



Middlesbrough Children’s Services
Virtual School
Interim Annual Report 2020/ 21



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Middlesbrough Children Matter

Our Mission is to show Middlesbrough children they matter. Our top 10 priorities that help us fulfill this mission are:

1. Making Middlesbrough a place that children are proud to live in.
2. Providing services that are fit for the children who will grow to serve Middlesbrough.
3. Seeing children and families as collaborators and not as clients.
4. Making Middlesbrough a community that children are proud to belong to.
5. Understanding our role is more than visiting children because we have to; we visit them because we want to.
6. Providing services that are focused on developing happy and healthy communities for our children and families.
7. Redefine the narrative of Middlesbrough and communicate a positive perception of our town on a national basis. We will create an environment that people are proud to be a part of, one in which children and families matter.
8. Create an environment where children can express themselves and communicate with us.
9. Celebrating the achievements of children and being active participants in the attainment of them.
10. Encouraging the ambition of our children and guiding them into the future they aspire to.

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce our Interim Annual Report outlining how we have been supporting our Children in Care to achieve their best learning outcomes. I am immensely proud to lead a dedicated team committed to supporting the Children's workforce and to champion the education of Middlesbrough's Children Looked After. Team stability has been a key factor in our success; the team is made up of a group of professionals who are determined to support and champion the education of our vulnerable learners, many of whom have experienced great upheaval in their lives.

Covid 19 has made a significant difference to the way we have worked over the last 18 months; our inability to attend face to face meetings has resulted in extensive use of telephone conferencing, allowing us to maintain regular contact with children, teachers, carers and professionals. Our Personal Education Plan completion rate for 'early years' and school age children was 100% last academic year. We also successfully ensured school age children were in possession of the appropriate technology to support learning during lockdown periods.

We are extremely proud of the progress our children have made both in their social and emotional development and educational achievements. We have many positive stories about how our young people overcame adversity and went on to make huge gains in both their personal achievements and education.

We have delivered an extensive training programme via the Designated Teacher forum. These meetings have been well attended and the feedback has been excellent. The 'Attachment Aware Trauma Informed' programme and the promotion of a 'relational support plan', rather than a 'behavioural plan' approach has been well received by schools and is being developed in a number of our settings as a direct result.

We have continued to work tirelessly to ensure that the education of Children in Care is seen as high priority across the Local Authority and that all professionals understand the difficulties children may face at school. Middlesbrough Children's Service is on an improvement journey and our role is to make sure we offer high quality support in educational matters and appropriate challenge where needed. This acknowledges that education is a significant protective factor. Education for many young people will provide a pathway out of poverty, increase social mobility and improve life chances. As good 'Corporate Parents' we always strive to ensure that Children in Care have the best educational opportunities available. We recognise that we need to continue to improve to ensure children receive the best possible education.

Victoria Banks Virtual School Head

Highlights of the Year

Over the academic year 2020/21 Middlesbrough Virtual School continued supporting our Looked after Children both inside and outside of their educational setting. The support provided varied depending on the needs of the child but included:

- Providing training and resources to schools and other settings.
- Directly supporting children and young people.
- Organising events and trips and encouraging disadvantaged learners to make the most of their education.

The Virtual School works closely with LA teams and multi-agency partners to increase the life-chances of our Looked after Children including working closely with our Leaving Care team 'Pathways' to support young people transitioning from care.

The Virtual School continues to provide Attachment Aware training to all schools who have a Middlesbrough looked after child on roll on request.

The impact of the continuing support of the Virtual School can be seen in the direction of travel of attainment and progress across Key Stages 4 this year. It is important to note that cohort sizes fluctuate and therefore results are variable making analysis more difficult. This is further compounded by the lack of comparable data due to the pandemic.



Academic Outcomes

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced uncertainty into major aspects of national and global society, including for schools. For example there is uncertainty about how the lack of face to face education has impacted on learning and outcomes. In recent times Middlesbrough's looked after population has made year on year improvements in end of key stage outcomes with good strides at key stage 2 though this has stalled a little this year. It is not possible at this time to understand how Middlesbrough Looked after children have performed in relation to their local, regional or national peers as these data sets are not yet available.

Although year on year data gives some indication with regards to looked after children performances it must be considered in context. Many factors such as; age entering care, pre-care experiences including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), the number of school and residential moves, current and historic school attendance and special educational needs all make year on year statistical comparisons difficult and unreliable.

