

# Northamptonshire Virtual School Head's Annual Report

Children First Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire County Council

This report covers the period from September 2018 – August 2019

This report has been published on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Charlotte Franks – Head of the Northamptonshire Virtual School

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## The Role of the Virtual School

The role of the Northamptonshire Virtual School is to promote the educational achievement of children in care to Northamptonshire, wherever they live or are educated. The Virtual School team of strong advocates work with partners to ensure that education is provided, children's needs are met and planning is of high quality.

The statutory duty of the Virtual School Head is stated in guidance from the Department for Education and sets the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under 22(3A) and 23ZZA of the Children Act (1989), The Children and Families Act (2014) and section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act (2017).

### [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children \(2018\)](#)

The Virtual School has several key duties which they are required to do, these are to:

- Maintain an up to date roll of our children in care (from birth until age 18)
- Have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance, exclusion and progress of our children in care
- Inform schools when they have a child in care on their school roll
- Promote and monitor the completion of Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
- Monitor and devolve the Pupil Premium Plus Grant
- Contribute towards the Corporate Parenting role by providing educational advocacy

## The Virtual School Team

The Virtual School is made up of a team of dedicated professionals who support outcomes for children in care in a variety of ways. Below is a description of the positions, it should be noted that within the academic year there were vacancies due to temporary acting up arrangements (which have now been resolved). There has been a successful strategy of recruitment during the spring and summer term and therefore from 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019 all but one position within the structure was filled. This will allow the Virtual School to carry out its statutory duties and to progress with the planned improvements for the academic year.

The Virtual School Head: This is a statutory post within each local authority who is discharged with the duty to monitor and champion the education of children in care and to devolve, as appropriate, Pupil premium Plus. Following an interim period the current Virtual School Head, Charlotte Franks, was appointed permanently to this position in April 2019.

Team Managers: There are two Team Managers who support the team and lead on development projects within the service. This year these projects have included; training, previously looked-after children, ePEP and Post 16.

Education Officers: There are 6 Education Officers within the structure that support children from early years to post 16. The Education Officers each monitor the education of a cohort of children, support education settings, quality assure PEPs and provide training information, and advice to a range of stakeholders.

Achievement Officer: There is one Achievement Officer who supports the work of the Education Officer; specifically in Early Years and Key Stage 1. They attend PEPs, sign post to support services and provide information and advice to a range of professionals.

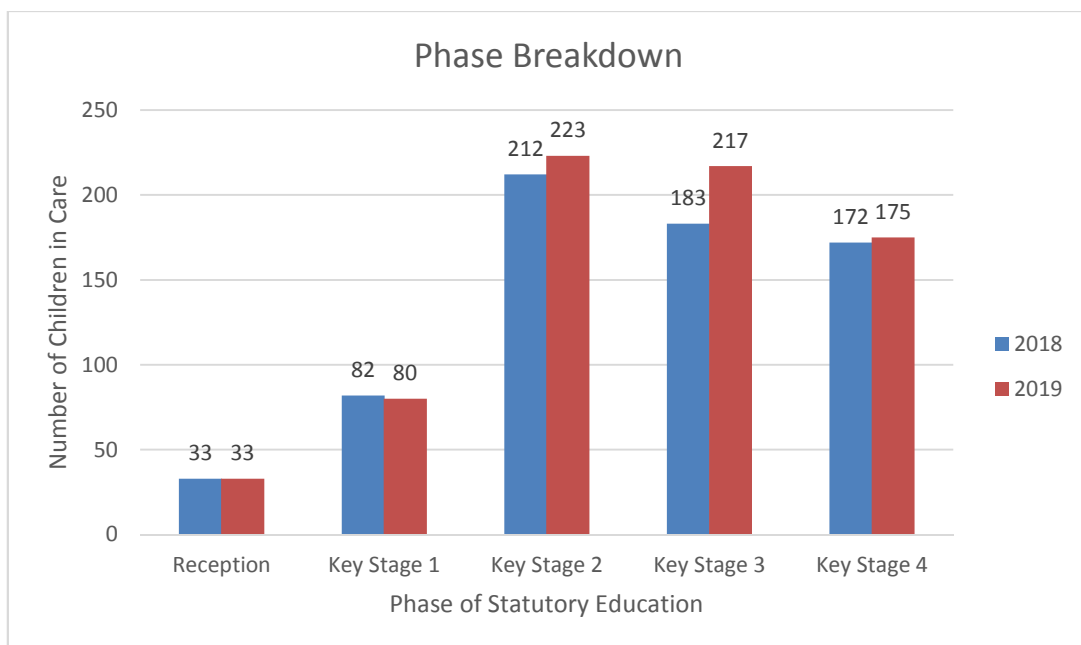
Participation and Engagement Officer: This role is responsible for engaging our children in care in meaningful wider curriculum activities. They develop and support delivery of a large range of activity programmes during the school holidays.

