Stockton Virtual School

Corporate Parenting Board Interim Report, June 2025

Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Introduction

Reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board

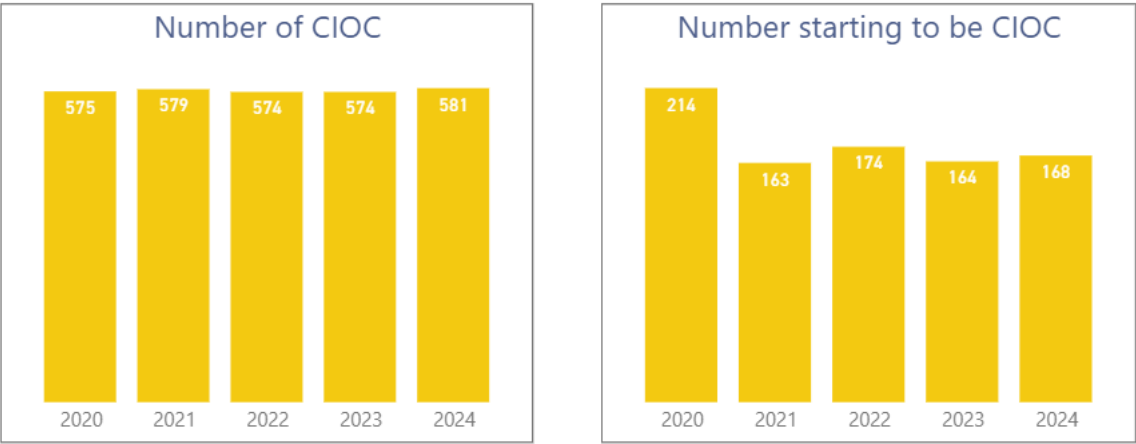The Virtual School Head Teacher provides two formal reports each year to the Corporate Parenting Board:

- **Annual Report (December):**
  This report presents the academic outcomes for the previous academic year (2023–24) and provides a comprehensive summary of the work undertaken by the Virtual School during that period.

- **Interim Report (June):**
  Timed to coincide with the publication of validated data on the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) in March and outcomes released by NCER, this report offers an update on the educational performance of Children in Our Care. It also provides a current overview of the Virtual School's ongoing work, including progress on new initiatives and developments since the Annual Report presented in December 2024.

The data included in these reports reflects the educational outcomes of Children in Our Care. These reports are designed to keep Board members informed and engaged with the Virtual School's priorities, challenges, and achievements throughout the year.
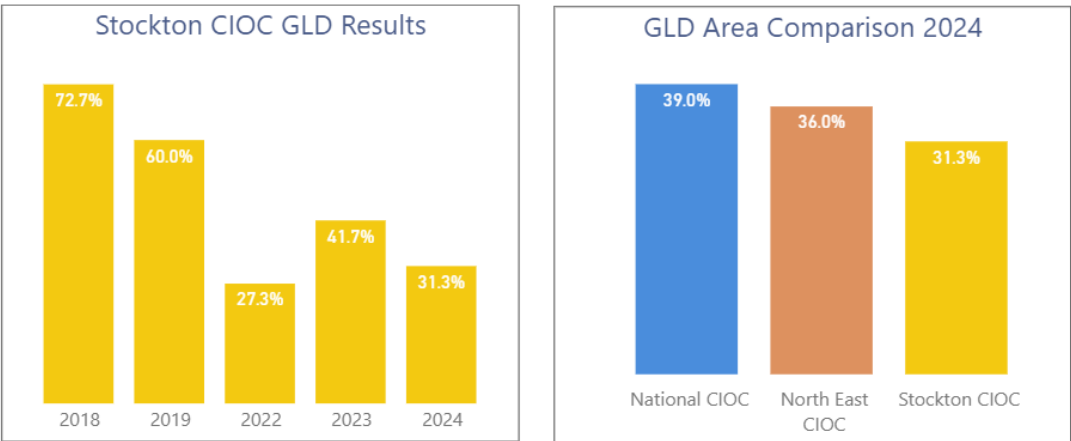
Educational Outcomes for Children in our Care

Graphs showing Age Related outcomes

Numbers of Children in our Care (CIOC)

Number of CIOC

2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
575	579	574	574	581

Number starting to be CIOC

2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
214	163	174	164	168

Good Level of Development (Early Years) Outcomes

- After a rise in 2023, results have dipped in 2024. Five out of sixteen children gained a good level of development (GLD). The explanation in the Virtual Head Teachers Report 2023-24 explains the complexity of the cohort in our reception year and explains that one additional child achieving GLD would put us in line with regional Children in Care.

