

Virtual School Middlesbrough

INTRIUM ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20



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Forward.....

In Middlesbrough we are passionate about all our looked after children and our key priority is to ensure that all our children achieve their potential. All Middlesbrough Children Matter as we take our role as Corporate Parents very seriously and strive to ensure that all our looked after children thrive to become successful adults.

The role of the Virtual School is to promote the educational achievement of children in the care of Middlesbrough Local Authority. The Virtual School has high aspirations for all our children and young people and strives to close the attainment gap between our children and their peers.

Our Virtual School works industriously to provide effective support and make a difference to the education outcomes for all our children



Sue Butcher

**Executive Director
of Children's Care**



Rob Brown

**Director of Education
And Partnerships**

The Role of the Virtual School

The role of Middlesbrough Virtual School is to promote the educational achievement of children in the care of Middlesbrough Local Authority, wherever they live or are educated. The Virtual School are a team of dedicated advocates who work with partners to ensure that high quality education and a rich curriculum is provided, that children's needs are met and planning is of the highest possible quality.

The statutory duty of the Virtual School Head is stated in guidance from the Department for Education, this Set out the framework through which local authorities must discharge their statutory duty under 22(3A) and 23ZZA

Of the Children Act (1989), The Children and Families Act (2014) and section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act (2017) and promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children (2018).

The Virtual School key duties:

- ✓ **Maintain an up to date roll of our children in care**
- ✓ **Have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance, exclusion and progress of our children in care**
- ✓ **Inform schools when they have a child in care on their school roll**
- ✓ **Promote and monitor the completion of Personal Education Plans (PEPs)**
- ✓ **Monitor and devolve the Pupil Premium Plus Grant**
- ✓ **Contribute towards the Corporate Parenting role by providing educational advocacy**

The Virtual School Team

The Virtual School is made up of a team of dedicated professionals who support outcomes for children in care in a variety of ways. Below is a description of the positions that enable the Virtual School to carry out its statutory duties and to progress with the planned improvements for the academic year.

The Virtual School Head: This is a statutory post within each local authority. Following an interim period the current Virtual School Head, Victoria Banks, was appointed permanently to this position in July 2020.

PEP Advisors: There are 6 PEP Advisors within the structure that support children from early years to post 16. The PEP Advisors monitor the education of a case load of children, support education settings, arrange, facilitate and quality assure PEPs, conduct EHCP annual reviews, alongside providing training, information, signposting and guidance to all stakeholders.

Project Officers: There are two project Officers who support additional 1:1 tuition for students and support the effective running of PEP completion.



Meet the Team

Virtual School Head Victoria Banks



Nickname: V or Vic

Why do you love your job?

I love my job because I get the pleasure of knowing my children, listening to them and being a strong advocate for their education. Also all of my young people are my heroes and who doesn't want to work with their heroes!

What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough?

I want to make sure that all my children get the best education and go on to be happy successful adults in whatever area they choose.

PEP Advisor Erika Walkington



Nickname: Erika

Why do you love your job?

It is an honour to be a part of our young people's life journeys. I love seeing each and every one of them achieve their potential and finally see what we know, that they are amazing!

What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough?

I want to support our young people to look beyond Middlesbrough, there is a whole world out there waiting to be explored. They have the potential to live and work anywhere in the world, don't just dream it, do it!

1 to 1 Tuition and Intervention Project

Officer

Tom Shorten



Nickname: Tom

Why do you love your job?

I love my job because I get to work with the children and young people of Middlesbrough and see them succeed in overcoming any barriers to achieving their dreams. It is a pleasure to advocate for their education and I come to work every day hoping I make a difference! I will always go that extra mile to ensure our children get the best support, help and guidance they need for a bright future.

What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough?

The difference I want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough is to open new avenues, raise attainment, open new doors, and ensure they receive the best chances possible in life. We are always willing to listen, guide, advise and support, no matter what.