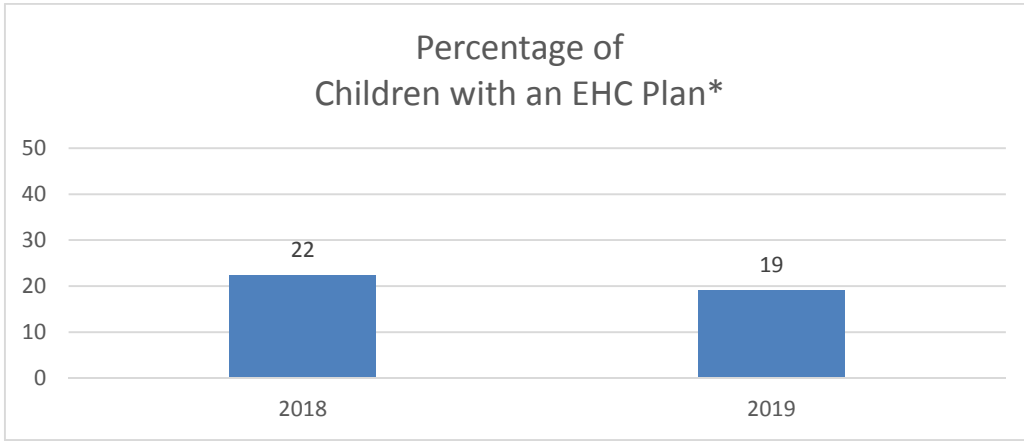
Performance Officer: This is a new role to the structure and was appointed to in June 2019. This officer is responsible for system development, data analysis and supporting the production of reports.

Co-Ordinators and Administrator: There are 3 Coordinators and 1 Administrator in the team who carry out a range of functions to support statutory processes. This includes setting up PEPs, devolving PP+, maintaining the Virtual School's roll and monitoring attendance and exclusions.

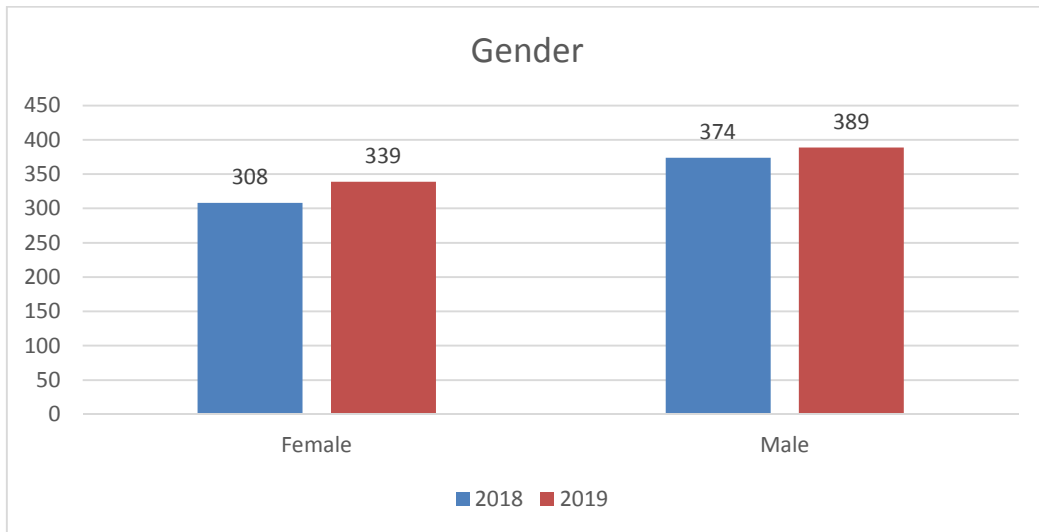
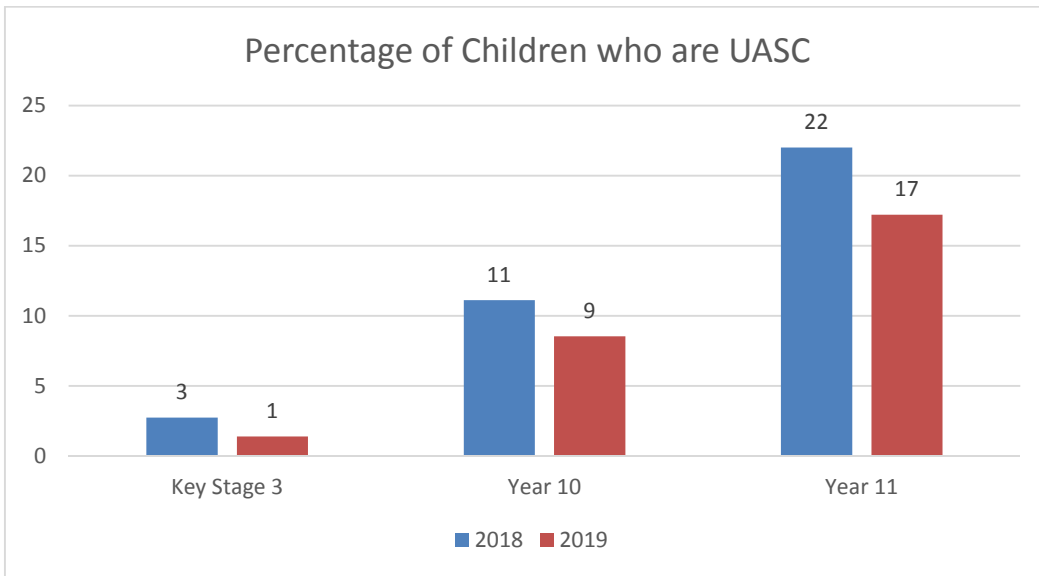
### Our Children and Young People