GCSE outcomes are above pre Covid figures with 14.7% of looked after children leaving secondary school with at least a grade 5 in both maths and English at GCSE. The data suggests that COVID 19 has had the largest impact at key stage 2 with a decline in all measures from the previous year.

Key stage 1 has seen a 1% dip in reading from last year however there is considerable improvement in the number of children who met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined with a 25% increase from 2019 (Pre-Covid) and a 23% increase from last year.

At Early Years Foundation Stage 33% of looked after children achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). Of the pupils in this cohort 20% were receiving Special Education Needs Support (SEN Support). It is worth noting that these young people will not have been of compulsory school age when they became Looked After, and therefore may not have been enrolled at a setting to receive early year's provision until they became Looked After.

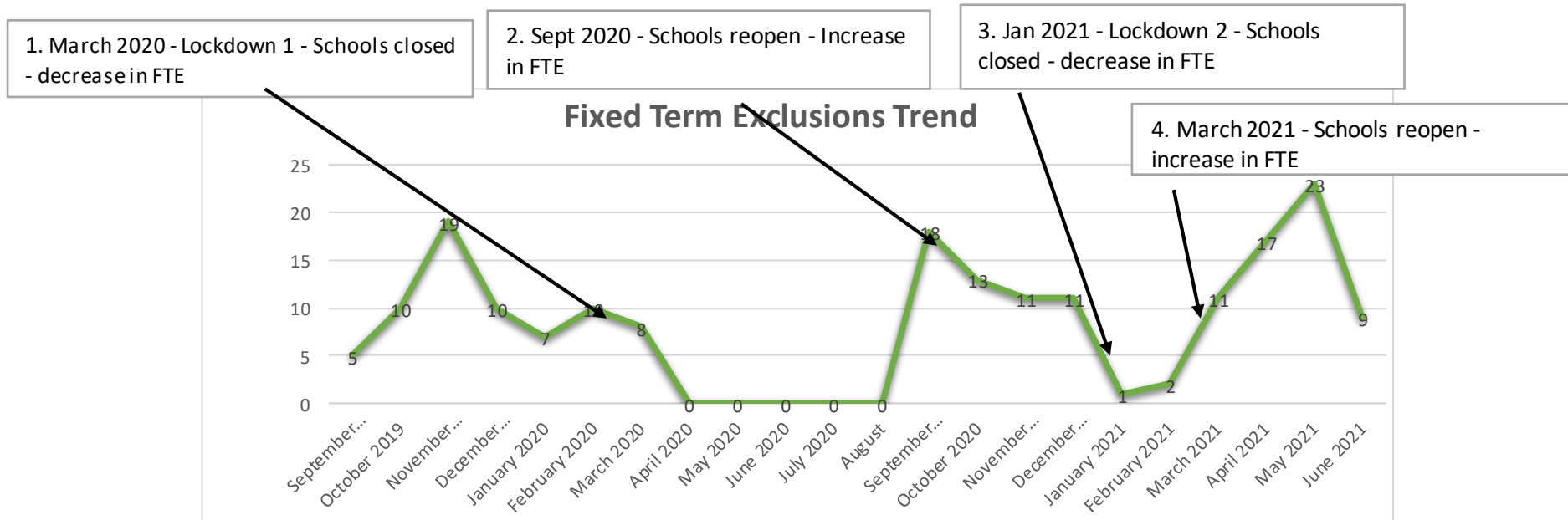
	12M+ 2019 % achieved standard	12m+ 2020 % achieved standard	12m+ 2021 % achieved standard
Early Years GLD	45	68	33
KS1 R/W/M	37	39	62
KS1 Reading	52	42	40
KS1 Writing	42	45	69
KS1 Maths	49	39	69
KS2 R/W/M	37	47	28
KS2 Reading	49	60	57
KS2 Writing	51	55	37
KS2 Maths	52	65	47
KS4 Basics 5+	10	13	14.7

Attendance, Exclusion and Progression

0% children permanently excluded in the last four years!

It is not just attainment and progress where the impact of the Virtual School is visible. Recent analysis has highlighted that the support of the Virtual School contributes to an 8.2% reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions received by Middlesbrough Looked after Children when compared to the national figure. In the academic year 2020/21, 36 pupils were excluded for 1 day or more equating to 213 days missed in total. There has been an increase in the number of CLA excluded (+8) from the previous year however there has been an decrease in the length of time that individual CLA are excluded for from previous years by 97 days. Behaviour Mentors, 1:1 support and fast track mental health support provided by Virtual School is impacting positively on reducing exclusions.

