



Dorset Virtual School Annual Report 2023/24

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Foreword from Miriam Leigh, Head of Children Thriving in Education

It has been a busy and successful year for the Virtual School so much has been achieved by our young people, their carers, communities, our education partners. We are incredibly proud of our children for all their successes and for the care, focus and attention provided by the Virtual School, carers and our education communities to empower them to achieve these.

Introduction

Dorset Virtual School is a proud advocate of our children. Our vision for our children is that they are thriving in the right educational setting, attending, feel included and listened to so that our children become independent and resilient young people.

There is a mutual commitment between educational settings and Dorset Virtual School to support our children and young people to fulfil their potential and live their best lives. We do this in a variety of purposeful activities.

We have had a very busy 2023 – 24. Our children and young people have shown incredible resilience, perseverance and positivity in terms of educational outcomes and aspirations and this has been exemplified in our weekly celebration awards, our recipe book for belonging and our wonderful Annual Awards, showing just how exceptional our children truly are.



The Virtual School Team have worked tirelessly to strengthen our practice, be creative for our children and young people and ensure that our settings have the right support to support our children.

Jo Smark-Richards: Service Manager Virtual School/ Virtual School Headteacher

Purpose of the report

This report provides an overview and analysis of the impact of the Virtual School's work during the academic year 2023 - 24. The Virtual School is the key educational advocacy service of Dorset's Education Service within the Children's Services Directorate for Dorset's Children in Care and Care Leavers regardless of where they live and learn. The Virtual School is ambitious for its children and ensures that our partner educational settings have high expectations and aspirations for the educational outcomes of our children to ensure that the life chances of each child are improved. The Virtual School has strong oversight and challenge from the Virtual School Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board.

A year in summary

2023/24 has been a year of developing creative approaches to supporting our children both educationally and in wider enrichment opportunities to raise aspiration and ambition. We have focused on highlighting and celebrating belonging and inclusion within our work and practice. We have worked closely with our schools and settings to ensure that our children and young people have the opportunity to achieve and be successful.

Virtual School headline data is reported weekly to the Children's Services Leadership Team with Key Performance Indicators reported monthly to ensure that there is a line of sight of

the work of the Virtual School. Monthly child-level reporting of our most vulnerable children and young people who are missing education or not in education or employment (NEET) is reported to the Children's Services Leadership Team to ensure that there is visibility and transparency around the transition and ambition for these young people. Performance is also reported monthly to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Virtual School Governing Body has a forward plan of monitoring activity linked to the priorities on the School Development Plan and continues to challenge the Virtual School to ensure that it is providing all our children with the best education possible.

Some of the key strengths this year have been:

- Outstanding PEP Quality Assurance (93% good or outstanding)
- Providing support and guidance on support for children without a school place with bespoke SEN transition packs
- Weekly celebrations of 160 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers
- Development of termly targets to EHCP outcomes and to Early Years goals
- Organisation and delivery of two residential opportunities for children from year 5-11, working in partnership with Jamie's Farm
- Development of our support for children Previously Looked After
- Reduction in the use of suspensions in Dorset secondary schools
- Reduction in the use of reduced timetables
- Organisation and delivery of a range of extra-curricular activities in response to our children's voices
- Knowledge Exchange Programme in the UK in collaboration with University College London - working in partnership with a cross-phase group of specialist and mainstream providers to develop practice with the aim of improving outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers
- 75% of Post-16 young people in Education, Employment or Training
- Production of the Dorset Virtual School recipe book for belonging
- Good outcomes for phonics, multiplication check and Key Stage 1 SATs

We need to continue to focus on:

- Improving attendance for those children with persistent or severe absence
- Enhancing our offer for our children living in Kinship Care arrangements
- Reduce the use of suspensions and the number of children missing education, particularly children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Develop targeted mentoring programmes for young people in Key Stage 4 and 5 to support education, employment and training.
- Developing awareness of the wider statutory role in supporting children with a Social Worker.
- PEP quality assurance for our Post 16 young people

Virtual School Structure and responsibilities

The Virtual School is led by the Service Manager (Virtual School) and overseen by the Head of Children Thriving in Education. The Virtual School team delivers their work within the Dorset Council locality structure, enabling best practice to be disseminated within the wider Children's Services structure. This enables the best possible support and guidance to be available for our schools and children and young people.

The Virtual School team consists of:

- Two Specialist Teachers: A Virtual School SENCo and a data and assessment lead who hold wider responsibilities to build skill and capacity within the Virtual School Team and schools to meet the needs of all children.
- Ten Virtual School Leads: responsibilities are for a case load of, on average 55 children in each locality (and a share of those children out of authority), ensuring that children have a suitable and ambitious education offer, there is strong liaison with their schools and Designated Teachers, and the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is effective in supporting children's progress.

Each member of the team holds a whole school responsibility to support the priorities of the Virtual School. This enables the team to develop leadership skills and have a sense of autonomy over the priorities within the school. During 2023/24, these whole school responsibilities led to the development of a SEN transition pack aimed at supporting children who are not yet in education, a recipe book for belonging and introduction of a panel for Children Previously Looked After.

The team also have half termly group supervision with the Educational Psychologist linked to the Virtual School. This has enabled team members to reflect on their practice and leadership, bring cases to group problem solve and address team issues in a solution focussed way.

The School Development Plan 2024/25 has set three strategic priorities with an overarching aim to ensure that all Children in Care and Care Leavers are ambitious around education and feel they belong. The Plan also has clear priorities to support all children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements as this responsibility moves under the Virtual School from September 2024. (further details in appendix 1):



1. Achieving educational stability: To provide children and schools the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 – 18
2. Improving how children are represented in our work: To provide children with the best support, led by them
3. Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions: To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success

A programme of half-termly Continuous Professional Development is in place for the

Virtual School Team. CPD training themes in the academic year 2023/24 have included:

- Developing alternatives to suspensions
- Developing our work with the Youth Justice Team
- Emotionally based school absence
- Understanding the Early Years Goals
- Using Welfare Call to monitor attendance effectively

