

Middlesbrough Virtual School

Annual Report

Academic Year: 2023–2024

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1. Executive Summary

Overview of the Virtual School's strategic priorities

1. Enhance CWSW visibility, improve workforce skills and ensure effective PEPs for Children Looked After.
2. Build strong service links, prioritise mental health support and conduct tailored training programmes.
3. Partner with experts, collaborate with social care and schools and establish mental health partnerships.
4. Focus on equity, use data for improvement and implement evidence-based interventions for better outcomes.

Headline successes and challenges from the academic year

1. Middlesbrough's Children Looked After Cohort Grows by 3% in 2024, with Significant Increase in Post-16 Group
2. Shift in Educational Placements: More Middlesbrough Children Looked After Educated Out of Borough in 2024
3. Diversity Increases Among Middlesbrough's Children Looked After, Highlighting Need for Culturally Responsive Support
4. Middlesbrough's Children Looked After Achieve 86.75% Attendance Rate in 2023-2024
5. Primary Education Shines with High Attendance Rates Among Middlesbrough's Children Looked After
6. Targeted Interventions Needed for Secondary Education Attendance in Middlesbrough's Children Looked After
7. Middlesbrough's Virtual School Achieves Seven Years with No Permanent Exclusions for Children Looked After
8. High Suspension Rates in KS3 and KS4 Highlight Need for Targeted Interventions in Middlesbrough
9. Gender Disparity in Suspensions: 55.8% of Suspended Children Looked After in Middlesbrough are Female
10. Stable SEND Proportion Among Middlesbrough's Children Looked After, Slight Increase in Post-16 Support
11. Early Intervention Strategies Lead to Decrease in SEND Identification in Early Years for Middlesbrough CLA

- 12.** Ongoing Challenges in Secondary Education: High SEND Rates in Years 9 and 11 for Middlesbrough CLA
- 13.** Middlesbrough's Virtual School Annual Conference Inspires Professionals with Strategies to Support Care-Experienced Young People
- 14.** Middlesbrough school-aged Children Looked After are placed across 147 settings, with 89.1% rated as Good or Outstanding.
- 15.** Only 1.4% of school settings for Middlesbrough Children Looked After are rated as Inadequate or having Serious Weaknesses.
- 16.** 48.7% of school-aged Children Looked After are in short-term fostering, which may indicate higher instability.
- 17.** 69.1% of Children Looked After have had only one placement in the last 12 months, suggesting recent stability for the majority.
- 18.** 11.6% of Children Looked After have had 10 or more placements, indicating significant disruption for this group.
- 19.** 46.7% of Children Looked After have been in their current placement for less than 12 months, while 21.5% have been in their placement for over 3 years.
- 20.** The Middlesbrough's Children Looked After cohort has grown larger, with increased diversity and a significant rise in the post-16 group.
- 21.** While primary education attendance rates are high, secondary education faces challenges, including high suspension rates and ongoing SEND issues.
- 22.** Stability in placements varies, with a notable portion experiencing frequent moves, impacting their overall stability and educational continuity.

End of Key Stage Outcomes

Summary of Educational Outcomes for Middlesbrough Children Looked After

The educational outcomes for Middlesbrough Children Looked After show a mixed picture across different stages of their education.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):

- Middlesbrough Children Looked After face significant challenges in the early years, with only 22.2% achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD). Literacy is a particular area of concern, with only 22.2% meeting expected goals. However, there is a notable strength in the area of Understanding the World, where 55.6% of children achieve expected goals.

Key Stage 2 (KS2):

- In reading, only 31.3% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After meet the expected standards, which is below national, regional, and statistical neighbour averages.
- Maths is a relative strength, with 50% of children meeting the expected standards, surpassing national and regional averages.
- Writing performance is mixed; while fewer children meet the expected standard, those who do often achieve at a greater depth.

Key Stage 4 (KS4):

- Middlesbrough Children Looked After perform relatively well compared to their peers nationally and regionally, with a Progress 8 score of -0.83, which is better than the national, regional, and statistical neighbours' scores.
- Their Attainment 8 score of 21.3 is higher than the national average but still significantly lower than the local authority average.
- EBacc entry and performance show mixed results, with some areas of strength but overall lower coverage compared to the local authority.

Overall, while there are areas of strength, particularly in maths and some aspects of KS4 performance, Middlesbrough Children Looked After generally face significant challenges, especially in literacy and early years development. Focused efforts on improving literacy and providing targeted support throughout their education are essential to help these children achieve their full potential

2. Context and Cohort

Local Context of Middlesbrough

Demographic Overview

Middlesbrough, located in the Tees Valley region of North East England, has a population of approximately 140,000 residents. The town is characterized by a relatively young demographic, with a significant proportion of the population under the age of 30. While the majority of the population is White British, there are growing communities of Asian, Black, and other ethnic minorities. Economically, Middlesbrough faces higher than average levels of deprivation, with many residents living in areas classified among the most deprived in the country.

Specific Challenges and Opportunities for Children Looked After (CLA)

Middlesbrough presents several challenges and opportunities for Children Looked After (CLA).

One of the primary challenges is educational attainment. Historically, Middlesbrough has struggled with lower educational attainment levels compared to national averages. This issue is particularly pronounced among CLA, who often face additional barriers to academic success. However, there are opportunities to address this challenge through initiatives such as the Virtual School, which aims to provide targeted support to improve educational outcomes for CLA.

Health and wellbeing is another area of concern. Children Looked After in Middlesbrough experience higher rates of mental health issues and lower overall wellbeing. Access to healthcare services can be inconsistent, posing further challenges. To address these issues, programs focused on mental health support and wellbeing initiatives are being developed.

Economic opportunities in Middlesbrough are limited, with higher unemployment rates impacting the future prospects of CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER as they transition to adulthood. However, local government and organizations are working on economic development plans to create more job opportunities and vocational training programs, which could benefit CLA.

Social care and support services in Middlesbrough face high demand, with resource constraints affecting the quality and consistency of care. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improvement through investment in social care infrastructure and training for carers to ensure better support for CLA.

Community and social integration pose challenges for CLA, who often struggle with social integration and building stable support networks. Community programs and initiatives aimed at fostering inclusion and providing social support networks for CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER present opportunities to address these challenges.

2.2 Children Looked After (CLA) Profile

This report provides a comparative analysis of the Children Looked After (CLA) on the Middlesbrough Virtual School (VS) roll for the years 2023 and 2024. The analysis highlights key trends and changes in demographics, educational placements, and care durations.

The total number of Children Looked After on the Middlesbrough Virtual School roll increased from 460 in 2023 to 474 in 2024. This represents a growth of 3%.

YEAR	TOTAL CLA	EARLY YEARS	STATUTORY SCHOOL AGE	POST-16
2023	460	45 (9.8%)	344 (74.8%)	71 (15.4%)
2024	474	34 (7.2%)	354 (74.7%)	86 (18.1%)

The gender distribution remained relatively stable, with a slight increase in the proportion of males.

Year	Total CLA	Male (%)	Female (%)
2023	460	266 (57.8%)	194 (42.2%)
2024	474	273 (57.6%)	201 (42.4%)

There was a notable shift in educational placements, with a decrease in the proportion of Children Looked After educated in borough and an increase in those educated out of borough.

Year	Total CLA	In Borough (%)	Out of Borough (%)
2023	460	289 (62.8%)	171 (37.2%)
2024	474	270 (57%)	204 (43%)

The proportion of Children Looked After who had been in care for 12 months or more increased slightly

YEAR	TOTAL CLA	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER 12 MONTHS+ (%)
2023	460	318 (69.1%)
2024	474	341 (71.9%)

Breakdown by Educational Stage

Early Years

The number of Children Looked After in Early Years decreased from 45 to 34.

There was a significant decrease in the proportion of males and those educated in borough.

Year	Early Years	Male (%)	Female (%)	In Borough (%)	Out of Borough (%)	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER12 months+ (%)
2023	45 (9.8%)	32 (71.1%)	13 (28.9%)	35 (77.8%)	10 (22.2%)	19 (42.2%)
2024	34 (7.2%)	19 (55.9%)	15 (44.1%)	19 (55.9%)	15 (44.1%)	18 (52.9%)

Statutory School Age

The number of Children Looked After in Statutory School Age increased slightly from 344 to 354.

The proportion of males and those educated in borough remained stable.

Year	Statutory School Age	Male (%)	Female (%)	In Borough (%)	Out of Borough (%)	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER12 months+ (%)
2023	344 (74.8%)	194 (56.4%)	150 (43.6%)	199 (57.8%)	145 (42.2%)	252 (73.3%)
2024	354 (74.7%)	200 (56.5%)	154 (43.5%)	200 (56.5%)	154 (43.5%)	260 (73.4%)

Post-16

The number of Children Looked After in Post-16 increased significantly from 71 to 86.

There was an increase in the proportion of males and those educated out of borough.

Year	Post-16	Male (%)	Female (%)	In Borough (%)	Out of Borough (%)	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER 12 months+ (%)
2023	71 (15.4%)	40 (56.3%)	31 (43.7%)	55 (77.5%)	16 (22.5%)	47 (66.2%)
2024	86 (18.1%)	54 (62.8%)	32 (37.2%)	51 (59.3%)	35 (40.7%)	63 (73.3%)

The year-on-year analysis of the Children Looked After cohort for Middlesbrough Virtual School reveals several important trends. The total Children Looked After cohort grew by 3%, with a notable increase in the Post-16 group. The gender distribution remained stable, with a slight rise in the proportion of males. There was a shift towards more Children Looked After being educated out of borough, and the proportion of Children Looked After in care for 12 months or more increased, indicating greater stability. These trends highlight the need for targeted support and resources to ensure the continued well-being and educational success of the Children Looked After cohort.

Gender, Age, Ethnicity

The proportion of Children Looked After identified as Asian or Asian British increased from 2% in 2022-2023 to 3.2% in 2023-2024.

The proportion of Children Looked After identified as Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African decreased from 5% to 4%.

The proportion of White Children Looked After remained relatively stable, though there was a slight decrease from 82% to 79.5%. The majority of the Children Looked After cohort continues to be White, with White British children making up the largest segment.

The proportion of Children Looked After from Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups increased from 7.8% to 8.4%.

The proportion of Children Looked After from other ethnic groups increased from 3.3% to 4.9%.

The comparative analysis of the ethnic composition of the Children Looked After cohort reveals several key differences and trends. The increase in the proportion of Asian or Asian British and Mixed ethnic groups, along with the rise in other ethnic backgrounds, underscores the growing diversity within the Children Looked After cohort. Conversely, the decrease in Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African Children Looked After

suggests a shift in the ethnic makeup of the cohort. These trends highlight the need for culturally responsive support and resources to cater to the varied needs of the Children Looked After

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER with SEND

This analysis examines the changes in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) data for Children Looked After (CLA) on the Middlesbrough Virtual School (VS) roll between the years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The data is segmented by educational stages: Early Years, Statutory School Age (SSA), and Post-16. Key differences and trends are highlighted, with conclusions drawn on potential reasons for these changes.