Stockton CIOC GLD Results

2018	2019	2022	2023	2024
72.7%	60.0%	27.3%	41.7%	31.3%

GLD Area Comparison 2024

National CIOC	North East CIOC	Stockton CIOC
39.0%	36.0%	31.3%

Key Stage 1 (Year 2) Outcomes

- Key Stage 1 assessments are not recorded nationally

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Key Stage 2 (Year 6) Outcomes

- Following the exceptionally high outcomes achieved by the Year 6 cohort in 2022–23, headline figures for the current academic year indicate a decline. While this may appear concerning at first glance, it is important to consider the broader context.

- The 2023 cohort demonstrated strong academic ability, as evidenced by their performance in Key Stage 1 assessments. However, the current Year 6 cohort did not sit Key Stage 1 tests due to pandemic-related disruptions, making direct comparisons challenging. Additionally, this group has experienced a significantly different educational journey, marked by four years of curriculum disruption, which may have impacted their attainment.

- The Virtual School continues to monitor these trends closely and remains committed to understanding the underlying factors influencing outcomes, ensuring that appropriate support and interventions are in place to help all children in our care reach their full potential

KS2 Results

| Subject	2019	2022	2023	2024
Maths	58.1%	58.8%	72.7%	50.0%
Reading	45.2%	64.7%	72.7%	52.9%
Writing	51.6%	55.9%	68.2%	44.1%

Subject: ● Maths ● Reading ● Writing
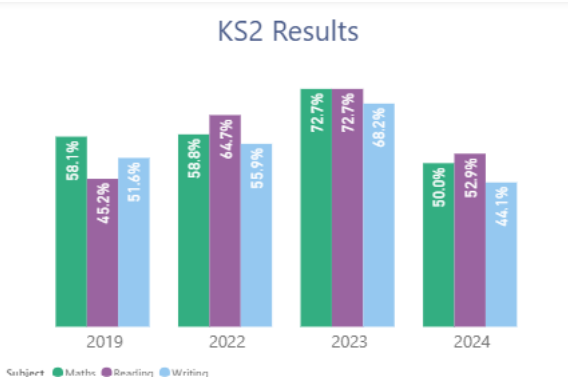
- Considering the very small numbers in our cohort, results for children in our care in Stockton are broadly in line with those for regional and national children in care

KS2 2024

Subject: ● Maths ● Reading ● Writing

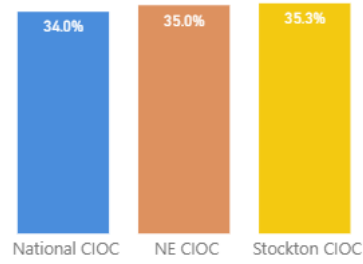| Subject	National CIOC	NE CIOC	Stockton CIOC
Maths	47.0%	52.0%	50.0%
Reading	53.0%	55.0%	52.9%
Writing	46.0%	47.0%	44.1%
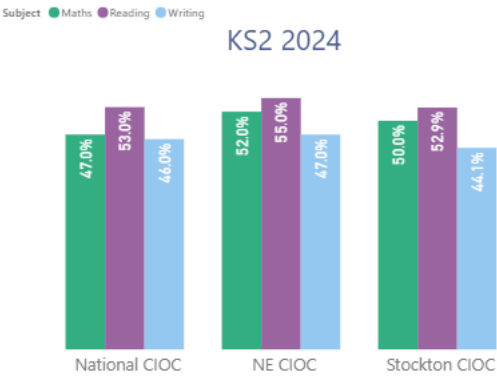
- The validated results for children in our care in Stockton have changed slightly. Following a remark, one child has gained the expected standard in reading, going on to achieve all the standards in Reading, Writing and Maths.
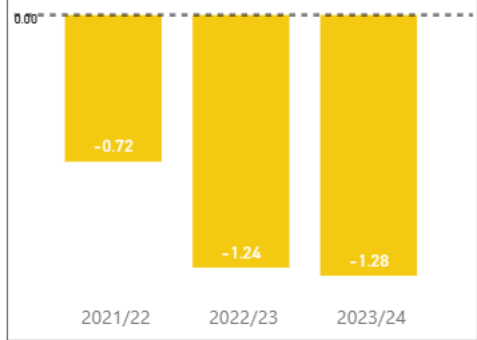
KS2 Combined Results
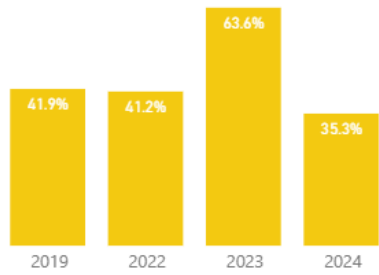
KS2 Combined 2024