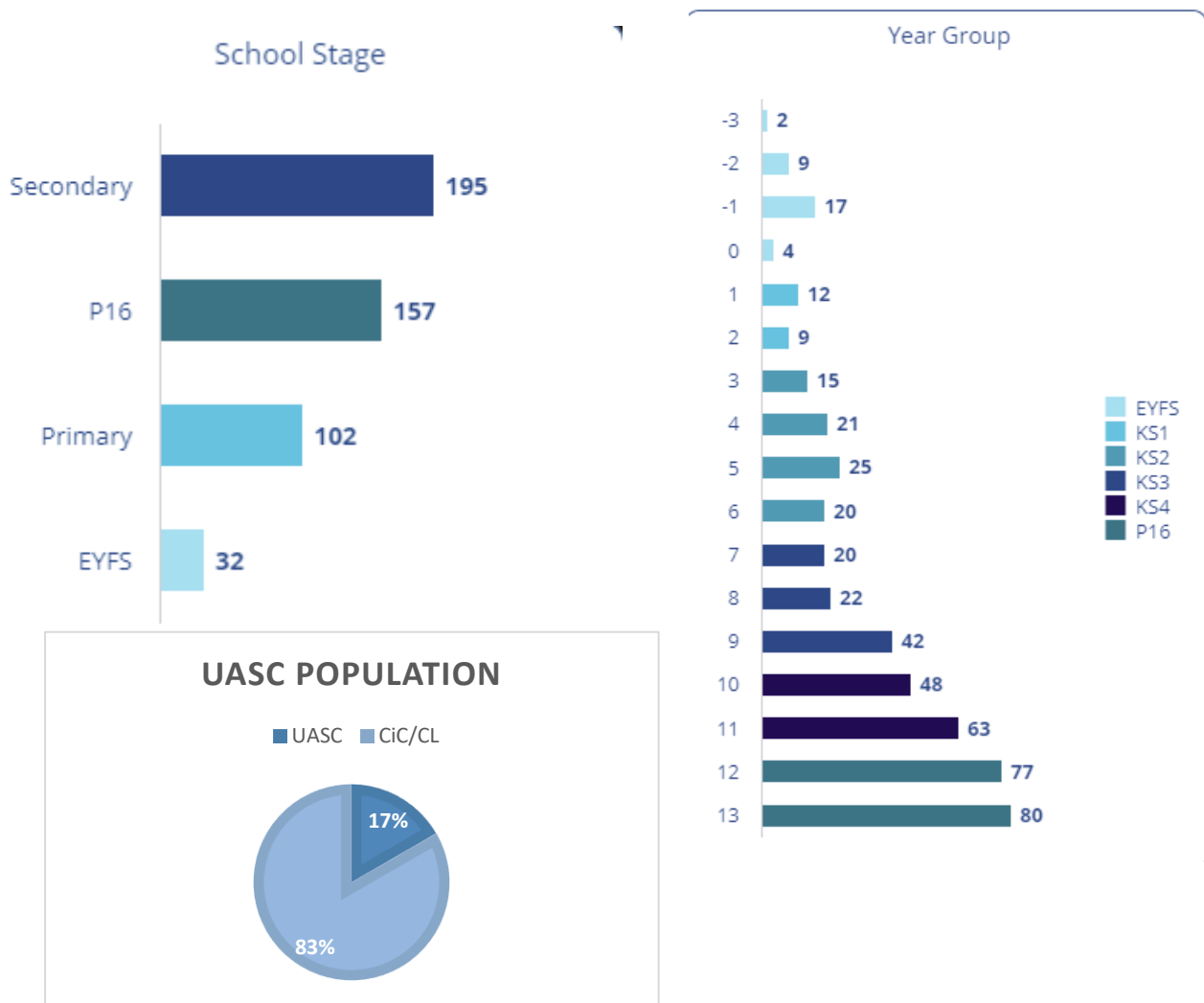
Children and young people in the Virtual School

Children join the Virtual School from the age of 2 to the end of the academic year following their 18th birthday. In this way the Virtual School can bridge the change from Social Worker

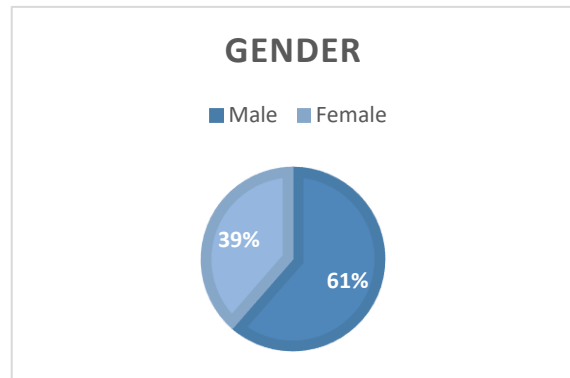
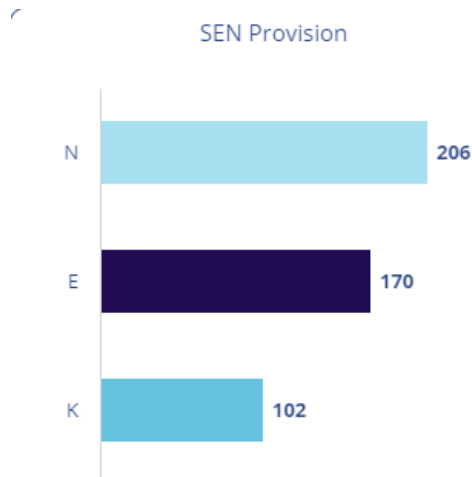
to Personal Assistant (PA) and maintain advice and guidance about education from a position of best knowledge of the young person. The Virtual School ensures that the PA is involved in post-16 PEPs alongside the social worker and is well briefed with regards to the young person's ambitions and any barriers to learning. The Virtual School works closely with the Care Leaver Team to ensure that our young people continue into suitable education, training or employment.

School roll

At the end of the reporting period, 486 children and young people were part of our school. The Virtual School cohorts range from Early years to our Post 16 cohort, which is made up of young people in Sixth Form, Further Education colleges, those in apprenticeships and those in employment. The Virtual School has a higher number of young people across Key Stage 4 and 5 and an increasing number of children aged 3-4 in 2023/24. The Virtual School has seen an increase in the number of children seeking asylum this year with 81 young people listed as unaccompanied from 9 to year 13.



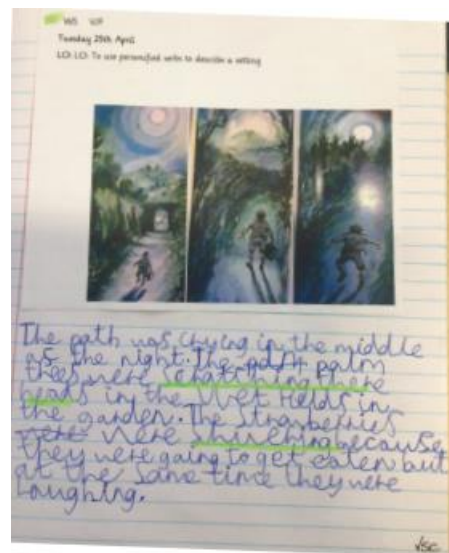
The Virtual School cohort is 61% male, with 51% of our young people living in County. 35% of our children have an EHCP and a further 21% of our cohort have an identified SEN need. In terms of SEN, 55% of our children have SEMH listed as their main need with a further 45% listing complex needs.