Overall SEND Data Comparison

The overall proportion of Children Looked After with SEND (either EHCP or SEN Support) remained relatively stable, with a slight increase from 55.2% in 2022-2023 to 55.3% in 2023-2024. This indicates consistent identification and support for SEND across the cohort.

Year	Total No. CLA	EHCP	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(EHCP)	SEN Support	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(SEN Support)	Total with SEND (EHCP or SEN Support)	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(Total with SEND)	No SEN	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(No SEN)
2022-2023	460	115	25%	139	30.2%	254	55.2%	206	44.8%
2023-2024	474	120	25.3%	142	30%	262	55.3%	212	44.7%

Early Years Comparison

The proportion of Children Looked After with SEND in Early Years decreased slightly from 31.1% to 29.4%. This reduction may be due to improved early intervention strategies, leading to better support and potentially fewer children requiring formal SEND identification.

Year	Total No. CLA	EHCP	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(EHCP)	SEN Support	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(SEN Support)	Total with SEND (EHCP or SEN Support)	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(Total with SEND)	No SEN	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(No SEN)
2022-2023	45	3	6.7%	11	24.4%	14	31.1%	31	68.9%
2023-2024	34	2	5.9%	8	23.5%	10	29.4%	24	70.6%

Statutory School Age Comparison

The proportion of Children Looked After with SEND in SSA remained stable, with a slight decrease from 61.9% to 61.6%. Year 9 continues to have the highest proportion with SEND at 79.1%, followed by Year 11 at 77.1%. This stability suggests ongoing challenges in secondary education, necessitating sustained support.

Year	Total No. CLA	EHCP	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(EHCP)	SEN Support	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(SEN Support)	Total with SEND (EHCP or SEN Support)	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(Total with SEND)	No SEN	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(No SEN)
2022-2023	344	94	27.3%	119	34.6%	213	61.9%	131	38.1%
2023-2024	354	96	27.1%	122	34.5%	218	61.6%	136	38.4%

Post-16 Comparison

The proportion of Children Looked After with SEND in Post-16 increased slightly from 38% to 39.5%. This increase may reflect better identification and support for SEND as children transition to further education and training.

Year	Total No. CLA	EHCP	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(EHCP)	SEN Support	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(SEN Support)	Total with SEND (EHCP or SEN Support)	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(Total with SEND)	No SEN	% CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER(No SEN)
2022-2023	71	18	25.4%	9	12.7%	27	38%	44	62%
2023-2024	86	22	25.6%	12	14%	34	39.5%	52	60.5%

The comparative analysis of SEND data reveals overall stability in the proportion of children with SEND. The slight decrease in Early Years SEND may indicate improved early intervention, while the stability in SSA highlights ongoing challenges in secondary education. The increase in Post-16 SEND suggests better identification and support during the transition to further education. These trends underscore the need for continued and targeted support across all educational stages to ensure the well-being and educational success of Children Looked After with SEND.

Importance of Good or Better Schools for Children Looked After

Children Looked After often face unique challenges that can impact their educational outcomes. Ensuring that these children are placed in good or better schools is crucial for several reasons. Good or better schools typically provide a higher standard of education, which is essential for the academic success of Children Looked After. These schools are more likely to have robust support systems in place, including trained staff who

can address the specific needs of Children Looked After. A stable and high-quality educational environment can provide a sense of normalcy and security, which is particularly important for Children Looked After who may have experienced significant upheaval in their lives. Research indicates that children in good or better schools are more likely to achieve better academic results, which can lead to improved life chances and opportunities. However, this must be balanced with the need for stability. If a child is already in a school that is rated below good, it may not always be in their best interest to move, especially if they have established relationships and are receiving high levels of support and challenge through their Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

Middlesbrough School aged Children Looked After are placed across a total of 147 settings, including 63 mainstream primary schools (42.9%), 44 mainstream secondary schools (29.9%), 31 special schools (21.1%), and 9 AP/other settings (6.1%). Of these settings, 111 (75.5%) are rated as Good, 20 (13.6%) as Outstanding, 3 (2%) as Requires Improvement, 1 (0.7%) as Inadequate, 1 (0.7%) as having Serious Weaknesses, and 11 (7.5%) have no rating.

131 out of 147 settings (89.1%) are rated as Good or Outstanding, indicating that the majority of Children Looked After are placed in high-quality educational environments. Only 2 settings (1.4%) are rated as Inadequate or having Serious Weaknesses, suggesting that very few Children Looked After are in schools that are significantly underperforming. The 11 settings (7.5%) with no rating.

While the majority of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough are placed in good or better schools, it is essential to continuously monitor and support those in settings that require improvement or have no rating. The decision to move a child from a below-good school should be carefully considered, weighing the potential benefits of a higher-quality educational environment against the importance of stability and existing support systems. High-quality PEPs that offer both high support and high challenge are crucial in ensuring that all Children Looked After receive the best possible education and opportunities for success.

The type of homes and home stability for CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Research indicates that different placement types for Children Looked After (CLA) often yield varying educational outcomes. However, it is crucial to highlight the nuance of individual child needs, which can significantly impact these outcomes. Stability in placements is a key factor that influences the well-being and development of CLA, and research supports the importance of stable placements in achieving better educational and emotional outcomes.

Studies have shown that children in long-term stable placements tend to perform better academically compared to those in temporary or multiple placements. The type of placement, such as foster care or residential care, can affect access to educational resources and support.

Each child's unique needs, including emotional, psychological, and educational requirements, must be considered when evaluating placement outcomes. Tailored support and interventions are essential to address these needs effectively.

Stability in placements is associated with improved emotional and behavioural outcomes. Children who experience fewer placement moves are more likely to develop secure attachments and benefit from consistent educational support. The provided data highlights the placement types and stability for School aged Children Looked After(N=353).

The largest group, 48.7%, is in short-term fostering, which may indicate a higher level of instability. Short-term placements can disrupt educational continuity and emotional stability. In contrast, 20.4% are in long-term fostering, which is generally more stable and beneficial for educational outcomes. Additionally, 9.3% are placed with parents, which can vary in stability depending on the family situation.

The average number of placements in the last 12 months is 1.5, with 69.1% having only one placement. This suggests a relatively stable recent period for the majority. However, 30.9% have had multiple placements, indicating instability for a significant portion of CLA. The average number of placements whilst Children Looked After is 3.6, with 37.7% having 2 or 3 placements. Frequent moves can negatively impact educational and emotional development. Notably, 11.6% have had 10 or more placements, which is highly concerning and likely to result in significant disruption to their lives.

Regarding placement length, 46.7% have been in their current placement for less than 12 months, suggesting recent instability. On the other hand, 21.5% have been in their current placement for over 3 years, indicating a stable environment for this group.

This underscores the importance of stable placements for CLA. While a significant portion of school age Children Looked After have experienced stability in the last 12 months, there remains a considerable number who face frequent moves and instability. Addressing the individual needs of each child and striving for long-term stable placements can enhance their educational and emotional outcomes. Continued research and tailored interventions are essential to support these vulnerable children effectively.

3. Strategic Vision and Leadership

The Middlesbrough Virtual School is dedicated to ensuring that Children Looked After (CLA) receive the highest quality education and support, guided by both government policy and a strong moral imperative. The vision of the Middlesbrough Virtual School is to create a nurturing and inclusive educational environment where every child can achieve their full potential. This vision is underpinned by core values of equity, excellence, empowerment, and collaboration. Equity ensures that all Children Looked After have equal access to educational opportunities and resources. Excellence is pursued through the highest standards in teaching, learning, and care. Empowerment involves encouraging Children Looked After to take an active role in their education and future, while collaboration emphasizes working together with various stakeholders to support the holistic development of CLA.

In recent years, the duties of the Virtual School have been extended to include all children who have previously been in care. This change came into effect following the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which expanded the responsibilities of Virtual Schools to support children who have left care through adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, or Child Arrangement Orders. This extension means that the Virtual School now provides ongoing support to ensure these children continue to receive the educational assistance they need to succeed.

The Virtual School has a strategic responsibility for children with a social worker. This role involves ensuring that these children receive the necessary support to overcome barriers to their education. The Virtual School is committed to promoting attachment-aware and trauma-informed practices, raising the profile of these children, and ensuring that systems work effectively to provide them with access to high-quality educational provision. The goal is to ensure that children with a social worker are able to attend school regularly and achieve well. Partnerships and multi-agency working are integral to the success of the Middlesbrough Virtual School. The Virtual school collaborates closely with other local authorities, children's social care, health services, and other local authority departments, to ensure a coordinated approach to the care and education of the young people within its remit. Engagement with schools and educational providers is also crucial, as it ensures that those students have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Additionally, the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provides further support and enrichment opportunities, enhancing their overall educational experience.

The Middlesbrough Virtual School places a strong emphasis on pupil voice and co-production, ensuring that Children Looked After are actively involved in decisions that affect their education and wellbeing. Regular feedback mechanisms, via the PEP, are implemented to allow Children Looked After to share their experiences and provide feedback on the support they receive. The co-production of educational plans involves Children Looked After in the development of their Personal Education Plans (PEPs), ensuring that their needs and aspirations are fully considered.

This strategic vision and leadership framework aims to create a supportive and empowering environment for CLA, ensuring that they have the opportunities and support needed to thrive both academically and personally.

4. Attendance and Engagement

Good attendance is a fundamental aspect of academic success and overall well-being. Regular school attendance ensures that students do not miss out on essential learning opportunities, which can significantly impact their academic performance and future prospects. It also helps in developing a sense of responsibility and discipline, which are important life skills.

For Children Looked After, consistent school attendance is particularly important due to the unique challenges they face. These children often experience instability in their personal lives, which can affect their emotional and psychological well-being. School can provide a stable and supportive environment, offering a sense of normalcy and routine. Regular attendance helps in building relationships with peers and teachers, which can be crucial for their social development and emotional support.

Overall Attendance

The overall attendance for all statutory school-aged Children Looked After from 1st September 2023 to 25th July 2024 was 86.75%. Authorised absences accounted for 7.56% of the total, while unauthorised absences were 5.69%.

Category	Attendance - Present Days %	Authorised Absence Days %	Unauthorised Absence Days %
Overall CLA	86.75	7.56	5.69

Monthly Attendance Trends

Monthly attendance data reveals fluctuations throughout the academic year. The highest attendance was recorded in September 2023 at 89.64%.

Month	Attendance - Present Days %	Authorised Absence Days %	Unauthorised Absence Days %
September 2023	89.64	6.25	4.11
October 2023	89.48	6.32	4.20
November 2023	88.69	6.62	4.69
December 2023	86.20	7.83	5.98
January 2024	85.70	6.75	7.55
February 2024	85.55	7.78	6.67
March 2024	86.11	7.86	6.03
April 2024	85.16	8.92	5.92
May 2024	85.83	7.73	6.45
June 2024	85.45	8.58	5.97

July 2024	85.99	9.25	4.75
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Termly Attendance

Attendance data by term shows a decline from the Autumn term to the Spring and Summer terms. The Autumn term had the highest attendance at 88.60%, while the Spring term had the lowest at 85.57%.

