary Section is a new section introduced in 2023 and is completed by Social Care.

It documents who attended the PEP and is a Summary of the PEP written for the young person covering comments on their emotional wellbeing and relationships/friendships, academic progress and whether the child is on track to achieve targets. The child's interests, successes and celebrations and next steps for the child. If the child has an EHCP, progress is referred to in the comments. The next meeting date and time is set and confirmed by the social worker, education setting, foster carer and virtual school. Ideally the summary is written by the social worker and used to inform the care plan.

The above shows at 64% rated as good or above. there is some way to go before it is at the same level as the other sections.

This will be the focus of additional, targeted training in the Summer 2025 term, where DTs have been graded Requires Improvement or Inadequate for this section of the PEP.

The Virtual School also monitors children who enter the care system during the academic year to ensure they have a PEP meeting undertaken as promptly as possible to establish that children are placed in appropriate schools, are settling into their environment and have the necessary support in place.

Month	Number new to care and still in care	Number where PEP meeting arranged within 14 days	% with PEP Meeting arranged within 14 days	Average time taken to arrange PEP meeting	Number with a completed PEP	% with a Completed PEP	Number where PEP completed by SW in 14 days	% where PEP completed in 14 days	Average days for SW to complete
Sep-23	8	7	88%	6.9	8	100%	0	0%	47.8
Oct-23	22	21	95%		22	100%	0	0%	
Nov-23	15	13	87%		15	100%	0	0%	
Dec-23	13	10	77%		13	100%	0	0%	
Jan-24	1	0	0%		1	100%	0	0%	
Feb-24	8	7	88%		8	100%	3	38%	
Mar-24	10	9	90%		10	100%	3	30%	
Apr-24	16	14	88%		16	100%	1	6%	
May-24	9	9	100%		5	56%	0	0%	
Jun-24	2	2	100%		2	100%	1	50%	
Jul-24	3	3	100%	1	33%	0	0%		
Total	107	95	89%		101	94%	8	7.50%	

Source: - Internal data PEP audit.

The average time taken to arrange the first PEP meeting remains around 7 days. The average time to complete the PEP has improved. It was 67 days in 2021/2022 and 51.2 days in 2022/2023 and is now 47.8 days in 2023/2024.

This is an area of focus for 2024-25 for the Virtual School and a new process has been created that will help drive down the average days it takes for the social worker to complete and sign off the PEP.

Case Study of a VS involvement on the Quality of PEPs

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School		Team: Primary	School: K
What were the concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children not making good levels of progress. 		Where we were? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School not completing PEPs to a good quality. Not implementing advised strategies. Poor correspondence. Insufficient targets set. 	
What difference have we made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEPs now completed to a good standard and in a timely manor. Built positive relationship with the school. School more confident to reach out to Virtual School if they need support. 		What did we do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Went into school to discuss barriers and gave examples of how to complete the PEP. Arranged for all PEPs to take place in school on one day per term so VSP could support. Changed the DT. Made sure date for next PEP day is in the diary. Sent regular check-in emails. 	
What have we done to embed good practice more widely <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep lines of communication open. Ensure VSP approachable and work with settings for best possible outcomes. 			Date 17/02/2024

Case Study where the VS Practitioner arranged a PEP and organised 1:1 tuition funding

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: Secondary	Age of child: 16 yrs	
What were the concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S is on roll at a Stoke-on-Trent Secondary Mainstream school. She refuses to attend this school and as such, they have provided her with 3 days provision at a local AP S's attendance at the provision has been sporadic, but when she attends, she works well and enjoys herself. S became pregnant during last academic year and gave birth in late July 2023. She had maternity leave for the first party of the Autumn Term 2023 and her return to education was planned in November 2023 after the half term holiday. Since her return from maternity leave, her attendance has declined as she doesn't want to come to school as she needs to be with her son. She states that she will start her education again in September 2024 when at college 	Where we were? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S is refusing to attend her mainstream setting on the two days that she would be there. Her attendance at the AP has also reduced. Consideration of S's needs as a mother also need to be taken into consideration alongside her educational needs – all professionals involved do not wish for her child to be taken into care. 		
What difference have we made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S has a customised educational offer that takes into account her situation and has allowed her to feel that her views have been listened to and taken into consideration. It is allowing her to get targeted support in in core subjects and the subject that she wishes to continue with in her post -16 education. It has helped to reduce her risk of being NEET both now and in year 12 	What did we do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings are held outside the PEPs with school and social care S and mum are also invited but often do not attend. EWO referral made by the VS Advice given by VSP to SW and SB regarding government grant to young mother's that will provide funds to secure childcare whilst in education. However, S does not want to take this off up as she doesn't want anyone else looking after her child. AP arrangements have been changed to accommodate S as a mother with AP provision reduced to 1 day and 2 days at home 1:1 tutoring being used. Arrangements have been made with school to allow S to undertake her learning in the inclusion centre at school on the 2 days that she needs to attend there. 		
What have we done to embed good practice more widely <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listened to and acted upon the pupil voice she has expressed that she feels listened to. Multi agency approach with regular contact with all professionals involved in SN care 			Date 31/01/2024

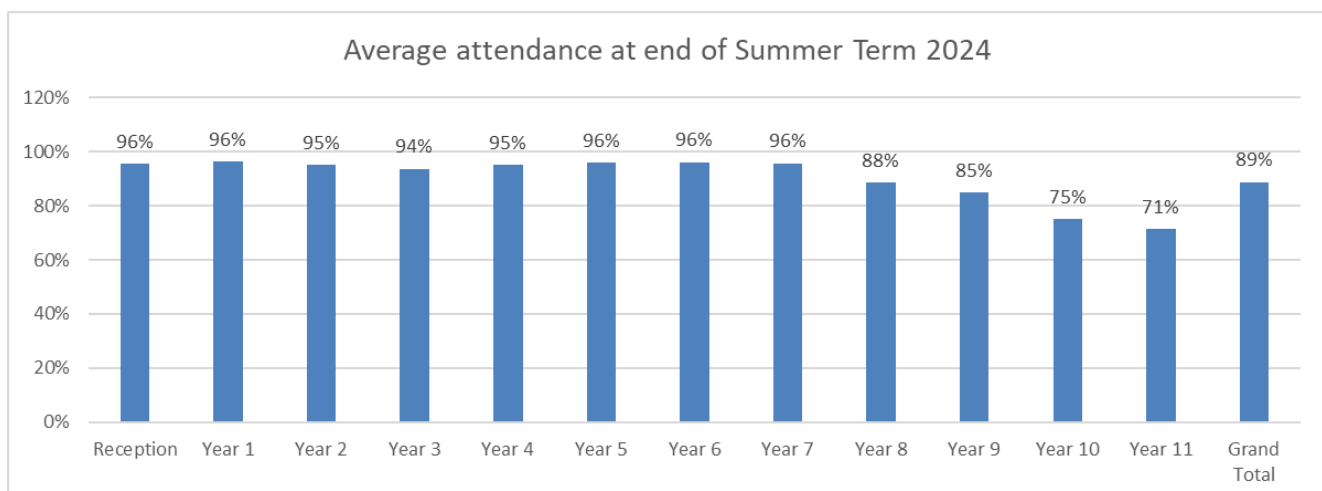
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Attendance

The VS monitors the attendance of all Cared for Children. For children placed out of the city where the information is not captured on the internal Capita One system, the VS commissions the services of the company Looked After Call to record the attendance and exclusion information and provide files to upload into our system.

The table below shows that attendance overall for the period 01/09/2023 to 19/07/2024 was 89%. The chart below shows Year 11 has the lowest attendance, some of this is due to year 11 leaving on 30/06/2024 and how this was initially recorded on the school's attendance systems. Without Year 11 the overall attendance is 92%.



Source: Internal data MBR

The average attendance this year is 89% or 92% excluding year 11 (figures from internal data sources) is down on the 2022/2023 year when the year-end figure was 92% or 93% excluding year 11 pupils.

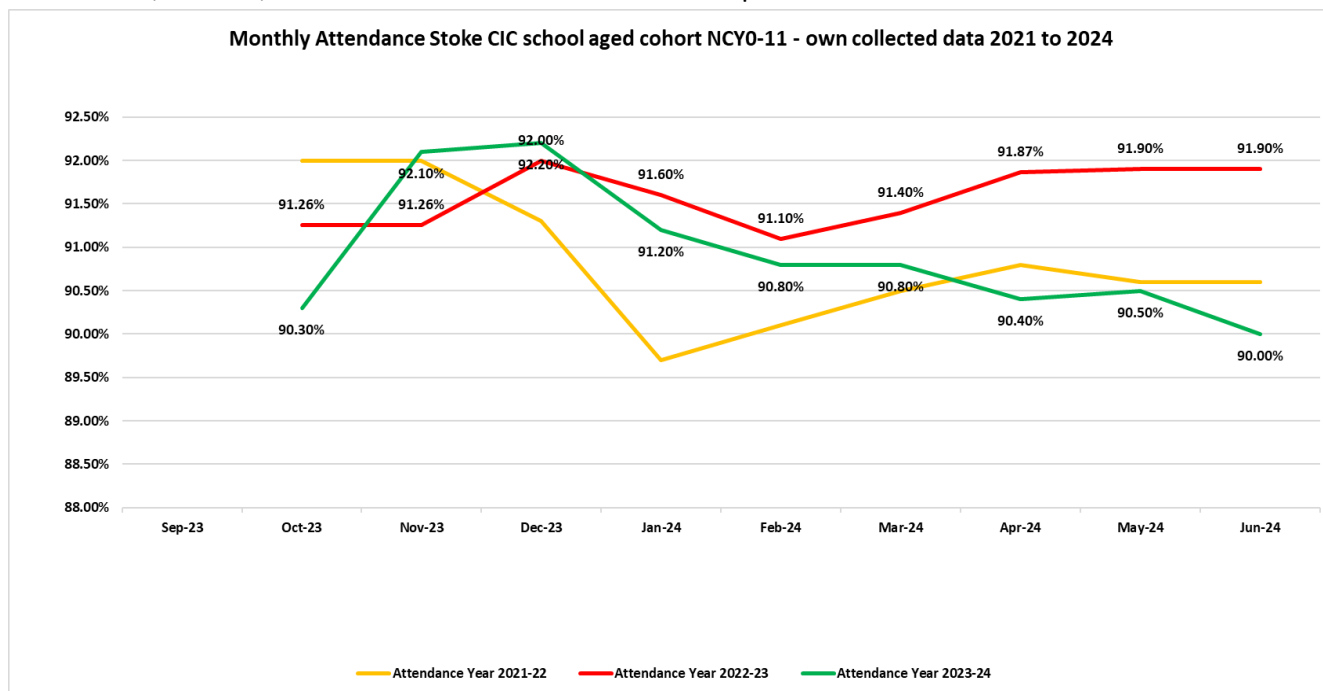
The Virtual School monitors the attendance of the individual pupils both by receiving monitoring reports monthly on attendances below 90% but also as part of the PEP process. This year with case workers the VS has been able to impact the attendance of some of the young people by engaging with the young person and hold regular attendance meetings.

The Virtual School have a multi-layered approach to improve attendance, depending on the %

- Below 95%- an attendance SMART target is automatically generated by the ePEP system, and an agreed SMART target must be written into the PEP with the aim to improve it that term
- Below 90%- In addition to the above the child will be rated as Medium intervention and Support so the child will receive a greater level of support from the Virtual School via their school, Foster Carer and Social Worker

Below 80%- In addition to the SMART targets the child will be rated as High Support and Intervention and will be offered the greatest level of support by the Virtual School. The Virtual School will work closely with the Education Welfare Service to support the school, Foster Carer and Social Worker to improve their attendance and utilise Pupil Premium funding and other grants to help them engage with their learning and catch up on missed learning.

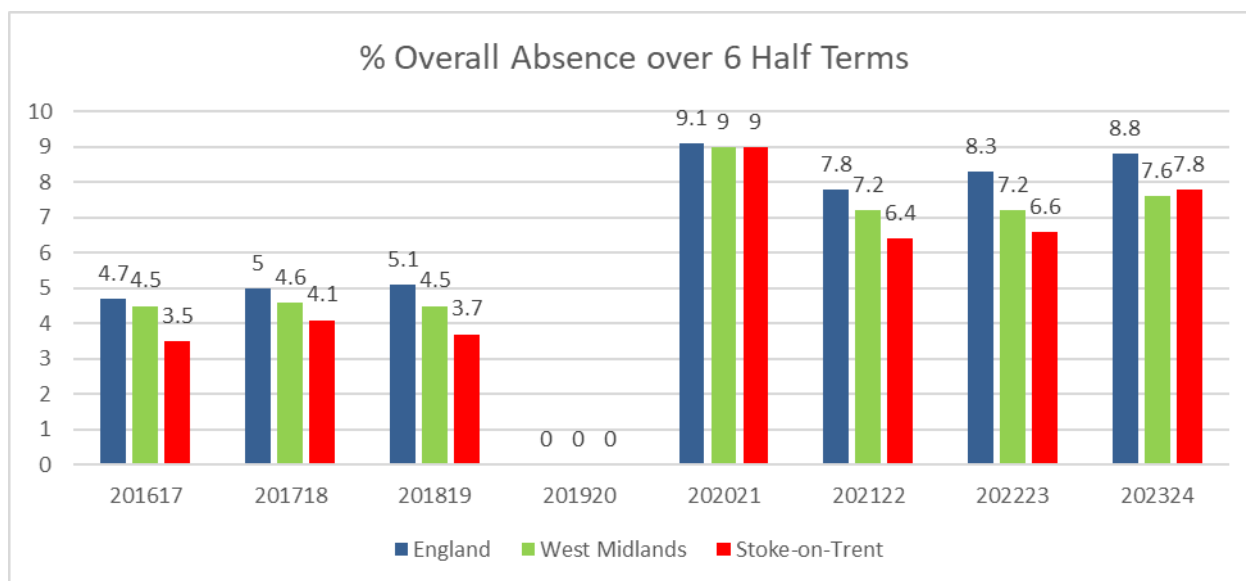
In May 2024 the team was restructured further, to increase the support for Stoke-on-Trent’s cohort of Children. Its new structure has 24 (FTE) members of staff. In addition to this a Service Level Agreement was made with the Education Welfare Service for an full time Education Welfare Officer who would have a ringfenced responsibility to track, monitor and support to improve the attendance for Cared for Children and Children with a Social Worker. They will review the attendance data weekly and work with the Virtual School staff, schools, foster carers and social workers to improve attendance.



Source: Internal data MBR

The above chart shows how the attendance rate has been falling compared to the previous years 2023/2024 is the green line.

Historically absence for the LAC cohort in Stoke-on-Trent has been marginally lower than for the West Midlands and National CfC cohorts.

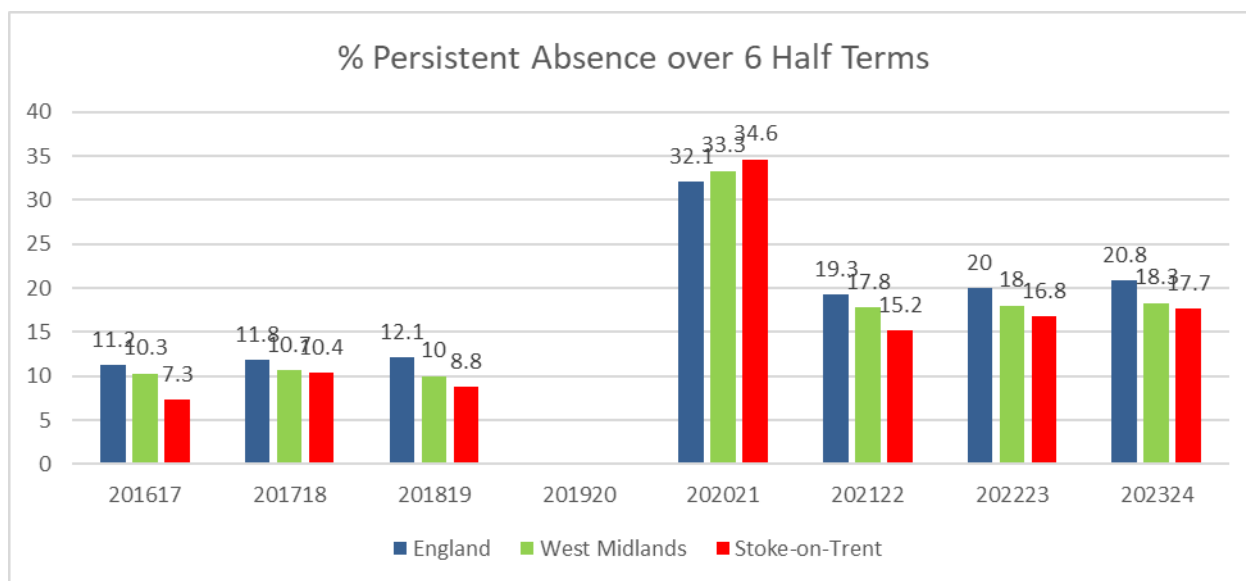


Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25

The DFE have published attendance information over the 6 half terms for 2016/17 to 2023/2024 (note there is no data for 2019/2020 due to covid.)

The table above shows that attendance in Stoke-on-Trent is higher than the National CfC comparative by 1% but is now lower than West Midlands.

The absent rate is 1.0% lower than the England CfC comparative figure but is now 0.2% higher than West Midlands. The chart shows that although attendance is still around 4% lower than pre Covid times.



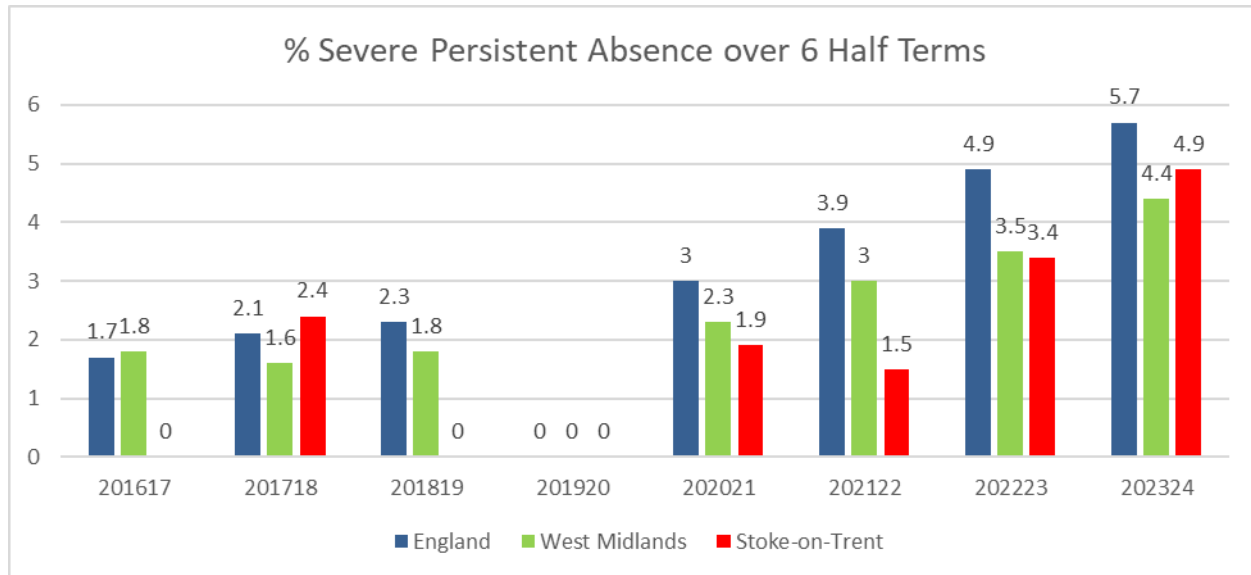
Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25

The DFE have published persistent absence information over the 6 half terms for 2016/17 to 2023/2024 (note there is no data for 2019/2020 due to covid).

The Persistent Absence (attendance under 90%) shows that although the % of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen by half compared to 2020/21, the rate rose again in 2022/23 and 2023/24 a further 0.9% and is now 8.9% higher than it was pre Covid.

The data for 2023/24 shows that Stoke-on-Trent has a lower rate of persistent absence at 17.7% compared to 18.3% for the West Midlands CfC and 20.8% for England CfC.

A new measure is now being monitored – Severe Persistent Absence (attendance under 50%).



Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25

The Severe Persistent Absence (attendance under 50%) shows that although the % of pupils who are severely persistently absent has increased again in 2023/2024 Stoke-on-Trent has a rate at 4.9% this is an increase of 1.5% on 22/23 and is now higher than the West Midlands at 4.4%. The England rate has risen by 0.8% rise on 2022/23. This is an area that Stoke-on-Trent needs to monitor.