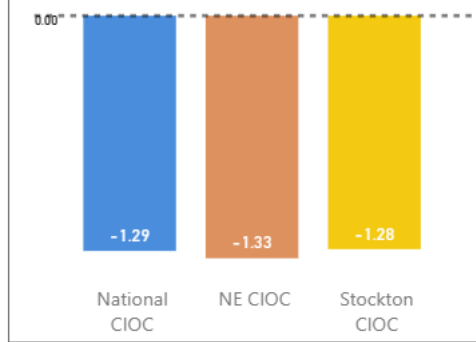## Key Stage 4 (Year 11) Outcomes

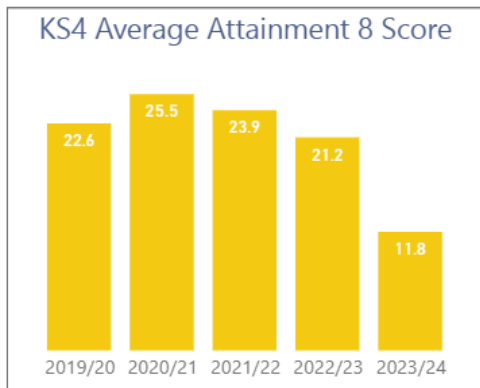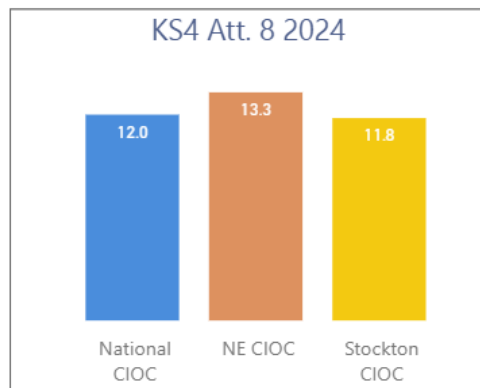### KS4 Average Progress 8 Score

KS4 Progress 8 2024

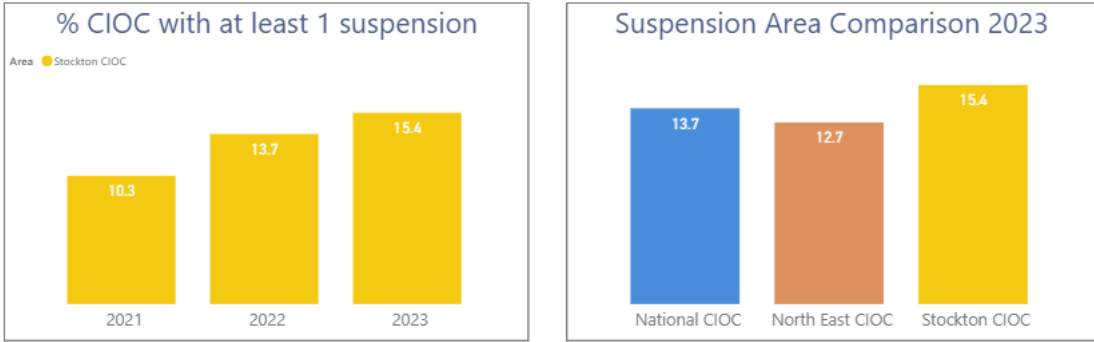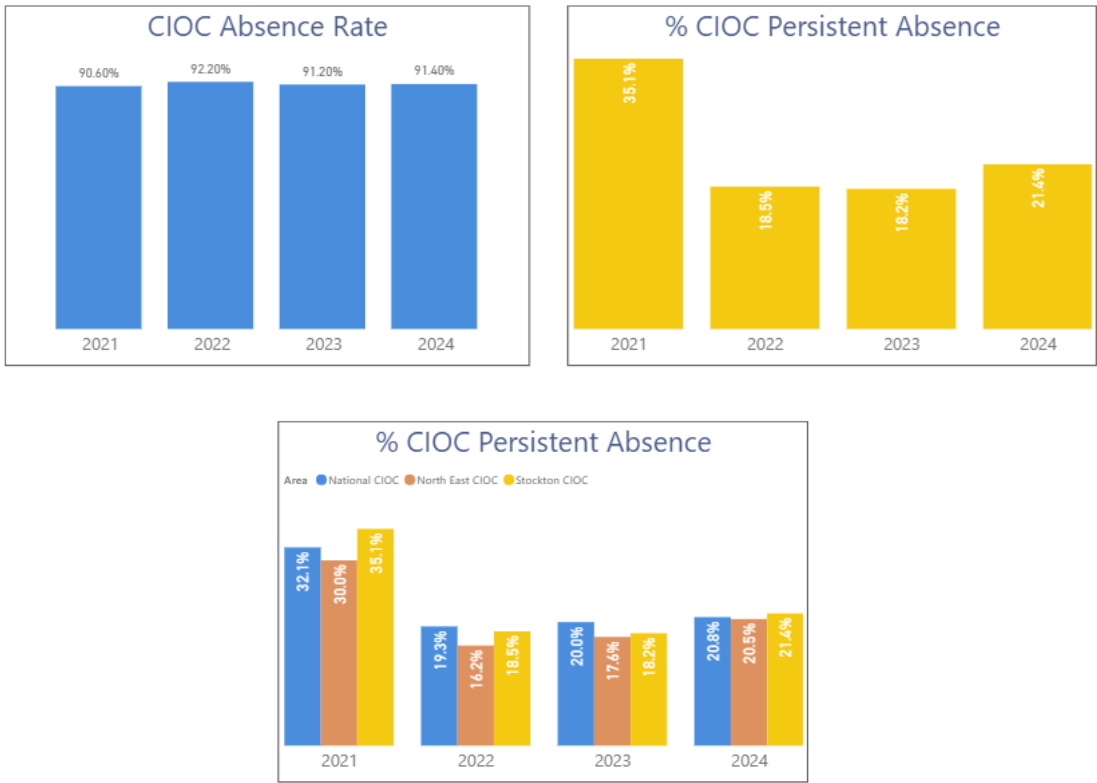### KS4 Average Attainment 8 Score