Term	Attendance - Present Days %	Authorised Absence Days %	Unauthorised Absence Days %
Autumn	88.60	6.71	4.68
Spring	85.57	7.64	6.79
Summer	85.71	8.42	5.86

Year Group Analysis

Attendance data by year group indicates that primary years (Reception to Year 6) generally have higher attendance rates. Year 6 had the highest attendance at 97.34%, while Year 11 had the lowest at 69.69%.

Year Group	Attendance - Present Days %	Authorised Absence Days %	Unauthorised Absence Days %
Reception	91.77	6.95	1.27
Year 1	94.53	4.18	1.29
Year 2	93.73	5.46	0.81

Year 3	97.22	1.92	0.86
Year 4	97.04	2.22	0.73
Year 5	96.58	2.83	0.59
Year 6	97.34	1.52	1.14
Year 7	95.39	2.87	1.74
Year 8	83.75	6.03	10.22
Year 9	80.22	9.76	10.02
Year 10	74.86	16.89	8.25
Year 11	69.69	14.59	15.73

Key Stage Analysis

Attendance data by key stage shows that KS1 and KS2 have significantly higher attendance rates compared to KS3 and KS4. KS2 had the highest attendance at 97.08%, while KS4 had the lowest at 72.44%.

Key Stage	Attendance - Present Days %	Authorised Absence Days %	Unauthorised Absence Days %
KS1	94.08	4.91	1.02
KS2	97.08	2.07	0.85
KS3	85.46	6.64	7.91
KS4	72.44	15.81	11.74

Areas of Strength

Primary Education (KS1 and KS2): High attendance rates, particularly in Years 3 to 6, indicating strong engagement and support at the primary level.

Early Years (Reception to Year 2): Consistently high attendance, suggesting effective early intervention and support.

Areas for Development

Secondary Education (KS3 and KS4): Noticeable decline in attendance, especially in Years 8 to 11. This suggests a need for targeted interventions to support older students.

Unauthorised Absences: Higher rates of unauthorised absences in secondary years, indicating potential issues with engagement and possibly underlying personal or social challenges.

Spring and Summer Terms have lower attendance compared to the Autumn term, suggesting a need for strategies to maintain engagement throughout the academic year.

Improving attendance for Children Looked After requires a focused approach, particularly in secondary education. Strategies could include enhanced support systems, mentoring programs, and addressing the specific challenges faced by older students. Ensuring a stable and supportive school environment can significantly impact their academic success and overall well-being

The Importance of Minimising Suspensions for Children Looked After

Suspensions should be a last resort for Children Looked After due to the unique challenges they face. These children often experience instability and trauma, which can affect their behaviour and emotional well-being. A suspension can exacerbate these issues by removing the child from a stable and supportive school environment, potentially leading to further disengagement from education.

The Virtual School plays a crucial role in working with schools to reduce suspensions. They provide information advice and guidance on targeted support and interventions to address the underlying issues that may lead to behaviours that challenge. This includes working closely with teachers, caregivers, and other professionals to develop individualised support plans, offering training and resources to school staff, and promoting positive behaviour strategies. The Virtual School also emphasises the importance of maintaining a stable school placement and ensuring that any disciplinary measures are proportionate and supportive.

It is noteworthy that there have been seven years with no permanent exclusions for CLA, highlighting the success of these collaborative efforts in creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

Monthly Suspension Data

During the 2023-2024 academic year, there were a total of 168 suspensions involving 52 children, resulting in 297.5 days of suspension. This indicates a significant number of suspensions, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address and reduce these occurrences.

The gender distribution of suspended children shows that 44.2% were male (23 children) and 55.8% were female (29 children). The higher percentage of female suspensions is notable and warrants further investigation into the specific challenges faced by female CLA.

Suspensions were fairly evenly distributed between children attending schools in Middlesbrough and those outside of Middlesbrough. Specifically, 51.9% (27 children) were suspended from schools in Middlesbrough, while 50.0% (26 children) were suspended from schools outside of Middlesbrough. One child experienced suspensions from both in-area and out-of-area schools. This balanced distribution suggests that suspension issues are not confined to a specific geographic area.

The majority of suspensions occurred in KS3, with 59.6% (31 children) of the suspended children being in this key stage. KS4 also had a significant number of suspensions, accounting for 38.5% (20 children). Only 1.9% (1 child) of suspensions were in KS2. The high suspension rates in KS3 and KS4 highlight the need for targeted interventions at these stages to address behavioural challenges and support these students more effectively.

Among the suspended children, 23.1% (12 children) had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), 48.1% (25 children) had SEN Support, and 28.8% (15 children) had no SEN. The high percentage of children with SEN Support (48.1%) indicates a need for additional resources and tailored interventions to support these students and reduce suspension rates.

Month	No. of Suspension Episodes	No. of Children Suspended	No. of Sessions	No. of Days
September 2023	10	5	20	10

<i>October 2023</i>	23	16	80	40
<i>November 2023</i>	14	11	45	22.5
<i>December 2023</i>	7	6	20	10
<i>January 2024</i>	17	11	61	30.5
<i>February 2024</i>	15	14	56	28
<i>March 2024</i>	22	12	84	42
<i>April 2024</i>	19	15	88	44
<i>May 2024</i>	15	11	53	26.5
<i>June 2024</i>	18	11	64	32
<i>July 2024</i>	8	8	24	12

The data outlines the importance of continued efforts to reduce suspensions for Children Looked After. The Virtual School's role in providing support and interventions is crucial in addressing the underlying issues that lead to suspensions. By fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment, we can help ensure that Children Looked After have the stability and support, they need to succeed academically and emotionally.

5. Virtual School Annual Conference

The Virtual School Annual Conference was held to bring together professionals from various sectors to discuss and develop strategies for supporting care-experienced young people. The event featured a series of keynote speeches, presentations, workshops and networking sessions, all aimed at providing valuable insights and practical advice.



Joe Tynan, Executive Director of Middlesbrough Children's Services, delivered a heartwarming opening address that set the tone for the day. His speech emphasised the importance of community and collaboration in supporting care-experienced young people. Joe's heartfelt words resonated deeply with the audience.

Kriss Akabusi, an Olympian and motivational speaker, shared his journey from the athletics track to becoming a life coach. His message focused on resilience, determination, and the power of believing in oneself. Kriss inspired the audience with his personal stories of overcoming challenges and achieving greatness.

Andy and Matt Smith, founders of Smash Life, spoke about their experiences growing up in the care system and how they turned their challenges into opportunities to help others. Their message was one of hope, resilience, and the importance of having someone who believes in you. They encouraged attendees to think creatively about how to engage and support young people.

Luke Rodgers, founder of The Care Leaders, discussed the importance of incorporating lived experiences into the development of social care services. His message highlighted the need for listening to and valuing the voices of care-experienced individuals. Luke's work aims to translate personal stories into actionable strategies to improve outcomes for young people.

The conference included workshops that provided attendees with opportunities to delve deeper into specific topics, such as creating aspirational education plans and understanding attachment and trauma. The networking sessions allowed for valuable connections and the exchange of ideas.

The Virtual School Annual Conference was a highly impactful event that successfully brought together professionals to discuss and develop strategies for supporting care-experienced young people. The keynote speeches were both inspiring and informative, providing valuable insights and practical advice. Joe Tynan's opening address set a positive and collaborative tone for the day, while Kriss Akabusi's motivational speech energised the audience. The presentations by Smash Life and Luke Rodgers offered powerful examples of how personal experiences can drive meaningful change. Overall, the conference was a resounding success, leaving attendees feeling inspired and equipped with new strategies to support care-experienced young people.

A special thanks to all those who attended and supported the conference. Your participation and contributions made this event truly memorable.

5.1 Feedback

"Kriss's was truly inspiring. His message about resilience and believing will help me deal with challenges in my own work."

"I was particularly struck by Kriss's personal stories. It was a powerful reminder that with determination and self-belief, we can achieve great things."

"Andy and Matt's presentation of their experiences growing up turning challenges into opportunities were really inspiring. It made me think about how I can better support the young people I work with."

"Luke's discussion on lived experiences and social care was eye-opening. It highlighted the need to listen to and value the voices of care-experienced children."

"I left feeling inspired to support care-experienced young people."

6. Attainment and Progress

Children in Care can be amongst the most vulnerable of learners. Many have had a disrupted education before coming into care, poor attendance, school moves, multiple exclusions and possibly elective home education. For those children coming into care late in their secondary school journey many have significant learning gaps. Many will have suffered trauma and have attachment difficulties which impacts upon neurological development. It is well researched and evidenced that the fight, flight or freeze response leading to the child often being hyper-vigilant will negatively affect their ability to focus in a school environment, until they feel safe and secure. This in turn has an impact on many of the skills needed for good learning. Children Looked After will inevitably suffer from a sense of loss whether this is due to being removed from birth family or bereavement, or they may feel very different to their peer group due to their circumstances. This often leads to low self-esteem - which again can affect confidence and the willingness to try new experiences and challenges. A key part of our work is to ensure that the education provided to Children in Care takes appropriate account of these factors in providing a bespoke approach suited to their needs. Children Looked After also experience changes in fostering arrangements, residential and care placements which can affect their schooling. This has been evidenced as a factor that impacts on outcomes by the research undertaken by the Rees Research Centre (The Educational Progress of Children Looked After in England: Linking Care and Educational Data, Nov 2015). The Virtual School Head's interim outcomes report captures attainment information for all Children Looked After alongside the qualifying cohort (children who have been in care for 12 months or more as at 31st March 2023 in line with the DfE's reporting methodology) the Virtual School actively supports every child in care regardless of duration in care.

There has been a return to pre-pandemic grading in England this summer as exams and assessments for all qualifications went ahead as normal this year and grading arrangements were also back to normal.

The Department for Education has confirmed it is not necessary for students to memorise formulae for GCSE mathematics and equations for GCSE physics and combined science in 2024.

The Department for Education has confirmed that 2024 will be the final year for these changes to its subject content requirements. There will be a return to normal exam arrangements for these subjects in 2025. This means that formulae and revised equation sheets will not be available after 2024. Students preparing for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams in 2025 and beyond will be expected to know and recall all the usual formulae and equations set out in DfE's subject content.

7. End of Key Stage Outcomes

7.1 Early years Foundation stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a framework that sets the standards for the learning, development, and care of children from birth to age five. It is designed to ensure that children are provided with the best possible start in life and are prepared for school. The EYFS framework is used by all early years providers in England, including nurseries, preschools, and reception classes in primary schools.

In this academic year, 2022-2023, the EYFS framework continued to build on the reforms introduced in September 2021. These reforms aimed to reduce workload for practitioners, improve outcomes for children, and ensure that the curriculum is more focused on what children need to learn. Key changes included revised Early Learning Goals (ELGs), which were updated to provide clearer expectations for children's development at the end of the EYFS. The revised ELGs aimed to be more specific and easier to assess. Additionally, the reforms aimed to reduce the amount of paperwork and data collection required from practitioners, allowing them to spend more time interacting with children. There was also an increased emphasis on developing children's communication and language skills, recognizing the importance of these skills for future learning.