Admissions and schools attended

The majority of our children (83.04%) attend settings rated as Outstanding or Good by Ofsted (235 schools with a further 16 schools waiting Ofsted feedback following academy conversion). We aim to support our children to attend the same school once they move into care to ensure stability and support at times of upheaval. If a child faces a change in their home arrangements whilst in care, we will ensure that we prioritise schools and settings rated as good or outstanding. In the unlikely event that a child may ask to attend a school that requires improvement, we will evaluate the suitability of each setting, considering the improvement plan in place and the progress the school has made. During 2023-2024, none of our children were in or moved to existing Ofsted 'Inadequate' settings.

61% of our children and young people attend a mainstream or Learning Centre setting, 7% are in Early Years settings and 14% of our children and young people are in specialist settings.



Educational engagement

Attendance

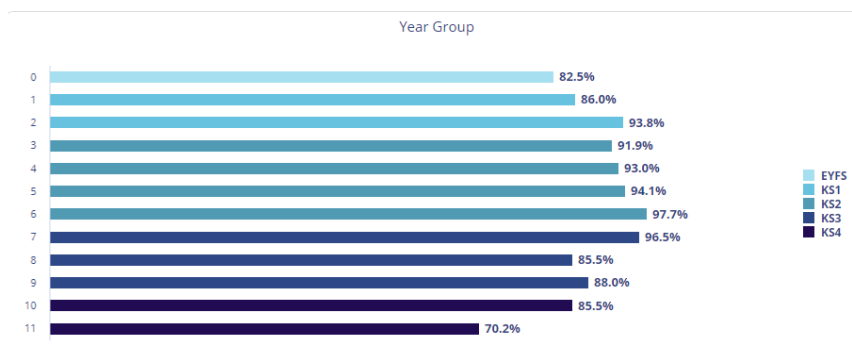
Nationally, attendance is low for Children in Care compared to the whole cohort with attendance standing at 87.7%, persistent absence at 29.5% and Severe absence standing at 9.5% in 2023/24. In 2023/24, there has been a slight increase nationally in overall absence and persistent absence but a sharp increase in the severe absence figures for Children in Care.

The Virtual School undertakes daily attendance monitoring through Welfare Call's live dashboard, providing dynamic and instant overview of attendance for all cohorts. This robust system provides data at a cohort, group and individual level to give an accurate view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns of absence. This has enabled the Virtual School to monitor, analyse and respond to attendance concerns rapidly and remains a key area for improvement (priority 1 on the School Development Plan). The attendance overview for statutory school age children in the academic year 2023 - 2024 is provided in Appendix 3.

Our ambition is to ensure that all our children thrive and achieve through the targeted monitoring of and challenging of attendance within the Virtual School. This also includes the reduction of persistent absence and unauthorised absence.

The Virtual School set an ambitious target of 92% attendance for our statutory school age children. Dorset Virtual School did not meet this target, but attendance was in line with the national average (87.0% compared to the national average of 87.7%) and slightly above 2022/23 (86.%).

All year groups are above 90% attendance with the exception of reception and year 1 and year 8, year 10 and year 11. There are 16 children in reception and year 1 and a number of this cohort had an enhanced transition into education this year, affecting their overall attendance. Our year 1 and 11 cohort have both had below 90% attendance this year but both year groups have had higher attendance during the year compared to 2022/23.



Additionally, there are 25 children with 100% attendance (15 in 2022/23), 160 children with above 95% attendance (60%) and 198 children with above 90% attendance (73%).

Attendance for children with an EHCP was slightly lower compared to the whole cohort (84.4%) with the lowest attendance seen in year 1 (67.0%) and year 11 (65.7%). However, the remaining year groups were all at or above 90% attendance for the year.

Attendance for children with a SEN need was slightly lower compared to the whole cohort (84.8%) with the lowest attendance seen in year 1 (76.2%) and year 11 (65.2%).

Unauthorised absence is defined as any absence that has not been agreed by school. Unauthorised absence has slightly reduced this year to 4.29% compared to 4.52% in 2022/23. This accounts for 135 children having at least one unauthorised mark during 2023/24. 47% of these children were in KS4 with 52% of unauthorised marks were from boys and 47% having an EHCP. There was a higher incidence of unauthorised absence from children living out of county (53%)

Persistent absence is defined as attending less than 90% of school sessions. Persistent absence figures have decreased since the previous year. 28% of our children have had persistent absence compared to 33.3% 2022/23. Our persistent absence marks are also lower when compared to the national average at 29.5%.

Severe Absence is defined as attending less than 50% of school sessions. There has been an increase of 2 children this year with severe absence (6% of our children) compared to 4.4% 2023/24. Dorset Virtual School have lower levels of severe absence compared to the national average of 9.5% for 2023/24.

A piece of work has been undertaken by the team to unpick barriers to education for this cohort of children with illness as the biggest driver of the increase in absence; an increase in anxiety and capacity within specialist provision to support places also contributing, as well as changing behaviours and habits during the Covid period.

Current attendance is lower than expected so additional monitoring including analysis into specific persistent 'low attenders' by attendance mark is being undertaken to provide an additional layer of scrutiny. Further scrutiny through bi-monthly Child in Care Child Inclusion Monitoring Board (CiC Inclusion) meetings involving the Virtual School Leads, SEN Leads and Social Workers allows discussion, analysis and support for targeted children to monitor and address concerns.

Monthly scrutiny of children with low attendance is undertaken via the Pupil Progress meetings and oversight is via the monthly Extended Leadership Performance Board monitoring. The Virtual School Governing Body have undertaken dip sampling during the academic year on attendance and strategies in place.

Targeted training for Virtual School Leads and Designated Teachers on attendance has discussed and embedded strategies to overcome barriers to attending school.