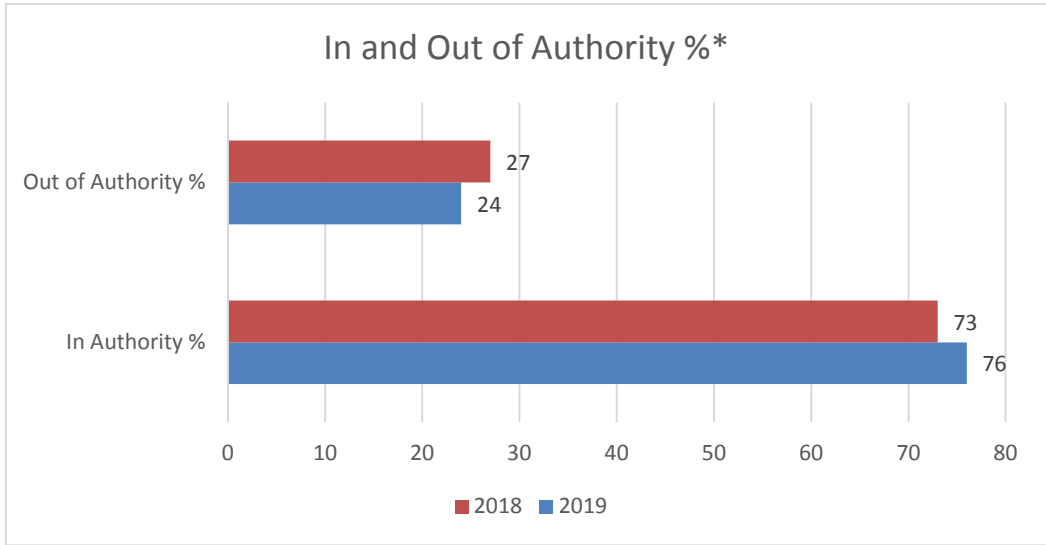
On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019 (last day of the academic year) there were 1138 children in care to Northamptonshire County Council of which 728 were statutory school age. A cohort breakdown of statutory school age children is provided in the appendix which offers a comparison to 20<sup>th</sup> July 2018 (the last day of the academic year).