PEP Advisor Mark Middlemiss



Nickname: Mark


Why do you love your job?

I love getting to know our young people as they all have hidden qualities that will surprise and amaze you.

What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough?

I want to be part of helping every young person to achieve and realise their full potential.

<p>PEP Coordinator Project Officer Louise Tennant</p>  <p>Nickname: Lu</p> <p>Why do you love your job? No day is the same, I enjoy meeting new people and feel privileged to help our young people.</p> <p>What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough? To help them build a better future – imagine, believe, achieve.</p>	<p>PEP Advisor Sarah Watson</p>  <p>Nickname: Sarah</p> <p>Why do you love your job? I love meeting young people in school and hearing about all your achievements.</p> <p>What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough? I want to make sure that everyone is happy in school and becoming the best person they can be.</p>	<p>PEP Advisor Georgina Camsell</p>  <p>Nickname: Georgina/George</p> <p>Why do you love your job? I love my job as I want the children to have the best educational experience from pre-school to post 16.</p> <p>What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough? I want the children to have an enriched educational experience to make sure they reach their full potential.</p>
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<p>PEP Advisor Gill Kipling</p> 	<p>Nickname: Gill</p> <p>Why do you love your job? I love my job because I enjoy working alongside and helping young people</p> <p>What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people in Middlesbrough? I want to make sure all young people that I meet are able to to the best they can do including when the hurdles they face are high</p>
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<p>PEP Advisor Jean Maddison</p>	<p>Nickname: Jean</p> <p>Why do you love your job? I enjoy making a difference in lives of young people and helping them to achieve.</p> <p>What difference do you want to make to the lives of children and young people? I ensure all our young people have access to high quality education and are able and equip to move onto further education, training or employment</p>
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Our student Profile

Total
Cohort

577

EHCP

15%

Males 57%

Females 43%

In area 50%
out of area
50%

In care for more
than 12 months

87%

Strengths and developments

Main Strengths	Main Areas for Development
98.6% of looked after children have an up-to-date PEP.	Continue to improve the quality of PEPs.
Arrangements are in place for the termly review of PEPs.	In an emergency placement, ensure the PEP is initiated within 10 working days of a child becoming Looked After.
Actions and activities recorded in the PEP are monitored, ensuring they are implemented without delay.	In emergencies, ensure a new educational placement is provided within 20 school days and avoiding drift and delay in providing suitable education.
Where a RI school is used, the VSH is confident of the school's ability to support the child.	For 16 – 18 year olds, liaise with the child's Personal Advisor to ensure educational goals and needs are understood.
Attendance is monitored and evaluated.	Ensure all children are receiving their appropriate entitlement to education, and continue to work creatively with SEND and Social Care to help achieve this.
Progress and attainment is monitored and evaluated.	Work with partners including social care to improve school placement stability.
Attainment, progress and attendance is reported regularly to the Governing Body.	Work creatively with schools and carers to continue to improve academic outcomes at all key stages.
Details of all educational settings are up to date.	Increased attendance at training for social workers
The PP+ policy is published.	Improve attendance and reduce PA.
Appropriate training is provided for: DTs, school staff, carers.	Reduce the number of Fixed term exclusion
In the event of an exclusion, arrangements for the child's on going education are made.	Increase the number of children accessing mainstream school
There are 0 Permanent exclusions	Decrease the number of NEETS

Enrichment and Celebrations

Distribution of books, study materials and on line learning resources

In line with attachment aware trauma informed practice and our legal and moral duty to promote education, the Virtual School made every effort to ensure children and young people felt remembered and loved, especially during COVID, a time of increased isolation. Every child in the care of Middlesbrough Local Authority received a parcel containing stationery, a reading book and a letter.