Case study how VS supported in improving Attendance

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: Primary	Age of child: 7 yrs	
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Persistent absence or late marks in school - Reluctance to separate from carers in the morning - Working below ARE's due to large gaps in learning 		<p>Where we were?</p> <p>Attendance as of 12/1/2024 is 29.6%</p>	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <p>L is now attending school in a morning and is usually on time; this is in line with His wishes and feelings gathered by myself</p> <p>L is attending all of his lessons and will now start to learn subject knowledge he Has missed over the past year.</p>		<p>What did we do?</p> <p>Supporting school / carers and social worker with meetings Supporting with a sensory diet to encourage attendance Supported with planning for backward chaining Spoke with L himself and gathered his voice</p>	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 			<p>Date 17/02/2024</p>
stoke.gov.uk		 City of Stoke-on-Trent	

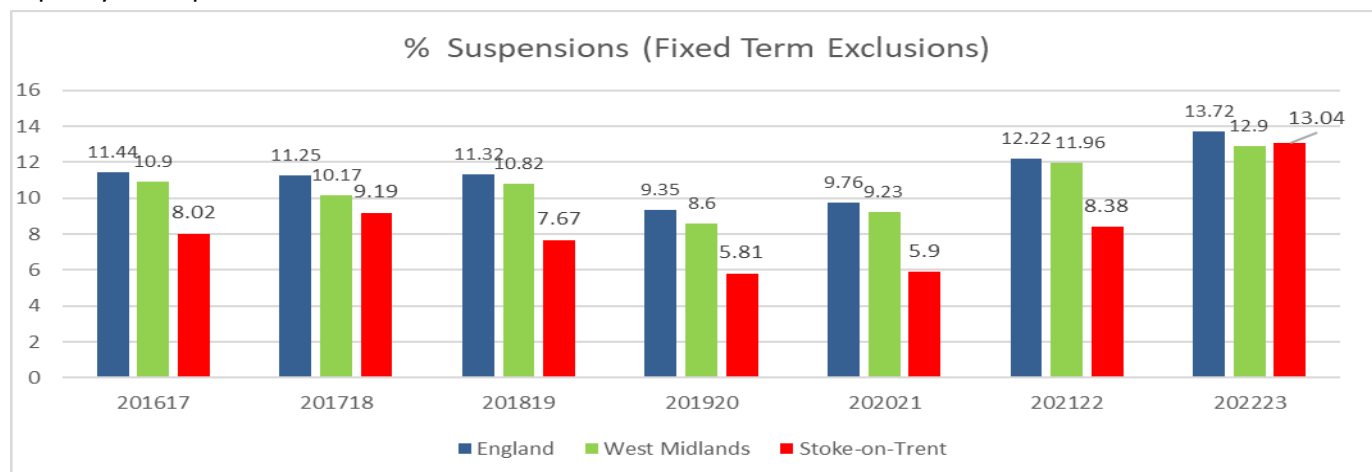
Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: Secondary K	Age of child: yr 10	
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <p>School attendance No SEND need to identify SEMH K refusing to attend school Vulnerable pupil Complex needs Is mainstream school right for K? Numerous meetings have taken place at school .</p>		<p>Where we were?</p> <p>Not attending school</p>	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <p>Attendance Officer Multi agency meeting scheduled with carers to discuss next steps to discuss smaller provision– Stop Gap or attend T Academy (same Trust) and attend their TCLC room.</p>		<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance targets on PEP • Meetings with carer and school re attendance • School considered K attending an AP • Advised part time timetable– school implemented this • Informed school of the Barnardo's watch Tower intervention school implemented this • School's attendance officer carried out home visits • School sent work home for K to complete– did engage with this, watching videos linked to school topics. • Fortnightly meetings between VSP and DT, and DT with Inclusion Manager • EHCP has been requested for K • VSP communicating with SW about attendance concerns 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi agency working 			<p>Date 01/02/2024</p>
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Exclusions/ Suspensions

Fixed Rate Exclusion/Suspensions

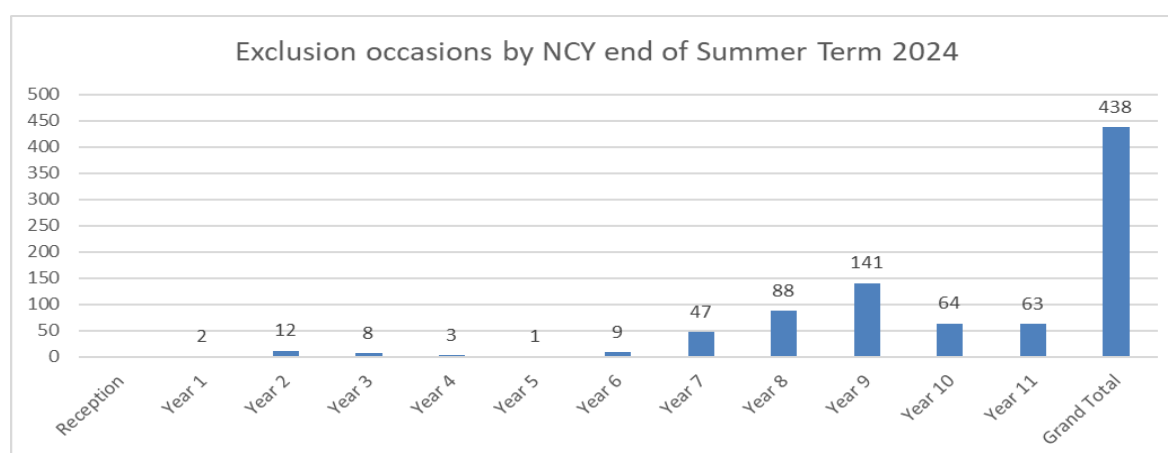
The VS has closely monitored fixed-term exclusions – now termed as “Suspensions” by the DFE. Last academic year the VS saw an increase in the overall suspension rates, these are tracked on a weekly basis via the Virtual School Weekly Dashboard meetings. From these meetings VS Practitioners liaise with the schools/education settings to be part of return-to-school meetings and offer support and guidance to make the return a success, as well as offering new ideas and resources to upskill staff and provide more capacity to help the child at this difficult time.



Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25

The published data for 2022/23 year (*note: this is published in 2023/24 and is 12 months behind other data*) shows that the % for Fixed Term Exclusions (or Suspensions) was 13.04% for Stoke-on-Trent this rate has risen sharply 4.7% since 2021/22 when it was 8.38%. The rate is now for the first time higher than West Midlands at 12.9% but lower than England CfC at 13.72%

There has been an increase on 2022/2023 of 5.4% rate and are now higher than pre-Covid levels. The table below shows the total suspension occasions by national curriculum year at the end of the Summer Term 2024.



Source: Internal data MBR

This year, NCY 9 had the most Suspensions last year it was the Year 10 cohort.

Since the VS expansion, the information we are gaining in PEPs is becoming more accurate each term and it matches the information we receive through our weekly dashboard and the requests for support from Designated Teachers in schools/education settings and the Social Workers. However, there are still some occasions when the VS are not informed when these suspensions occur, so it is hard for us to have a positive influence on the reintegration of our pupils back into school. In the first instance, the VS would challenge that a suspension has a huge negative impact on our children’s education, and we would like the school/education setting to reconsider or find an alternative solution to an exclusion. However, on some occasions, the VS cannot influence their decision. Ideally in these situations, the VS would be part of the return-to-school meetings and would help by offering advice and where appropriate additional Pupil Premium+ funding to help with supporting the pupil's re-engagement with education.

This is also an opportunity to remind schools/education settings of the impact exclusions have from an attachment and trauma perspective on the rejection our pupils experience in exclusion and how it can retrigger trauma from previous rejections in their lives. On many occasions, this will mean relationships between staff and peers at the school will be negatively affected and the child will find it challenging to return after a period of suspension.

The priority rating of the pupil will be immediately changed to with High-Intervention and Support and be in liaison with DTs, SWs, and Foster Carers on at least a fortnightly basis. The VS would also be requested to attend the return-to-school meeting to offer support and guidance on how to make the return as successful as possible for the pupil. Where appropriate the VS may request an emergency PEP meeting to look at building an action plan with SMART targets designed to support a reintegration into school/education setting and additional funding to support the high needs of that child at threat time. It may include supporting the school in writing a risk assessment for that child, or a positive behaviour plan. On very few occasions it may also include 1:1 support or reduced timetables as they transition quickly back onto full-time timetables.

Suspension and Exclusion rates in our RAiE/AATI Schools.

	20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances	Number of permanent exclusions	Number of FTE instances
AATI schools	0	42	1	82	0	98	1	111
RAiE schools	0	43	1	115	2	233	1	196

(highlighted are when schools joined either the AATI project or RAiE project)

The number of FTE instances shows a consistent increase each year for AATI schools, with permanent exclusions remaining consistent. The number of permanent exclusions fluctuates slightly in RAiE schools, with no exclusions in 2020/21 and 2022/23, and one exclusion in 2021/22 and 2023/24. The number of FTE for RAiE schools has decreased since their start with the project. We did not have the Stoke-on-Trent schools and national average to compare these results against.

Case study how VS supported to reduce Exclusions

Stoke-on-Trent Early Intervention & Children's Social Care Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: EY and Primary	Age of child: 9
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> L has been living with Carer's since he and his sister were removed from mum's care in April 2021 due to concerns of domestic violence, substance misuse, neglect and poor parental mental health. L had a school move to F in January 2023 so he could attend a school nearer to his carers. He struggled with the transition. Physical – L has a club foot and has used a splint for stability. 	<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following a number of suspensions for physical harm and damage, L was placed on a part time timetable from 14th July 2023. He attends Mon -Fri 8:40-11am. L was achieving ARE in maths and reading and working towards in writing. Due to his reduced timetable and SEMH, L is now below in all areas. He struggles to engage in any academic learning. L is having limited contact with his peers as much of his time is spent 2:1 with adults. Carer was struggling with L's behaviours at home. Initially, carer was acting as one of the adults in school in the 2:1 ratio. 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EHCP Pending. L is currently having a settled period in school on his PT timetable. He attends early for breakfast. FC now uses school carpark to ensure L arrives in school safely. NB: Trial increase in time attending did not work. CAMHS's assessment did not confirm ADHD. Through B emotional support has been offered to L and his carers. Placement now seems more stable. Aim – To ensure L is placed in the right SEMH specialist setting and accessing a full -time school place/curriculum. 	<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VSP attended CAMHS's meetings for professionals and Carer's. School reported concerns that L's behaviours were starting to escalate. VS provided additional funding- Summer term 2023, (used for an Ed Psych and EHWP support through B. Autumn term 2023 (used for 1 to 1 staffing). VSP attended professionals' meetings to discuss school's concerns and how to meet L's needs whilst making sure he stays safe. PT timetable put in place. Advised school on procedure/paperwork for PT timetable. Advised school/SW on what specialist provisions to consult with pending EHCP. VSP visited SEMH provision with SW. PEPs attended by VSP. 	<p>Date 31/01/24</p>
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p>		

Permanent Exclusion

There were 2 Permanent Exclusions during 2023/2024 year, both were fiercely contested by the Virtual School but were upheld by the schools.

One involved a child that was permanently excluded within 14 days of coming into care, where he had been separated from his twin sibling. This child has since moved to an Independent school that better meets his needs.

The second case involved twin siblings that again had been separated in care and in this case the child was attending a school that had no other Cared for Children on roll and the school had struggled to cater for this child's needs. He has since moved to a residential special school.


The 2022/2023 figure for England records 0.1% of children are permanently excluded and West Midlands and Stoke-on-Trent reporting 0% for permanent exclusions. Again, the data is 12 months later than the other data.

We anticipate that this will be harder to maintain for our Cared for Children going forward as schools and academies are exercising their rights to exclude, and numbers in the non-CfC cohort are increasing. From attending West Midlands VS Head Teacher (WMVSHT) meetings it is clear that permanent exclusions are on the rise regionally including the virtual school cohorts.

In 2023-24 the Virtual School managed to overturn or avoid 15 Permanent Exclusions of Cared for Children. The Stoke-on-Trent VS Head will be part of a regional task and finish group to review Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions for Cared for Children in 2024-25. The ambition will be to look for trends and solutions that can be shared to help improve the education stability for our children across the region.

Case study how VS supported to overturn a Permanent Exclusion

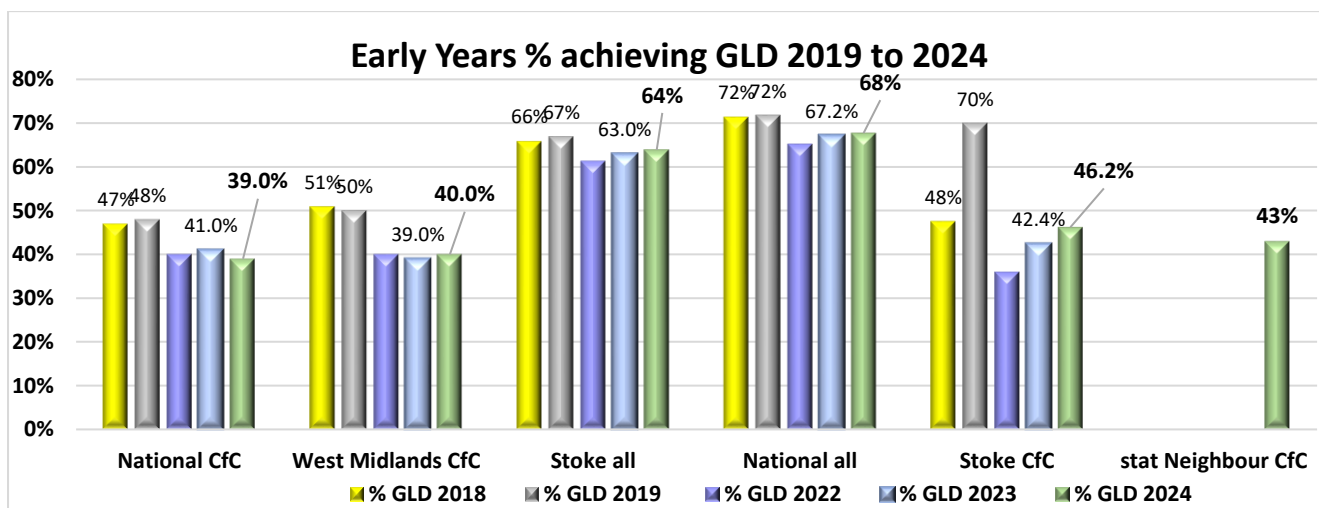
Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School		Team:		Age of child: 7 years	
What were the concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationship between D and school had broken down, school were unwilling to accept support or advise from ourselves or the therapists where D lived. He had a number of exclusions resulting in a permanent exclusion. The class teacher held carpet time with the whole class and D to ask his peers how his behaviours made them feel. This resulted in D feeling shamed and reinforced his feelings that he felt isolated from his peers. D displayed behaviours that were seen as challenging such as swearing, throwing objects and hitting out. However, D is a 7 - year-old who has experienced 7 placement moves within the past 8 months. D has not accessed full time education since June 2023, the school did perm ex D 			Where we were? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessing education At risk of a placement breakdown due to not being in school Permanently excluded 		
What difference have we made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> D is having positive school experiences D is accessing his education and has made friends The placement is now much more stable 			What did we do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Perm ex was overturned and tutoring put in place A new school was found which are very supportive and nurturing – D is having positive school experiences and has settled in well. D is slowly increasing his timetable to access more lessons. 		
What have we done to embed good practice more widely					 Date 17/05/2024

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Outcomes 2023-2024

Early Years



Source: Nexus Data 2024.

The EYFS cohort for 2024 was 26, 4 had no data or had been disapplied. The results for 2024 are 46.2% achieved GLD (Good Level of Development). A key factor that has impacted this increase in achievement is down to the number of Cared for Children who are now accessing Nursery provision.

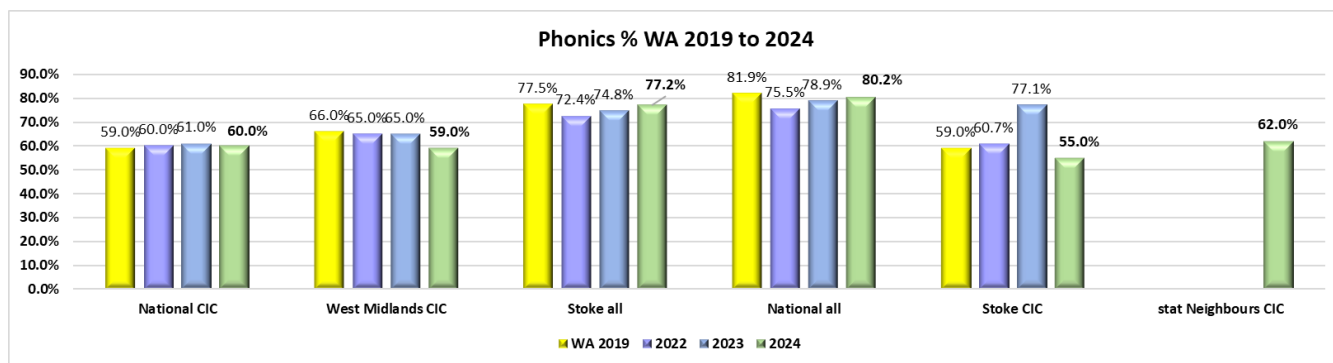
Since the expansion of the Virtual School in January 2022, we have been supporting children from 0-18 instead of school-aged only. In that time, we have supported around 164 Cared for Children to go to nursery, this means that instead of around 20% being in settings the percentage is now around 83%. The Virtual School also helps by making sure they receive the appropriate funding. The Virtual School has also made sure each of these children has a PEP which comes with £100 to help the setting with interventions and help identify needs earlier than when only 20% of Cared for Children went to nursery pre-January 2022. The impact this has had on 2022-23 data can already be seen in the 6.4% increase against 2021-22.

The 2024 figures show Stoke-on-Trent is 7.2% higher than the National CfC figure of 39% ,6.2% higher than the West Midlands figure of 40% and 3.2% higher than Statistical Neighbours at 43%.

This shows a steady improvement for this post-Covid cohort.

Phonics

The cohort for 2024 at this Key Stage is 40. Below is the 2024 Phonics data for NCY Year 1 assessed in the Summer Term.



Source: Nexus data for 2024.

The Phonics figures for 2023/24 is 55% as WA (Working At) this is 22.1% lower than the last published results in 2022/2023 of 77.1% and is 5% lower than the National CfC figure of 60% and 4% lower than the West Midlands CfC figure of 59% and is 7% lower than the Statistical Neighbours figure of 62%.

The figure of 77.1% was an usually high percentage which is being explored through the business analyst team to find out how this cohort outperformed all children in Stoke-on-Trent. The figure this year is a huge decrease which can be explained by the difference in numbers of children in the Year 1 cohorts in the years ending 2023 and 2024.

In 2023, 44 children were in Year 1 and cared for, carrying an individual child percentage of 2.27%. 31 children met the standard. (32 marks). 3 children did not sit the test due to SEND needs.

In 2024, 62 children were in Year 1 and cared for, carrying an individual child percentage of 1.61%. 36 children met the standard (32 marks). 2 children did not sit the test due to SEND needs. 1 child was very close to meeting the standard (scoring 30 marks)

Case Study showing the VS impact on supporting an EY CfC to achieve Good Level of Development (GLD)

Stoke-on-Trent Early Intervention & Children's Social Care Case Study


Service Area: Virtual School
Team: EY and Primary
EYFS PVI setting

What were the concerns?

- M a 3-year-old child with a diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, Global delay, highly dysregulated, preverbal, hypermobile and physically unstable (did not walk until just before his 3rd birthday).
- Had experienced DV, neglect, substancemisuse and possible sexual harm.
- Concerns about meeting his needs.

Where we were?

- Nursery unsure of how to support.
- New foster carers
- New Social worker



What difference have we made


- PEP meetings were very positive and of a good standard
- All professional's child focused and prepared for the meeting.
- M is doing well in nursery and at home and can now say some words and jump!
- EHC application in process.

What did we do?

- Research around thechilds needs.
- Attended FAS training.
- DT supported throughout the PEP meetings.
- Discussion with EP regardingM's needs in a consultation meeting.
- Advice given to Foster carers and nursery around ways to manage dysregulation, communication difficulties.
- Advice given to SW, FC and nursery regarding the EHC and school application process.
- Led Pre Cop meeting with SW, FC and nursery to prepare them.
- Attended EYCoPathwaymeeting and supported throughout

What have we done to embed good practice more widely

- Shared Copathway procedure with all VS Practitioners. Social worker now more aware of EHC process.