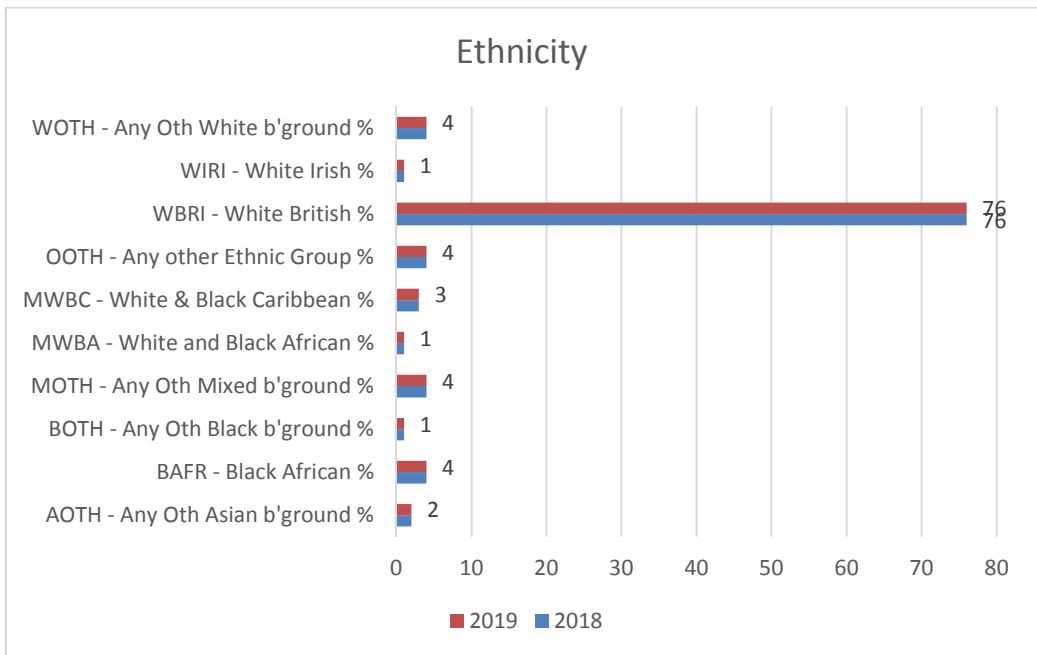


*\*NCC is not routinely informed of children with EHCPs where they reside out of county*



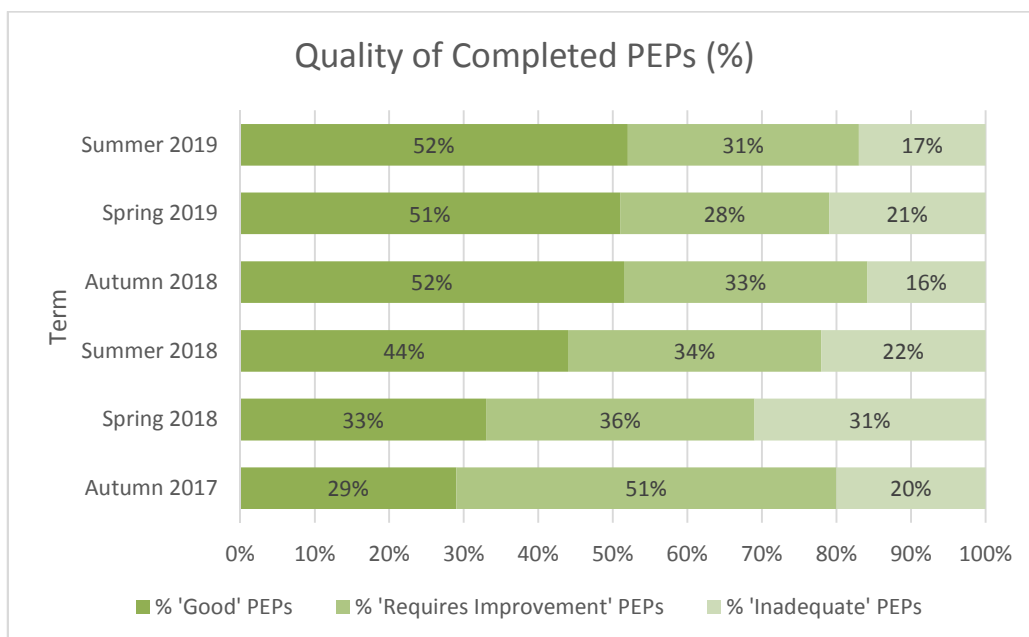
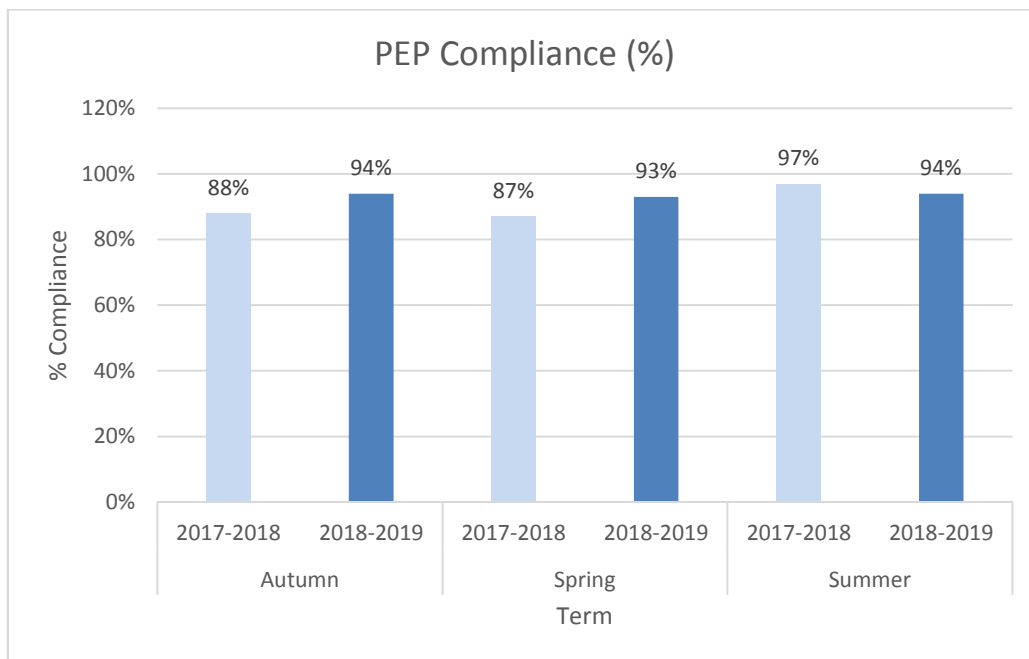