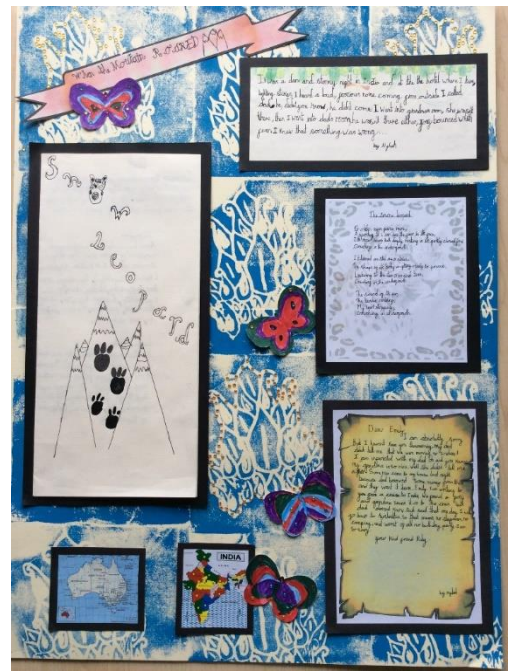
Children in Care Not in Full Time Education

Reducing the number of children in care who are missing out on education is within priority 1 of the development plan. To address this there are robust methods for identifying, supporting and tracking these children. A Children in Care Inclusion Monitoring Board is chaired by the Service Manager for the Virtual School fortnightly that focuses on actions being taken to re-engage identified children and young people in education (or training and employment if relevant post-16) with a cross Children's Services panel. The meeting gives clear oversight of these children and ensures that robust actions are in place to secure suitable full-time education. A monthly child-level report is produced for Children's Services Leadership Team to ensure there is sufficient oversight and challenge around our most vulnerable young people.

During the year we have returned 76 children and young people to full time education. A further 34 young people have closed to the tracker at the end of year 13. The team have focused this year on ensuring that children who are also open to the Youth Justice System are monitored via the board fortnightly to ensure that there is collaboration around the support for these young people.

Reduced Timetables

The team have focussed on reducing the number of children on reduced timetables with 20 children being opened to reduced timetables in 2023/24 for a small period of time as a reintegration or transition period. Fifteen of these children have been closed during the year with two further children planned to close in September 2024.



Children missing education

The team have also focused on reducing the number of children who are CME with 31 children opened to the tracker in 2023/24. This year, 5 of the children have had an EHCP and 16 children being children seeking asylum. 4 children remain open to CME at the end of July, all whom have EHCPs.

This year, the team have focused on children who have a school place but professionals have been unable to engage with education. At most, there have been 6 children who have not accessed their educational provision. This has been reduced to two children at the end of July with both young people accessing a package of AP whilst aiming to engage back with their educational provider.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (Post 16)

75 young people have been opened to the tracker as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) during the academic year with 38 closed during the year. This has meant the EET figure for Dorset Virtual School has maintained 75% throughout the academic year. The team have found an increase in young people seeking asylum and placement moves has contributed to the NEET figure and plans are in place to attend the UASC team meetings in 2024/25 to fully engage with the team around education and placement moves for our young people.

14 Post 16 young people also are employed in part-time or full-time employment. These young people are still monitored on the fortnightly inclusion monitoring board to ensure that the correct support and guidance is offered throughout their career and close collaboration with the Leaving Care and Education, Employment and Training team has been crucial to this success.

Development and monitoring of the Inclusion Board in 2023/24 has highlighted the following:

- The effectiveness of the Inclusion Board (the fortnightly space in which these children are discussed) relies on good cross service attendance so that we are not just talking to ourselves. We have an internal Virtual School Pupil Progress meeting which takes place monthly and looks at different cohorts each month, so the two spaces achieving different things is important. We need to ensure that Care Leaver, fostering, SEND Team, EET Team and QARO representation remains consistently strong in the Inclusion Board, and that social workers and PAs attend to discuss their children alongside the Virtual School Lead to ensure good collaborative working and joint problem solving.
- There has been a real improvement in the use of reduced timetables this year. There are times when a reduced timetable has been used as part of a transition into a new school, and this can be necessary for example when a child is suffering from emotionally based school absence or anxiety. Where possible we now aim to provide suitable AP to support the child in those circumstances rather than a reduced timetable, we ensure that it is time-limited and carefully monitored.

Alternative Provision

During 2023/24, there have been 73 children and young people who have accessed some form of alternative provision as part of their weekly educational package. The Virtual School have robust plans in place to ensure that this alternative provision is for a time limited period with clear guidelines in place to ensure a smooth transition back into education. These children are monitored fortnightly through the Child in Care Inclusion Monitoring Board to ensure that progress is monitored and transition plans are secure. The provision used varies

and is bespoke to the child or young person in order to reengage with education but consists of tutoring, play therapy, mentoring programmes and outreach centres that provide emotional support alongside maths and English learning. In order to assess impact, interventions are funded through Pupil Premium + and commissioning through Children's Services brokerage team. AP providers offer weekly feedback on our young people and these are considered at the next panel request for funding to ensure that impact is considered.

Exclusions

Our ambition is for effective inclusive practice in our schools which leads to zero suspensions and permanent exclusions of Children in Care. This was an area for improvement during 2022/23 and was priority 1 on the school development plan.

Permanent Exclusions

There were 3 permanent exclusions during 2023/24 compared to 2 in the previous year (one in county and 2 out of county). The reasons for these permanent exclusions were violent behaviour towards adults and children. For each child, the Virtual School worked closely with the locality team, SEND team and setting to ensure that an alternative setting was sourced with additional support in place for the young person to achieve. Two of the three children returned to another educational settings within half a term whilst one young person now has a school place for September 2024. Work has been undertaken for numerous children in this academic year to prevent further permanent exclusions and this was due to collaborative working between schools and VSLs to reduce the risk.

Suspensions

The Virtual School undertakes daily monitoring of suspensions and permanent exclusions through Welfare Call's live dashboard, providing dynamic and instant overview of exclusions of our young people.

Despite a focus on reducing suspensions, 14.45% (53 children) of children had at least one suspension during the academic year compared to the 15.00% (50 children) in 2022/23. This amounted to 48 children being suspended during the year with 81% from secondary school age (45% of these were Key Stage 4). 62.2% of these children had repeat suspensions during the year. Appendix 4 gives a breakdown of suspensions in 2023/24.

A high proportion of suspensions were children with a SEN need (49.1% with an EHCP and 37.8% with a SEN need) and a higher proportion of boys (66%) had at least one suspension compared to girls.

There has been an increase in the number of suspensions from schools out of county with 45% of children suspended being in out of county schools. There has also been a slight increase in the number of small primary schools within Dorset suspending primary aged children and this is an area to focus on in 2024/25.