The EYFS framework is divided into seven areas of learning and development, which are further categorized into three prime areas and four specific areas. The prime areas include Communication and Language, Physical Development, and Personal, Social, and Emotional Development. These areas focus on developing children's listening, attention, understanding, speaking skills, gross and fine motor skills, health and self-care, and positive sense of self, relationships, and behaviour management. The specific areas include Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World, and Expressive Arts and Design. These areas involve encouraging children to link sounds and letters, read and write, develop counting and numerical skills, understand shapes and measures, make sense of their physical world and community, and express themselves through various media and materials.

Assessment in the EYFS is primarily based on ongoing observations of children as they engage in everyday activities and play. Practitioners use these observations to understand each child's level of achievement, interests, and learning styles. This information is then used to plan future learning experiences that are tailored to the individual needs of each child. At the end of the EYFS, practitioners assess children against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELGs). These goals set out the expected level of development for children by the end of the reception year. The assessment is based on practitioners' observations and knowledge of the child, rather than formal testing.

Children's progress is recorded in the EYFS Profile, which is completed at the end of the reception year. For each of the 17 ELGs, children are assessed as either emerging, expected, or exceeding the expected level of development. The EYFS Profile provides a comprehensive picture of a child's development and is shared with parents and the child's future school to support their transition to Key Stage 1.

The EYFS framework is a vital part of early childhood education, providing a structured approach to learning and development for young children. The changes introduced in the academic year 2022-2023 aimed to enhance the framework by making it more focused and reducing the administrative burden on practitioners. Assessments in the EYFS are designed to be holistic and based on ongoing observations, ensuring that each child's unique needs and progress are recognized and supported.

The dataset below outlines the achievements of children in various categories in terms of their educational goals and benchmarking. The categories include National (CLA), DfE Region - North East (CLA), Statistical Neighbours (CLA), Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools), and Virtual School - Middlesbrough. The data includes the number of eligible children, the percentage of CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER matches, the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD), the average number of expected Early Learning Goals (ELGs), and the percentage of children achieving specific goals in areas such as Communication (COM), Personal, Social, and Emotional Development (PSE), Physical Development (PHY), Literacy (LIT), Mathematics (MAT), Understanding the World (UTW), and Expressive Arts and Design (EXP).

EYFS outcomes Benchmarking data

Eligible	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER Matches	GLD ^{1 2}	Avg. No. Exp. ELGs ²	ACHIEVED EXPECTED										Specific Goals	All Goals
				COM ²	PSE ²	PHY ²	Prime Goals	LIT ²	MAT ²	UTW	EXP				

NCER National (CLA)	1,140	101.0%	39.0%	10.8	59.0%	55.0%	63.0%	46.0%	43.0%	55.0%	61.0%	69.0%	41.0%	38.0%
DfE Region - North East (CLA)	80	101.0%	36.0%	10.4	53.0%	53.0%	68.0%	44.0%	39.0%	48.0%	58.0%	65.0%	38.0%	36.0%
Statistical Neighbours (CLA)	110	100.0%	45.0%	11.2	61.0%	58.0%	68.0%	50.0%	48.0%	58.0%	62.0%	68.0%	44.0%	42.0%
Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools)	1,876	-	61.3%	12.6	70.3%	74.5%	77.3%	66.6%	63.4%	69.1%	69.7%	74.9%	60.1%	59.0%
Virtual School - Middlesbrough	9	100.0%	22.2%	7.7	44.4%	44.4%	44.4%	33.3%	22.2%	33.3%	55.6%	44.4%	22.2%	22.2%

The National (CLA) data indicates that 39% of children achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). The average number of expected ELGs is 10.8. The highest achievement is in the area of Expressive Arts and Design (69.0%), while the lowest is in Literacy (43.0%). This suggests that while children are excelling in creative and expressive areas, there is a need for improvement in literacy skills.

In the DfE Region - North East (CLA), 36% of children achieved GLD, with an average of 10.4 expected ELGs. The highest achievement is in Physical Development (68.0%), while the lowest is in Literacy (39.0%). This indicates a strong performance in physical skills but highlights a similar need for improvement in literacy.

For Statistical Neighbours (CLA), 45% of children achieved GLD, with an average of 11.2 expected ELGs. The highest achievement is in Expressive Arts and Design (68.0%), while the lowest is in Literacy (48.0%). This pattern is consistent with the national data, showing strengths in creative areas and a need for development in literacy.

In the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools), 61.3% of children achieved GLD, with an average of 12.6 expected ELGs. The highest achievement is in Expressive Arts and Design (74.9%), while the lowest is in Literacy (63.4%). This data shows a higher overall performance compared to national and regional averages, with significant strengths in creative and physical development, but still indicates room for improvement in literacy.

For Middlesbrough Children Looked After, 22.2% of children achieved GLD, with an average of 7.7 expected ELGs. The highest achievement is in Understanding the World (55.6%), while the lowest is in Literacy (22.2%). This data highlights significant challenges, with lower overall performance and particular difficulties in literacy.

Comparing Middlesbrough children to other cohorts, it is evident that Middlesbrough (all schools) performed better overall, with 61.3% of children achieving GLD, which is significantly higher than the national average (39%), the DfE Region - North East (36%), and Statistical Neighbours (45%). Middlesbrough children also had a higher average number of expected ELGs (12.6) compared to the other cohorts. The highest achievement in Middlesbrough was in Expressive Arts and Design (74.9%), which was better than the highest achievements in the other cohorts.

However, Middlesbrough Children Looked After had a lower performance, with only 22.2% of children achieving GLD, which is below the national average and other cohorts. The average number of expected ELGs (7.7) was also lower. The highest achievement in this group was in Understanding the World (55.6%), but the lowest was in Literacy (22.2%), indicating significant challenges in this area.

Overall, while Middlesbrough (all schools) shows strong performance in creative and physical development, there is a consistent need for improvement in literacy skills across all categories. Addressing these literacy challenges could help to further enhance the overall educational outcomes for children in these regions

7.2 Special Educational Needs (SEN) support EYFS Benchmark

Understanding and analysing the outcomes for Children Looked After (CLA) and those with special educational needs (SEND) is crucial to our mission. Our commitment to breaking down and examining this data underscores our dedication to their well-being and development. By leveraging these insights, we can ensure that our interventions are effective, our resources are well-allocated, and our policies are evidence-based. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of these children.

					ACHIEVED EXPECTED											
		Eligible	CLA Matches	GLD ^{1,2}	Avg. No. Exp. ELGs ²	COM	PSE	PHY	Prime Goals	LIT	MAT	UTW	EXP	Specific Goals	All Goals	
NCER National (CLA)			1,140	101.0%	39.0%	10.8	59.0%	55.0%	63.0%	46.0%	43.0%	55.0%	61.0%	69.0%	41.0%	38.0%
E	EHC Plan	120	103.0%	-	2.4	10.0%	5.0%	11.0%	-	-	-	11.0%	18.0%	-	-	
K	SEN Support	310	101.0%	19.0%	7.7	38.0%	33.0%	44.0%	23.0%	22.0%	38.0%	41.0%	53.0%	21.0%	18.0%	
N	No SEN	690	101.0%	55.0%	13.6	77.0%	73.0%	80.0%	63.0%	60.0%	70.0%	79.0%	85.0%	57.0%	53.0%	
Unknown			20	105.0%	-	7.0	37.0%	32.0%	37.0%	-	-	-	37.0%	42.0%	-	-
DfE Region - North East (CLA)			80	101.0%	36.0%	10.4	53.0%	53.0%	68.0%	44.0%	39.0%	48.0%	58.0%	65.0%	38.0%	36.0%
E	EHC Plan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
K	SEN Support	20	100.0%	-	8.1	-	35.0%	47.0%	-	-	41.0%	53.0%	59.0%	-	-	
N	No SEN	50	100.0%	47.0%	12.6	69.0%	67.0%	84.0%	57.0%	51.0%	57.0%	69.0%	76.0%	49.0%	47.0%	
Unknown			-	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	-	0.0%	-	-	-	0.0%	0.0%	

For the National (CLA) category, the average number of expected Early Learning Goals (ELGs) is approximately 10.8. About 39% of children achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD). Specific goals such as Communication (COM) are achieved by 59% of children, Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSE) by 55%, Physical Development (PHY) by 63%, and Prime Goals by 46%.

In the EHC Plan category, the average number of expected ELGs is around 2.4. The percentage of children achieving GLD is not provided. However, 10% achieve COM, 5% achieve PSE, and 11% achieve PHY, with no data for Prime Goals.

Children receiving SEN Support have an average of 7.7 expected ELGs. About 19% achieve GLD, with 38% achieving COM, 33% achieving PSE, 44% achieving PHY, and 23% achieving Prime Goals.

For children with No SEN, the average number of expected ELGs is approximately 13.6. A significant 55% achieve GLD, with 77% achieving COM, 73% achieving PSE, 80% achieving PHY, and 63% achieving Prime Goals.

In the Unknown category, the average number of expected ELGs is around 7. The percentage of children achieving GLD is not provided. Specific goals are achieved by 37% for COM, 32% for PSE, 37% for PHY, with no data for Prime Goals.

In the DfE Region - North East (CLA) category, the average number of expected ELGs is about 10.4. Around 36% achieve GLD, with 53% achieving COM, 53% achieving PSE, 68% achieving PHY, and 44% achieving Prime Goals.

For Statistical Neighbours (CLA), the average number of expected ELGs is approximately 11.2. About 45% achieve GLD, with 61% achieving COM, 58% achieving PSE, 68% achieving PHY, and 50% achieving Prime Goals.

In the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) category, the average number of expected ELGs is around 12.6. A notable 61.3% achieve GLD, with 70.3% achieving COM, 74.5% achieving PSE, 77.3% achieving PHY, and 66.6% achieving Prime Goals.

For Middlesbrough CLA, the average number of expected ELGs is approximately 7.7. About 22.2% achieve GLD, with 44.4% achieving COM, 44.4% achieving PSE, 44.4% achieving PHY, and 33.3% achieving Prime Goals.

Middlesbrough Children Looked After show strengths in achieving specific goals such as COM, PSE, and PHY at a rate of 44.4%, which is a notable achievement given the challenges faced. The average number of expected ELGs (7.7) is higher than that of the EHC Plan category (2.4) and comparable to SEN Support (7.7).

However, there are areas for development. The percentage of Middlesbrough children achieving GLD (22.2%) is lower compared to the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (61.3%) and Statistical Neighbours (45%). There is also room for improvement in achieving Prime Goals (33.3%) compared to other categories such as No SEN (63%) and Statistical Neighbours (50%).

7.3 End of Key Stage 2 Outcomes

Key Stage 2 (KS2) in England refers to the stage of primary education that covers children aged 7 to 11 years old, encompassing Year 3 to Year 6. At the end of Key Stage 2, children undergo assessments to evaluate their progress in core subjects.

In Key Stage 2, children are assessed in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. These assessments are conducted through a combination of teacher assessments and national curriculum tests, commonly known as SATs. Teacher assessments are ongoing and provide a comprehensive view of a child's abilities and progress. Teachers evaluate children's performance based on their work throughout the year, including observations, classwork, and any other relevant activities.