Date
25.3.24

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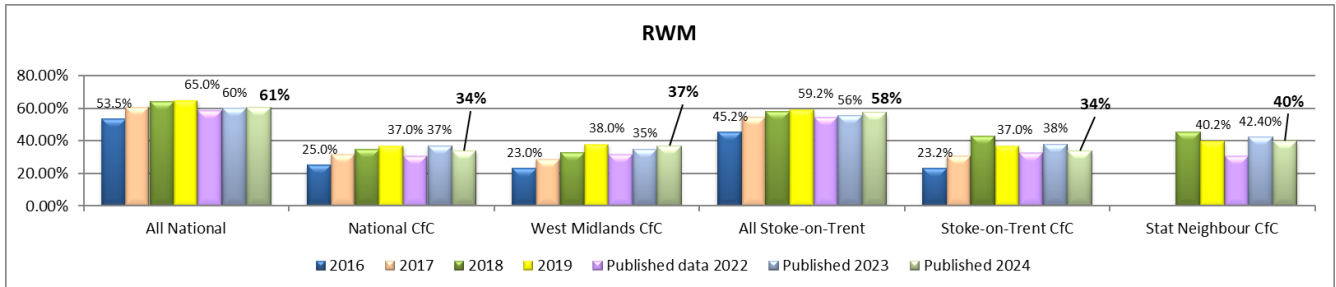
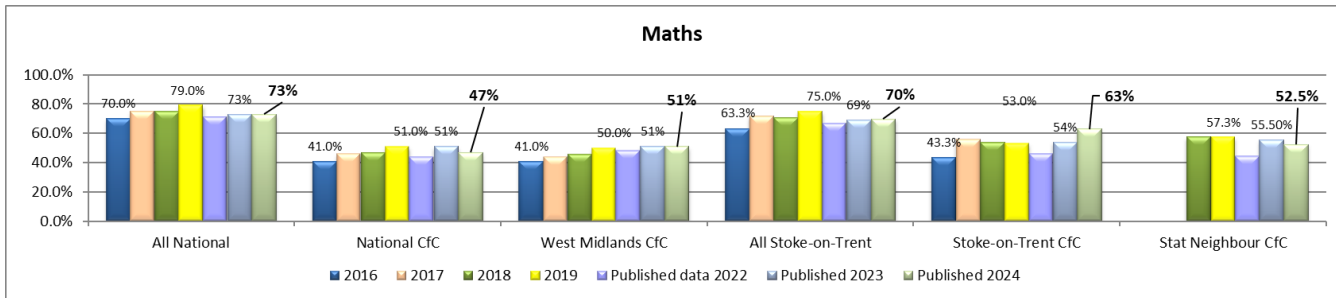
Key Stage 1 The DFE stopped requiring schools to do Key Stage 1 assessments at the end of NCY 2.

Key Stage 2

Group	2016	2017	2018	2019	Published data 2022	Published 2023	Published 2024
All National	66.0%	75.0%	73%	74%			
National Cfc	41.0%	51.0%	54%	53.0%			
West Midlands Cfc	38.0%	51.0%	54%	55.0%			
All Stoke-on-Trent	58.5%	69.4%	67%	70%			
Stoke-on-Trent Cfc	36.7%	63.0%	56%	56.0%			
Stat Neighbour Cfc			56.7%	56.50%			

Group	2016	2017	2018	2019	Published data 2022	Published 2023	Published 2024
All National	74.0%	78.0%	71%	72%			
National Cfc	46.0%	49.0%	48%	46%			
West Midlands Cfc	43.0%	48.0%	46%	51%			
All Stoke-on-Trent	69.6%	74.1%	69%	70%			
Stoke-on-Trent Cfc	40.0%	57.0%	46%	57%			
Stat Neighbour Cfc			59.1%	49.50%			48.3%

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Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.2025 – with Nexus data for 2024.

Reading: The number at expected for reading at Key Stage 2 for 2024 is 56%. This the same as the last published results in 2022/2023 and is 11% higher than the pre-pandemic 2019 results of 45%. It is 3% higher than the National CfC at 53% and 1% higher than the West Midlands at 56% and 0.4% lower than Statistical Neighbours at 56.4%.

Writing: The number at expected for writing at Key Stage 2 for 2024 is 57%. This is 11% higher than the last published results in 2022/2023 of 46.0% and is 4% higher than pre-pandemic 2019 results of 53%. It is 11% higher than the National CfC at 46% and 6% higher than the West Midlands at 51%. And 8.7% higher than Statistical Neighbours at 48.3%.

Maths: The number at expected for maths at Key Stage 2 for 2024 is 63%. This is 9% higher than the last published results in 2022/2023 of 46% and this is 10% higher than pre-pandemic 2019 results of 53%. It is 16% higher than National CfC of 47% and 12% higher than West Midlands CfC at 51% and 10.5% higher than Statistical Neighbour at 52.5%.

RWM: The number at expected for RWM at Key Stage 2 for 2024 is 34%. This is 4% lower than the last published results in 2022/2023 of 38% and is 3% lower than pre-pandemic 2019 results of 37%. It is the same as the National CfC and 3% lower than the West Midlands CfC at 37% and 6% lower than Statistical Neighbours at 40%.

The Virtual School has tightened its use of Pupil Premium Funding to focus on academic progress and supporting our children to access their education. As the quality of the PEPs improves so will the interventions and impact they are having on pupil progress. This can be seen in the year-on-year data against previous Stoke-on-Trent Cared for Children cohort’s post-pandemic.


For our Year 6 children we provide specific targeted support through their PEP. Children are tracked closely by schools and VSPs to make sure that they are making the best progress possible from baseline. Pupil Premium Plus is used for interventions and booster sessions to ensure that children receive the support they need. Additional funding is often given schools to provide this support. Children are also given extra emotional support to prepare them for their SATs and to provide them with this during the testing time.

Progress – There is no progress data for Key Stage 2 cohort for 2024 as this cohort was not assessed at Key Stage 1 due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Case Study showing the VS impact on supporting a KS2 CfC towards achieving Age-Related Expectations

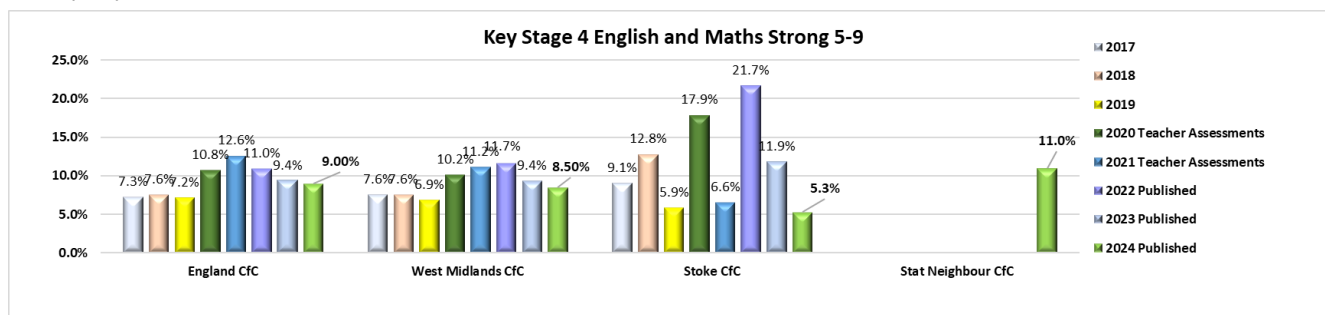
Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School		Team: Primary	Age of child: 10 yrs
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> G placed in care under S20 due to neglect and placed with her Auntie and younger siblings. G has been home schooled by Mum since she was Year 2. 		<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> G is not on a school roll. G is currently working at Year 2 level. 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> G made accelerated progress by the summer term in all key areas of learning, working at Year 5/6 level. G SATs scores Reading 96, Writing WTS, SPAG 98, Maths 102. 		<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VSP liaised with Oldham admissions to secure G a school place to start in Year6 for September. Attended pep meetings. Arranged additional funding of £700 per term from the VSH, for 1:1 support in key learning areas. Built positive relationship with the school and facilitated communication between school and social care. 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative working with all professionals to achieve the best possible outcomes for G. Flexibility to attend meetings outside of working hours to suit other professionals so meeting could go ahead 			<p>Date 17/07/2024</p>

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Achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 (ages 14 to 16)

The graphs below are the results for children who have been in care for a full 12 months from 01/04/2023 to 31/03/2024.

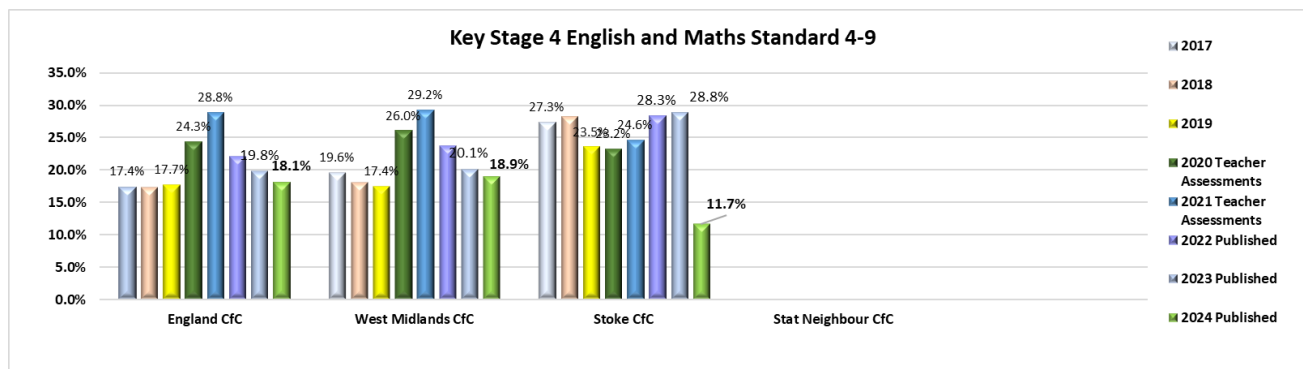


Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children cared for by local authorities, in England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25 – with Nexus data for 2024

The 2023/2024 results in the above chart shows that 5.3% achieved a ‘Strong Pass’ (5-9) in English and Math’s this is, this is 6.6% lower than 2022/23 figure of 11.9% and 0.6% lower than pre-pandemic 2019 of 5.9%. It is 3.7% lower than National CfC at 9% and 3.2% lower than West Midlands CfC at 8.5% and is 5.7% lower than Statistical Neighbours at 11%

Our cohort is a lot bigger this year it is 42% higher for those in care over 12 months. The majority (70-75%) of those who got a Standard or Strong passes had been in care more than 5 years. This shows that

the stability of being in care can have a positive impact on the outcomes for our young people. Of the total cohort of 78, 37(47%) had been in care 5 years or more at the time of the exams in the summer and 25% had entered care during NCY 10 and 11. This will be an area of deep dive for the Business Analyst which will be used when future planning and support offered by the Virtual School.



Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children cared for by local authorities, in England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.2025 – with Nexus data for 2024.

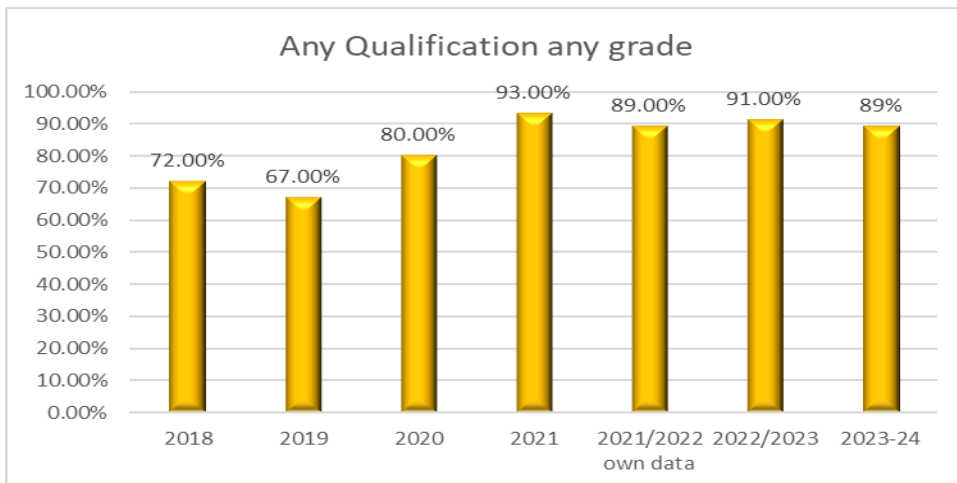
The results in the above chart shows that 11.7% achieved a ‘Standard Pass’ (4-9) this is 17.1% lower than 2022/23 figure of 28.8% and 11.8% lower than pre-pandemic 2019 of 23.5%. It is 6.4% lower than National CfC at 18.1% and 18.9% lower than West Midlands CfC at 18.9% there is currently no Statistical Neighbour data for this measure.

5 GCSEs including English and Maths



Source: Own collected data

This is no longer a measure published by the DFE and is for information only. 12% of pupils achieving 5 GCSE’s including English and Maths which is 9% lower than the 2022/2023 figure of 21%.



Source: Own collected data

Not all the cohort were at the level to be assessed for GCSE's. Eight took Functional Skills for English and Maths and some took a mix of Functional Skills and GCSEs, as the chart above shows 89% achieve a qualification either BTECs, Foundation Skills or GCSEs, this is 2% lower than 2023.

11 pupils (16%) of the cohort did not take any qualifications. 3 were below level 2 due SEN needs, 2 refused to sit any exams, 1 is retaking year 11 due to her becoming a parent during the year, 1 pregnant during the year and looking to do functional Skills September, 1 was placed out of the area during the exam period and was unable to sit them so is to enrol at college to take functional skills and 3 of the cohort were ESOL pupils awaiting courses.

25 children in this cohort achieved no qualifications at the close of the summer term. 17 (68%) of these children of this group had an EHC Plan. 4 (16%) had active SEND support. 4 (16%) had no identified SEND in their NCY 11.

11 (44%) children were in Specialist settings. 5 (20%) children were in mainstream settings. 1 (4%) child was in an Independent setting (ISP) and 8 (32%) were attending an Alternative Provision during their Year NCY 11. The gender balance in this cohort of 25 was 16 (64%) males and 9 (36%) females.

The analysis of their historic Key Stage 2 data showed that 3 (12%) of these 25 children who achieved no qualifications did meet the *expected standard* in their Key Stage 2 SATS examinations. 2 of these children who had achieved expected progress in NCY6 were attending Alternative Provisions in Stoke in their NCY 11 and 1 child was attending a mainstream school in the City.

The Virtual School acknowledges the myriad of challenges for NCY 11 children. As such the continuation of the Summer Programme will continue in the Year 2024-5. This will offer targeted support and enrichment in the summer months, as well as targeted and specific mentorship in September. The primary aim of such an intervention is to ensure that the retention rate of children in Education, Employment and Training increases and that children have the support to access education and training, despite their aptitude, ability or qualifications.

In addition to the above, the Virtual School acknowledges that for this cohort, a number of children had multiple placement moves, contested with unmet SEND needs in provisions, experienced fixed term exclusions and changes to social workers; which may have impacted upon their education and attainment. This is an exciting time for reflective practice within the Virtual School in respect of planning for progress.

We would like to see stronger outcomes for Key Stage 4 children, and are looking at the future development of the structure of the Secondary Virtual School Practitioners- to enable stronger and more impactful support for children in this key stage. This will be inclusive of collaborative working with Post 16 colleagues and In City *and* Out of City SEND teams to ensure timely SEND actions, purposeful academic intervention, work experience and enrichment. The Virtual School would expect Secondary Practitioners to monitor the attainment of children within the Statutory PEPs and to work with the Designated Teachers to ensure that SMART targets are linked to attainment and tracked robustly within the three termly PEP process. Any such anomalies should be acted upon swiftly with outcome focussed interventions that can be measured and provide a positive outcome for the education of the child.

Case Study showing the VS impact on supporting a KS4 CiC

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team:	Age of child:	15yrs
What were the concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handover from previous VSP made me aware of her concerns Challenging Education sent twice, not signed up to it PERMA and PBS sent and not utilised Number of suspensions from school; walking out of class, punctuality to lessons, failing to complete sanctions, running around the school, running into lessons and disrupting them, school saying he was showing inappropriate images to others, persistent disruption, refused to follow instructions, defiance, truanting and verbally abusive to staff. 		Where we were? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspensions Carer feeling school not supporting her or the pupil Carer feeling school not listening to her or the pupil 	
What difference have we made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More regular meetings held with all people involved in the pupil's care Carer feels listened to Pupil has had the opportunity to tell the school what works for him with VSP present. Plan for education in yr11 put into place which included a bespoke timetable. City College for College Links, Cadets, DT to teach English and named person to teach Maths, Mrs C to be T's safe adult. Pupil now attending Alternative Provision. DT has delivered Nurture training to the whole school to be used with all children especially T. DT has shared strategies to use when with T- what works and what doesn't for him. DT and VSP regular face to face meetings to discuss T's progress and to use Challenging Education as a CPD tool for whole school staff. 		What did we do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Meetings with carer, social worker and supervising social worker Education meeting with DT, replacement DT, pupil and carer Education meetings with DT and VSP Education meetings with DT, SSW, SW and VSP Challenging Education resource sent to school twice PERMA sent twice. PERMA completed by VSP at a meeting at school Liaised with DT and Inclusion Manager Inclusion Manager sent EHCP request- agreed to assess for EHCP during autumn term Discussed AP provision- part funded by Virtual School Discussed College Links Discussed Managed Move and Dual Registration Attended PEPs Meetings with VS manager, VSP and Inclusion Manager Now attending AP until end of the summer term- Created and NTAS 	
What have we done to embed good practice more widely <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging Education shared, school using this resource. Regular meetings between VS manager and school Inclusion Manager DT to DT training days at Port Vale FC. Training providers shared by VSP with DT. Face to Face meetings with DT, Carer, SSW and VSP 			Date 21/12/2023

Previously Cared for Children

As part of the duties disposed to the Local Authority under Section 23 of The Children and Social Work Act 2017, Virtual Heads have been tasked to promote the educational achievement of those children who were previously cared for (PCFC) accessing schools/education settings in the Virtual School Head's Local Authority by offering information and support to parents and educators.

Guidance and signposting for parents was in relation to;

- Pupil Premium + funding that is allocated to schools to support those previously cared for.
- Support parents to build better relationships with schools and Designated Teachers.
- Advice and guidance where schools had issued fixed-term exclusions.
- Advice and signposting about EHC plan assessments and the process schools follow.

- Advice on school moves, how to identify appropriate schools, and key contacts within schools for guidance on transitions.

Guidance and support for schools was in relation to;

- Information on support agencies.
- Advice on how to identify the Previously Cared for Children cohort and record them accurately to be allocated the Pupil Premium + Grant..
- Advice on the information needed by the Local Authority.
- Advice on how best to support children in their provision.
- In the Summer Term 2022 the Virtual School launched the Education Plan (EP) for PCfC

Guidance and support for the Adoption Team were in relation to;

- Joint attendance at meetings in schools and settings
- Attend meetings to offer advice and guidance on the EHC process, behaviour strategies, designated teacher responsibilities.
- Obtain education-specific information to support children e.g. roles and responsibilities, policy information, attachment-aware, and trauma-informed information.
- Joint case working .

Future Plans

Our plan for next year 2024/2025 is to maintain this strong strategic offer, linking even more so with the Post Adoption Service to cross reference children who we are supporting and to continue to proactively promote the needs of previously cared for children with families and education professionals alike, providing training, advice, guidance and support as requested.

Case Study of support for a Previously Cared for Child and parent

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School Team: Primary Age of child: 7 yrs

What were the concerns?

- S had been adopted following a period of being in care
- S was struggling to regulate her emotions in school and her behaviour deteriorated resulting in a fixed term exclusion.

Where we were?

- S was hurting staff and other children and refusing to complete her work.
- There was no EHC in place.
- Support was put in place by the school, but this had little impact resulting in a 2-day exclusion.
- The relationship between mum and school had broken down.

What difference have we made

- S now has an EHC in place.
- Mum knows which schools she would like to be consulted.
- S is accessing school on a reduced timetable and this is going well.
- The relationship between mum and school has improved.
- School have improved knowledge of trauma informed practice.

What did we do?


- Regular meetings with Mum, school and SW adoption team.
- Supported with EHC progress and this was done more quickly due to collaboration with Virtual School.
- Guided mum through the EHC process.
- Provided Trauma informed classroom practice resources and advice.
- Supported the part time timetable process.
- Supported mum to look for Special School.
- Supported school with relationship building with mum.

What have we done to embed good practice more widely

- Collaborative working with all professionals to achieve the best possible outcomes for S.
- School say they will use trauma informed classroom resources for other children who need this support.
- Mum has S's younger sibling who may need an EHC, mum feels more confident to support him with this now.