We also created educational resource packs that can be accessed via the Council website with everything from Early Years to Year 11. There are also resources for foster carers to help them deliver home education

The Virtual School run a weekly competition where students are asked to

1. Go to www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize and register their details to create a Bitesize account.
2. Pick a topic, complete the tasks and take the quiz at the end.
3. When they get all the answers right, take a screen shot and email it to Virtual School.

Every Friday names are entered into a prize draw.



Choices Together

Choices Together is a six week programme organised by the North East Rising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) for Looked After Young People in Year 11. Young people were offered the opportunity to find out what it's like to be a university student, with the opportunity to try out some popular subjects, see where real students live and find out a little more about student life. 7 of young people were supported by Virtual School to attend this Project. The Young people were also thrilled to be joined by our Director of education and partnerships, Rob Brown.



Looked After Awards

Celebrating Childrens success is an incredible way to nourish and encourage their progress and growth. By praising both outstanding achievements and everyday successes, no matter how big or small, we can unlock one of the most powerful tools to support and connect with children in their continued development.

The Virtual School had the privilege of hosting the 2019 Looked after awards on 31st October. It was an incredible evening where our young people, officers, councillors and foster carers had the opportunity to come in Halloween costumes to jointly celebrate our wonderful children. The celebration was held at Middlesbrough River side stadium where our young people were given the red carpet treatment.



We celebrated with a formal award ceremony followed by messy play and activities booths, a disco and a fantastic Ariana Grande tribute act with our very own Tom Shorten on the drums!

There was a fantastic attendance with 186 certificates of achievement being awarded on the night. There were also 6 special trophies and 2 outstanding achievement trophies awarded.

This year the VSH has introduced education awards so that our children successes are celebrated throughout the year. Sue Butcher, Director of Childrens Services and Rob Brown, Director of Education and Partnerships also presented special awards for those students who have made outstanding achievements.

Transition cards

Change is a normal part of life and can provide opportunities for children to develop their resilience. Whether a child is starting primary school, moving from infants to juniors, primary to secondary school or from secondary to employment, training or further education, this transition period needs to be carefully managed. If a child struggles with a transition it can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and academic achievement.

The Virtual School has sent each child, at each transition phase, a congratulations card to let all of our students know that we are thinking of them and that we are here to support them during their transition.



1:1 core subject tuition

The Virtual School Offer a buy back services were schools can request specialist teachers to deliver 1:1 tuition to looked after children to support students to reach the aspirational targets detail in their PEPS. This services reduces drift and delay in access interventions and ensure our children have access to high quality teaching.

Promoting the Educational Achievement for Children in Care

The Local Authority and VSH have a duty to promote the educational achievement of the children they look after.

The VSH is charged with promoting the educational achievement of all the children looked after by their local authority they work for.

This report aims to set out what the VSH had done to Promote the Educational Achievement for Children in the Care of Middlesbrough Local Authority

PROCLAIM Project

Providing Rich Opportunities for Children Living Around and In Middlesbrough

The aim is to benefit the whole school population, however the project will is aimed to support:

- ✓ **those who are care experienced – in previous or current care placements;**
- ✓ **those who are described as being a ‘Child in Need’ – previously, currently or those at risk;**
- ✓ **those under ‘Child Protection’ - previously, currently or those at risk.**

What is the current PROCLAIM project?

The current project is aiming to support 2 schools (Acklam Grange and Linthorpe Primary School) to work towards gaining ‘Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed’ status.

Why is this important?

- to further develop a sense of safety, stability and security
- to further develop a sense of belonging for pupils and staff
- to further develop relationships in the school (pupil/pupil, pupil/staff and even staff/staff)
- to develop knowledge, competence and skills amongst adults, building further on their understanding of attachment and trauma (including the cognitive, emotional and physiological responses) and how/when to ‘intervene’ – in a preventative and reactive way
- to improve school outcomes for children and young people, including their attainment, attendance, inclusion and feelings of wellbeing



Future For Families and Virtual School

Futures for Families is a brand new service which will provide a rapid response to children and families in crisis who need support to prevent family breakdown.