The national curriculum tests, or SATs, are standardized tests taken by children in reading, mathematics, and grammar, punctuation, and spelling (GPS), usually in May. The reading test consists of a single paper with questions based on a variety of texts. The mathematics test includes three

papers: one focusing on arithmetic and two on mathematical reasoning. The GPS test comprises two papers: one on spelling and the other on grammar and punctuation. Writing and science are assessed solely through teacher assessments, without formal tests.

In the reading test, children read texts and answer questions to demonstrate their comprehension skills. The questions may include multiple-choice, short written answers, and longer written responses. In the mathematics test, children solve arithmetic problems and answer questions that test their understanding of mathematical concepts and reasoning. The GPS test assesses children's knowledge of spelling, grammar, and punctuation through a combination of multiple-choice questions, short written answers, and spelling exercises. Teacher assessments in writing and science involve evaluating children's skills through a combination of classwork, observations, and specific assessment tasks.

The results of these assessments are reported to parents, providing an overview of their child's progress and areas for development. The results also help schools identify areas where additional support may be needed and inform future teaching strategies. These assessments aim to ensure that children are developing the necessary skills and knowledge to progress to secondary education

The table below compares Middlesbrough Children Looked After (CLA) to various benchmarks including national averages, regional data, statistical neighbours, and local authority data. The dataset includes measures for Reading, Writing Teacher Assessment (TA), Maths, and Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling (GPS). Each category is measured in terms of the number of children in the group (cohort), the percentage of children meeting the expected standards (Children Looked After Matches), the percentage of children achieving at least the expected standard ($\geq$ Exp), the percentage of children achieving high scores (High), the average scaled score (Avg. SS), the percentage of children below the expected standard ($<$ Exp), and the percentage of children achieving greater depth standard (GDS).

		CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER	RWM*		READING				WRITING TA		MATHS				GPS			
	Cohort	Matches	≥ Exp	High	Avg. SS	< Exp	≥ Exp	High	≥ Exp	GDS	Avg. SS	< Exp	≥ Exp	High	Avg. SS	< Exp	≥ Exp	High
NCER National (CLA)	2,820	100.0%	34.0%	1.0%	101.8	45.0%	53.0%	15.0%	46.0%	4.0%	99.8	51.0%	47.0%	8.0%	100.7	51.0%	47.0%	13.0%
DfE Region - North East (CLA)	200	100.0%	35.0%	-	101.7	44.0%	55.0%	13.0%	47.0%	5.0%	100.8	46.0%	52.0%	9.0%	100.7	50.0%	49.0%	10.0%

Statistical Neighbours (CLA)	220	100.0%	40.0%	-	101.8	40.0%	58.0%	15.0%	50.0%	-	99.7	44.0%	55.0%	8.0%	100.8	47.0%	53.0%	13.0%
Virtual School - Middlesbrough	16	100.0%	31.3%	0.0%	99.7	37.5%	56.3%	6.3%	50.0%	0.0%	99.7	43.8%	50.0%	12.5%	98.0	50.0%	43.8%	6.3%
Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools)	2,153	0.9%	59.7%	6.0%	104.4	27.9%	71.0%	24.6%	71.8%	11.7%	103.9	26.8%	72.2%	20.5%	103.6	32.7%	66.4%	23.6%

Reading

Middlesbrough Children Looked After had 31.3% of students achieving at least the expected standard in reading, which is lower than the national average for CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER (34.0%), the regional average for the North East (35.0%), and the average for statistical neighbours (40.0%). The average scaled score for Middlesbrough CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER in reading was 99.7, which is also lower than the national (101.8), regional (101.7), and statistical neighbours (101.8). This indicates that Middlesbrough CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER are underperforming in reading compared to their peers.

Writing Teacher Assessment (TA)

In writing TA, 37.5% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After met the expected standard, which is lower than the national average (45.0%) and the regional average (44.0%), but comparable to statistical neighbours (40.0%). However, 56.3% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After achieved greater depth, which is higher than the national (53.0%) and regional (55.0%) averages, and slightly lower than statistical neighbours (58.0%). This suggests that while fewer Middlesbrough Children Looked After meet the expected standard in writing, those who do perform at a higher level.

Maths

For maths, 50.0% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After met the expected standard, which is higher than the national (46.0%) and regional (47.0%) averages, and equal to statistical neighbours (50.0%). The average scaled score for Middlesbrough Children Looked After in maths

was 99.7, which is lower than the national (99.8), regional (100.8), and statistical neighbours (99.7). This indicates that while a higher percentage of Middlesbrough Children Looked After meet the expected standard in maths, their overall performance is slightly lower in terms of scaled scores.

Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling (GPS)

In GPS, 43.8% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After met the expected standard, which is lower than the national (51.0%), regional (46.0%), and statistical neighbours (44.0%). The percentage of Middlesbrough Children Looked After achieving greater depth in GPS was 50.0%, which is comparable to the national (47.0%), regional (52.0%), and statistical neighbours (55.0%). This suggests that Middlesbrough Children Looked After are underperforming in GPS compared to their peers, but those who achieve greater depth perform similarly to others.

When compared to the overall performance of all schools in the Middlesbrough local authority, Middlesbrough Children Looked After are significantly underperforming. For example, 59.7% of all students in Middlesbrough achieved at least the expected standard in reading, compared to 31.3% of CLA. In writing TA, 27.9% of all students met the expected standard, compared to 37.5% of CLA, but 71.0% of all students achieved greater depth, compared to 56.3% of CLA. In maths, 71.8% of all students met the expected standard, compared to 50.0% of CLA, and in GPS, 26.8% of all students met the expected standard, compared to 43.8% of CLA.

Middlesbrough Children Looked After generally perform below national, regional, and statistical neighbour averages in reading and GPS. However, they perform relatively well in writing TA and maths, particularly in achieving greater depth standards. Compared to the overall performance of all schools in the Middlesbrough local authority, Middlesbrough Children Looked After are significantly underperforming in most areas.

The below dataset shows the educational performance of Children Looked After (CLA) with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across different categories such as Reading, Writing Teacher Assessment (TA), Maths, and Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling (GPS). It is important to show how Children Looked After with SEND are achieving because these children often face additional challenges that can impact their educational outcomes. By analysing their performance, we can identify areas where additional support is needed and measure the effectiveness of interventions.

SEN Provision (Codes)	SEN Provision (Codes)	Cohort	CLA Matches	RWM*		Avg. SS	READING			WRITING TA		Avg. SS	MATHS			GPS			
				≥ Exp	High		< Exp	≥ Exp	High	≥ Exp	GDS		< Exp	≥ Exp	High	< Exp	≥ Exp	High	
NCER National (CLA)		2,820	100.0%	34.0%	1.0%	101.8	45.0%	53.0%	15.0%	46.0%	4.0%	99.8	51.0%	47.0%	8.0%	100.7	51.0%	47.0%	13.0%
E	E	750	100.0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.0%	-	-	-	2.0%	-	-	-	
K	K	900	100.0%	24.0%	1.0%	99.4	51.0%	47.0%	11.0%	37.0%	2.0%	97.8	58.0%	40.0%	5.0%	98.1	59.0%	39.0%	8.0%
N	N	1160	100.0%	-	3.0%	105.1	20.0%	80.0%	24.0%	-	7.0%	103.0	25.0%	75.0%	14.0%	104.5	24.0%	75.0%	23.0%
Unknown	Unknown	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0%	-	-	-	0.0%	-	-	-	
DfE Region - North East (CLA)		200	100.0%	35.0%	-	101.7	44.0%	55.0%	13.0%	47.0%	5.0%	100.8	46.0%	52.0%	9.0%	100.7	50.0%	49.0%	10.0%
E	E	40	100.0%	-	0.0%	96.3	80.0%	20.0%	-	-	-	94.6	-	-	-	95.4	-	-	-
K	K	70	100.0%	-	-	99.4	49.0%	49.0%	-	-	-	99.0	-	-	-	97.4	-	-	-
N	N	80	100.0%	60.0%	-	104.9	24.0%	76.0%	23.0%	80.0%	7.0%	103.5	24.0%	76.0%	17.0%	104.6	24.0%	76.0%	19.0%
Statistical Neighbours (CLA)		220	100.0%	40.0%	-	101.8	40.0%	58.0%	15.0%	50.0%	-	99.7	44.0%	55.0%	8.0%	100.8	47.0%	53.0%	13.0%

The dataset includes various benchmarks, National (CLA), DfE Region - North East (CLA), Statistical Neighbours (CLA), and Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools). Each category is measured in terms of the number of children in the group (cohort), the percentage of children meeting the expected standards (Children Looked After Matches), the percentage of children achieving at least the expected standard (≥ Exp), the percentage of children achieving high scores (High), the average scaled score (Avg. SS), the percentage of children below the expected standard (< Exp), and the percentage of children achieving greater depth standard (GDS).

In reading, 31.3% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After achieved the expected standard, which is 2.7% lower than the national average of 34.0%, 3.7% lower than the North East average of 35.0%, and 8.7% lower than the statistical neighbours' average of 40.0%.

In writing TA, 37.5% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After met the expected standard, which is 7.5% lower than the national average of 45.0%, 6.5% lower than the North East average of 44.0%, and 2.5% lower than the statistical neighbours' average of 40.0%.

In maths, 50.0% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After achieved the expected standard, which is 4.0% higher than the national average of 46.0%, 3.0% higher than the North East average of 47.0%, and equal to the statistical neighbours' average of 50.0%.

In GPS, 43.8% of Middlesbrough Children Looked After met the expected standard, which is 7.2% lower than the national average of 51.0%, 2.2% lower than the North East average of 46.0%, and 0.2% lower than the statistical neighbours' average of 44.0%.

Overall, Middlesbrough Children Looked After performed slightly worse in reading and writing compared to other benchmarks, but they performed better in maths compared to the national and regional averages. In GPS, their performance is mixed, with a slight advantage over statistical neighbours but lower than the national and regional averages.

7.3 GCSE Grading System

The GCSE grading system has been updated from the traditional A* to G grades to a numerical system ranging from 9 to 1:

- **Grade 9:** Highest grade, equivalent to above an A*
- **Grade 8:** Between A* and A
- **Grade 7:** Equivalent to an A
- **Grade 6:** Between B and A
- **Grade 5:** Between B and C (considered a strong pass)
- **Grade 4:** Equivalent to a C (considered a standard pass)
- **Grade 3:** Between D and E
- **Grade 2:** Between E and F
- **Grade 1:** Equivalent to a G

Progress 8

Progress 8 is a measure of the progress students make from the end of Key Stage 2 (primary school) to the end of Key Stage 4 (secondary school). It is calculated based on students' performance in eight subjects, which include:

- English
- Maths
- Three English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (such as sciences, computer science, geography, history, and languages)
- Three other subjects (which can be EBacc subjects or other approved academic, arts, or vocational qualifications)

The Progress 8 score is determined by comparing students' actual GCSE results to their expected results, based on their Key Stage 2 scores. A positive Progress 8 score indicates that students have made more progress than expected, while a negative score indicates less progress.