Date

5.12.23



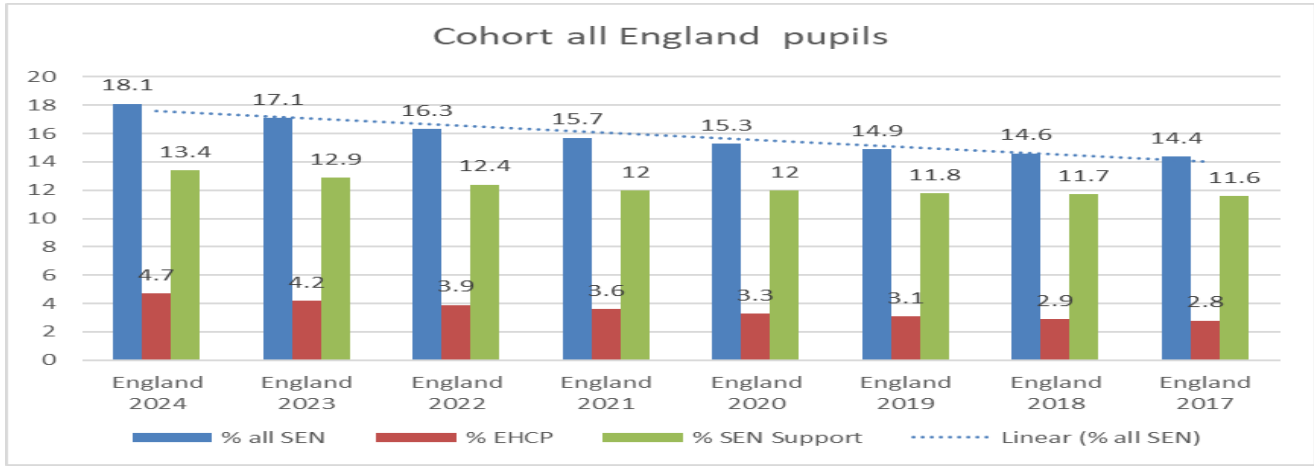
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SEN Cohort

The SEN Cohort section of the Annual Report was a new addition last year, this was decided as we have a high proportion of children with SEN needs and over one fifth of our children have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). We want to be well informed with the progress and outcomes for our most vulnerable children and this analysis will allow us to make strategic plans for improvement going forward.

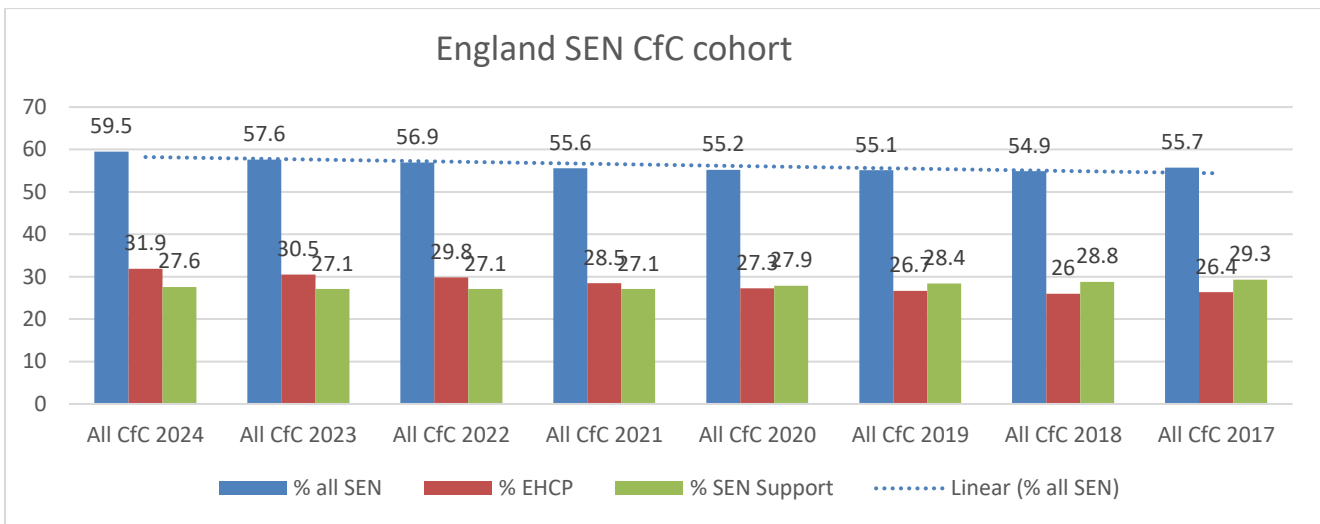
The cohort of SEN pupils has risen since 2017. The chart below shows the 'All England' cohort and the total percentage of pupils with SEN has risen by 3.7% from 14.4% in 2017 to 18.1% in 2024.



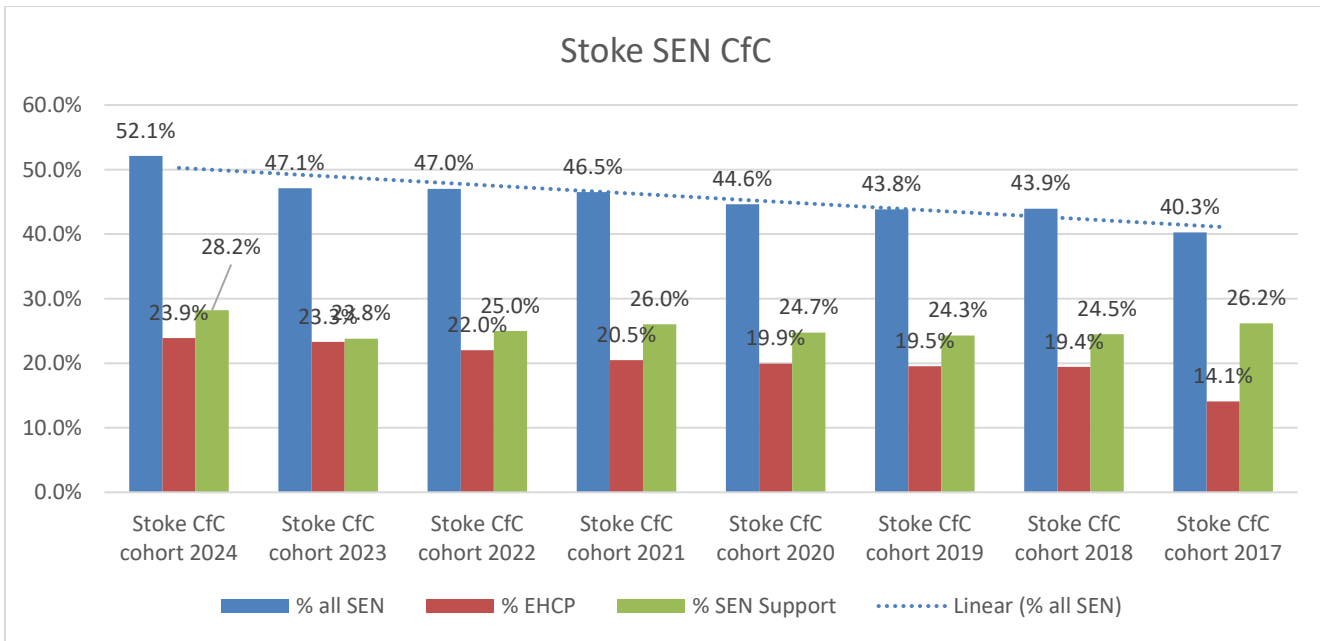
Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.2025

During the year 2023-2024 (data as of April 2024) there were 439 Cared for Children with SEN NCY 0 to 11.

The charts below show the All Cared for Children cohort (England) and the Stoke-on-Trent Cared for Children cohort. Both show a rise in the total SEN pupils Cared for Children cohort from 2017 to 2024 but the rise has not been as great as the all England rise, however in contrast the percentage of the cohort with an EHCP has increased above the percentage of the cohort with SEN support since 2021 for the England SEN cohort but the Stoke-on-Trent SEN cohort this differs and although the percentage with SEN has risen more than the England SEN Cared for Children cohort the percentage with an EHCP compared to SEN support is still lower for the Stoke-on-Trent Cared for Children cohort.



Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25



Source: Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2022 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 10.04.25


Our internal data shows that the trend has continued in 2023/24 with both an increase in the total cohort and the percentage that have SEN.

The increase in this cohort can affect the school's capacity to support the increasing demand of their pupil population. The additional needs of their pupil population will mean the time dedicated to pupils' individual needs will have an impact on the school's budget as more staff and resources will be needed.

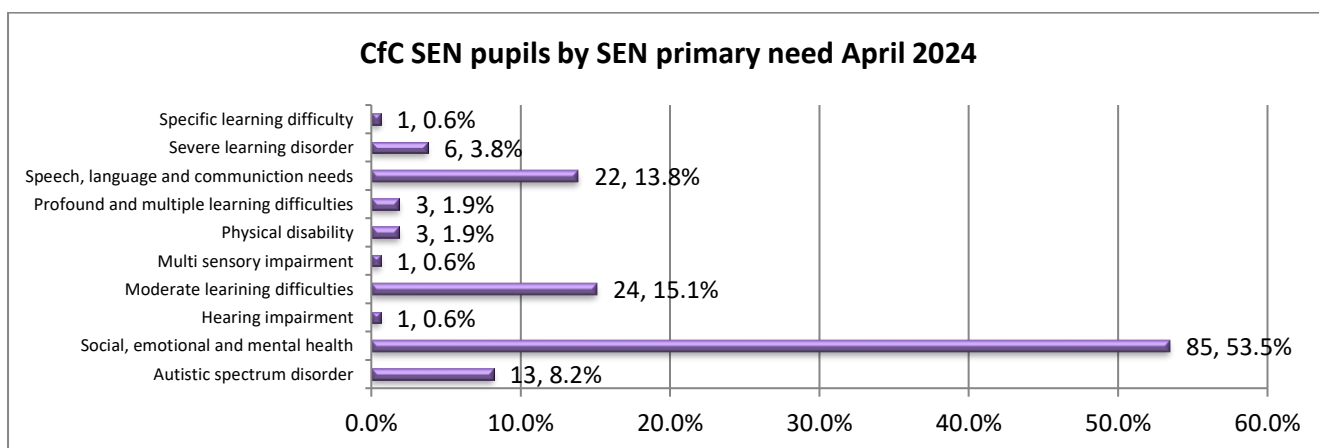
Case Study showing the VS impact on supporting Children with an EHCP and collaborative working

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: Primary	Age of child:	4yrs SEN
What were the concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> J not making any progress. J displaying behaviour of being in crisis J not getting support needed to access his learning. 		Where we were? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EP visited school and wrote a report with strategies and recommendations. School had not put in place what was advised on the EP report. 	
What difference have we made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> J is now in a targeted support small group class. Regular check in meetings are held and emails are sent once a week. School and home working closer together with better communication. J now has an EHCP. 		What did we do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed off report and took to school, spent time with DT to prioritise recommendations to support J's emotional well-being. Set up regular professional meetings to discuss J and any hurdles. Provided resources to support the school. VSC supported and attended school visits. Supported school with collecting evidence and completing EHCP application. Provided additional funding for 1:1 support while waiting for EHCP. 	
What have we done to embed good practice more widely			Date 17/04/2024

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The largest identified SEN primary need is social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) for 53.5% of the cohort.



Source: Internal data MBR

The table above shows that SEMH cases remain the highest primary need but in 2023-2024 there was also a rise in the number of Speech, language and Communication Needs from 8.6% in 2022-2023 to 13.8% in 2023-2024.

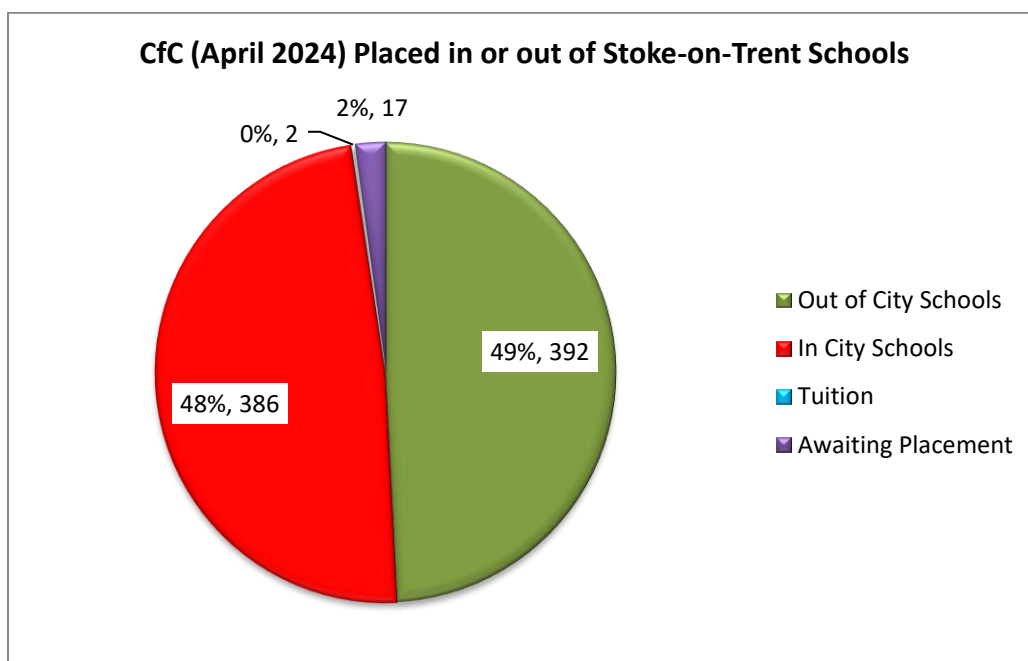
This is more than likely linked to the impact on children’s social experiences due to Covid-19. Referrals into the Early Years Inclusion Service saw an all-time high for Speech, Language and Communication post Covid and the lack of socialising within and outside of education has had a detrimental impact on all aspects of Early Education, as speech and communication underpins the Early Years Framework. Also, many children who have SEMH needs have underlying and undiagnosed Speech, Language and Communication needs that have not been supported thus resulting in lower attainment and lower rates of progress not just at primary level but into secondary level as well.

As stated earlier, Social, Emotional, and Mental Health needs often result in presenting behaviours that are more complex, and schools/education settings are increasingly finding it difficult to manage and support children effectively. Many interventions and strategies that schools/education settings use are designed to support Cognition and Learning (C&L) rather than SEMH. Added to this several schools/education settings implement zero-tolerance behaviour policies and formal learning environments, that are not always inclusive enough to meet the needs of our children in this category.

School/education settings Placements

The SEN cohort attended 230 different schools/education settings.

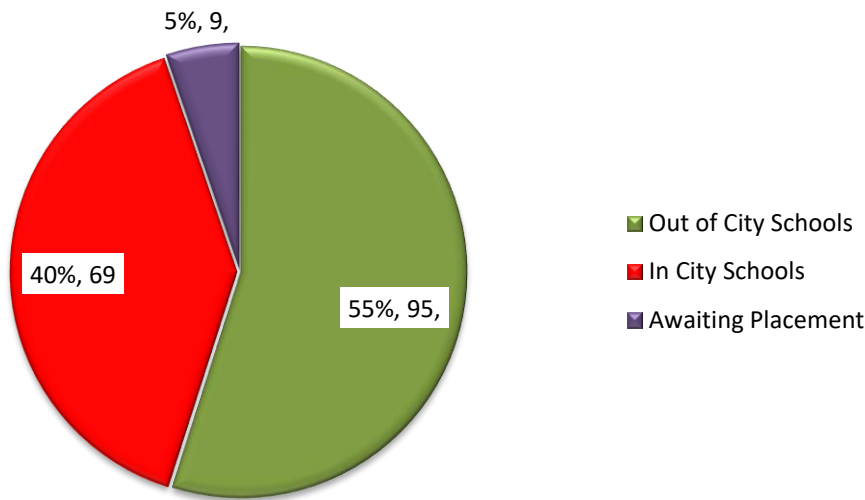
The chart below is the total Cared for Children cohort as of April 2024 whether placed in an In-City School or placed Out of City 48% were placed In City schools.



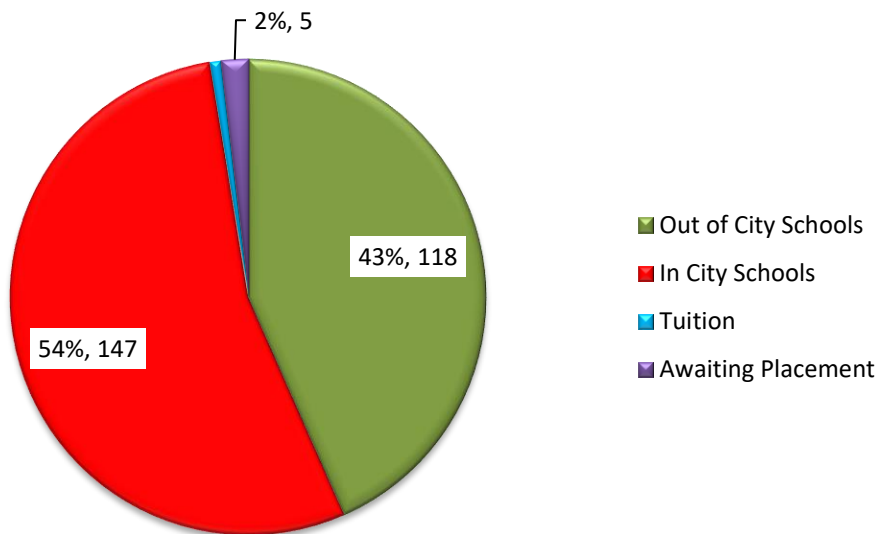
Source: Internal data MBR

The tables below show the SEN CIC cohort as of April 2024 and whether they are placed in an In City or Out of City School. For those with an EHCP 35% were placed In City and for those with SEN Support 54% were placed In City.

CfC with an EHCP (April 2024) Placed in or out of Stoke-on-Trent Schools



CfC with SEN Support (April 2024) Placed in or out of Stoke-on-Trent Schools



Source: Internal data MBR

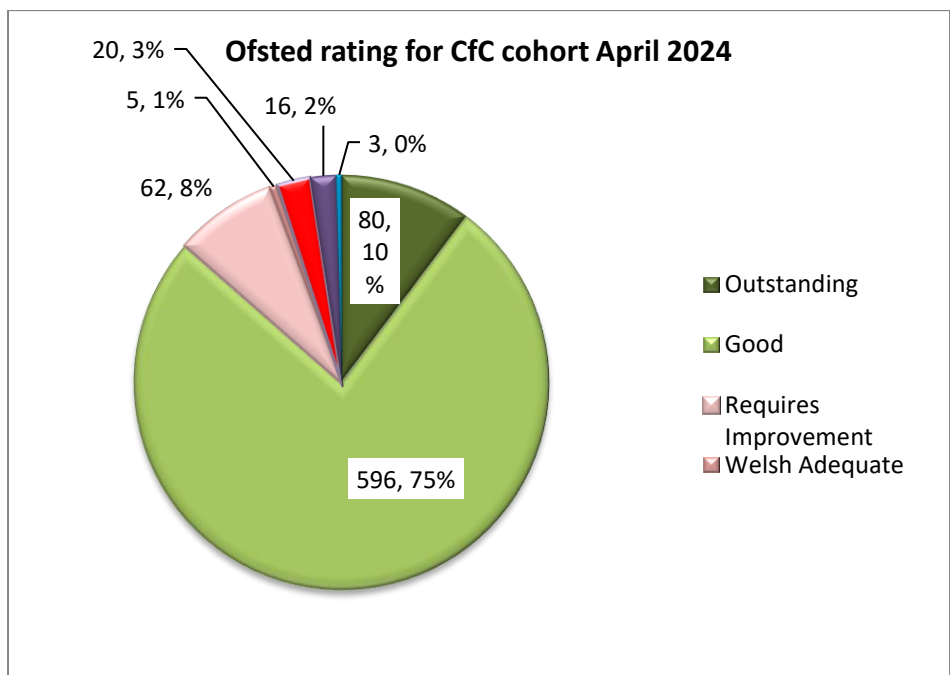
The Virtual School works closely with SENMAS (Special Educational Needs Monitoring and Assessment Service) who are the team in Stoke-on-Trent LA who are responsible for assessing the needs of children in the city and writing the Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) that are designed to meet the educational needs of the individual child. The SENMAS caseworkers and Virtual School staff discuss which settings are going to be consulted and contribute to the Education panel where these decisions are made as to what school will be named on their EHC Plan.

For the 95 CfC placed out of the city with an EHCP the VS staff liaise with the LA that the child resides in the equivalent of SENMAS to find suitable settings for our children. The Virtual School staff share information regarding the child's needs and interests to help the process. Alongside this level of support,

the Virtual School also monitors the length of time it takes to consult and find suitable settings for our children, and where necessary reminders of timescales are made to avoid drift and delay for these children.