At Middlesbrough Council we want to help families stay together, we want to keep homes safe and most of all enable children to have the future they desire.

The Department of Education (DfE) have invested into the project to help councils develop their work with families and safely reduce the number of children entering care, helping to keep young people safe and with their family and community.

Futures for Families is based on North Yorkshire County Council's 'No Wrong Door' model which has, and continues to, successfully support children and families to achieve positive outcomes.

The VSH sits on the deep dive panel to ensure that education is prioritised in any future planning. The VSH has support this project by working closely with partners to identify an education lead and will continue to work closely with them in order to promote the best possible educational outcomes for Middlesbroughs children.

To further promote the educational outcomes of Children Looked After the VSH attends and contributes to the following;

- ✚ The Cooperate Parenting Board
- ✚ Fostering panel
- ✚ Virtual School Governing Body
- ✚ Risk Management Group
- ✚ FFF strategic and operational Board
- ✚ Solutions Panel
- ✚ Innovations operational group
- ✚ Complex case panel
- ✚ NEET strategic group

The Pupil Premium Grant

ITEM	% of PPPG Spend
EP Time 14 days a year	0.81
Devolved to school PPP	55
Exam & course fees	0.08
Training	0.6
Books & publications	0.02
Office expenses	0.06
Professional, commission & membership fees	0.06
Laptops	0.13
Postage	0.01
Telephones charges	0.08
Staffing	32.5
Data Support	4.12
Celebration awards	0.06
Wellfare Call	5.81
Post Looked after education support ATV	0.66
Total	100

The pupil premium grant (PP+G) was previously set at £1,900 per pupil per annum until April 2018 where it was increased to £2,300 per pupil.

Middlesbrough Virtual School provides a wide range of services to schools to support looked after children, including: advice and guidance, management of the PEP process and associated quality assurance, exclusion support, advocacy, in class TA and teacher support, one to one teaching support and DT, governor and staff training. These services cannot be provided from the top slicing amount as detailed below with the reaming amount being paid direct to schools. This reduction had bene implemented over a two year period as set out below:

April 2019 devolved portion of PP+G = £1,150 (£380 per term)

April 2020 devolved portion of PP+G = £1,000 (£330 per term)

School can ask for additional PP+G where there is evidence that the £1,000 has been used to support the academic attainment of the students and further funding is needed to ensure students have access to the correct support and interventions.

Over half the PP+G funding (55%) was devolved to schools and the other 45% was dedicated to high quality training, raising the quality and accessibility of PEPs and staff to support all stakeholders to advocate for looked after Childrens education.

Training

The VSH should ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to meet the training needs of those responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

Over the last academic year there has been two physical Designated Teacher (DT) Forums covering topics such as;

- Pupil Premium Plus
- SMART targets
- Exclusions
- Attachment and Trauma aware
- EPEP's - systems and protocols
- PEP Quality
- Back to basics for new designated Teachers

Due to COVID 19 we adapted how we are delivered training. In conjunction with guest speaker Sheila Mulvenney, we Virtual School delivered a bespoke webinar for DTs, foster carers and social workers on 20th May 2020. This event was well attended with over 50 delegates. The feedback from the event was positive and request for further training on Post looked after children was requested. To address this demand the Virtual School will look to deliver a training session on how schools can support previously looked after children in the autumn term 2020.

Foster Carer training

The Virtual School has delivered training to both in house foster carers and to independent foster cares on topics such as:

- Supporting your child with Home work
- PEPs: The What, When, Why and how
- GCSE grading system
- How to support your Childs education at home

The Virtual School will look to build on this training in coming years ensuring that our Foster carers feel supported and assured to engage our children in school and to promote academic excellence.

Initial Teacher Training



BECOME are registered charity who have been working to improve the everyday lives and future life chances of children in care and young care leavers. In September 2018 BECOME published, "TEACHERS WHO CARE: How to help teachers and schools support looked after children."