Attainment 8

Attainment 8 measures the achievement of students across the same eight subjects used in Progress 8. It is calculated by adding up the points for each grade achieved in these subjects. The points are assigned as follows:

- Grade 9: 9 points
- Grade 8: 8 points
- Grade 7: 7 points
- Grade 6: 6 points
- Grade 5: 5 points
- Grade 4: 4 points
- Grade 3: 3 points
- Grade 2: 2 points
- Grade 1: 1 point

The total points are then divided by 10 to give the Attainment 8 score. This score provides an overall measure of students' academic achievement at the end of KS4.

Key Stage 4 is a crucial period in secondary education where students prepare for their GCSE exams. The new GCSE grading system uses numerical grades from 9 to 1. Progress 8 measures students' progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, while Attainment 8 measures their achievement across eight key subjects. Both metrics are used to assess school performance and student outcomes

The below data compares the performance of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough, end of Key Stage 4, to national averages, regional averages (North East), and statistical neighbours. It highlights differences in attainment, progress, and entry into key academic subjects, providing insights into areas where support and interventions may be needed to improve outcomes for these students.

	Cohort	CLA Matches	Attainment 8	Progress 8			9-5			EBacc		Entry			
				Cov.	Avg. Score	Conf. Int.	EBacc Eng. LL	EBacc Mat.	E&M	Entry	APS	EBacc Slots	Other Slots	Triple Sci.	≥2 Lang.
N CER National (CLA pupils)	5650	100.0%	18.7	77.0%	-1.29	±0.04	17.0%	13.0%	9.0%	12.0%	1.54	1.5	1.5	5.0%	0.0%
DfE Region - North East (CLA)	320	100.0%	20.2	84.0%	-1.33	±0.17	20.0%	17.0%	13.0%	15.0%	1.70	1.5	1.6	6.0%	-
Statistical Neighbours (CLA pupils)	370	100.0%	18.3	83.0%	-1.48	±0.16	15.0%	12.0%	9.0%	12.0%	1.49	1.5	1.5	6.0%	-
Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools)	1675	-	39.4	94.7%	-0.45	±0.07	53.4%	40.6%	36.0%	31.3%	3.42	2.5	2.6	12.2%	0.7%
Virtual School - Middlesbrough	35	100.0%	21.3	74.3%	-0.83	±0.54	22.9%	14.3%	11.4%	22.9%	1.80	1.5	1.8	5.7%	-

Middlesbrough Children Looked After, had a Progress 8 score of -0.83, which is better than the National (Children Looked After pupils) score of -1.29, the DfE Region - North East (CLA) score of -1.33, and the Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) score of -1.48.

However, it is worse than the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) score of -0.45. In terms of Attainment 8, Middlesbrough Children Looked After scored 21.3, which is higher than the National (Children Looked After pupils) score of 18.7 and the Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) score of 18.3, but lower than the DfE Region - North East (CLA) score of 20.2 and significantly lower than the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) score of 39.4.

For EBacc entry, Middlesbrough Children Looked After had a coverage of 74.3%, which is lower than the National (Children Looked After pupils) coverage of 77.0%, the DfE Region - North East (CLA) coverage of 84.0%, and the Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) coverage of 83.0%, but higher than the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) coverage of 94.7%.

The average EBacc slots for Middlesbrough Children Looked After were 1.80, which is higher than the National (Children Looked After pupils) average of 1.54, the DfE Region - North East (CLA) average of 1.70, and the Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) average of 1.49, but lower than the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) average of 3.42. In terms of EBacc APS, Middlesbrough Children Looked After scored 1.5, which is consistent with the National (Children Looked After pupils) and Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) scores, but lower than the DfE Region - North East (CLA) score of 1.6 and significantly lower than the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) score of 2.5.

For Triple Science, Middlesbrough Children Looked After had a coverage of 5.7%, which is higher than the National (Children Looked After pupils) coverage of 5.0%, the DfE Region - North East (CLA) coverage of 6.0%, and the Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) coverage of 6.0%, but lower than the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) coverage of 12.2%.

For the ≥ 2 Languages measure, Middlesbrough Children Looked After had a coverage of 0.0%, which is consistent with the National (Children Looked After pupils) coverage, but lower than the DfE Region - North East (CLA) coverage of 0.0%, the Statistical Neighbours (Children Looked After pupils) coverage of 0.0%, and the Local Authority - Middlesbrough (all schools) coverage of 0.7%.

Middlesbrough Children Looked After performed relatively well compared to other looked after cohorts. Their Progress 8 score of -0.83 was better than the national average for Children Looked After pupils (-1.29), the North East region (-1.33), and their statistical neighbours (-1.48). Their Attainment 8 score of 21.3 was also higher than the national average (18.7) and their statistical neighbours (18.3), though slightly lower than the North East region (20.2).

However, there is still significant work to be done to close the gap with their peers in all schools within the Local Authority of Middlesbrough. For example, the Attainment 8 score for all schools in Middlesbrough was 39.4, which is considerably higher than the 21.3 achieved by Middlesbrough Children Looked After. Similarly, the EBacc entry rate and average EBacc slots were much higher for all schools in Middlesbrough compared to the Children Looked After.

To close this gap, focused efforts on improving educational outcomes for Children Looked After are essential. This could include targeted support, additional resources, and tailored interventions to help these students achieve their full potential and perform on par with their peers.

8. The Role of the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After

The role of the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After is both demanding and impactful. Research indicates that effective Designated Teachers play a crucial role in promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after and care-experienced children. Schools

and other educational settings are required to appoint a Designated Teacher, ideally a member of the senior leadership team, who possesses the necessary seniority and professional experience to provide effective leadership.

The Designated Teacher is pivotal in championing the educational needs of children who are looked after and care-experienced children within their school. They play a key role in ensuring that these children have high-quality Personal Education Plans (PEPs), which are essential for tracking and supporting their educational progress.

It is imperative that Designated Teachers receive ongoing training and have sufficient time away from their regular timetable commitments to fulfil their role effectively. This includes attending the Virtual Schools' Designated Teacher Training, which occurs half-termly. The Designated Teacher should serve as the central point of contact for children who are looked after and previously looked after within the school. Additionally, they should raise awareness among parents of previously Children Looked After about the importance of informing the school of their status to ensure they receive the enhanced support they are entitled to.

The role of the Designated Teacher encompasses several critical responsibilities. They act as an advocate for children who are looked after, ensuring their needs are prioritised. They lead efforts to help school staff understand the challenges faced by these children and how positive support systems can help overcome these challenges. Promoting a culture of high expectations among all staff and providing advice to support this goal is another key aspect of their role. The Designated Teacher ensures that every young person has a voice in setting their learning targets and that their personal, emotional, and academic needs are prioritised.

Developing and monitoring systems for liaising with carers, social workers, health professionals, and the Virtual School is essential. The Designated Teacher supports carers and maintains regular communication with them. They monitor the educational progress, attainment, and attendance of all children who are looked after and previously looked after. Leading the development and implementation of each child's PEP and intervening if there is evidence of underachievement or absence is a crucial responsibility. Liaising with staff responsible for monitoring children on the Child Protection Register to ensure all children who are looked after are safeguarded is also part of their role.

Ensuring children who are looked after are prioritized in one-to-one tuition arrangements and that carers understand the importance of supporting learning at home is vital. The Designated Teacher provides feedback to the school governors at least once a year. Encouraging a whole school culture that supports children who are looked after by ensuring all staff have high expectations and set targets to accelerate educational progress is fundamental. Staff should be aware of the emotional, psychological, and social effects of loss and separation from birth families (attachment and trauma awareness) and how these experiences might affect the child's behaviour and ability to build trust.

The Designated Teacher should be aware of the Pupil Premium Plus+ budget allocated to the school and be able to demonstrate how effectively it has been utilized for each child. A summary of this utilization, without identifying individuals, should be made available on the school's website.

The role of the Designated Teacher is integral to the educational success of children who are looked after. By advocating for their needs, supporting staff, and ensuring robust systems are in place, Designated Teachers can significantly enhance the educational outcomes and overall well-being of these vulnerable children.

9. The Role of the Social Worker in Supporting Educational Outcomes and PEPs

The role of the social worker for Children Looked After is crucial in supporting their educational outcomes and ensuring the effectiveness of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Social workers play a key role in advocating for the child's educational needs and coordinating with other professionals to develop comprehensive care plans that include educational goals. They work closely with Designated Teachers, foster carers, and the Virtual School to ensure that each child's PEP is tailored to their individual needs and supports their academic progress.

Social workers conduct regular visits and assessments to monitor the child's educational progress and well-being. They ensure that any barriers to learning are identified and addressed promptly. By providing consistent support and advocating for the child's educational needs, social workers help to create a stable and supportive environment that promotes academic success.

Ongoing training and support are essential for social workers to stay informed about best practices in education and child welfare. This includes training on attachment and trauma, as well as strategies for supporting children who have experienced significant adversity. By building trusting relationships with children and their families, social workers can effectively support their educational journey and help them achieve their full potential.

10. The Role of the Foster Carer in Supporting Educational Outcomes and PEPs

Foster carers play a vital role in supporting the educational outcomes of children who are looked after. They provide a stable and nurturing home environment that is conducive to learning and academic success. Foster carers are responsible for ensuring that the child's educational needs are met, including regular school attendance and engagement with their studies.

Foster carers work closely with social workers, Designated Teachers, and the Virtual School to develop and implement Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for each child. They play a key role in supporting the child's educational goals and providing encouragement and motivation. Foster carers also help to create a positive learning environment at home, where the child feels supported and valued.

Comprehensive training and support are essential for foster carers to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to support the child's education. This includes training on attachment, trauma-informed care, and strategies for managing behaviours that can challenge. By providing a stable and loving home, foster carers can help children who are looked after to thrive academically and reach their full potential.

11. The Role of the Virtual School in Supporting Educational Outcomes and PEPs

The Virtual School is instrumental in promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after. It oversees the educational progress of these children within the local authority and ensures that they have access to high-quality education. The Virtual School works closely with Designated Teachers, social workers, and foster carers to develop and implement Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that are tailored to each child's needs.

The Virtual School monitors the attendance, attainment, and progress of children who are looked after, ensuring that any barriers to learning are identified and addressed. It provides training and support for school staff on attachment and trauma, as well as strategies for supporting the educational needs of these children. The Virtual School also advocates for the child's educational needs, ensuring that they receive the necessary support and resources to succeed academically.

By providing targeted support and advocacy, the Virtual School helps to close the educational gap for children who are looked after and promotes their academic achievement. Its role is essential in ensuring that these children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed in their education.

12. Delivering Training

The Virtual School plays a crucial role in delivering training to support the educational outcomes of Children Looked After. It provides training to teachers, teaching assistants, and other school staff to ensure they understand the specific needs of Children Looked After. This training often includes attachment and trauma awareness, effective teaching strategies, and emotional and social support. Foster carers also receive training from the Virtual School to help them support the educational needs of the children in their care. This includes understanding the education

system, supporting learning at home, and advocacy skills. Social workers are key advocates for Children Looked After, and the Virtual School provides training to ensure they are equipped to support the educational progress of these children. This includes educational planning, collaboration with schools, and monitoring progress. The Virtual School also offers ongoing professional development opportunities for all stakeholders involved in the education of Children Looked After. This includes workshops and seminars, online resources, and networking opportunities. The comprehensive training approach helps to create a supportive and effective learning environment for Children Looked After, ultimately improving their educational outcomes.