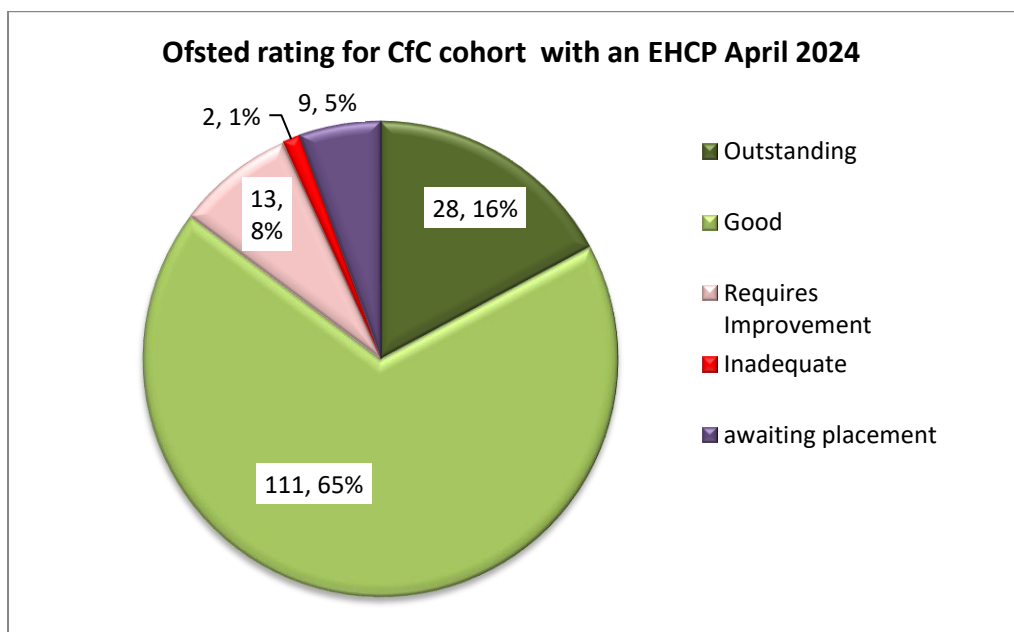
Quality of all provision by Ofsted rating

It is imperative to place all Cared for Children in the highest quality provision to suit their needs and ensure that they are not disadvantaged by being placed in poorly performing educational establishments. The table below shows all the CfC cohort as of April 2024 and 85% were placed in Good or Outstanding schools.

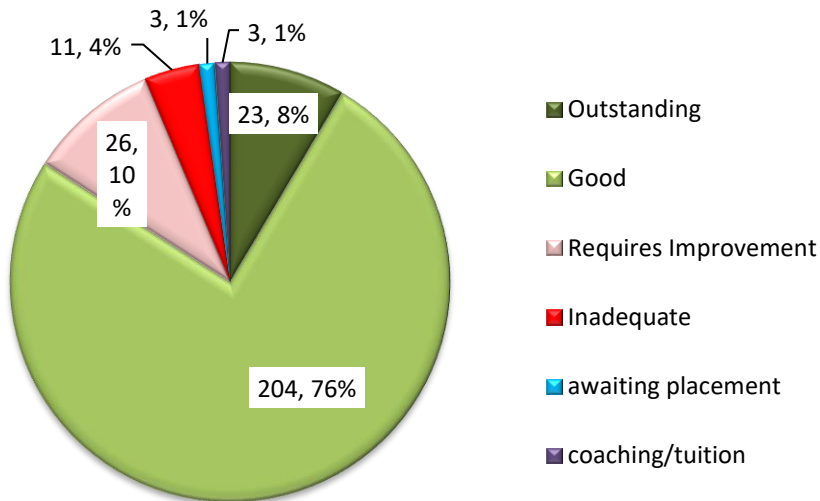


Source: Internal data MBR

The charts below show the Ofsted rating for the SEN cohort with an EHCP 81% were placed in Good or Outstanding schools and for SEN Support 84% were placed in Good or Outstanding schools.



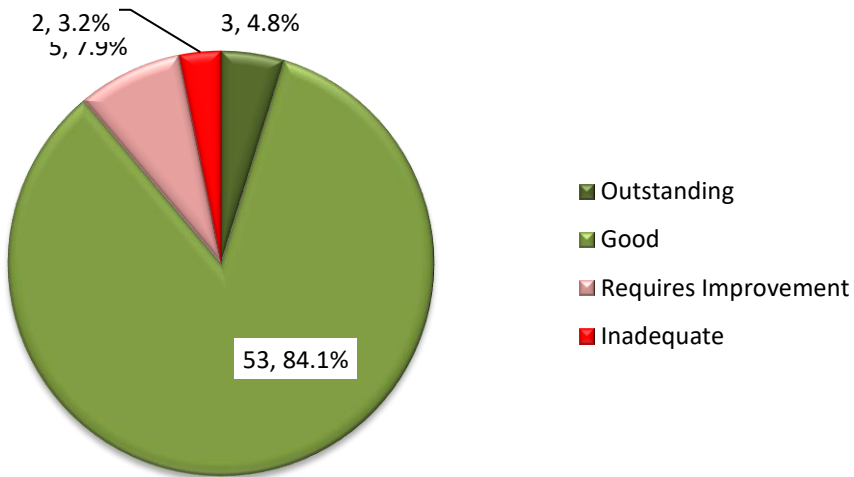
Ofsted rating for CfC cohort with SEN Support April 2024



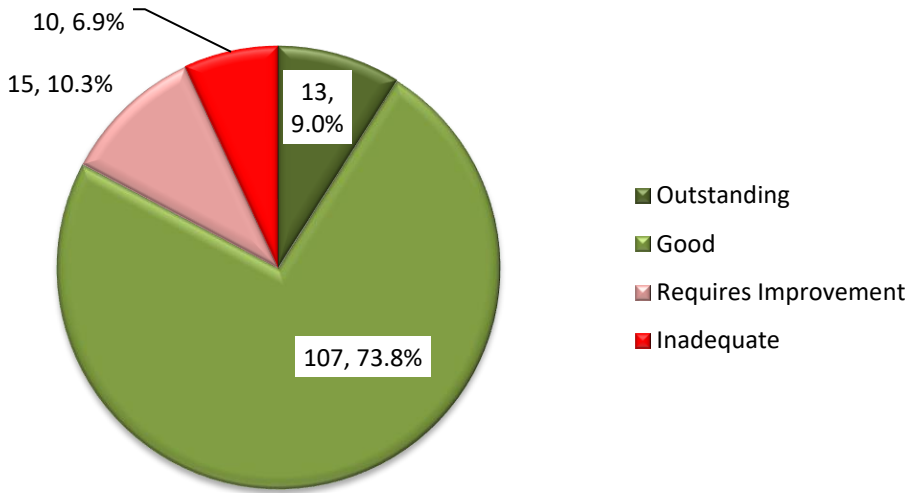
Source: Internal data MBR

In City Cohort

Ofsted rating In City CfC cohort with an EHCP April 2024



Ofsted rating In City CfC cohort with SEN Support April 2024

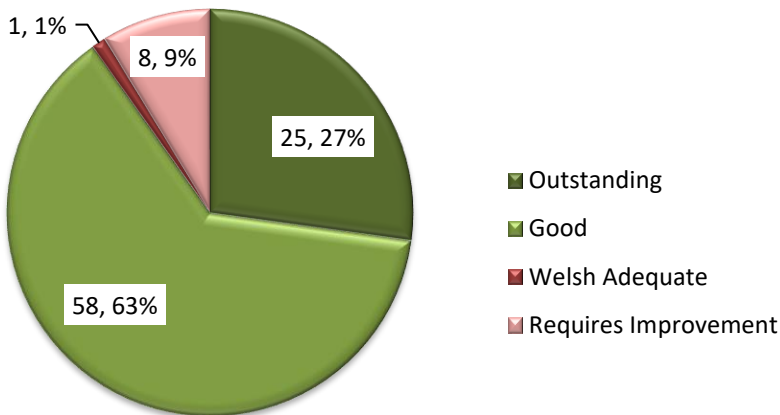


We have one SEMH setting in the local authority which is rated Inadequate December 2021 and become academized in February 2023 and is awaiting an Ofsted visit since changing. We have 6 children on roll of that school with an EHCP.

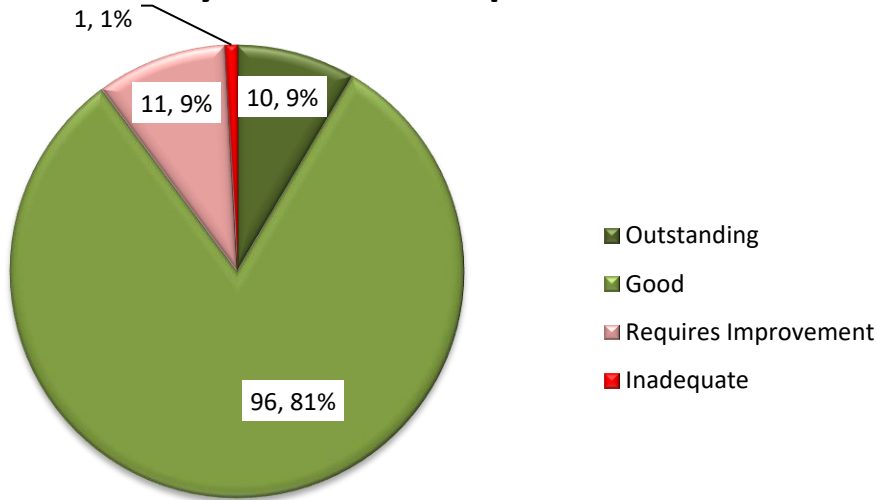
We have 1 pupil with an ECHP and 8 with SEN Support on the roll of a Secondary School that became Inadequate during 2023-2024 year and one pupil with an EHCP and 2 SEN Support at a Primary School in the City rated Inadequate. Due to the schools Ofsted grading these children are prioritised for our high intervention and support with the practitioners and Co-ordinators allocated to make sure they are making expected or good progress whilst at the school.

Out of City Cohort

Ofsted rating for ECHP Out of City CfC cohort April 2024



Ofsted rating for SEN Support Out of City CfC cohort April 2024

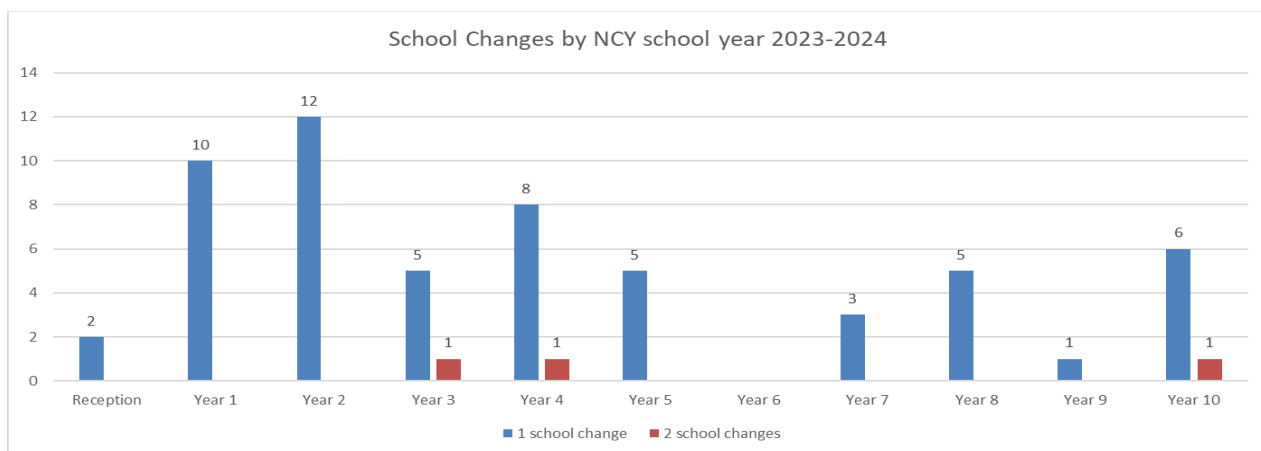


Source: Internal data MBR

For the Out of City Cohort we had 1 with an EHCP placed in an Out of City School this had been Inadequate but was rated Good During 2024. The one pupil with SEN Support the school was graded Inadequate in April 2024.

One challenge that the Virtual School has regarding children with SEN support and being placed in Good/Outstanding schools/education settings is that we need to influence the Social Workers when they are applying for schools for our children and this is impacted by the locality that the child is placed and what schools are in the area. The Virtual School has worked hard to build strong relationships with Social workers, Foster Carers and other LA admissions teams to emphasize the importance of our children being placed in Good or Outstanding Schools/education settings.

Number of School Changes -last 12 months (excludes routine phase changes)

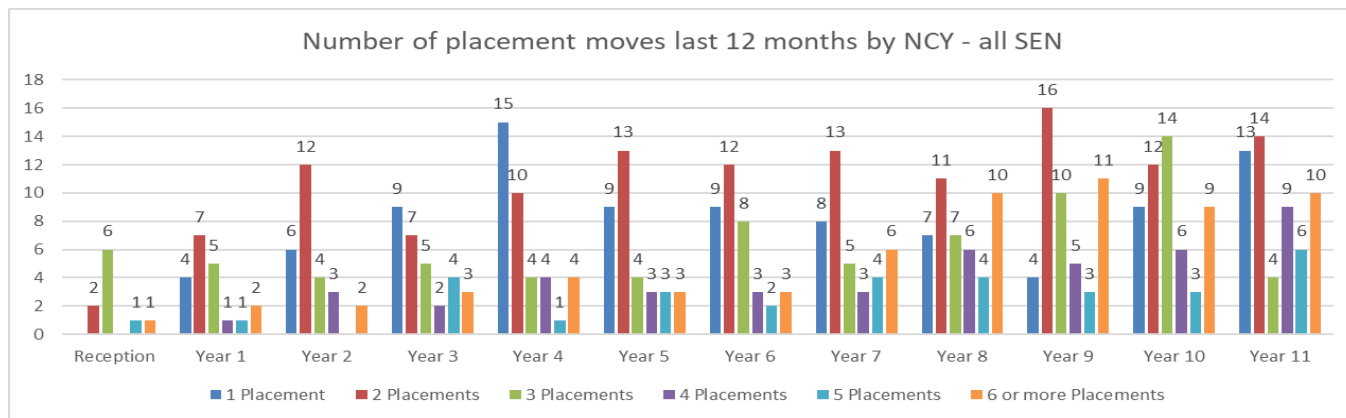


Source: Internal data MBR

The above chart shows that 58 (13%) of the SEN cohort had experienced 1 school move in the last 12 months and 3 pupils had 2 moves which were not related to the normal phase move. For the Non-SEN cohort, it was 21% of the cohort had experienced 1 school move.

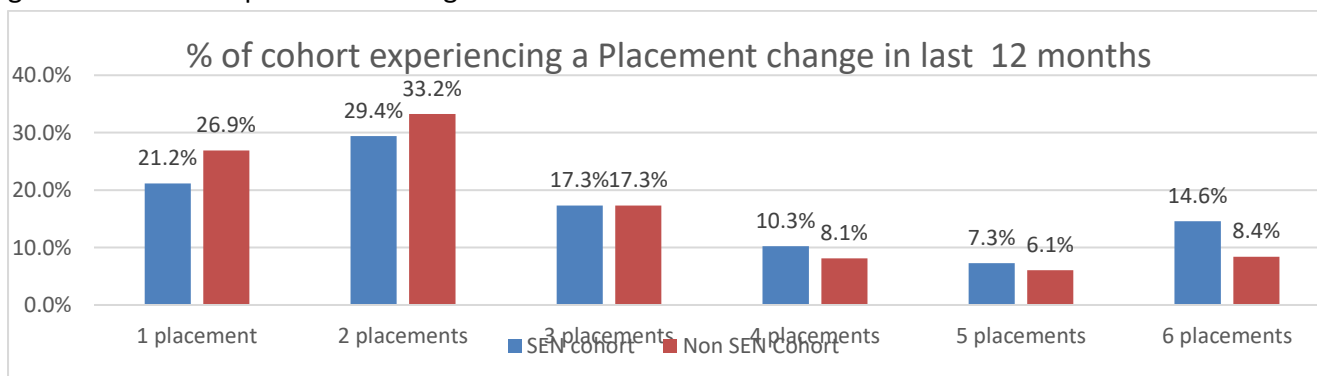
The number of pupils with Non-SEN experiencing school changes has increased from 13% to 21%. Last year it was the SEN pupils that experienced more School Changes.

Number of Care Placements



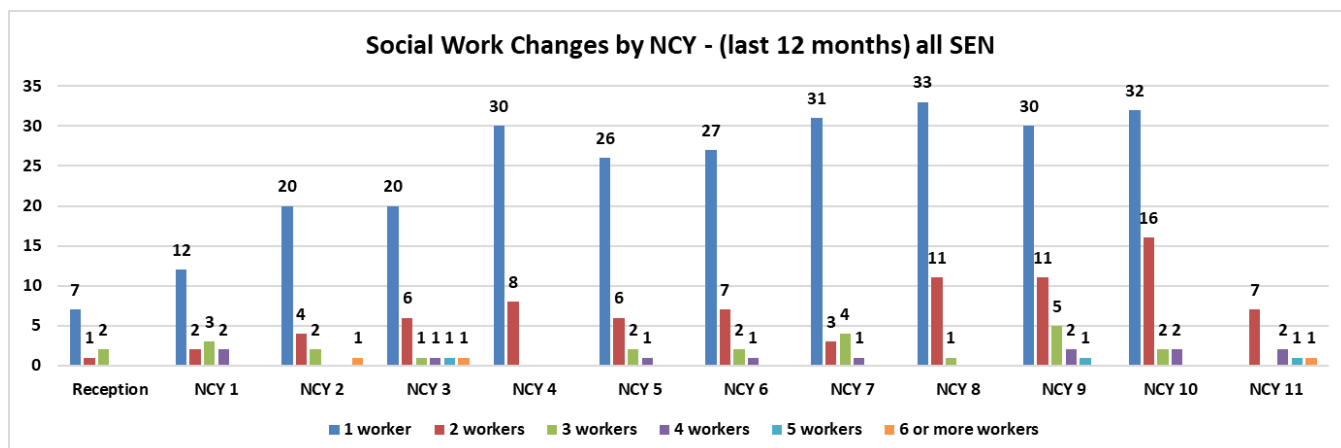
Source: Internal data MBR

Of the majority of children with SEN, 68%, have 3 or less placement moves in the last 12 months. When you compare the non-SEN cohort with the SEN cohort the placement the SEN cohort experience the greater number of placement changes as shown in the chart below.

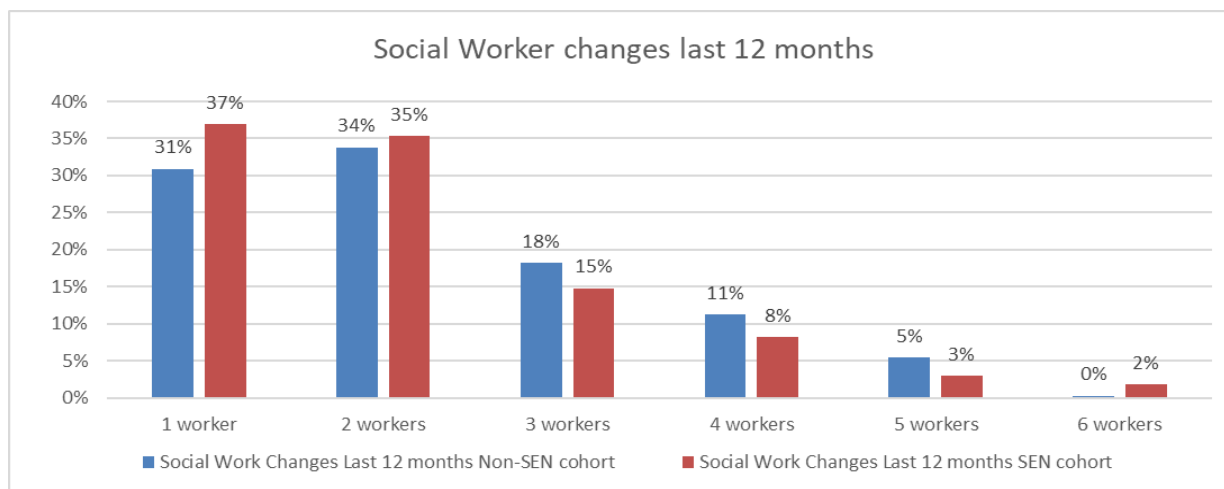


Source: Internal data MBR

Number of Social Worker Changes



Source: Internal data MBR

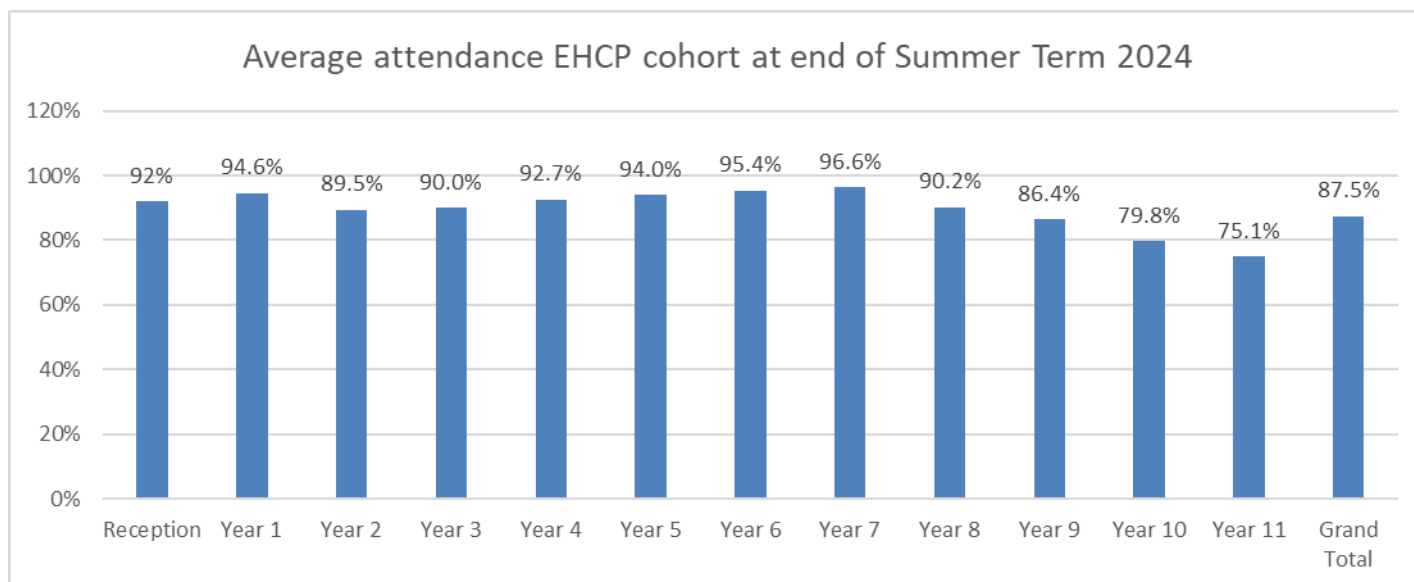


The above graph shows that 63% of children with SEN have experienced a change in Social Workers in the last 12 months with 37% of the cohort having the same Social Worker for the full 12-month period or time in care. This is slightly better than the Non SEN cohort where 69% have experienced a change in Social Worker in the 12 month period.