KS4 Att. 8 2024

- Progress and attainment are broadly in line with National and Regional Children in Care at Key Stage 4.

- The percentage of children achieving a level 4 pass in English and Maths in Stockton was 19.6% compared to 18.1% for children in care nationally.

Other Educational Outcomes

% CIOC with at least 1 suspension
Area ● Stockton CIOC

- 2021: 10.3
- 2022: 13.7
- 2023: 15.4

Suspension Area Comparison 2023

- National CIOC: 13.7
- North East CIOC: 12.7
- Stockton CIOC: 15.4

- It is pleasing to report that there were no permanent exclusions for children in our care in 2023-24

- However, the number of suspensions (formerly known as fixed term exclusions) is high and continues to be an area of concern for the Virtual School

CIOC Absence Rate

- 2021: 90.60%
- 2022: 92.20%
- 2023: 91.20%
- 2024: 91.40%

% CIOC Persistent Absence

- 2021: 35.1%
- 2022: 18.5%
- 2023: 18.2%
- 2024: 21.4%

% CIOC Persistent Absence
Area ● National CIOC ● North East CIOC ● Stockton CIOC

	National CIOC	North East CIOC	Stockton CIOC
2021	32.1%	30.0%	35.1%
2022	19.3%	16.2%	18.5%
2023	20.0%	17.6%	18.2%
2024	20.8%	20.5%	21.4%

- Attendance at school continues to be a national concern and this is the case in Stockton for our children in care. Overall attendance is still well below where it was pre pandemic and is a major focus of our work in the Virtual School. You will see further on in this report there are signs of some progress and some areas of improvement. It is important that we look at attendance on an individual level and work to understand the individual reasons why our children are struggling to access school. This approach forms the basis of our attendance improvement planning. Working with partners to ensure our children attend school is our highest priority.
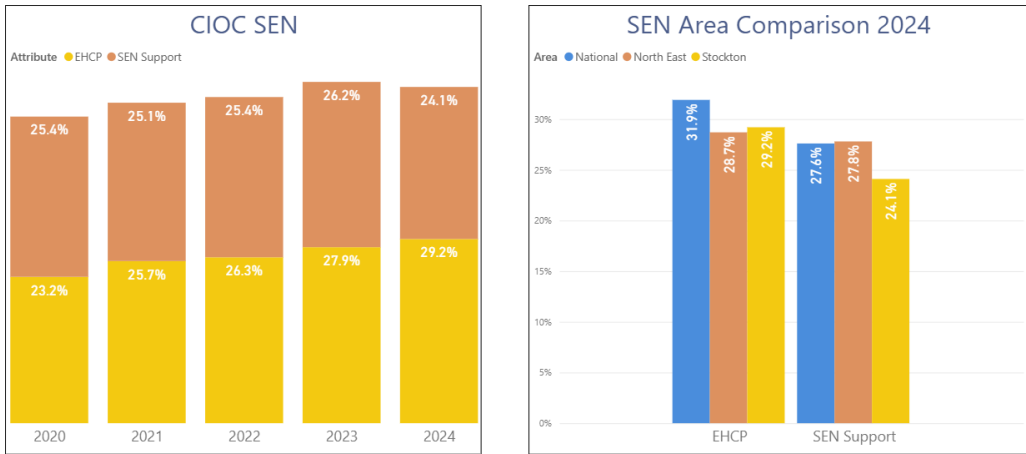
- The number of Children in our Care with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP's) continue to rise, although we are still below national levels. Our focus is on ensuring that children's needs are identified and then met in the most appropriate way.