The report found, *"many disparities among teachers' experiences. Some received good quality training in this area [children in care] before they qualified, but the majority did not. They meet their students and feel unprepared to fully support those who are looked after, whether that is through meeting the statutory*

requirements of the Personal Education Plan and working with the Virtual School, or through understanding the experiences of these students by having a good level of knowledge about the care system and children's services. Without this background, teachers are struggling to meet the needs of some of their most vulnerable students and find themselves rushing to catch up."

- 87% received no training about looked after children before they qualified as a teacher
- 26% of respondents received no training about looked after children before or after they qualified.

To address this issue in the North East the Virtual School Middlesbrough deliver annual training to Carmel College Teacher Training Program under the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust. This Year we have delivered training on;

- ✓ What does it mean to be in care?
- ✓ Who are the key people in a looked after child's life?
- ✓ What is a Virtual School and how do they support looked after children?
- ✓ What is a Personal Education Plan and why are they important?
- ✓ Attachment aware trauma informed practice in school
- ✓ Attachment aware trauma informed intervention

Additional Support given to Schools

Our PEP Advisors work closely with DTs offering support and challenge to produce better outcomes for individual children looked after by Middlesbrough LA. Often our PEP Advisors will work with school with to create systematic change working alongside DTs and SLT to bolster the support offered to looked after children across the school, some examples are;

- ✓ **Support with advice on exclusions to reduce fixed term exclusion of looked after children in schools with high rates of fixed term exclusions.**
- ✓ **Provided training materials to DTs to deliver whole school CPD days**
- ✓ **SEND support and advice for multiple out of area school to support EHCP applications**
- ✓ **Support in school system development to better support Looked After Children**
- ✓ **Supporting school transition plans in being Attachment Aware Trauma Informed (AATI)**
- ✓ **Facilitation of exams outside of school settings were required**

Social Worker Training

The VSH has delivered 2 training sessions to AYSE social workers covering;

- What is a Virtual School?
- What support can Virtual School Middlesbrough offer?
- What is a PEP and why are they important?
- How can we support education stability?
- How can social workers support children and young people's education?

The impact of this training has seen social workers contact the Virtual School for information, guidance and signposting alongside raising the profile of the importance of education excellence. The Virtual School will look to expand this in the future ensuring a wider range of social workers and IROs receive high quality.



During the summer the VSH delivered 3 webinars on Education post COVID: attachment and Trauma, this was delivered to School nationwide, targeted at Head Teachers and Designated Teachers. There were 87 delegates at session one, and a further 15 people requested the recording & presentation

The second webinar was opened to 100 classroom Teachers and Supply Teachers nationally who were suitable and interested in working with CLA students and supporting their return to education. A further 300 Teachers showed an interest in attending the webinar however were unable to join as the webinar was fully booked. The presentation and the recording were sent out to all who attended and the additional 300 Teachers who requested to join. The VSH delivered a third follow up session designed to attract the people who were unable to attend the previous session.

Feedback from Training



Feedback from Young People, Foster Carers and Schools

*Erika does my PEPs and
I like her.*

Year 4 Student

*"10/10 support, Wendy is
really helpful, the online
tuition was fantastic and
I find everyone really
proactive"*

*Foster Career of three
brothers*

*I am really enjoying
school now*

Year 6



*Support from the staff at the Virtual
School is excellent. Their staff have a
tremendous amount of expertise and are
always available throughout the day to
support with any queries and to offer
advice. The staff support my colleagues
in school to champion the needs of
Looked After Children and to make sure
they have the best possible outcomes in
education.*

Middlesbrough School

*I like the Teachers at Virtual
School, they make stuff easy
to understand*

Year 11 Student

Attendance and Exclusions

In the academic year 2019/20, 41 students, a decrease of 111 from the previous year, were excluded for a total of 406 sessions (2018/19: 743 sessions) with 203 days lost to education (2018/19: 374.5 days lost),