Attendance

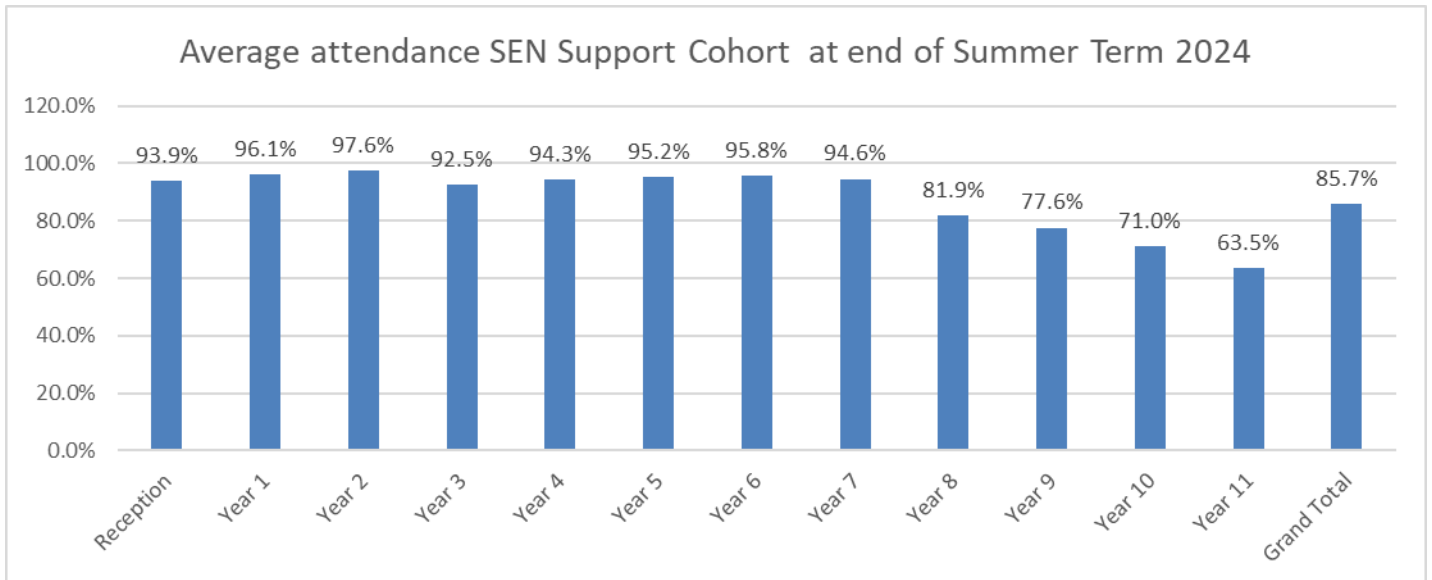
The average overall attendance for Cared for Children for the period 01/09/2023 to 25/07/2024 was 89% including Year 11.

For the EHCP cohort this was 87.5% as shown in the table below.



Source: Internal data MBR

For the SEN Support cohort this was 85.7%



Source: Internal data MBR

The overall attendance for Non SEN pupils is 92.1%

For all cohorts, the attendance dips in NCY years 10 and 11 especially in the Summer Term when Year 11's are completing exams.

The SEN cohort average attendance is lower than the overall cohort average. There are a number of contributing factors for this including schools/education settings having the capacity and ability to support the needs of our Children with SEN needs, or key staff for those children not being available so their behaviours escalate and attendance drops or exclusion increases (see the below section on Exclusions (Suspension)). The PEP tracks the needs of all our children and their attendance and if attendance drops below 95% for any reason a bespoke SMART target is generated and agreed by all professionals.

For all cohorts, the attendance average is less for Secondary aged pupils compared to Primary.

Exclusions (Suspension)

The Overall rate for exclusions (Suspensions) for 2023-2024 using local data is 14.8%.

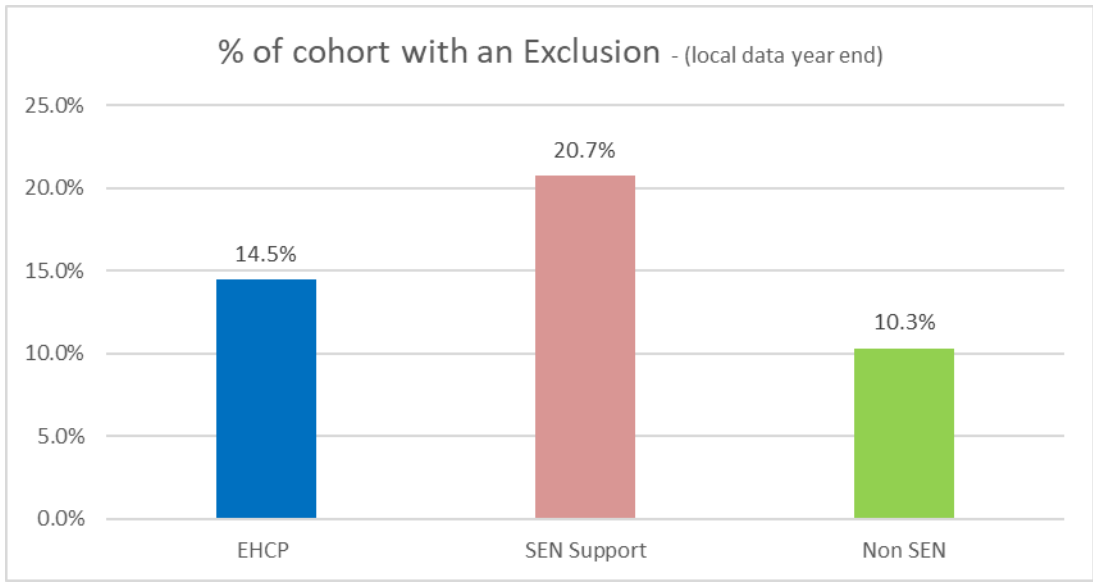
We only have local data showing the split in cohort between SEN and non-SEN.

The chart below shows that SEN Support and EHCP pupils are more likely to receive an exclusion (Suspension).

Of the cohort with an EHCP 14.5% (25 of the cohort) had received an exclusion (suspension) by the end of the Summer Term. There had been a total of 118 occasions and 442 sessions lost due to exclusions.

Of the cohort with SEN Support, 20.7% (56 of the cohort) had received an exclusion (suspension) by the end of the Summer Term.

For the Non SEN cohort 10.3% (36 of the cohort) received and exclusion (suspension) by the end of the Summer Term.

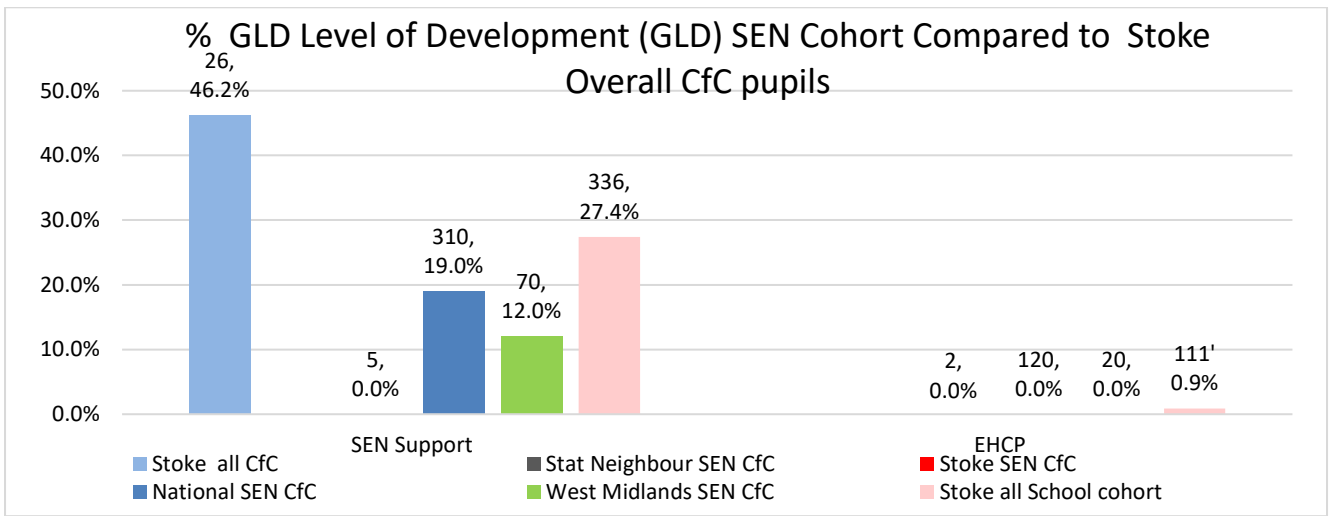


Source: Internal data MBR

There was 1 pupil that was Permanently Excluded in the year who had an EHCP and the other Cared for Child Permanently Excluded was SEN Support.

Outcomes SEN 2023-2024

Early Years



The above results for 2024 show 46.2% of all CfC pupils were GLD (Good Level of Development).

SEN Support – No Stoke-on-Trent SEN CIC were GLD, National CIC 19% were GLD, West Midlands 12% were GLD and Stoke-on-Trent SEN cohort overall 27.4% were GLD. The above shows the SEN pupils in Stoke-on-Trent are behind National and West Midlands comparatives.

For the **SEN EHCP cohort**, none of the pupils with an EHCP were GLD either National CIC, West Midlands CfC, Stat Neighbours or the Stoke-on-Trent CfC cohort. However, for the Stoke-on-Trent-on-Trent SEN cohort overall 0.9% were GLD.

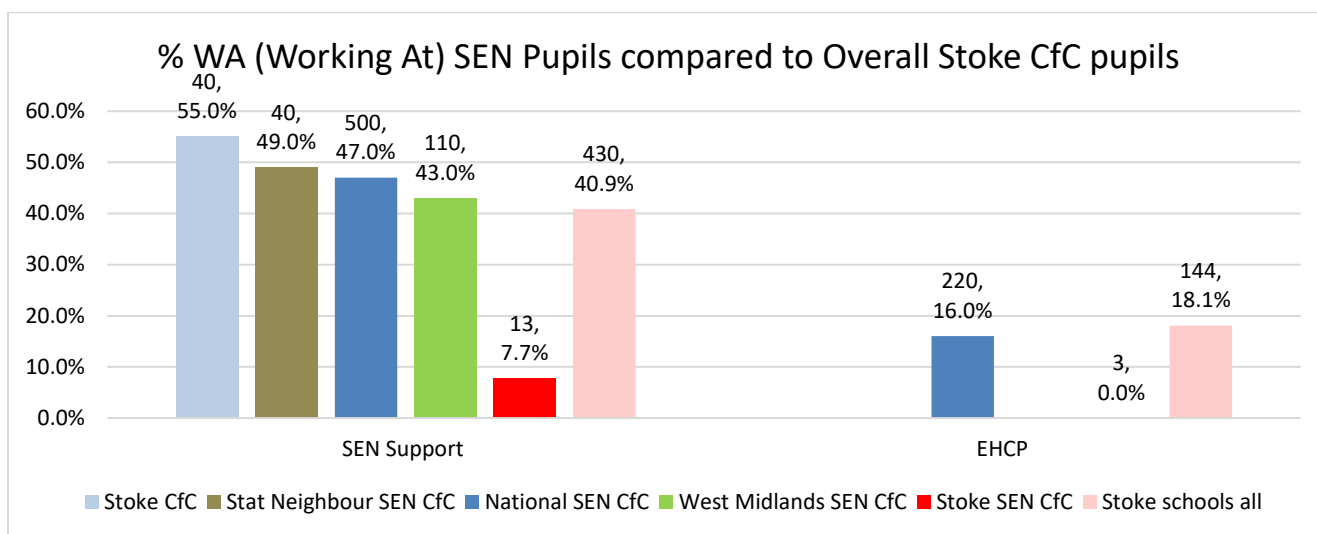
The above shows that Stoke-on-Trent CfC cohort with SEN does not achieve as high as their comparatives, however the cohorts are low numbers, there were 2 with an EHCP and 5 with SEN support for the Stoke-on-Trent CfC cohort in 2024.

The results for the overall cohort are 46.2% for Stoke-on-Trent CfC compared to 39% National CfC and 43% for Statistical Neighbours and 40% for West Midlands CfC.

This is most likely due to the numbers of SEND children differing between the year 2023 and 2024 and the more complex needs on the 2024 cohort.

Phonics

There was a total of 40 pupils at the Phonics stage and of these, 3 had an EHCP and 13 were SEN Support.



2024 results show 55% of all CfC pupils were WA (Working At).

The table above shows that 0% of the pupils with an EHCP were WA for phonics this compares to 16% for the National CfC pupil both West Midlands and Stat Neighbours had no pupils WA with an EHCP. Stoke-on-Trent Schools all 18.1% of pupils with an EHCP were WA.

7.7% of Stoke-on-Trent CfC pupils with SEN Support were WA for Phonics this compares to 47% for England CfC and 43% for West Midlands and 49% for Stat Neighbours. Stoke-on-Trent Schools all 40.9% of pupils with SEN Support were WA.

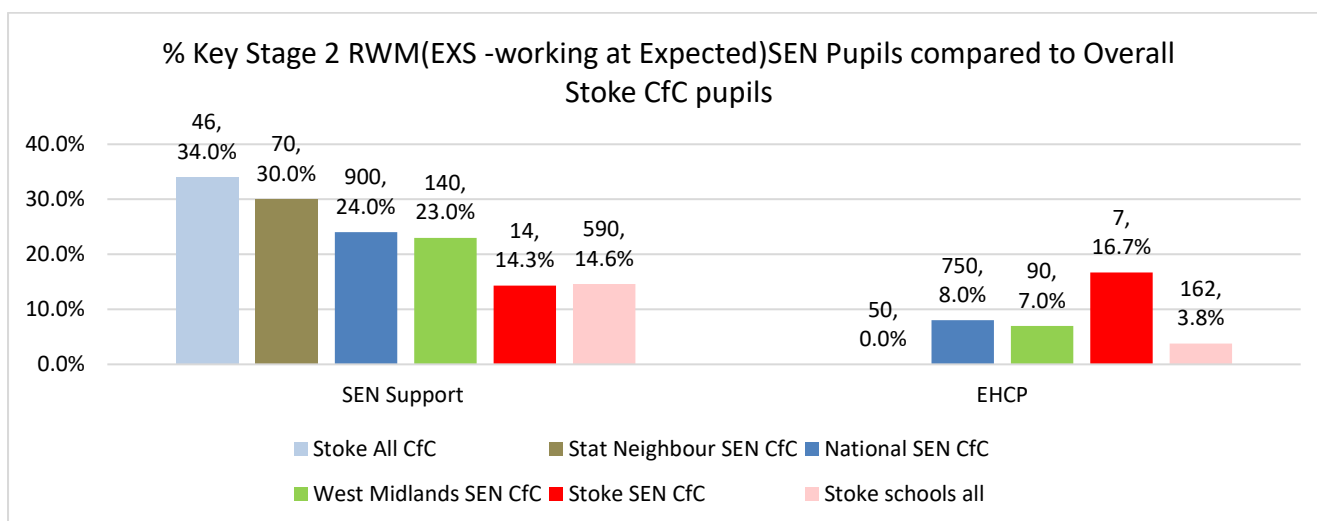
The above shows that Stoke-on-Trent CfC cohort with SEN are not achieving as well in Phonics compared to all comparators and especially Stoke-on-Trent CfC with SEN support are 41.3% down on Statistical Neighbours.

This is also most likely due to the numbers of SEND children differing between the year 2023 and 2024 and the more complex needs on the 2024 cohort.

Key Stage 1 This Key Stage is no longer being reported on by the DFE.

Key Stage 2

RWM – Reading, Writing and Maths.



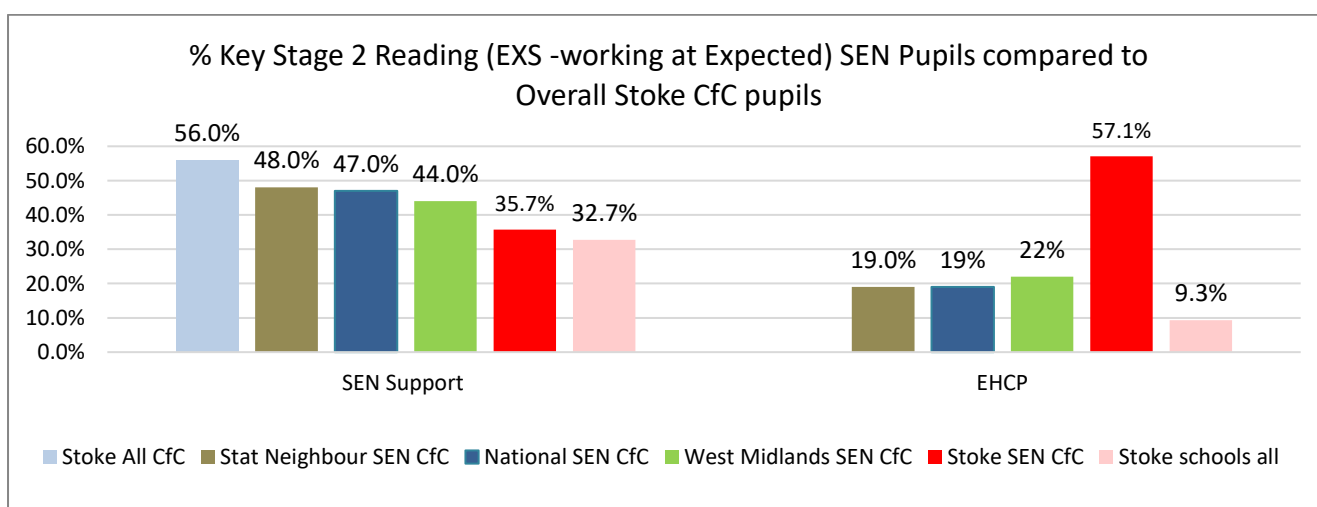
The cohort for 2024 is 46 and the results show 34% of all CfC pupils were EXS (Working at Expected). For Reading, Writing, and Maths (RWM).

SEN Support – CfC cohort - National cohort 24% were EXS, West Midlands 23% EXS, Stat Neighbours 30% EXS and Stoke-on-Trent-on-Trent cohort achieved 14.3% EXS. The Stoke-on-Trent all-SEN cohort was 14.6%.

For the **SEN EHCP** CfC cohort- National cohort 8% were EXS, West Midlands 7% EXS, Stoke-on-Trent 16.7% Stat Neighbours 0% and Stoke-on-Trent SEN overall cohort 3.8% were EXS.

There have been improvements in this area – especially for the Stoke-on-Trent CfC with an EHCP cohort with however the cohort numbers are small so care must be taken, the table below shows that 4 out of the 7 cohort with an EHCP achieved the expected standard for Reading taking the % in the chart below to 57.1%.