*\*Data is taken from the child's home address*

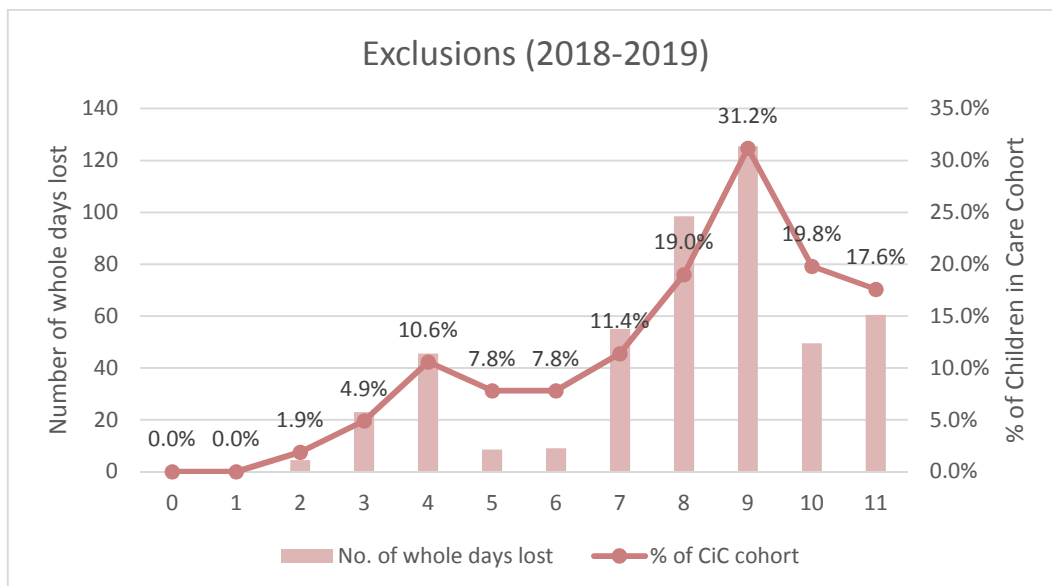


## Outcomes

There are a number of measures that are used for identifying the outcomes for children in care. Data has been provided to compare 2017/2018 outcomes to 2018/2019 outcomes for children in care.



The above two charts indicate the improving picture of PEP compliance and quality from 2017/2018 to 2018/2019. This is a result of improved structures and procedures within the Virtual School and remains a focus going forward. A quality Personal Education Plan is key to supporting children and young people to make progress in education and ensuring their needs are identified and supported.



The Virtual School improved its monitoring of exclusions in 2018/2019 allowing data to be presented in this report. 12.6% (105 of 833) of children received a fixed term exclusion. The most recent national data that was published was for 2017 which was 11.8% ([DfE 2018](#)). No children received a permanent exclusion in 2018/2019.