Virtual School Update

What is working well?

Integration of new staff into the Virtual School

Following a sustained period of staffing stability, the Virtual School experienced several key staffing changes during 2025:

- Andrew Ruffell, Education Development Adviser, left the service in December 2024 to start a Deputy Headship at one of our maintained primary schools.
- In January 2025, Sally Large moved on to a new role with Horizons Academy Trust as Safeguarding Lead, with specific responsibility for Looked After Children.
- Hannah Nichol-Brown commenced parental leave in April 2025.

As part of a competitive external recruitment process, Stacey Bell was successfully appointed on secondment to the Education Development Adviser role. She has made an excellent start and is already having a positive impact in her new position.

As a result of these changes, three new caseworkers joined the team in April 2025. Given the unique nature of the role, each undertook a comprehensive induction programme, including work shadowing. All three have made a strong start, ensuring a smooth transition with minimal disruption to the service.

Virtual School Data Dashboard and FOCUS Dashboard

The Senior Data Officer has developed a suite of Power BI dashboards to enhance data accessibility, oversight, and responsiveness within the Virtual School team. These dashboards provide real-time insights and support data-driven decision-making across various operational areas.

- The Virtual School now has access to weekly headline data through Power BI dashboards. This ensures timely and current information is available, enabling effective oversight and challenge of both internal colleagues and external partners.
- Each caseworker has a personalised dashboard page that consolidates data from children's Personal Education Plans (PEPs). This allows caseworkers to quickly identify areas of concern and take prompt, appropriate action to support individual children.
- The Senior Data Officer also maintains the FOCUS Dashboard; a collaborative tool developed in partnership with schools. This dashboard identifies children known to social care and early help services in Stockton.
- The FOCUS Dashboard updates daily, ensuring schools have the most current information. This enables them to provide timely and appropriate support and to communicate effectively with the relevant workers and teams.
- Feedback from schools regarding the FOCUS Dashboard has been overwhelmingly positive.
- Input has been gathered through face-to-face meetings with school leaders, surveys, and network meetings.
- These forums have also facilitated the sharing of good practices and the discussion of any concerns.

Therapeutic Interventions

In response to the increasing complexity of needs among children in our care, particularly those struggling with emotional regulation during the school day, the Virtual School has collaborated with partners to implement a range of therapeutic interventions and training initiatives. These efforts aim to support schools in managing these challenges effectively and promoting positive emotional development among children.

The following therapeutic interventions have been introduced:
- We now have two learning hubs, promoted through the Attachment Research Community (ARC), celebrating best practice. Abbey Hill, part of the Horizons Academy Trust, has been a learning hub for the past year and in July we were informed that Billingham South Primary School has won the Northeast region Primary Category ARC Timpson Award. They have been asked to become a learning hub starting in September. This follows the work they have done with the Virtual School and a nomination from the Virtual School Head Teacher recognising the positive work they do with Children in our Care.
- Be Devise Wise, Attentiveness and Interpersonal Skills Training. A 12-week course for Year 6 children from Mandale Mill and Bader Primary schools. The course has received overwhelmingly positive feedback, and we are hoping to extend this offer for the children as they move into Year 7 and to offer a second course to Year 5's going into Year 6.
- The Speech and Language offer, delivered by Speech Buddies, through the Inclusion Hub at St Johns the Baptist Primary School. Forty children in our care have received a speech and language assessment with sixteen receiving further support and/or intervention.
- To further support schools in understanding and responding to the emotional needs of children in care, Virtual School has continued to deliver our Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed Offer

Attendance

The data presented in this section is sourced from the **NCER Insights Intelligence Module**, which provides detailed analysis for local authorities, including a dedicated section for Virtual Schools. The chart below displays a snapshot of attendance data for Stockton's Children in Our Care, covering the period from **September 2024 to April 2025**.