Reading



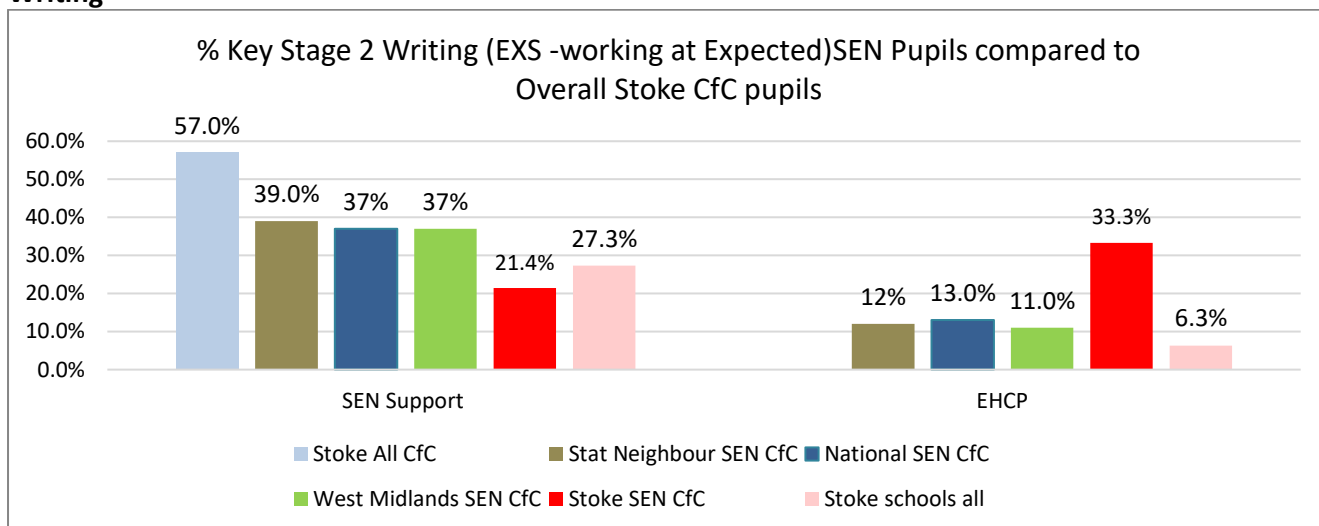
2024 results show 56% of all CfC pupils were EXS. (Working at Expected) for Reading.

SEN Support – CfC cohort - National cohort 47% were EXS, West Midlands 44% EXS, Stat Neighbours 46% EXS and Stoke-on-Trent-on-Trent cohort achieved 35.7% EXS. The Stoke-on-Trent all-SEN cohort was 32.7%.

For the **SEN EHCP** CfC cohort- National cohort 19% were Working at Expected (EXS), West Midlands 22% EXS, Stoke-on-Trent 57.10% Stat Neighbours 22% and Stoke-on-Trent SEN overall cohort 9.3% were EXS.

There have been improvements in this area – especially for the Stoke-on-Trent CfC with an ECHP cohort where 4 out of the 7 achieved expected standard in Reading but the CfC SEN Support cohort is still behind comparator groups.

Writing



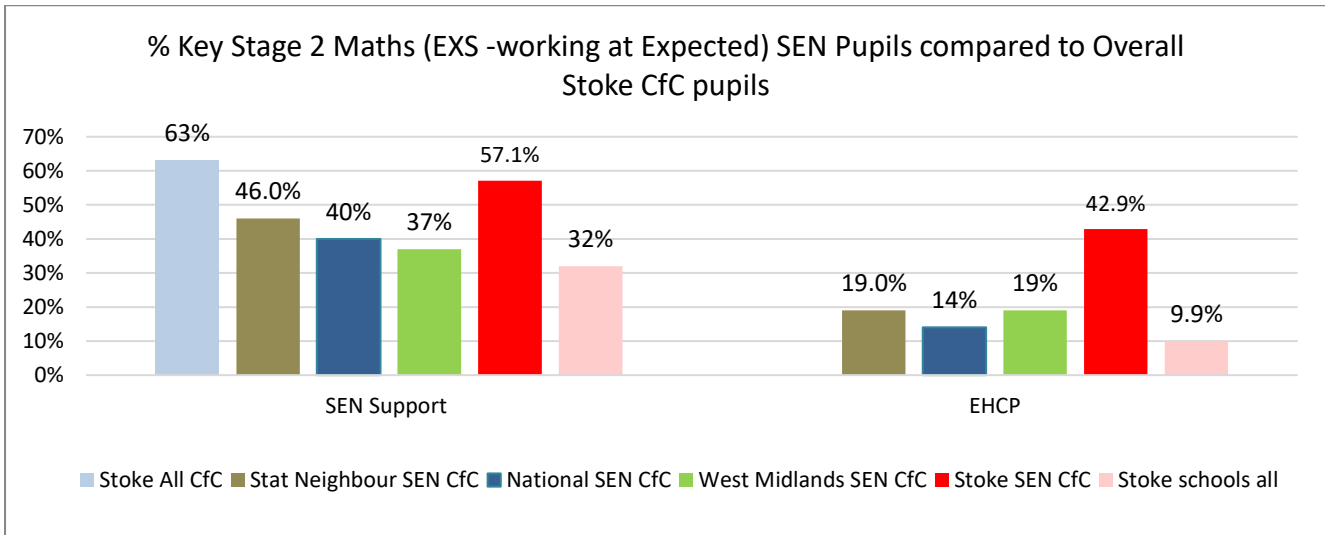
The 2024 results show 57% of all CIC pupils were EXS. (Working at Expected) for Writing.

SEN Support – CfC cohort - National cohort 37% were EXS, West Midlands 37% EXS, Stat Neighbours 39% EXS and Stoke-on-Trent-on-Trent cohort achieved 21.4% EXS. The Stoke-on-Trent all-SEN cohort was 27.3%.

For the **SEN EHCP** CfC cohort- National cohort 13% were EXS, West Midlands 11% EXS, Stoke-on-Trent 33.3% Stat Neighbours 12% and Stoke-on-Trent SEN overall cohort 6.3% were EXS.

There have been improvements in this area – especially for the Stoke-on-Trent CfC with an ECHP cohort with 2 achieving the expected standard for Writing but the CfC SEN Support cohort is still behind comparator groups.

Maths



The 2024 results show 63% of all CIC pupils were EXS. (Working at Expected) for Maths.

SEN Support – CfC cohort - National cohort 40% were EXS, West Midlands 37% EXS, Stat Neighbours 44% EXS and Stoke-on-Trent-on-Trent cohort achieved 57.1 % EXS. The Stoke-on-Trent all-SEN cohort was 32%.

For the **SEN EHCP** CfC cohort- National cohort 14% were EXS, West Midlands 19% EXS, Stoke-on-Trent 42.9% Stat Neighbours 19% and Stoke-on-Trent SEN overall cohort 9.9% were EXS.

There have been improvements in this area – especially for the Stoke-on-Trent CfC with 8 out of the 14 with SEN support and 3 out of the 7 with an EHCP achieving the expected standard for maths.

Progress – There is no progress data for Key Stage 2 cohort for 2024 as this cohort was not assessed at Key Stage 1 due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Key Stage 4

Year 11 Cohort

Of the 77 total year 11 cohort that had been in care for a full 12 months April 2024, 52(68%) of the cohort had SEN needs. 29 were SEN Support and 23 had an EHCP.

SEN Support Cohort (29 CYP)

- 1 of the 29 SEN Support pupils gained Standard Pass in English and Maths and also gained 5 GCSE's
- 10 gained at least 1 GCSE or equivalent.
- 13 gained Entry level qualifications or GCSE's below grade 4.
- 3 of the 29 SEN pupils did not take any qualifications.
- Of the 29 at the end of year 11, 15 continued full-time education, 5 started Training programs, 4 were NEET and 5 not known as at 28/09/2024.

EHCP Cohort (23 CYP)

- 3 gained one or more GCSE level 4 or above.
- 12 gained Entry level qualifications or GCSE's below grade 4.
- 5 of the 23 with an EHCP did not take any qualifications and we are awaiting results for 3 more of the cohort 2 of which were due to take Entry Level Qualifications but had not completed them at the time of enquiry.
- Of the 23 at the end of year 11, 12 continued with full time education, 1 in Training, 2 in Residential Accommodation, 1 Tuition and 3 NEET, 4 unknowns as at 28/09/2024.

Published DFE data shows that 7% of the National CfC cohort with SEN Support and 2% with an EHCP achieved a Strong Pass (9-5) in English and Maths. For the comparative groups Statistical Neighbours 0% with and EHCP and 6% with SEN Support achieved a Strong Pass (9-5) in English and Maths.

Years 12 and 13 Cohort

As at July 2024 there were 34 SEN pupils in NCY 12 and 13.

Of the 34, 22 (65%) were in Full Time Education, 1 in Full time employment and 2 in part time Education or Training. There were 9 (26%) NEET. The EET/NEET data for the overall cohort July 2024 was 61% EET and 23% NEET and 16% unknown.

The above data shows that the pupils with SEN are more likely to be in Education in Year 12 and 13.

SEN Care Leavers and Our Children Attending University

One (3%) of our care leavers with SEN undertook Level 3 qualification July 2024 (in Years 13).

There are no care leavers with an EHCP who are attending University Currently.

Post 16

Support for Post 16 young people in care

Since the expansion of the Virtual School in January 2022, the VS has had the capacity to support the Post 16 pupils up to the age of 18 or the end of Year 13. The new VS structure has been designed to have a VS Co-Ordinator and 2 Practitioners supporting the education of Post 16 CfC.

Post 16 PEPs

The new Post 16 PEP was officially launched March 2022. The previous Pathway Plans for Post 16 young people did not have a sufficient educational focus - and so a new Post 16 PEP was developed on the current system e-gov.

There are termly Post 16 PEP meetings planned for all Cared for Children and for Care Leavers until the end of Year 13.

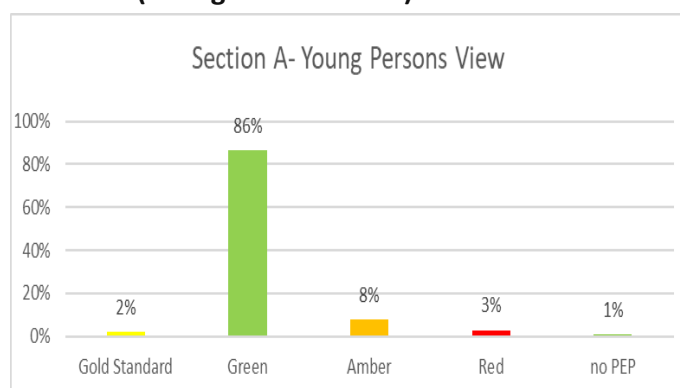
Service Level Agreements are being drawn up between the VS and other services that have Post 16 involvement to make sure plans are aligned, information is shared and available for all, and there is no duplication of support given.

Summer Term 2023-2024					Spring Term 2023-2024					Autumn Term 2023-2024					Summer Term 2022-2023				
Row Labels	Year 12	Year 13	Grand Total	%	Row Labels	Year 12	Year 13	Grand Total	%	Row Labels	Year 12	Year 13	Grand Total	%	Row Labels	Year 12	Year 13	Grand Total	%
Green	71	10	81	78.6%	Green	68	30	98	75.0%	Green	56	43	99	70%	Green	69	9	78	87%
Amber	15	1	16	15.5%	Amber	15	8	23	17.5%	Amber	22	10	32	22%	Amber	8	1	9	10%
Red	3	2	5	4.9%	Red	4	4	8	6.0%	Red	6	3	9	7%	Red				
not complete	1		1	1.0%	not complete	2		2	1.5%	not complete	1		1	1%	not complete	2	1	3	3%
Grand Total	90	13	103	100.0%	Grand Tot	89	42	131	100.0%	Grand Tot	85	56	141	100%	Grand Tot	79	11	90	100%

The overall PEP completion rate for the Summer Term is 99%. this is 2% higher than in Summer 2023 and 26% higher than Summer 2022.

The rating of the PEP's has become more comprehensive as the Virtual School strives to ensure all pupils have a Good PEP. In the Summer Term 79% had a good PEP. This is a 4% increase in the PEP's rated Green in the Spring Term and 1% less were rated RED compared to the Spring Term.

Section A (Young Persons View)

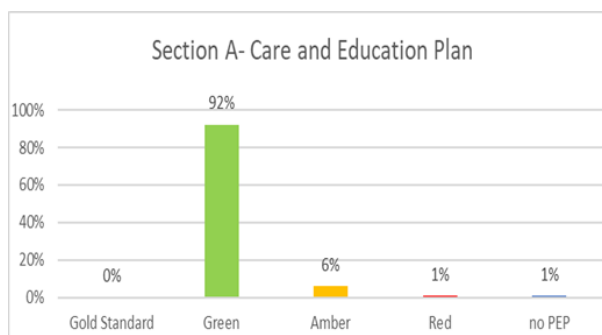


This was previously Section C at the end of the PEP but has now been moved to the forefront of PEP highlighting the importance of young person's involvement. The audit gave feedback on PEPs with insufficient evidence of the "voice" of the young person.

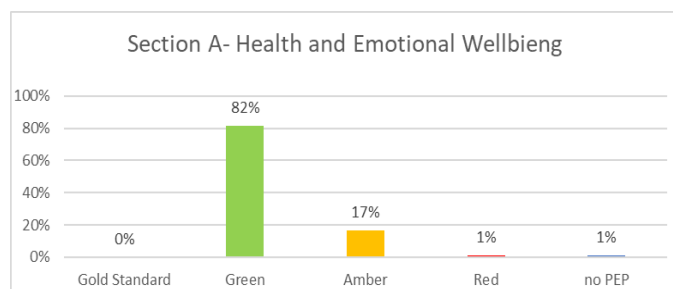
For Section A, 86% were rated Green (Good), 8% Amber (Requires Improvement) and 3% Red (Inadequate). 1% (1) had not had this section completed.

Care and Education Plan

Also, part of Section A is the Care and Education Plan, this is completed by Social Care. In the Summer Term, 92% were rated Green (Good), 6% Amber (Requires Improvement). 1% (1) had not had this section completed.

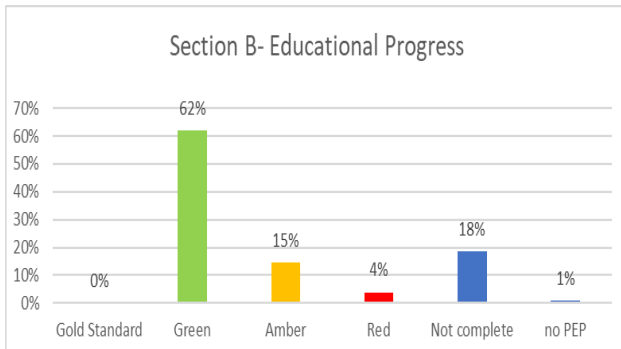


Emotional Health and Wellbeing



This is completed by Social care and 82% were rated Green in the Summer Term and 17% Amber (requires improvement). 1% (1) Red (Inadequate) and 1% (1) had not had this section completed.

Section B – Educational Progress completed by the college/training provider or if NEET completed by Social Care.



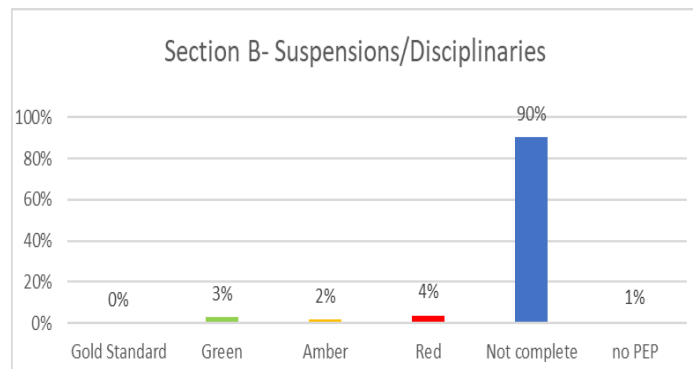
For the 103 PEP's completed in the Summer Term.

For Section B Educational Progress 62% were rated Green (Good), 15% Amber (Requires Improvement). 4% Red (inadequate) and (18%) 19 had not had this section completed and 1%(1) had no PEP. 17 of the 19 where this section had not been completed were NEET. For the other 2 one PEP was marked Green overall and the other Requiring Improvement overall.

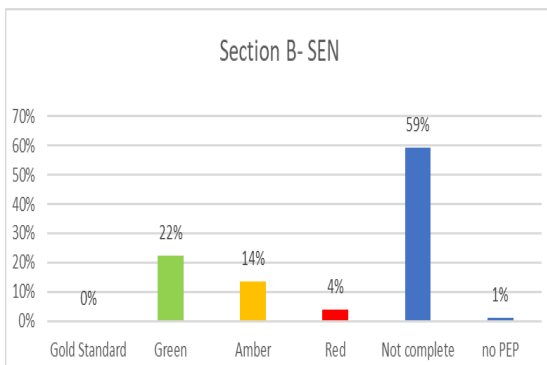
Suspensions and Disciplinarys – Completed by the college/Training provider if applicable

For the 103 PEP's completed in the Summer Term.

For Section B Suspensions/Disciplinaries 3% were rated Green (Good), 2% Amber (Requires Improvement). 4% Red (inadequate) and 90% Not applicable /Not completed and 1% (1) no PEP.



SEN



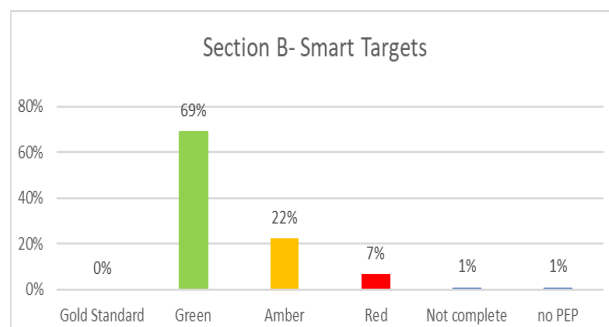
For the 103 PEP's completed in the Summer Term.

For Section B SEN 22% were rated Green (Good), 14% Amber (Requires Improvement). 4% Red (inadequate) and 59% Not applicable /Not completed and 1% (1) no PEP.

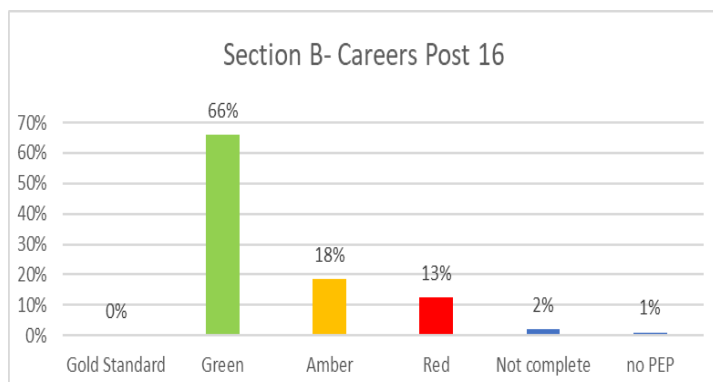
Smart Targets

For the 103 PEP's completed in the Summer Term.

For Section B Smart Target 69% were rated Green (Good), 22% Amber (Requires Improvement). 7% Red (inadequate) and 1% (1) no PEP.



Careers Post 16



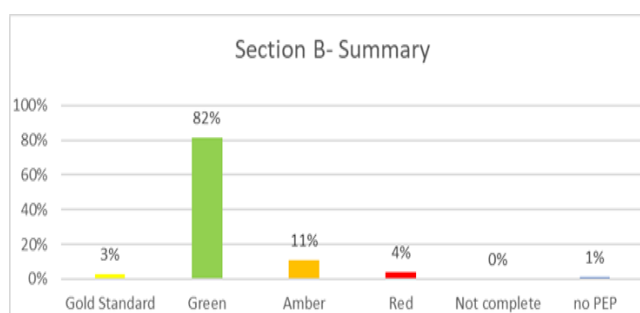
For the 103 PEP's completed in the Summer Term.

For Section B Careers 66% were rated Green (Good), 18% Amber (Requires Improvement). 13% Red (inadequate) 2% not applicable and 1% (1) no PEP.

Summary Section

For the 103 PEP's completed in the Summer Term.

For Section C Summary 3% were rated as Gold Standard, 82% were rated Green (Good), 11% were rated Amber (Requires Improvement) and 4% Red (inadequate) and 1% (1) No Pep.