12.1 Half-Termly Training Programme Outline

The Virtual School designed a comprehensive half-termly training programme for all stakeholders involved in supporting the educational outcomes of children who are looked after. This program was developed by gathering views on training requirements from Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and identifying strategic development areas based on educational KPI data analysis throughout the year.

Understanding the Role of Stakeholders

- The program began with an overview of the roles of social workers, foster carers, Designated Teachers, and the Virtual School. "Understanding each other's roles is crucial for effective collaboration," one participant noted.
- The importance of collaboration and communication among stakeholders was emphasized.
- An introduction to Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and their significance was provided.

Attachment Theory

- Participants learned about attachment theory and its impact on child development. "This session helped me understand the importance of building secure attachments," a foster carer shared.
- Strategies for building secure attachments with children who are looked after were discussed.

Trauma-Informed Care

- The session focused on recognizing signs of trauma in children.
- Practical approaches to supporting children who have experienced trauma were provided. "The trauma-informed care strategies were incredibly useful," a social worker commented.

Developing Effective PEPs

- A step-by-step guide to creating high-quality PEPs was presented.
- Setting realistic and achievable educational goals was emphasized.
- Monitoring and reviewing PEPs to ensure progress was discussed. "This session gave me the tools to create more effective PEPs," a Designated Teacher remarked.

Supporting Educational Outcomes

- Strategies for improving attendance and engagement were shared.
- Techniques for supporting academic achievement and addressing barriers to learning were covered.

Effective Pupil Premium Plus and SMART targets

- understanding the Pupil Premium Plus+ budget and strategies for its effective use.
- Training on creating SMART targets in PEPs was provided, with practical examples.
- Emphasis was placed on linking SMART targets to PPP funding to support educational outcomes.

12.2 Report on Training Program Attendance and Effectiveness

The recent training program aimed to equip all stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed to support the educational outcomes of children who are looked after effectively. By fostering collaboration and providing targeted support, the Virtual School helped ensure that these children had the opportunity to thrive academically and reach their full potential.

The training program was designed with a clear objective to enhance the educational support for looked-after children. The content provided was comprehensive and relevant, addressing key areas necessary for stakeholders to effectively support these children. The Virtual School demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering collaboration among stakeholders, which is crucial for the success of the program. However, attendance was notably low, with the same individuals participating repeatedly. This indicates that the program did not reach the intended target audience. The marketing strategies employed were insufficient in attracting the target audience. There is a need for more targeted and effective marketing campaigns. High turnover across all agencies likely impacted the program's effectiveness.

13. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a statutory document that outlines the educational needs, progress, and support required for a child who is looked after by the local authority. It is part of the child's care plan and is designed to ensure that their educational needs are met and that they have the best possible opportunities to achieve their potential. PEPs should be initiated as soon as a child becomes looked after and must be reviewed regularly. The initial PEP should be completed within 20 working days of the child entering care. Subsequent reviews should take place at least every six months, but more frequent reviews may be necessary depending on the child's needs and circumstances.

PEPs are crucial for several reasons. They provide a tailored plan that addresses the specific educational needs and goals of the child, help track the child's academic progress, and identify any areas where additional support may be needed. PEPs facilitate collaboration between the child, their carers, social workers, teachers, and other professionals involved in their education. They ensure that there is a consistent approach to the child's education, even if there are changes in their living arrangements or school placements. Additionally, PEPs are a statutory requirement, ensuring that the educational needs of looked-after children are formally recognized and addressed.

The Virtual School plays a critical role in the quality assurance of PEPs. Their responsibilities include ensuring that PEPs are completed and reviewed in a timely manner and that they meet the required standards. They provide training and support to designated teachers, social workers, and other professionals involved in the PEP process. The Virtual School regularly monitors the quality of PEPs and evaluates their effectiveness in meeting the educational needs of looked-after children. They advocate for the educational needs of looked-after children and ensure that their voices are heard in the planning and review process. The Virtual School identifies areas for improvement and recommends strategies to enhance the quality and impact of PEPs.

13.1 PEP Completion Rates

As of July 25th, 2024, the completion rates for PEPs within the last four and six months are as follows:

Category	PEP within last 4 months	PEP within last 6 months
Early Years	100%	100%

Stat. School Age	99.4%	100%
Post 16	98.8%	100%
Overall	99.4%	100%

(Note: These figures exclude New To care, without a PEP yet. There were 2 Early Years, 7 Statutory School Age, and 2 Post-16 without a PEP).

The completion rates for PEPs within the last four and six months are impressive across all categories (Early Years, Statutory School Age, and Post-16). Specifically:

- Early Years, both within the last four months and six months are at a perfect rate of 100%.
- Statutory School Age completion rate within the last four months is slightly lower at 99.4%, but reaches a perfect rate of 100% within the last six months.
- Post-16 completion rate within the last four months is at a commendable rate of 98.8%, reaching a perfect rate of 100% within the last six months. Overall completion rates are high with an average of over 99% within the last four months of the year and a perfect rate of 100% within the last six months of the year.

Across the academic year of 2023-2024, a total of 1672 PEPs were completed for 562 young people. The distribution of PEPs across categories shows that statutory school age PEPs constitute the majority (71.9%), followed by post-16 (21.1%) and early years (6.9%).

Category	Total PEPs Completed	Gold	Green	Amber	Red
Early Years	116	0	52	29	35
Stat. School Age	1203	5	539	297	362
Post-16	353	3	153	87	110

Quality assessment reveals that only a small fraction (0.5%) achieved gold status while a significant portion (44.5%) were rated green. Amber and red ratings indicate areas for improvement with amber at (24.7%) and red at (30.3%).

PEP QA by Term: The quality assessment by term indicates variations in performance:

Term	Total PEPs Completed	Gold	Green	Amber	Red
Autumn Term	612	1	228	204	179
Spring Term	486	4	267	61	154
Summer Term	574	3	249	148	174

- Autumn Term: A total of 612 PEPs were completed with a lower percentage achieving gold status (0.2%) compared to other terms.
- Spring Term: A total of 486 PEPs were completed with a higher percentage achieving gold status (0.8%) and green status (54.9%).
- Summer Term: A total of 574 PEPs were completed with consistent performance across gold (0.5%), green (43.4%), amber (25.8%), and red (30.3%).

The average number of working days from PEP date to sign-off and completion varies across roles and terms:

Role	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Overall
Designated Teacher	10.87	13.30	11.38	11.75
Social Worker	11.84	14.16	11.90	12.53
Virtual School	9.25	8.92	11.80	10.03
PEP Completion	21.95	23.65	24.72	23.40

The distribution of days to completion indicates that most PEPs are completed within the range of:

Days to Completion	No. and % PEPs
1 – 5	21 (1.3%)
6 – 10	44 (2.6%)
11 – 15	195 (11.7%)
16 – 20	309 (18.5%)
21 – 25	445 (26.6%)
26 – 30	370 (22.1%)
30+	288 (17.2%)

While the completion rates are commendable across all categories and terms indicating strong performance in ensuring timely completion of PEPs for looked-after children in Middlesbrough, there are areas for improvement in quality assessment ratings, particularly in achieving higher gold status ratings and reducing amber/red ratings.

14. Use of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is a government-funded initiative aimed at supporting care-experienced young people in their educational journey

PP+ is designed to provide additional resources and support to care-experienced children, such as those in foster care or adopted from care. The primary objectives of PP+ are to enhance educational opportunities, raise aspirations, and improve outcomes for these children.

PP+ should be utilised for specialised educational programs, extracurricular activities, therapeutic support, and academic assistance. These interventions are tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by care-experienced children, ensuring they receive the support necessary to succeed.

Care-experienced children often face distinct challenges that require targeted support. PP+ is crucial in levelling the playing field and providing these children with opportunities to achieve their full potential. Using PP+ for general expenses undermines its purpose, as it is intended to offer something extra and specific to their needs.

Effective use of PP+ requires collaborative decision-making involving designated teachers, carers, social workers, and Virtual Schools. This collective responsibility ensures that the support provided is well-rounded and impactful, ultimately benefiting the children it is meant to serve.

Pupil Premium Plus is not just about making progress; it is about unlocking the potential of care-experienced children and giving them the opportunities they deserve. By working together, stakeholders can ensure that PP+ is used effectively to genuinely improve outcomes for these young people.

14.1 Pupil Premium Plus Policy

The Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) grant was set at £2,345 per pupil for the financial year 2022-2023.

Middlesbrough Virtual School provides a wide range of services to schools to support Children Looked After, 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 key stakeholder training.

These services cannot be provided without the top slicing amount. The remaining amount is paid directly to schools.

The devolved portion of funding to schools is £1,000 (£333 per term). If schools have effectively mapped the £666 Pupil Premium Plus from the previous two terms within the PEP, the spring payment of £333 is released to schools in May.

Schools can request additional funding 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.

Almost half the PP+ funding (47%) was devolved to schools. This year, there has been a significant increase in PPP required to support the mental health and wellbeing of our students. The last year for COVID recovery funding was 2022-2023.

Category	Percentage
Staffing	25%
COVID recovery	7%
Emergency Alternative Provision top up	9%
Top UP PPP to Schools	9%
Devolved PPP to Schools	31%
Enrichment	1%
EP Time (20 days a year)	1%
Professional commission & membership fees	1%
Training, books & publications	1%
Office expenses	0.3%
Laptops	0.7%
Mental health support	5%
Celebration awards	4%
Welfare Call	4%
Post Looked After: ATV	1%
Total	100%

From <https://middlesbroughcouncil-my.sharepoint.com/personal/trevor_dunn_middlesbrough_gov_uk/Documents/Documents/TD/@%20People/@Victoria/Annual%20Report%2023-24.docx>

15. Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Support for Children Looked After in Middlesbrough

15.1 Trauma-Informed Practice Developments

Middlesbrough has been actively developing trauma-informed practices to better support Children Looked After. These practices involve training caregivers, and School settings to understand and respond to the effects of trauma. Key developments include:

- Regular training sessions for professionals working with Children Looked After to recognize and address trauma.
- Adoption of trauma-informed policies to ensure a consistent approach.
- Establishment of support networks for schools to share strategies and experiences.

For further detail please see PROCLAIM information.