All Exclusions are counted in sessions

Month	Children Excluded	Total Fixed Term Exclusions (sessions)	Total Fixed Term Exclusions (days)
September	9	52	26
October	7	68	34
November	10	82	41
December	5	43	21.5
January	1	48	24
February	5	53	26.5
March (COVID)	4	60	30
April (COVID)	0	0	0
May (COVID)	0	0	0
June (COVID)	0	0	0
July (COVID)	0	0	0
Total	41	406	203

Attendance

The whole school attendance at the end of February was 90.31%. School attendance has remained relatively static with a concerning dip during December.

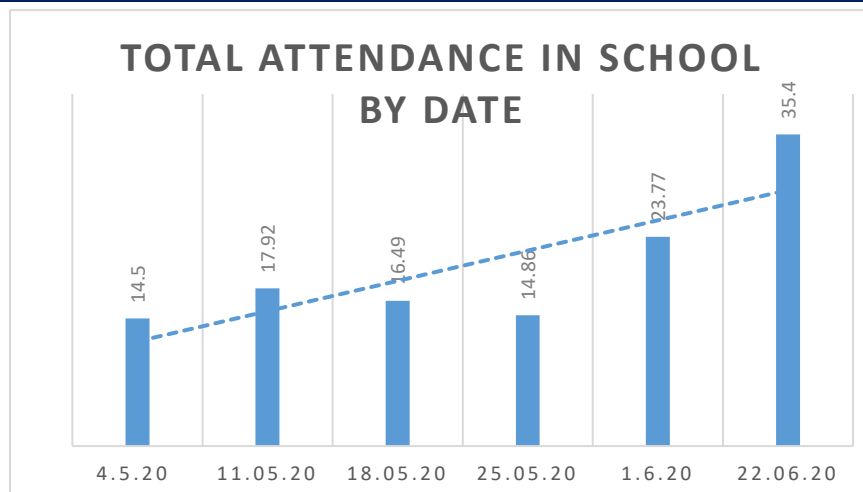
Months	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20
whole school attendance %	92.95	92.21	90.09	88.58	90.3	90.31

On March 18th 2020 the Government announced that schools across England would be 'closed' from Friday 20th March 2020 until further notice. Schools would however continue to accommodate vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

In response Virtual school collect attendance data of CLA who were access education in school. Virtual School worked closely with social workers and schools to increase the number of CLA attending school.

The bar chart below, shows the average attendance of all Children in Care from May to July 2020. The average attendance was calculated by using the total number of days students could have attended school and how many days were actually attended.

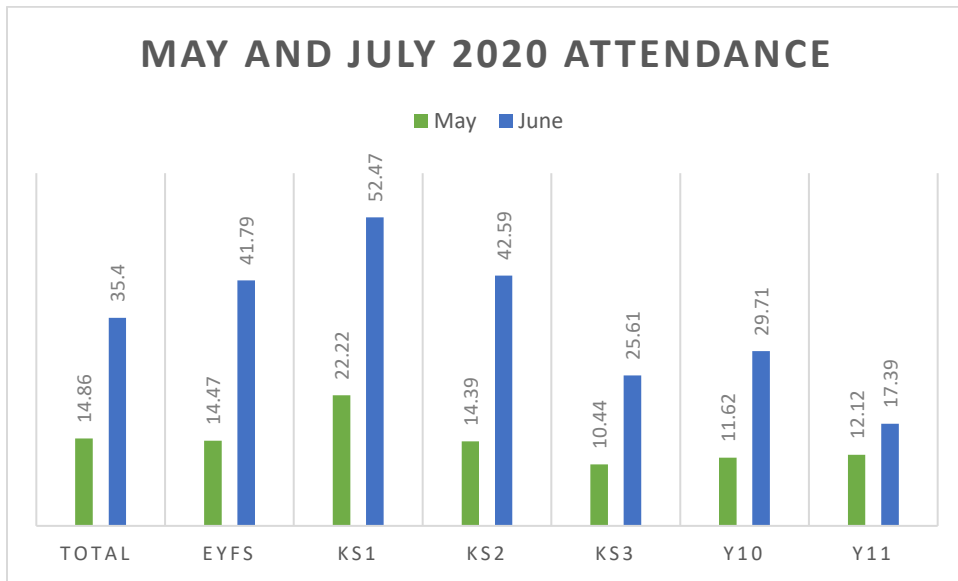
Average attendance of all Children in Care over a number of weeks from May to July 2020