### Academic Outcomes

#### Foundation Stage

Northants CiC 12+ Months at March 31st	2016	2017	2018	2019 PROVISIONAL
Foundation Stage: Good level of development	46%	47%	44%	68%

#### Key Stage 1

Northants CiC 12+ Months at March 31st	2016	2017	2018	2019 PROVISIONAL
KS1 expected standard or above in reading, writing and maths	42%	43%	33%	41%

#### Key Stage 2

Northants CiC 12+ Months at March 31st	2016	2017	2018	2019 PROVISIONAL
KS2 expected standard or above in reading, writing and maths	38%	23%	30%	24%



#### Key Stage 4

Northants CiC 12+ Months at March 31st	2016	2017	2018	2019 PROVISIONAL
KS4 Grade 4+ in English & Maths	9.8%	13%	7%	TBC

The foundation stage performance improved significantly in 2018/2019 where 68% (19 of 28) children achieved a good level of development. This performance is only marginally behind the performance of all children achieving the measure in Northamptonshire and Nationally which in 2017/2018 was 71% and 72% respectively.

The performance of the Key Stage 1 Cohort was also an improving picture with 41% (16 of 40) achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

There was a slight dip in the Key Stage 2 performance from the previous year with 24% (10 of 41) achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. Of the 28 children who did not achieve the measure, 18 have registered SEND.

#### Post 16

At the end of the 2019 Academic Year there were 166 Post 16 students on the Virtual School roll (at the start of the academic year there are around 300 students but they move off role when they move to the leaving care team on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday).

The Virtual School (VS) provide a specialist Post 16 personal education plan (PEP) and a dedicated officer for Post 16. The Post 16 Education and Skills Officer (ESO) provides specialist training for Post 16 settings, support to social care colleagues on Post 16 matters and attends PEP meetings. The Post 16 ESO prioritises initial PEPs, PEPs for those at risk of becoming NEET and those who are NEET who do not have a clear re-engagement plan. In addition the Post 16 ESO attends the LAC NEET and Transitions Focus Group which is chaired by a VS Team Manager.

The VS training offer is well received and has led to changes in policy and practice at some Further Education (FE) Colleges. In addition, the increased training offer has improved relationships with key staff in colleges which has resulted in earlier notification of issues to the Post 16 ESO, this has in turn led to earlier intervention and collaboration resulting in students being retained in college. The new Post 16 PEP has been well received and where completed has led to an improvement in the quality of plans. Transition planning from Year 11 to 12 has been greatly improved, allowing better support to be put in place for young people in care. Finally, VS support to the LAC NEET and Transitions Focus Group has supported the reduction in those young people in care not engaged in education, training or employment with training (NEET) noted by Ofsted in their recent report.

## Early Years

There were 132 children on the Virtual School. The Virtual School offers a wide range of support to settings, Social Workers and other professionals involved with Early Years children in care (EY CiC). In the last 12 months this has included attending PEPs and EY Inclusion meetings, correspondence to settings via the EY bulletin, delivering training to EY specialist SENCo's and signposting to the EY Educational Psychologist (EP) where appropriate. The current expectation is that PEPs take place once a child is taking up their funded 15 hours, which can be from the term after a child's second birthday.

One Education Officer and the Achievement Officer (AO) oversee the early years. When attending PEPs their role is to provide a balance of support and challenge with regard to the provision the child is receiving and, where appropriate, discuss how the EY Pupil Premium (EYPP) is being used and the impact it is having. One focus over the past year has been virtual school attendance at PEP meetings for children who will be starting school in September 2019. Professionals and carers have been encouraged to take time to identify the right school setting, particularly where a child has SEN. Settings have also been asked to consider additional transition arrangements that may be required to support the move into school as it can be an anxious time for many CiC.

One impact of our work has been that early year's professionals, particularly the designated lead for CiC, have increased confidence in their role and recognise just how important it is. If a child has someone advocating for them in the setting, ensuring a positive start to their education where their individual needs are met in full, they will start school with good emotional health, developed social skills and a readiness to learn.

Another positive outcome of our role has been an increase in the number of children being referred to the EY Educational Psychologist. This has led to early intervention, targeted support and in a number of cases valuable recommendations to support transition to school.

## Ofsted

Northamptonshire Children's Service were subject to a full inspection in June 2019. The conclusion of the Virtual School was extremely positive stating that 'The Virtual School has improved considerably in the last two years. Effective systems and procedures are in place to monitor the educational progress of each child and young person in care. Key documents, such as PEPs, are increasingly consistent in quality and are well matched to each young person's needs and aspirations.' (Ofsted, 2019) The full report can be viewed below.