Due to the work undertaken by the Virtual School, there has been a reduction in suspensions for young people in Dorset secondary schools in 2023/24 and a reduction in the number of schools who repeatedly suspended our children. There have been no suspensions for our post 16 young people. Virtual School Leads attend every reintegration meeting with the school and team around the child and collate feedback from the child and team about strategies to prevent further suspensions. The Virtual School Lead will request that a Speech, Language and Communication Need checklist is undertaken by the setting and used as part of the strategy to prevent further suspensions. The Virtual School Service

Manager or specialist teachers will support the Virtual School Lead at meetings when the child has had more than one suspension.

The Virtual School have worked with Universities College London (UCL) on a knowledge exchange programme in 2022/23 around a toolkit for schools and settings as an alternative to suspensions and this was shared in September 2023.

Further scrutiny through bi-monthly Child in Care Child Inclusion Monitoring Board (CiC Inclusion) meetings involving the Virtual School Leads, SEN Leads and Social Workers allows discussion, analysis and support for targeted children to monitor and address concerns.

Monthly scrutiny of children with suspensions is undertaken via the Pupil Progress meetings and oversight is via the monthly Extended Leadership Performance Board monitoring.

Training for VSLs and designated teachers has been delivered in relation to reintegration post suspensions that put the emphasis on what schools can do differently rather than on the child as the 'problem'.

Through monitoring, we identified schools that repeatedly used suspensions for Children in Care and have worked with these settings to put in place support that focuses on helping the school to better understand the whole child and look at strategies that may be more effective than suspensions.

The experiences and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers

Educational progress

The Virtual School ensure that our children have high aspirations and equity of opportunity for making good progress and high academic outcomes with all data for children from aged 2-18 evaluated in the Annual Report.

The Virtual School challenges where academic expectations are too low and celebrates successes, including overcoming barriers. As a result, the academic outcomes for our children are very positive and have improved across all key stages compared to 2021/22 apart from writing and maths progress at Key Stage 1 and 2.

Early Years Provision (reception and Early Years)

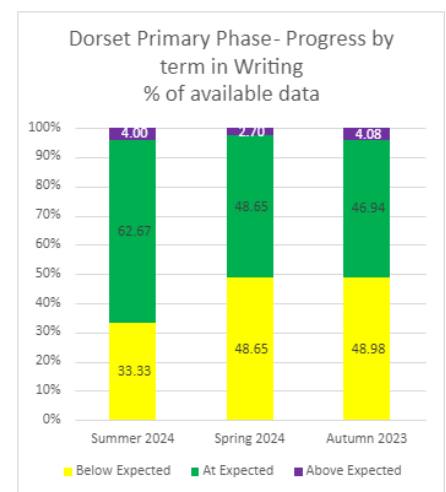
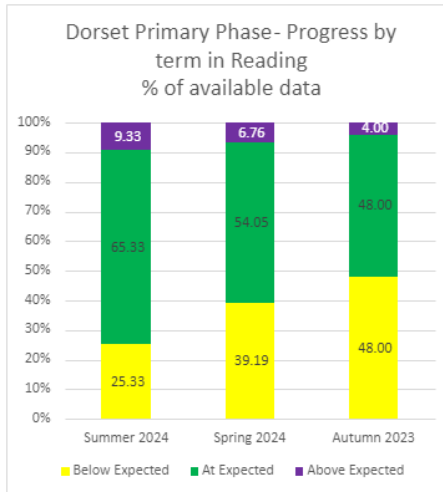
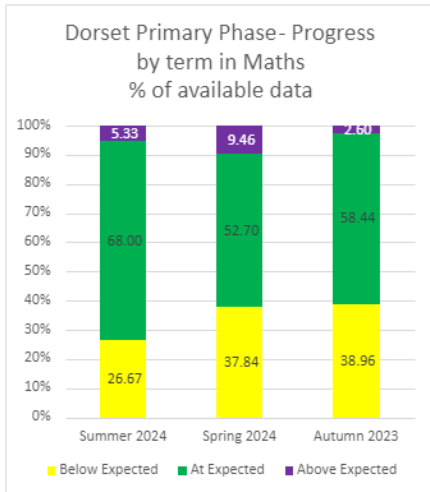
The Virtual School will focus on 'Good level of progress towards Early Years Goals' for each child- further detail for each learning goal is broken down under the full list of goals within each PEP if further detail is needed.

Within early years, there are 35 children on roll in the Virtual School, including in reception year.

18 children are making good progress towards their Early Years goals in the term. Of the remaining 16 children, 8 children are in Early Years settings/reception and no data has been provided. The remaining 8 children are not in early years settings so will not have data.

Progress at Primary age

Through the PEP process, the Virtual School monitors the progress made by or children and young people each term. This assessment is completed by the class teacher and discussed at each PEP by the team around the child to consider possible interventions and celebration for the child. The Virtual School has offered a literacy pack to all primary aged children during 2023/24 and it is positive to see an increase in progress made by primary aged children in reading, writing and maths during this year.

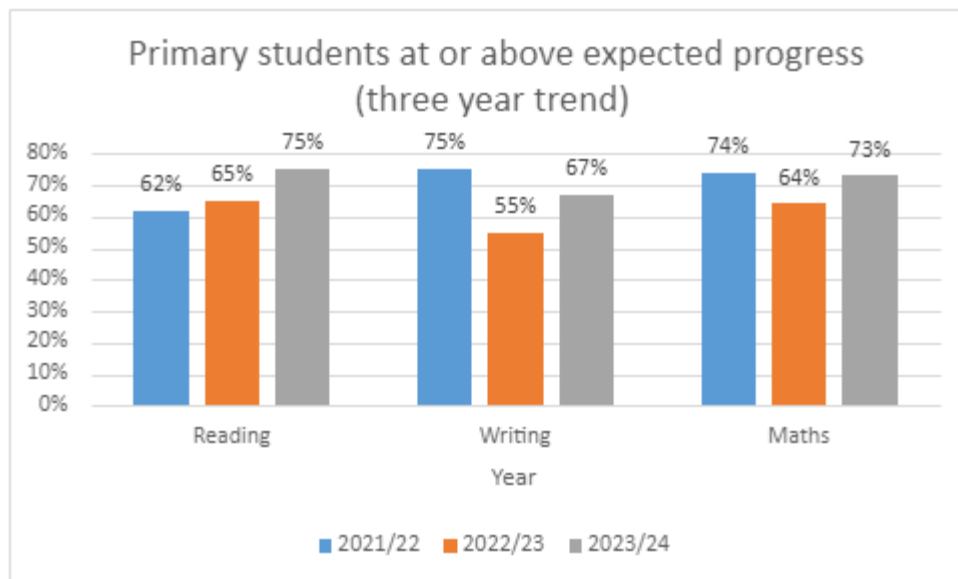


74.66% of primary aged children are making expected or above expected progress in Reading, 66.67% in writing and 73.33% are making expected or above expected progress in maths during the summer term. A greater number of children have made progress in the compared to the Autumn Term (52% Reading, 50.02% % in writing and 61.04% maths).