15.2 Access to Mental Health Services

Access to mental health services is crucial for the wellbeing of Children Looked After. Middlesbrough has several initiatives to ensure these children receive the support they need:

- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)** provides specialised mental health services for children and young people, including those in care.
- Many schools in Middlesbrough have dedicated counsellors to support the mental health of students, including Children Looked After.
- HeadStart Middlesbrough focuses on building resilience and promoting emotional wellbeing among young people.
- If there is drift and delay and no ordinary available funding stream Virtual School can support with spot perches bespoke therapeutic interventions

15.3 Key Partnerships

Effective support for Children Looked After involves collaboration between various stakeholders. Key partnerships in Middlesbrough include:

- **Educational Psychologist:** Collaborates with the Virtual School to provide tailored assessments and interventions. They can share insights and strategies with Virtual School staff to support the child's learning and emotional well-being. They also support with delivery of PROCLAIM project.
- **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) Lead:** Works with the Virtual School to integrate mental health support into the child's educational plan. They can coordinate services to ensure that the child's mental health needs are addressed, enabling them to focus better on their studies.
- **Children's Social Care:** Facilitates communication between the Virtual School and other services. They ensure that the child's educational needs are considered in their overall care plan and that the Virtual School has the necessary information to support the child effectively.
- **Youth Justice:** Engages with the Virtual School to provide educational support for children involved in the criminal justice system. They can help create individualised plans that keep the child engaged in their education and reduce the risk of reoffending.
- **Health Services:** Collaborates with the Virtual School to address any health-related barriers to learning. Health professionals can provide the Virtual School with information on the child's health needs and work together to ensure these needs are met in the school setting.
- **Foster Carers:** Work closely with the Virtual School to advocate for the child's educational needs. They can provide the Virtual School with insights into the child's home environment and support the implementation of educational plans.
- **Head Teachers and School Senior Leaders:** Partner with the Virtual School to ensure that Children Looked After receive appropriate educational support. They can share best practices, resources, and strategies with the Virtual School to create a supportive learning environment.
- **Children's Services Senior Leadership Team:** Ensures that the Virtual School Head (VSH) is integrated into the broader network of support for Children Looked After. They provide strategic direction and oversight, enabling the VSH to effectively coordinate with various stakeholders.

By fostering strong partnerships with educational psychologists, SEMH leads, social care, youth justice, health services, foster carers, and school leaders, the Senior Leadership Team ensures that the VSH has the necessary influence and resources to meet the educational needs of children with social workers. This collaborative approach maximizes the impact of the Virtual School across all areas of support

The Virtual School plays a central role in coordinating educational support for Children Looked After, and these partnerships are crucial in ensuring that the child's educational, emotional, and social needs are comprehensively addressed

16.The Extended Duties of the Virtual School

The 2019 review of children in need in England highlighted several key findings. A significant number of children were identified as being in need due to various factors such as abuse, neglect, family dysfunction, and disability. These children often faced poorer educational outcomes compared to their peers, including lower attendance rates, lower academic achievement, and higher exclusion rates. The review emphasised the importance of timely and effective support services to improve outcomes for these children, highlighting gaps in service provision and the need for better coordination among agencies.

Following the review, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) was extended to include a broader range of responsibilities. The VSH's duties were expanded to promote the educational achievement of children who have or have had a social worker, including children in need and those who have been subject to child protection plans. The VSH is expected to provide strategic leadership and ensure a coordinated approach to supporting the educational needs of these children. This involves working closely with social care, education settings, and other partners to ensure that children receive the support they need to succeed academically.

The VSH is responsible for monitoring and improving the educational outcomes of children with a social worker. They provide training and support to designated teachers and other professionals to help them understand the impact of trauma and attachment issues on learning. Additionally, they act as advocates for children with a social worker, ensuring their educational needs are prioritised in care planning and decision-making processes.

16.1The PROCLAIM Programme

The PROCLAIM programme is designed to support schools, settings, and services in Middlesbrough in developing attachment and trauma-informed, relational practices. The aim is for all participants to be on an 'attachment aware and trauma informed' journey by 2025, enhancing the educational experience for everyone involved. Schools that join PROCLAIM commit to developing best practices in this area, with at least two Project Leads appointed to lead these efforts. The programme aligns with all inclusion services to provide consistent and effective support for children and families.

In the first year, 10 schools joined the PROCLAIM programme, followed by 15 schools in the second year. The journey begins with a three-hour training session for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Project Leads, scheduled between September and October 2024. This session

includes an audit of current practices and the development of an implementation plan. Following this, a one-hour online session will be held to finalize the audit and implementation plans.

Project Leads are required to submit termly updates and case studies, which are reviewed with the PROCLAIM team. Specialist training for all adults in the school is provided by AC Education and The Care Leaders. Reflective supervision sessions are held half-termly to support Project Leads in navigating the personal and professional challenges of implementing these practices.

The PROCLAIM practitioner network meets half-termly for two-hour face-to-face sessions, focusing on shared priorities such as improving transitions and developing restorative practices. Workshops on key issues are offered based on development priorities identified through audits. Schools also contribute impact data and case studies to the annual PROCLAIM conference, helping to develop a deeper understanding of challenges and outcomes.

A children and young people's reference group provides insights and feedback, ensuring that young people's voices are central to the work. Heads and LA partners form a strategic group to address broader issues affecting all schools and services, such as developing a relational behaviour management policy framework.

Psychologist support is available through PROCLES, helping schools apply theory to practice through individual case exploration. Additional elements of the programme include Master's level modules in Attachment, Trauma, and Mental Health offered by Birmingham Newman University, and mentoring sessions from experienced senior leaders. Schools also have the opportunity to become mentors themselves, supporting others in implementing attachment and trauma-informed practices.

Impact Report from PROCLAIM Schools

In the academic year 2022-2023, PROCLAIM schools have demonstrated significant improvements in various areas compared to the previous year, 2021-2022.

There has been a 40% reduction in the number of suspensions from PROCLAIM schools, highlighting the effectiveness of the attachment and trauma-informed practices implemented. In comparison, non-PROCLAIM schools saw a 30.4% reduction in suspensions during the same period.

Additionally, PROCLAIM schools reported a 40.5% reduction in the number of days students were suspended, further emphasising the positive impact of the programme. Non-PROCLAIM schools experienced a 24.5% reduction in the number of days suspended.

The number of children suspended from PROCLAIM schools decreased by 19%, showcasing the programme's success in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. Non-PROCLAIM schools saw a 15.4% reduction in the number of children suspended.

PROCLAIM schools have identified a difficulty with change or supply staff and have implemented strategies to give advanced warning and plan accordingly to support these transitions. Staff have become less personal in their response to behaviours and are more equipped to deal with complex behaviours without taking them to heart. They are allowing space between stimulus and response to ensure the best outcomes.

A collective vision has been developed due to close work with social workers, leading to improved communication between care teams. There is a sense of gratitude for the support provided and a feeling that the network around each child has become larger and more supportive.

These statistics and observations reflect the substantial progress made by PROCLAIM schools in creating a more positive and nurturing educational experience for their students.

16.2 The Vulnerable Children Attendance Project (VCAP)

The Vulnerable Children Attendance Project (VCAP) aims to improve the attendance of children with a social worker by fostering collaboration among schools, social workers, local authorities, and other key stakeholders. The principle "Attendance is everyone's business" from the DfE's guidance underscores the importance of partnership working and consistency of practice. VCAP addresses the Local Authority's strategic role in promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker, as outlined in the DfE's June 2022 document. Research shows a correlation between school attendance and higher academic achievement, and poor attendance particularly affects vulnerable groups like children with a social worker. These children often face complex issues such as neglect, abuse, domestic violence, mental ill-health, and substance misuse, leading to frequent transitions and challenging behaviours. School provides a consistent, safe, and nurturing environment for these children, making it crucial to support their attendance.

The June 2022 DfE guidance focuses on preventing patterns of absence, intervening early by using data to spot and address attendance issues, and targeting support for persistent and severe absentees. VCAP's objectives include rigorously tracking local attendance data for children with a social worker, making attendance a key focus of all frontline council services, and ensuring all operational staff understand their roles in delivering this strategy. The project involves a dedicated Attendance CWSW School Officer and VCAP Lead who provide communication and advice through targeting support meetings, multi-disciplinary support for families, and information, advice, and guidance to key stakeholders.

VCAP will monitor and improve attendance in conjunction with the Virtual School, building on the progress made since the expansion of the Virtual School Head's duties. This includes triangulating data, identifying persistently and severely absent children, driving a multi-agency approach to care planning, and providing training on barriers and evidence-based strategies. Information sharing is vital for promoting the welfare and educational outcomes of these children, and all parties involved must recognize its importance and adopt effective procedures. The

VCAP Lead, an appointed role within the Local Authority and part of the Virtual School Team, strategically promotes the attendance of children with a social worker on a child protection plan with attendance under 40%. The VCAP Lead also promotes strong partnerships across education settings and agencies, conducts root cause analysis of low attendance, drives multi-agency meetings, advocates for the school attendance and attainment of these children, escalates concerns to the Virtual School Head, and reports annually on trends, strengths, and areas for development.

The role of the CWSW Education Welfare Officer is to proactively offer support and guidance to schools and social workers to improve the school attendance of children with a social worker, use data to identify a cohort of low school attendance and analyses patterns, liaise and challenge schools and social workers when targets are not met, develop and deliver training packages, promote sharing good practice between schools, and link with the Virtual School and attendance teams. Schools are best equipped to support good attendance when they closely monitor attendance and absence, are inclusive and supportive, have well-trained staff, and have robust systems in place. Their role includes informing a pupil's social worker of unexplained absences, setting high expectations, communicating these expectations clearly, setting achievable targets, identifying unmet or unrecognized SEND, ensuring timely assessments, explaining the importance of good attendance, listening to parents and pupils, challenging non-attendance, having the right people to converse with parents, accurately recording attendance, analysing data, understanding attachment disruptions and trauma, contacting the VCAP Lead or CWSW School Attendance Officer when necessary, and continuously pushing for improvement.

Parents and carers must adhere to high expectations of attendance, liaise with and accept support from schools and social workers, attend support meetings, be vigilant of non-attendance patterns, take an interest in their child's school day, and keep the school updated on significant changes. Social care's role is to promote excellent attendance and punctuality, ensure these are key elements of the child's plan, consult with schools, discuss absence trends with parents, and consult with the VCAP Lead or CWSW School Attendance Officer. The project is embryonic, and impact data is difficult to collect due to the nature of the cohort. As John C. Maxwell said, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

17. Key Priorities for 2024–2025

17.2 Strategic objectives for the coming year:

- Enhance the visibility and recognition of Child Welfare Social Work (CWSW) within the educational framework.
- Improve the skills and knowledge of the workforce to better support Children Looked After.
- Ensure all Children Looked After have comprehensive and effective Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
- Build strong links with other services to support Children Looked After.
- Prioritise mental health support and overall wellbeing of Children Looked After.

17.3 Planned developments in data systems, training, partnerships,

- Conduct training needs assessments and develop tailored training programs and workshops.
- Partner with experts for specialised training and continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives.
- Collaborate with social care and schools to develop and maintain high-quality PEPs, and provide training and support to staff.
- Establish and maintain partnerships with mental health services, educational psychologists, learning advocates, mentors, post-16 support officers, and education welfare officers.
- Implement programs and initiatives focused on mental health and wellbeing, and monitor and evaluate their impact.

17.4 Continued focus on equity, outcomes, and aspiration:

- Provide high support and high challenge to drive improvement.
- Utilise data to inform decisions and continuously improve practices.
- Implement evidence-based interventions targeted to address specific needs and gaps in educational outcomes.
- Ensure that all initiatives are designed to enhance the educational outcomes and overall wellbeing of Children Looked After and those with a social worker, fostering an environment of equity and aspiration.