[Inspection of Children's Services: Northamptonshire County Council 2019](#)

## Training

A comprehensive [training offer](#) was delivered throughout the 2018/2019 academic year to a range of stakeholders including;

- Designated Teachers
- Wider School staff
- Governors
- Social Workers
- Foster Carers
- Parents of Adopted Children
- Guardians and connected persons
- Early years Specialist SENCOs
- School Effectiveness Partners

The impact of this training has been re-opening dialogue with schools who now feel able to contact the Virtual School for support and trust that it will be provided. It has improved the quality of the PEPs produced as evidenced in data. It has empowered carers, guardians and parents to make informed choices about education and champion the needs of their young person. It has been eye opening for partners who have said they have changed the way in which they view the needs of their children with difficulties. It has provided local authority services with key information to ensure they are in a better position to challenge and support settings.

## Pupil Premium Plus

The Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is grant funding from the DfE to raise the achievement of looked after children and to close the gap with their peers. For the financial year 2019-20 the Virtual School will receive £2300 of PP+ funding for eligible pupils from Year R to 11 who are looked after by Northamptonshire Local Authority. VSHs are responsible for managing pupil premium funding for the children they look after and for allocating it to schools and alternative provision settings.

The Northamptonshire Virtual School have set out their [arrangements](#) for the 2019/2020 financial year and continue to devolve the full amount of £2300 to eligible settings in termly instalments.

In the 2018/2019 financial year 92% of our children in care were eligible for PP+ funding in at least one of the termly devolvments. The remainder of the funding was spent on central services which in 2018/2019 were;

1. ePEP (online PEP) System - £39,400
2. Virtual School Participation Programmes (Holiday Programmes)- £27,897
3. Letterbox Club (postal service to promote reading and maths) - £33,480
4. Education Psychology Service Level Agreement - £60,000
5. Contribution towards NCC's High Needs funding to pay for some of the Alternative Provision accessed by our Children in Care - £110,000

## Participation Programmes

The Virtual School Participation Programme offers programmes in social, cultural, sporting and leisure activities to promote achievement for our children and young people growing up in care. We believe that engaging vulnerable young people in positive activities and offering safe and trusted adults for the young people to talk to, encourages a belief in their ability to succeed. The Virtual School (VS) provides participation activities through the year for young people to engage with and to give fragile placements much needed respite during school holidays. Our aim is to provide our young people with a strong sense that they can achieve, support is in place for them, and they should have high expectations and ambitions for themselves and their future. We do this by encouraging them to try new things and to persevere. We strive to give them transferable skills to help them succeed in the classroom and offer positive relationships with adults.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the VS have increased the offer from eight to thirteen weeks of holiday programmes, provided two individual days and one evening of diverse experiences to our Children in Care (CiC). The programmes planned for the young people were aimed at different interests and stages of development and we now offer programmes for key stage 2 to key stage 4. We have also introduced a short report to be sent at the end of a programme to the designated teacher (DT), carer and social worker (SW); so they are aware of the young person's achievements out of school hours.

Highlights of this year's programmes have been:

- two programmes provided for our unaccompanied asylum seeking children; twenty young people developed English acquisition skills and learnt more about the history and culture of Northampton
- the takeover day delivered for the Children in Care Council; capturing their voice and opinions on their PEPs
- in February, ten students attended a drama residential at the Frontier centre; where they completed a play in a weekend and performed to carers.
- during the summer holidays, five weeks of varied programmes were provided and all places were taken. One of our older students gave up his time during the holiday to work as a mentor with our younger group; this was a positive experience for him and the younger students.

## Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

The Virtual School joined the 'Dolly Parton's Imagination Library' programme in May 2019. This is a book gifting programme for Children aged 0-5 operated by the Dollywood Foundation. All our Children in Care aged 0-5 and on a full care order are part of this amazing programme. They have started to receive a free, age appropriate book each month and will continue to do so until they start school. There are currently 61 children benefitting from this programme each month. This is in addition to the Letterbox Club; whereby children receive their own colourful parcel once every month for six months.

## Letterbox

Letterbox is an award winning scheme run by BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity, in partnership with the University of Leicester. The aims are to inspire a love of reading and engagement with numeracy for children who are in care.

The Virtual School signed up to Letterbox for the calendar year 2018 and 2019 to provide books and learning resources for approximately 200 children in care in targeted year.

The parcels are sent out by the Virtual School and addressed to the child. Each brightly coloured personalised parcel contains age appropriate books, stationery and number games to help encourage reading and learning at home.