Further analysis this term highlights that overall our primary aged children have maintained or slightly improved their progress during the year and children within Key Stage 1 have seen an increase in those working at or above for all areas of learning.

In the Autumn Term, year 1 had also made less than expected progress with a high number of our children starting year 1 on a reduced transition programme into education in September and October. During the remainder of the year, this improved with an increase in the number of children making progress.

The Virtual School have seen a steady increase in progress for our primary aged children over the past three years with increased scrutiny from the team each term to ensure that areas of concerns are flagged with settings and support in place for the following term.

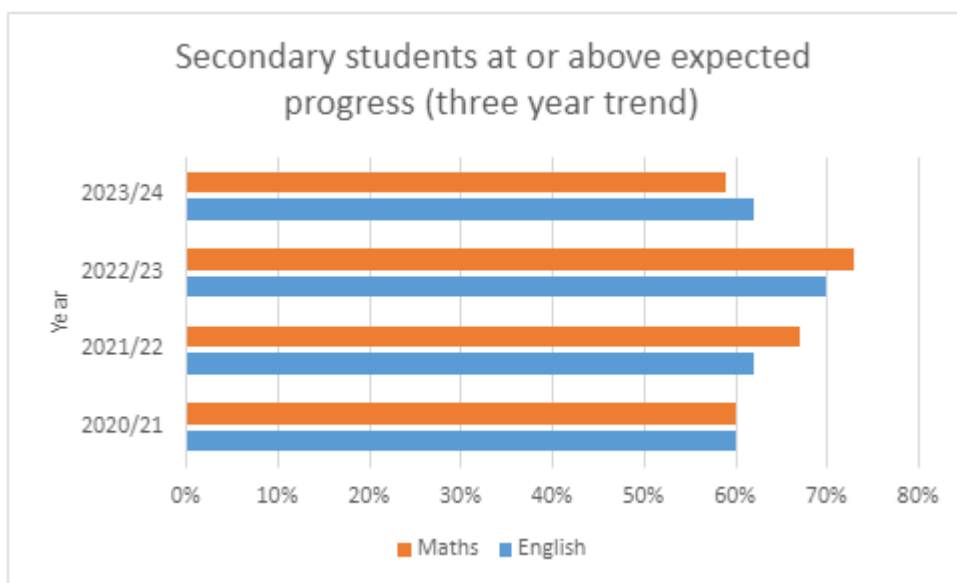
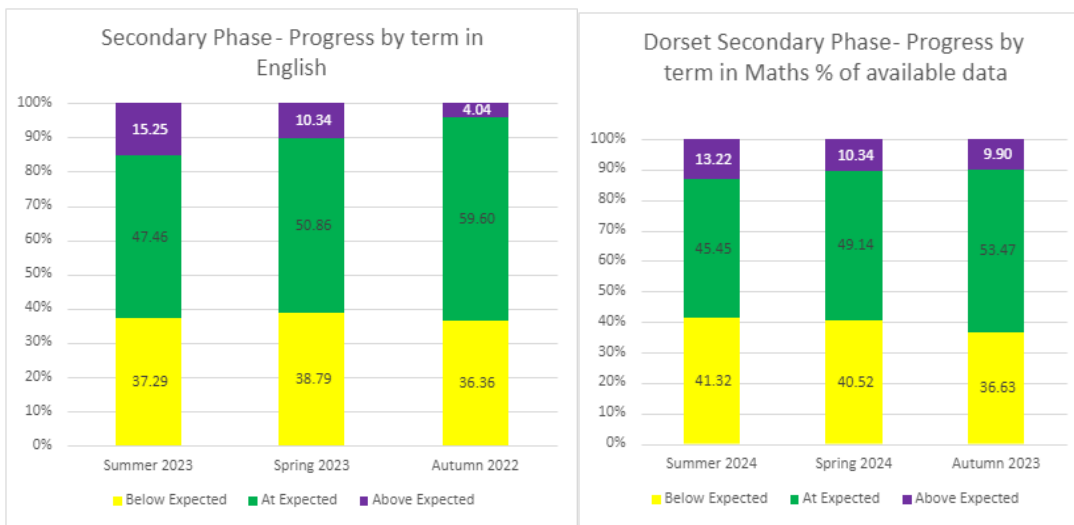


Progress at secondary age

Progress this year has been maintained for Secondary English and maths results compared to the two previous years, but this should be seen in the context of the pandemic, which will have impacted on progress in 2020/21.

62.21% of secondary aged children are making expected or above expected progress in English and 58.67% are making expected or above expected progress in maths this term. Fewer children have made progress in the Summer term compared to Autumn 2023 (maths 63.37% and English 63.64%).

Further analysis highlights the higher number of children in year 11 who have not made expected progress this term in both English and maths and this is similar numbers compared to the Autumn term with the majority of these children being CME or new into care unaccompanied young people.