It is difficult to compare exclusion rates to previous years due to the pandemic however it is clear that exclusions have decreased during episodes of lockdown. This gives more weight to the findings of well documented studies that looked after children do better in school when there are higher levels of adult support.



Nationally 0.35% of CLA were permanently excluded but in Middlesbrough no looked after child has been permanently excluded for 4 years.

Good attendance is considered to be above 95%, or approximately no more than one day of absence each half term. In 2018/19, the last available national data sets, children who had been continuously looked after for 12 months or more had a rate of 4.7% absence the same as the average for all pupils and far lower than the average for CiN. The last year's overall CLA attendance for Middlesbrough was 84.2%, with an overall absence rate of 15.5% of which 12.7% were authorised, with 2.9% of absences unauthorised. It must be noted that school attendance has been affected by the pandemic. As there is no current national data it is not possible to compare CLA attendance with that of their peers.

- 44 children (12%) have 100% attendance.
- 177 children (48.3%) have 95% or above attendance.
- 161 children (44%) have less than 90% attendance.

Celebrating Success

It is important to recognise and support the achievements of all children and young people. This can help to develop their confidence and motivation for learning. It can also help them to reflect on their own learning and plan appropriate next steps. The Virtual School worked with colleagues in Children's Services to ensure that all children received a package in the post with a gift and a personalised card noting how we, as corporate parents are proud of them for their individual achievement. The Virtual School also coordinated a theatre trip where CLA were able to enjoy a Horrible Histories play. The Virtual School celebrates individual achievements each term with prizes and awards for children who do well and also ensures children with 100% attendance are recognised each term with an Attendance Award.

It is not just through compulsory schooling that the Virtual School is supporting disadvantaged pupils to be ambitious and aspirational. The Virtual School provides support to care experienced young people engaged in further education and training. The local authority has a duty to make sure young people leaving secondary school are offered a suitable post 16 place by the end of September. This is known as the September Guarantee. Care leavers are also eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund which can help with things like books, travel and equipment. Last year 47 young people transitioned from secondary to post 16; 2 of those young people are now in their forever homes and are no longer looked after, 28 have Special Educational Needs, 38 had an offer of full time education and the other 9 have a training offer.

Case Study 1

D came into care in June 2018 when she was in year 7. Prior to coming into care D had very poor school attendance, as low as 30% in primary school. When at primary school D was on a Child Protection Plan under the category of neglect. This is as a result of parental substance misuse, potential domestic abuse and parents failing to meet D's needs. This included ensuring D attended school regularly and attended health appointments.

Since coming into care D has had one single long term placement and is thriving. She has had 100% attendance at school. She has thrown herself into school life. D's pupil premium pays for the school counsellor and an academic mentor. She is taking part in the school's Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Outside of school D attends the police cadets. D has also expressed an interest in joining the Children in Care Council.

During Covid D and carer decided not to take up the school offer due to the ill health of the carer. D was provided with a DfE laptop and had some additional tuition in science provided by the Virtual School. To everyone's surprise, in spite of her low attendance at primary school, D is a very high achieving pupil. She has been predicted to achieve 6 and 7 in her final GCSE grades. In recent assessments since returning to school following lock down she has achieved grade 9 in her English assessments. Her teacher says that the quality of her work is A level standard, D was given a high street voucher to recognise her achievement.

When D talks about her early life she says that reading was an escapism for her. She is an exceptional young lady that shows remarkable resilience. She plans to go to university in the future and we look forward to supporting her in all her achievements!

Case Study 2

L spent the first two years of his life with his biological family, during which time he experienced significant neglect. L was removed from his parents due to concerns around his parents learning difficulties and capacity to protect L and meet all of his needs. L functions at an age much younger than his chronological and only began walking when in placement with his carers. L is 4 years old and has lived with his foster carers for 2 years.

During Ls first personal education planning meeting it was apparent that he presented with moderate to severe delay in his understanding and spoken language skills. L could only say 'hiya'.

Observations of L in the nursery environment highlighted that he struggled to engage with learning and coping in a larger classroom without additional strategies and interventions.

The care team placed L on the SEN register so that the nursery could implement a support plan for him and closely monitor his development. In conjunction with this a referral to Speech and Language therapist and the Educational Psychologist was made. The care team worked closely together to support L gaining an Educational Health and Care Plan.

L is now attending a specialist provision that can meet his needs. L loves going to school and no longer gets frustrated or displays any concerning behaviours. Carers are now in the process of adopting L so he can have a secure placement in a loving and caring environment.