## Letters of Celebration

This year saw the introduction of letters to celebrate the success of our Children in Care. These are sent out to children who have demonstrated achievement in education such as; completing an excellent piece of work, positive attitude to learning, receiving an award. The letters are accompanied by a gift voucher and are signed from the Head of the Virtual School, The Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services.

## Previously Looked After Children

New [statutory guidance](#) in February 2018 increased the duty of the Virtual School head to support educational achievement of previously looked after children by making available information and advice to:

- any person that has parental responsibility for the child;
- providers of funded early years education, designated teachers for previously looked-after children in maintained schools and academies; and
- any other person the authority considers appropriate for promoting the educational achievement of relevant children.

The DfE recognised this extension of duty with a grant of £44,628 for the 18/19 financial year. The Virtual School Head has assigned a team manager to lead on this extension of service. The team manager has delivered 9 sessions to parents or guardians of PLAC and 2 events for Designated Teachers of PLAC and also has extended the website to include information and advice for parents and guardians.

## System Update

### eGOV

The Virtual School commissioned eGOV Digital Ltd to manage an online system for the timely completion of PEPs for all children in care to Northamptonshire. This system has allowed us to have clear oversight of the PEPs taking place, report on the compliance and quality of PEPs and report on the outcomes and progress of children.

This academic year we launched a revised PEP for our Post-16 cohort which was based around the Signs of Safety methodology. This PEP offered stronger planning for young people and improved accountability for the professionals supporting them. We have now redesigned our early years and school age PEP to reflect this same level of robust planning which will be implemented in September 2019. This new PEP will also allow for improved quality assurance feedback to settings and reporting on key measures such as PP+ spend.

### Looked After Call

In April 2019 the Virtual School commissioned Looked After Call Ltd to complete an Attendance Monitoring Service for statutory school age children in care. This services provides us with timely attendance and exclusion data which supports our statutory reporting and our ability to react to challenges. As this service commenced during the academic year, we do not yet have a full year's data. We are confident that this should support our development in this area going forward.

### Virtual School Advisory Panel

To offer unbiased scrutiny, the Virtual School has an Advisory Panel who meets once a term to review the performance of the Virtual School. This panel of 'critical friends' is made up of 4 Head Teachers (primary, secondary and special), managers from social care, the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, and Education Psychology, a foster carer representative and county councillors. The panel is chaired by Councillor Fiona Baker, Lead Member for Childrens Services and the report which the Virtual School produce for this termly meeting is then subsequently shared with the Corporate Parenting Board. This year the panel has re-branded itself from its previously known 'Virtual School Governing Body' to offer a better reflection of its role and purpose. This year the panel has scrutinised data, offered advice on Pupil Premium Plus, supported with recruitment and interviews and shared expertise and resources.

### Virtual School Priorities

The Virtual School Improvement Plan will focus on 6 priority areas this year. These are:

1. Ensuring all children have good quality PEPs which are regularly reviewed
2. Providing high quality training, advice and support to social care colleagues, IRO's and other partners to ensure that when decisions are made, they support progress with education
3. Children in Care's needs are assessed sufficiently and in a timely way to ensure that appropriate support is put in place
4. Providing quality training, advice and support to education settings to ensure that they understand the needs of children in care, are aspirational for them and know how best to support their progress in education
5. Excellent partnership working to ensure that Children in Care have timely access to quality education which is right for them and they are not excluded from
6. Ensuring of effective and efficient use of Pupil Premium Plus which are connected to SMART targets which are regularly reviewed

Each of these priorities are supported by a series of actions to be completed during the academic year.

<b>Acronym Key</b>	
<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Detail</b>
CiC	Children in Care
DCS	Director of Children's Services
EHCP	Education and Health Care Plan
EM	English and maths
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EY	Early Years
FT	Full Time
IASS	Independent Advice and Support Service
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
KS1, 2, 4	Key Stage 1, 2, and 4. That is, at the end of years 2, 6 and 11 (when children are most often 7, 11 and 16 years of age respectively).
L4+ EM	Level 4 or higher in both English and maths GCSE
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked-after Children
NEET	Not in Education, Training or Employment
NICE	National Institute for Clinical Excellence
NMPAT	Northampton Music and Performing Arts Trust
OC2	The OC2 cohort refers to those children continuously looked after for 12 months at 31 <sup>st</sup> March each year.
OOO	Out of County
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PP+	Pupil Premium Plus
QA	Quality Assurance
RWM	Reading, writing and maths
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children
VS	Virtual School
VSH	Virtual School Head
Yr	Year