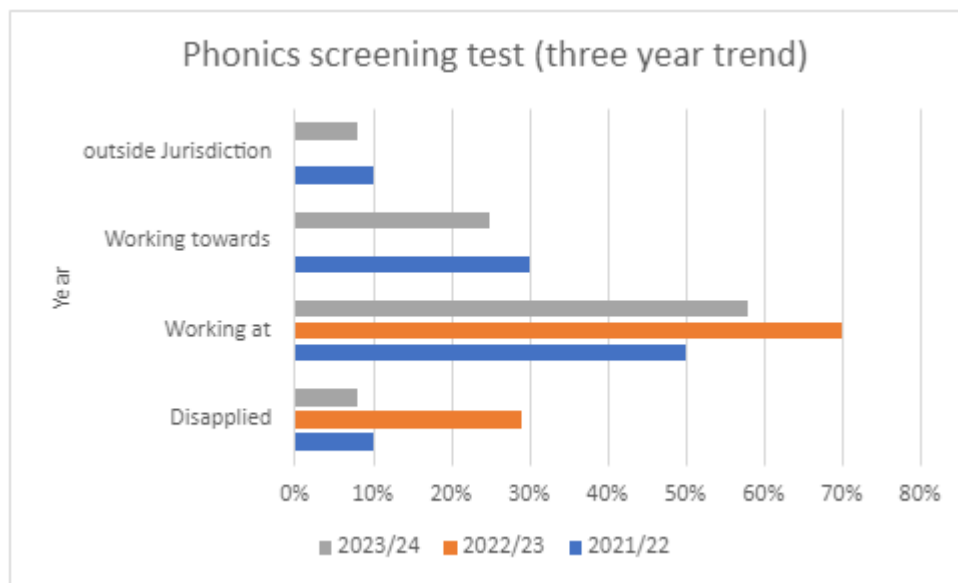


Attainment data

Phonics Screening

There are twelve children in year 1. Seven children undertook and passed the Phonics screening test, three children working towards the screening test and one child disapplied as they attend a specialist provision. One child also attends an independent school so has not sat the assessment. However, this young person is making good progress this term.

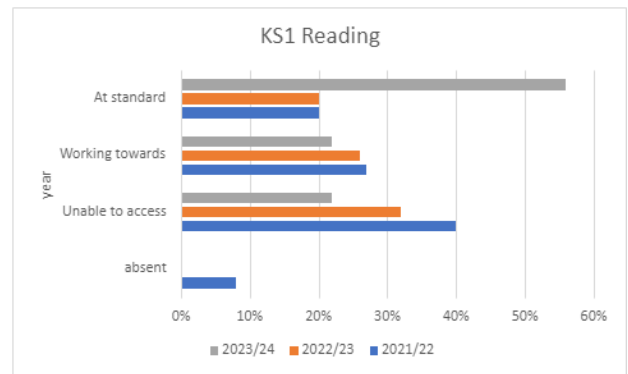
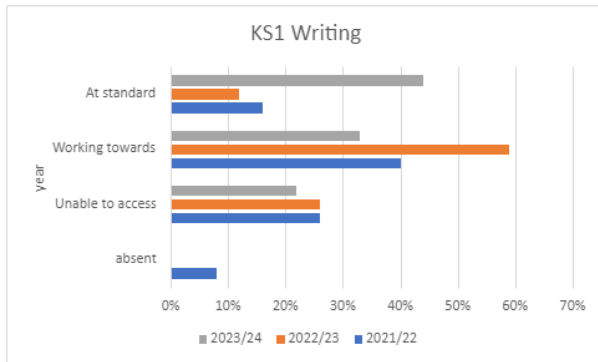
However, conclusions are difficult to draw due to the small number of children within our cohort. It is positive to see an increase in the number of children attempting the assessment in 2023/24 compared to the previous year where a number of children were disapplied.



Key Stage 1:

In year 2, there were 9 children on roll. One child is in a specialist provision and was disapplied from the assessment. From 2024, the Key Stage 1 assessments are optional. Dorset Virtual School have used the collated teacher assessment levels as a method of monitoring our and supporting our young people as they progress into Key Stage 2.

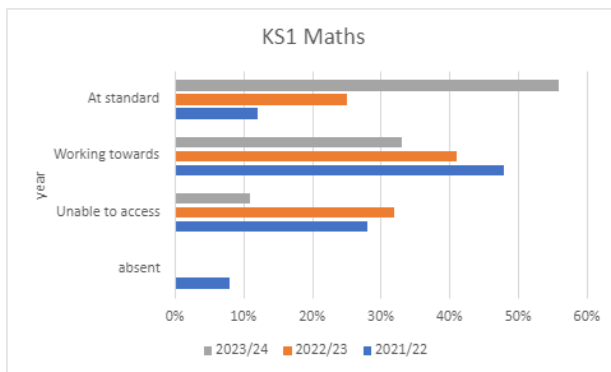
56% of our children are working at expected standard in maths and reading (an increase on 2022/23) and an increase in the number of children working at standard in writing from 12% to 44%.

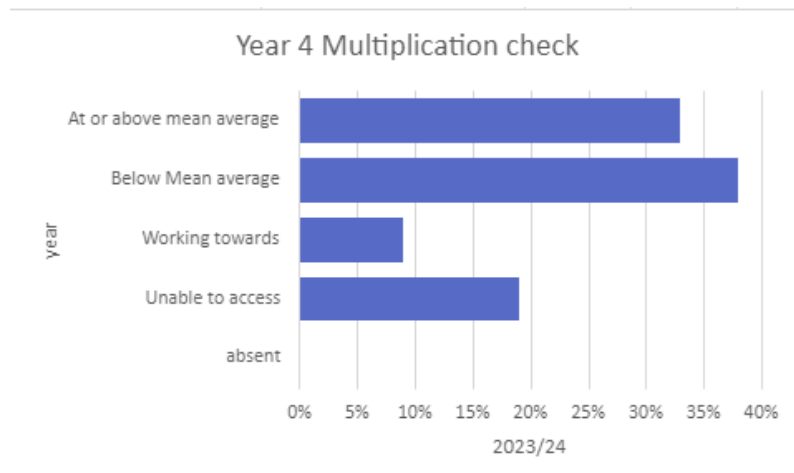


This improvement in outcomes for our children is reflected in the termly progress reports from our settings and the impact of the work that the Virtual School have implemented this year in terms of target setting, literacy and maths interventions and improved scrutiny each term of progress.

Year 4 multiplication check:

In year 4, there were 21 children on roll. Five children are in specialist provision with four children unable to access and disapplied from the assessment. Dorset Virtual School have collected the Year 4 multiplication check for the first time in 2024 so unable to compare to previous cohorts. However, the mean average for the year 4 multiplication check for all children is 19. The mean average for Dorset Children in Care is 17.