Key highlights include:

- **Significant improvements** in both **persistent absence** (attendance below 90%) and **severe absence** (attendance below 50%), with both metrics now performing **better than the national average** for children in care.

- These improvements reflect the impact of Stockton's attendance strategy, which emphasises that **"attendance is everybody's business."** A shared, relentless focus on attendance across all partners has contributed to these positive outcomes.

Despite these gains, overall attendance remains an area of concern. The Virtual School continues to implement targeted processes to address this, including:

- The use of **multi-agency attendance support plans** when concerns are identified.

- Weekly monitoring of attendance through the **Power BI attendance dashboard**, enabling timely intervention and support.

ABSENCE - AUT/SPR

STRENGTHS

PERSISTENT ABSENCE (YEAR-ON-YEAR TREND)

V.Sch. 23/24		V.Sch. 24/25		Diff.
19.9%	➡	**17.1%**	=	**-2.8%**

The virtual school has significantly improved this year.

PERSISTENT ABSENCE (GAP-TO-NATIONAL)

Virtual Sch.:		Nat. (CLA):		Diff.
17.1%	—	**20.0%**	=	**-2.9%**

The virtual school is significantly better than the CLA national average.

SEVERE PERSISTENT ABSENCE (GAP-TO-NATIONAL)

Virtual Sch.:		Nat. (CLA):		Diff.
5.4%	—	**6.0%**	=	**-0.6%**

The virtual school is significantly better than the CLA national average.

SEVERE PERSISTENT ABSENCE (YEAR-ON-YEAR TREND)

V.Sch. 23/24		V.Sch. 24/25		Diff.
6.7%	➡	**5.4%**	=	**-1.3%**

The virtual school has significantly improved this year.

AUTHORISED ABSENCE (GAP-TO-NATIONAL)

Virtual Sch.:		Nat. (CLA):		Diff.
4.5%	—	**6.0%**	=	**-1.5%**

The virtual school is significantly better than the CLA national average.

What are we worried about?

Concerns

- Suspensions

- Attendance

- Post 16 (young people aged 16-18) re-engagement with education, employment, and training

- Increasing complexity of need

- Increasing caseload numbers

- The release and publication of the new statutory guidance for Virtual School Head Teachers that will be published for implementation in September 2026 following the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill receiving Royal Assent.

Actions to support our concerns

- **Suspensions**

  Continue to work with schools to ensure that interventions and reasonable adjustments are in place to support those children who are having repeated suspensions from school. NCER data suggest that it is a core group of children who are being repeatedly suspended from school that should be our focus and concern.

- **Attendance**

  Promote and deliver training that supports children to improve their attendance. The Virtual School will support the ATTEND framework and the EBSA (Emotionally Based School Attendance) Horizons package of training to all stakeholders involved in the care and education planning for children in our care

- **Post 16 re-engagement with education, employment, and training**

  Use the newly created post of Project Officer within the Virtual School in partnership with the Care Leavers Service to develop programmes that will support 16–18-year-old young people in care to re-engage with education, for example through:

    - Functional Skills tuition and assessments

    - 8-week reintegration support that links in with the work experience available through the Council

    - Work experience support for any young person who does not access this through school

- **Increasing complexity of needs**

  Further develop our therapeutic offer to ensure it is reviewed, evaluated, and developed in line with the changing needs of young people.

  Work with social care and SEND Teams to ensure that drift and delay is kept to a minimum when children with EHC Plans are moved in and out of area. The availability of high quality SEND specialist places is a major concern and one that it being felt on a national level, we must ensure that the impact of this is kept to a minimum for our young people by working in a cohesive and creative way to support our children.

- **Increasing caseloads**

  We will continue to monitor the implications of this on outcomes for children in our care

- **New Statutory Guidance**

  The Virtual School Head Teacher will be mindful about the release of this information

The Virtual School remains committed to fostering a culture of high aspirations for Children in Our Care. We continue to prioritise the development of strong, collaborative partnerships with all stakeholders, ensuring that the needs of our children are identified, understood, and addressed in a timely, positive, and effective manner. Through this collective effort, we aim to empower our young people to achieve their full potential and thrive within their educational settings.