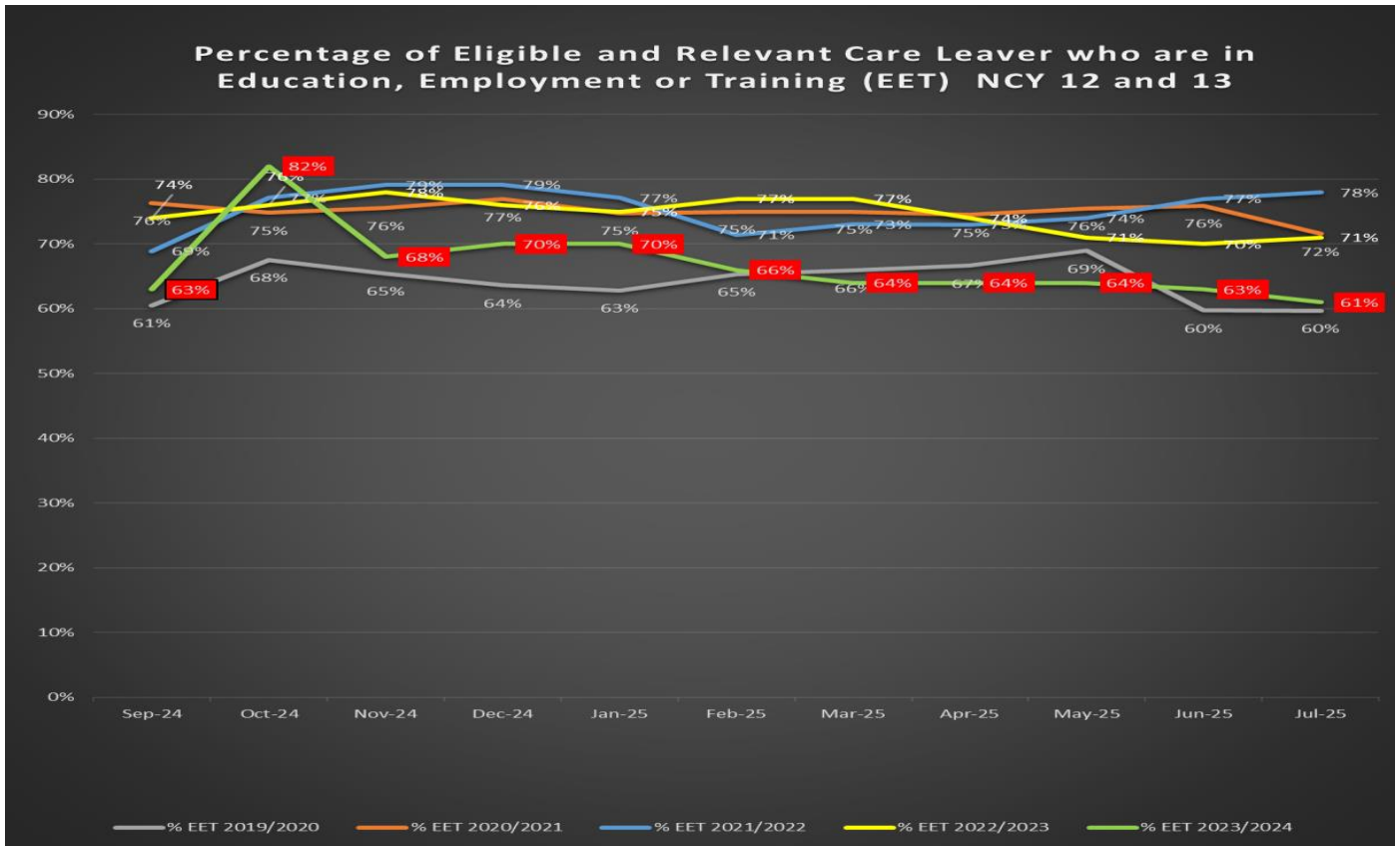


Post 16 PP+ Funding was introduced in September 2023 as the DfE have now expanded Post 16 funding to all LA Virtual Schools across the country, so this was the first year that funding was attached to Post 16 cohorts, this means that funding for the most needy through SMART targets Were possible for the first time.

Since the Post 16 PEP launch in September 2022 the Post 16-19 CfC NEET figures have gone from 26% to 29% by July 2023.

The Post 16 focus for 2024-25 is an improvement in the quality of SMART Targets and the Development of the Careers section of the Post 16 PEP. The Virtual School are now recruiting a discrete Careers Advisor for the Virtual School, who will support with direct work and the evidence of such work being recorded within the PEP. In March 2023, the Careers Service in the local authority was disbanded, previously there was a Careers Advisor for Cared for Children and Care Leavers, and the impact of this has been seen in the City.

The Post 16 Network Meetings for Designated Teachers will be focussed in the academic year of 2024-25 upon offering direct work and support for outcome focussed SMART targets. The Virtual School Practitioners will offer specific sessions to support with effectiveness of this PEP section. This will also be included within the training calendar, most notably the Designated Teacher Conferences held at Port Vale Football Club.



In March 2023 the Careers Service in the local authority was disbanded, previously there was a Careers Advisor for Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

There were 109 young people at Key Stage 5 (NCY 12 and 13) who were Eligible or Relevant Care Leavers on 18/07/2024. 61% (66) were EET and 23% (25) were NEET and 16% (18) were Unknown. Four of the 66 in Education, Employment and training were completing apprenticeships, 54 in full-time education, 2 in full-time training, 2 were employed, and 4 were in part-time time training or education. The 25 NEET are all unemployed and currently seeking employment.

There are 18 with an “unknown” status. The unknowns are rising due to no allocated careers advisor in the team to update the system with the current details.

The percentage of this cohort in education, employment, or training has reduced since 2022/23 when it was 71%

Case Study showing the VS impact on supporting a KS5 CfC who is an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team:	Age of child:	17 yrs
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <p>A presented to Stoke on Trent Children's Services, via his solicitor following an assessment by the Home Office that stated he was 22 years of age. A appealed this and was age assessed by the local authority. A provided an ID card with photo that said he was 16 years of age, and this was not refuted in the age assessment</p> <p>A travelled for approximately 11 months to reach to the UK</p> <p>A experienced significant trauma as there was a threat to his safety.</p> <p>Once A started college, there was a phase at college with A's punctuality - he was often arriving late to his 9am lessons and during the afternoon which was surprising as there were no concerns at the start when he first started.</p>		<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A was on a waiting list at Stoke on Trent for an ESOL course. He was not accessing any face-to-face education as there was no other provision in Stoke offering ESOL 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A is in full time education at Stoke college studying ESOL. He has made exceptional progress through the levels. Staff have nothing but positive comments to make about A's progress and work ethic. A has made numerous friends at college and he meets them regularly outside of college too Well integrated in the community, especially after attending Friday afternoon prayers at the local mosque. A likes cricket and football and plays this at Hanley Park with his friends A is taking part in activities and learning independence skills. A has shared in his education meetings that he wants to become a good electrician. He understands that he needs to improve his English and will require some support with progression to a level 1 electrical course. He feels as though Stoke college would be the best place to continue with his progression. 		<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigned A to Flash Academy and issued a laptop so that he could begin his learning remotely and to begin developing his English. Staff at placement supported A with this. Regular Education Meetings A's punctuality drastically improved as there was a supportive measure put in place to ensure that A arrived on time to college. VS suggested cricket cave facility in Middleport to support with social and communication skills. Frequent calls were made to Stoke college to identify whether a place was available for A. Requested for an adapted timetable for a Friday afternoon so that A could attend Prayer at the local Mosque Taster day organised in the electrical and mechanics curriculum department for Future progression. 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication between services. Strong plans and actions in Place. 			<p>Date 18/04/24</p>
stoke.gov.uk		 City of Stoke-on-Trent	

Case Study showing the VS impact on supporting a KS5 CfC

Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School Case Study

Service Area: Virtual School	Team: VS Post 16	Age of child:	17 yrs old
<p>What were the concerns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> M is a Child in Care. M has an EHCP, High CE Risk. Moved out of area due to gang risks. On going investigation. Residence is residing in an unregulated at this time and is also unstable due to who M is residing with. M attended P Education. Behaviours and attitude to learning predominantly put his place at PEAK at risk. M is undertaking Entry Level 3 ICT 		<p>Where we were?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At Risk of losing his placement at PEAK The chances of M engaging in education or remaining at PEAK are extremely low. This would have an impact on his prospects Residence unstable – unstable education and residence, more susceptible of becoming NEET and possible further criminality 	
<p>What difference have we made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint working with Children in Care Team, PEAK and SENMAS. Improved attendance Residence has been sought through Social Care Through regular meetings , we have improved attainment, M has a residence and M's EHCP is to be transferred to his residence Authority. Consultations to be made from B Local Authority to education providers. Secure Residence with a secure education placement. 		<p>What did we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint working with Children in Care Team PEAK and SENMAS Held regular Professional Meetings ensuring an action plan Held an EHCP Review, to review M's needs to support M in a new education placement Held PEPS Consulted Management of Virtual School they in turn consulted with Management at SENMAS 	
<p>What have we done to embed good practice more widely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and Joint Working . 			<p>Date 13/06/2024</p>
stoke.gov.uk		 City of Stoke-on-Trent	

Post 16 destinations

Year 11

There were 78 Year 11 pupils at the end of July 2024 that had been in care for a full 12 months, their EET/NEET status is shown below. (Status as at mid-September 2024 – will change as Term continues and education establishments are found).

Row Labels	Total	%
Apprenticeship	1	1%
Full Time Education	44	56%
Training	7	9%
Tuition NTAS	1	1%
Residential Placement	2	3%
NEET	12	15%
Not known.	11	14%
Grand Total	78	100%

All information is current on Liquid Logic at the time of reporting in regards to Not Knowns. (Status as at mid-September 2024 – will change as Term continues and education establishments are found).

Year 12

There were 95 Year 12 Eligible Care Leavers July 2024. 68 of them were in Education or Training (72%). 27 (28%) were NEET

Year 13

The number of Care Leavers in NCY 13 decreases as the year continues, as many opt out of support after turning 18 and become Former Relevant the table below shows the full cohort of NCY 13 and their destinations at the end of the Summer Term 2024 63% are in Education or Employment and 37% are NEET for various reasons.

Destination	Total	%
Apprenticeship	4	5%
Full Time Education	41	47%
Full Time Employment with no planned Training	4	5%
Full Time Training	1	1%
Part time Employment, Education or Training	5	6%
NEET	22	25%
Unemployed - Custody	1	1%
Unemployed - Young Parent	1	1%
Unemployed as a result of ill-health or disability	1	1%
Unemployed for other reason	8	9%
Grand Total	88	100%

As of 2024-25 when the new Careers Advisor for Cared for Children and Care Leavers starts this will be the offer of support for our Year 13's when they progress to year 14.

1. If on Level 2 programmes (so did L1 in year 12, and L2 in year 13) they can return for further study for year 14/15 for L3 with agreement from the College, and DOB eligibility.

2. If on first year of L3 they will return for fully funded year 14.
3. If finishing their L3 study, they can: apply for University and employment.

Above bullet points 1 and 3 – they are also eligible to apply for Apprenticeships.

At all stages, Colleges can access advice from The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor and can liaise with them and VS/Social Care colleagues if there is risk of NEET.

For those students that want alternative options, there is very exciting new work being done to establish a 'Future Ready' Business Pledge where Businesses can agree work experience, taster days, and could hopefully even lead to part time work/apprenticeships in some cases. This is still in development stages, but it is envisioned that the process would be:

- The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor works with young people and professionals to determine needs of young people.
- The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor can then determine work experience offer most suitable.
- The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor to then refer young people to YES programme, or ACL study programme, where young people can be supported to access the work experience opportunity, and do workplace study skills (employability skills) and maths and English if needed.

The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor can offer home visits locally, work alongside carers and Social Care, and can support with applications for jobs and apprenticeships etc as needed.

The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor also has strong links with DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) who can also offer support.

The Virtual Schools Career's Advisor can also refer to online learning programmes for young people that do become NEET and are not ready to access the full range as outlined above.

Care Leavers and Our Children Attending University

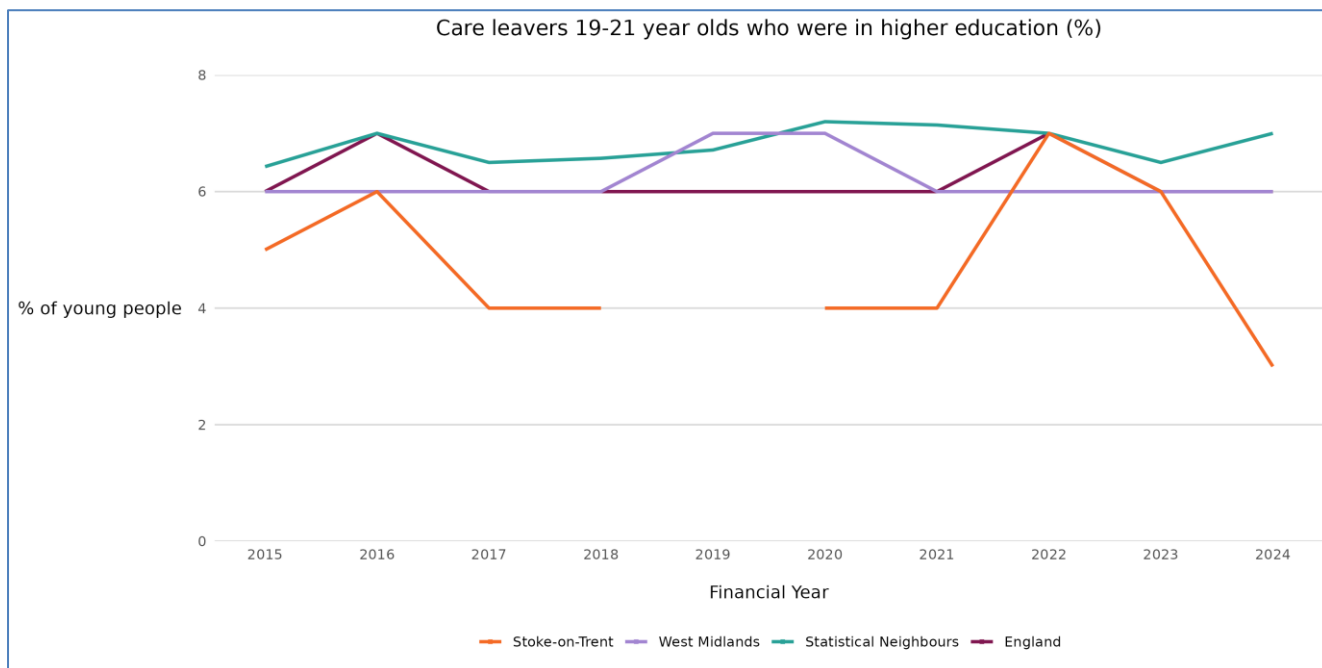
Three (3%) of our care leavers undertook Level 3 qualification July 2024 (in Years 13).

1 of the 3 is now attending University and 1 has started to work and the other has taken on seasonal work with the aim of starting a University Course next year.

We have a total of 9 Care Leavers attending University currently.

Two of our care leavers gained University Degrees July 2024.

The chart below shows in 2024 we again fell below our Statistical Neighbours who had 7% of Care Leavers in higher education compared to our figure of 3%. England and West Midlands are now both higher than us at 6%. We now rank 55 against National data and in Quartile D.



Source – Lait Tool 10.04.25

Gifted and Talented process for Cared for Children

The gifted and talented process is designed to enhance the educational journey of gifted and talented children in care. This process is holistic, integrating academic support with emotional and social development, and involves a coordinated effort from a dedicated team of professionals. By addressing both the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of these young people, the proposed process aims to create an environment where they can thrive academically and personally.

There are joint responsibilities between the Virtual School, Social Worker, Foster Carer, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Supervising Social Worker and the Schools and Colleges the CfC attend.

This is a brief summary of how the process will be managed each year

Action	When	Who
Review of all young people in Year 8, 9, and 10 to identify young people that meet that meet the 'high achievers' threshold.	Term 4 (Feb-April)	Virtual School Co-ordinator
List of all 'gifted and talented' young people to be shared with CIC Principal Managers.	April	Virtual School Co-ordinator
The Gift or Talent will be a discussion point in the PEP meeting with all professionals and the young person and a SMART target will reflect the terms target towards that area.	Each Term	SW, DT in School, FC, VSP
Meeting to be held to review the list and check that all young people are receiving the support they should be, and plan for anything additional that could be put in place.	May	VS, CIC managers, and IRO representative

'Gifted and talented' event to be held to inspire and promote best outcomes with young people.	Term 2 (October – December)	Joint venture between VS and CiC Service.
Meeting to be held to review the list and check that all young people are receiving the support they should be, and plan for anything additional that could be put in place.	November	VS, CiC managers, and IRO representative

The Gifted and Talented Process will be further developed following initial launch. Other ideas could include the development of annual event/ series of events between Social Work teams and the Virtual School to bring gifted and talented young people together to celebrate their achievements and inspire and promote the best outcomes.

University programme

In conjunction with a few local Virtual Schools in the area a University program is being developed to support our children to aspire to university. In 2024-25 there will be University taster days for KS3+4 pupils at Keele and Staffordshire University. The above children who are on the Gifted and Talented Process will be targeted but the offer will be open to all who are interested. The ambition is for this program to grow to a stage where young people will have mentoring from current care experienced young people who are in university and hopefully residential placements can be arranged in the future.

Summary

From the detailed analysis and insight from the data included within this report, the Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School key areas of focus for 2024-25 are

- Improve the Quality of PEPs to 90% at least Good by September 2025.
- Improving the Attainment and progress for Children with SEN and an EHCP, especially at KS4
- Persistent Absence and Attendance for Cared for Children/ Children with a Social Worker. Utilising ringfenced EWO to support and advise for improvements.
- NEET Figures and projects to improve support measures for those CYP at risk of NEET. Recruiting a Careers Advisor for CfC.
- NOSR utilising the VS Weekly Dashboard/ Education Solutions Panel and Escalation processes to reduce drift and delay in placing CYP in education. Using stricter escalations and actions with other agencies who are supporting our CYP.
- Phonic % working at ARE, KS2 RWM combined scores as a focus following this years decreases in outcomes
- KS 4 outcomes across the board, what impact is the Virtual School and PEPs having on outcomes?
- Improve the gathering of our Young peoples voices and providing them with greater opportunities in Sports and Arts with the addition of a VS Apprentice for Participation and Engagement.

The Virtual School will also continue working on the pilots and projects we are leading or involved with

- Transition summer program/mentoring to aid transition at year 11's into Post 16.
- Relational Approach to improving Education Outcomes (prev. AATI) with EPS-year 3.
- RADY pilot- Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters with an additional 9 schools.
- Supporting the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) project and writing co-regulation plans with schools to support our CYP.
- Raising the Profile of Education across CAFS with CSC and ERT.

Glossary

Acronym	Definition
AATI	Attachment Aware, Trauma Informed
ARC	Attachment Research Community
ARE	Age-Related Expectations
ASYE	Newly Qualified Social Workers/ Assessment Year Social Workers
CAFs	Childrens and Family services
CfC	Cared for Children
ciC	Children in Care
CIN	Children in Need
CLA	Children Looked After
CP	Child Protection Plan
CSC	Childrens Services Centre
CYP	Children, Young People
DfE	Department for Education
DT	Designated Teacher
DT LAC/CfC	Designated Teacher for Looked After Children/Cared for Children
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHCP	Education Health & Care Plan
EEF	Educational Endowment Foundation
EET	Education, Employment or Training
EPP	Education Pathway Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EP for PCfC	Education Plan for Previously Cared for Children
ePEP	electronic Personal Education Plan
ETE	Education, Training or Employment
EXS	Working at Expected Standard
EY	Early Years
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYPP	Early Years Pupil Premium
FC	Foster Carer
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GDS	Working at greater depth within the expected standard
GLD	Good Level Development (EY measure of progress)
ILACs	Inspection of local authority children's services
IRO's	Independent Review Officers
KCA	Kate Cairns Associates (attachment training)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KS1/2/3/4/5	Key Stage 1/2/3/4/5
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
NAVSH	National Association of Virtual School Heads
NCY	National Curriculum Year
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training

NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NTAS	National Teaching and Advisory Service
OBM	Operational Business Meeting
OOC	Out of City
PA	Personal Assistant
PP+	Pupil Premium +
PBS	Positive Behaviour Support
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PLAC/ PCfC	Previously Looked After Children/ Previously Cared for Children
PLP	Primary Leadership Partnership
P/T	Part-Time
RADY	Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters
RAG	Red, Amber, Green
RAiE	Relational Approaches in Education
RI School	Requires Improvement School
RPG	Recovery Premium Grant
RWM	Reading, Writing and Mathematics
SASCAL	Stoke-on-Trent Association of School, College, Academy Leaders
SATS	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SDQ	Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire
SEMH	Social Emotional Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs Disability
SENMAS	Special Educational Needs Monitoring and Assessment Service
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLTG	School Led Tutoring Grant
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focussed, Time Bound
SW	Social Worker
TDFDL	Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Youngsters
TT	Time table
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
UNI	University
VHT	Virtual Head Teacher
VS	Virtual School
VSCo	Virtual School Co-ordinator
VSDP	Virtual School Development Plan
VSEP	Virtual School Educational Psychologist
VSGB	Virtual School Governing Board
VSH	Virtual School Headteacher
VSHT	Virtual School Headteacher
WMVSHT	West Midlands Virtual School Head Teachers
WT	Working Towards expected standard
VSP	Virtual School Practitioner
YOS	Youth Offending Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team