The average attendance for all children continued on an upward trajectory from the first week in May 2020 to the last week in June 2020 with a rise of 20.9% attendance over this time.

All Key Stages saw a rise in school attendance with the largest rises in KS1 (10.35) and KS2 (28.2%) and the smallest in Year 11 at 5.27% rise.

May: June attendance comparative by key stage



COVID-19 response

On March 18th 2020 the Government announced that schools across England would be 'closed' from Friday 20th March 2020 until further notice. Schools would however continue to accommodate vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

With the repurposing of schools it was not practical for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to be created or reviewed. This was due to the difficulties in assessing academic attainment and progress in order to create SMART targets. Many schools contacted the Virtual School noting that carrying out meaningful PEPs was not currently viable and that the added pressure of completing PEPs was adding unnecessary pressure to schools. Virtual School responded by suspending all PEPs until June 1st 2020 when a COVID specific PEP template was created. By 31st June 2020, 96% of all children in care had an up to date COVID PEP.

Safeguarding children

Middlesbrough Local Authority worked closely with schools to ensure that vulnerable children, where it is was safe to do so, attended school or college.

The majority of Middlesbrough's educational settings remained open and safe for vulnerable children and young people. The Virtual School ensured that all Middlesbrough's looked after children, both in and outside of Middlesbrough have the option of attending a school setting and that continued educational support and safeguarding checks were in place where children were deemed to be safer at home.

After the DFE issued guidance on vulnerable children attending school during COVID-19, the local authority then took the decision to undertake safety plans for all vulnerable children. Information was also gathered from all schools regarding the support offered and this information was recorded directly onto the children's electronic record to inform the safety planning process.

Within the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service, individual "Lead Professionals" including officers from SEN Assessment Team, Alternative Provision team, EYSS, STARS and Community Learning were allocated to each setting with a child/young person with an EHCP to quality assure risk assessments produced by settings in dialogue with families and the LA alongside weekly contact with settings on the provision for each child/young person with an EHCP. The aim was to ensure in addition to the safety plans produced by social care staff, there was also a robust risk assessment, quality assured and monitored for each child/young person concerned.



Foster Carer Support

At Middlesbrough Virtual School the voice of the child is at the heart of everything we do, however we also recognise that listening to parents/carers and supporting them is essential to promoting a positive home environment. During recent communication with parents/carers it became apparent that many are feeling isolated and worried - they are not doing enough to support their child's education.

In order to support parents/carers during these unprecedented times we have organised a weekly Educational Support Session which will allow everyone to share their concerns and provide us with the opportunity to support them and, most importantly, share our experience and resources on how to approach home education and how education by stealth can often be the best way forward.

Tuition Provision

To ensure our students had the best support possible with their education the Virtual School used an on line education platform called Bramble which is an interactive online classroom allowing for direct teaching to take place. It can be accessed via computer, laptop, iPad or tablet.

Each student had a bespoke programme of education and staff can continue to build relationships, carry out safeguarding checks and help bridge educational gaps.

At the end of the academic year 2020 Virtual School were delivering over 145 hours of 1:1 education to those children who were most, who live in care homes and our year 10 cohort .

There 8 Children who were so happy with the provision they requested their sessions to continue over the summer holidays