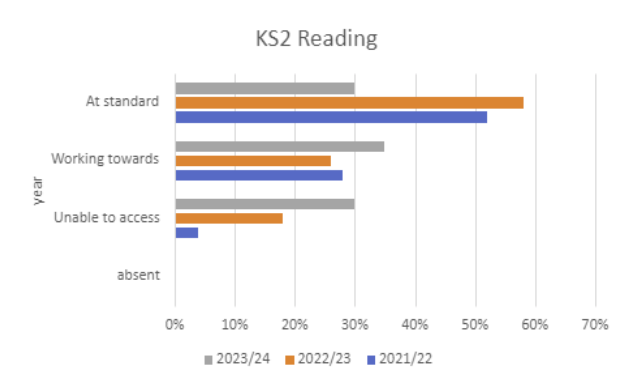
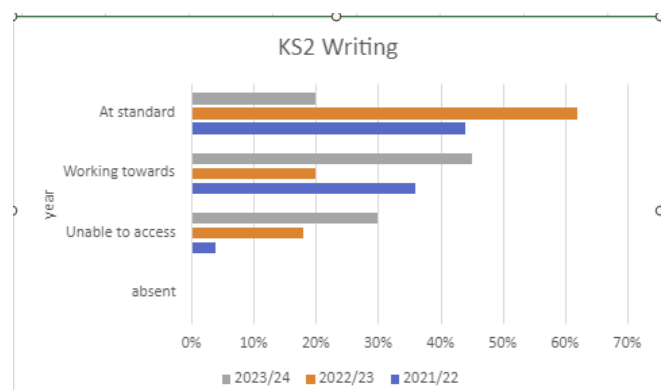
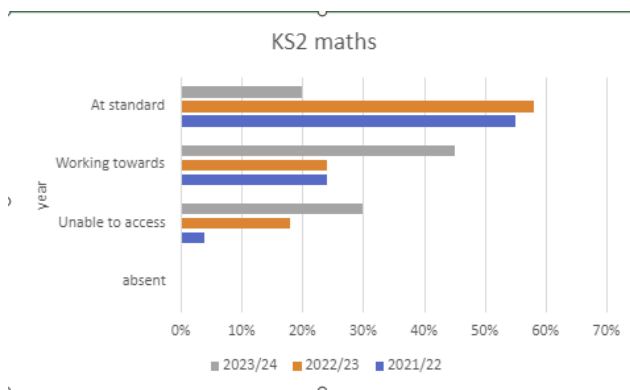




Key Stage 2:

In year 6, there are 20 children with 19 children on roll. Fifteen of these children have either an EHCP or SEN need with eight children in specialist provision. Six children did not sit assessments and were disapplied, with five of these children in specialist settings.

20% of our children are working at expected standard in maths, 30% at reading and 20% of our children are working at expected standard for writing. However, when removing children who were disapplied from the assessment, 58% of our children are on track for reading, writing and maths; this is a similar figure to the previous cohort.



It appears that children in year 6 in mainstream schools are performing well for reading, writing and maths in comparison to the previous year. However, we still appear to have similar numbers of children who are working at below the standard of the test in maths in

comparison to the previous year and this is an area to consider additional interventions when the children reach year 7.

Key Stage 4:

In year 11, there were 63 children on roll during 2023/24 with 30.15% being children seeking asylum (19.67% of cohort in 2022/23). 34% of year 11 have an EHCP and 21% have a SEN need. Of the 61 children, 41 undertook examinations which is a decrease on 2022/23 (65% compared to 84%). This is in part due to the increase in children seeking asylum and number of children without a school place in year 11.

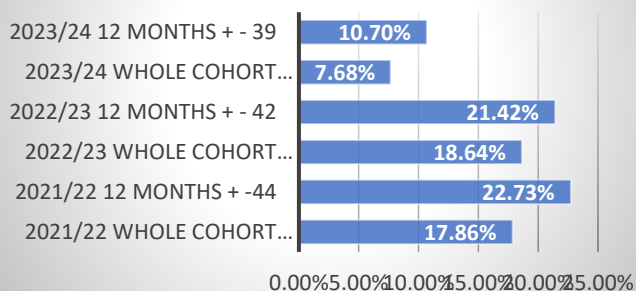
82.53% of our young people are in mainstream provision and just under 13% within specialist provision. 5% of our young people were not in education to take examinations but this does include our unaccompanied young people who may have been in pre-ESOL courses.

	No.	%	In Care for 12 Months Plus	%
Total GCSE Entries	185		154	
Total GCSE Grade 4+	32	17.29%	30	19.48%
Total Vocational Entries	14		14	
Total Vocational Passes or better	12	85.72%	12	85.72%

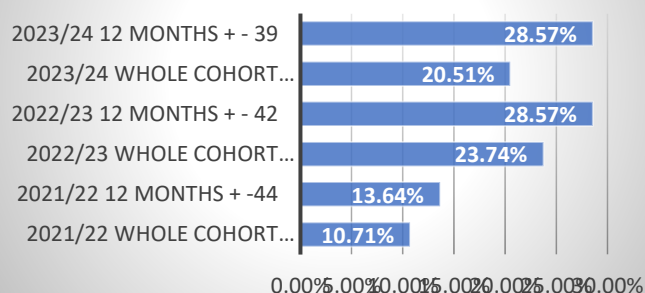
Table 1.4 show the entries and qualification types of children in care

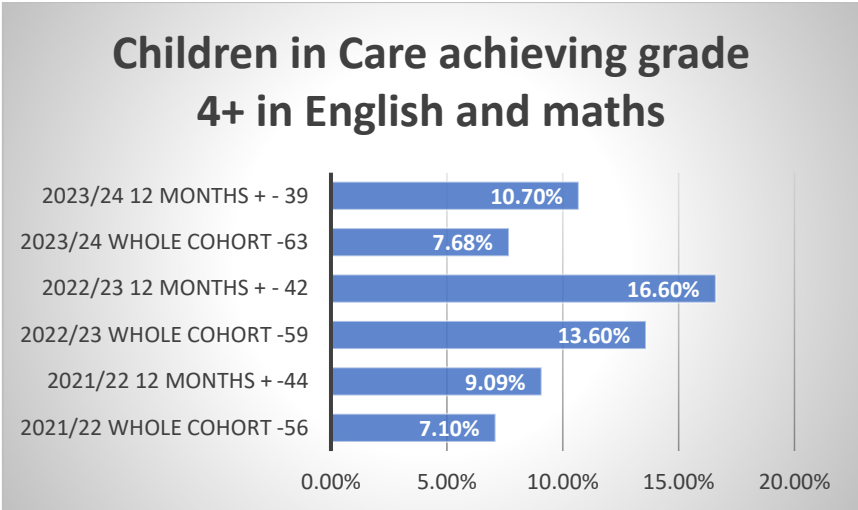
We have seen an improvement in achievement rates at GCSE with 28.57% of our cohort achieving a grade 4 or above in maths (25.80% in 2022/23) but a reduction (10.7%) achieving a grade 4 or above in English (21.42% in 2022/23).

Children in Care achieving grade 4+ in English



Children in Care achieving grade 4+ in maths

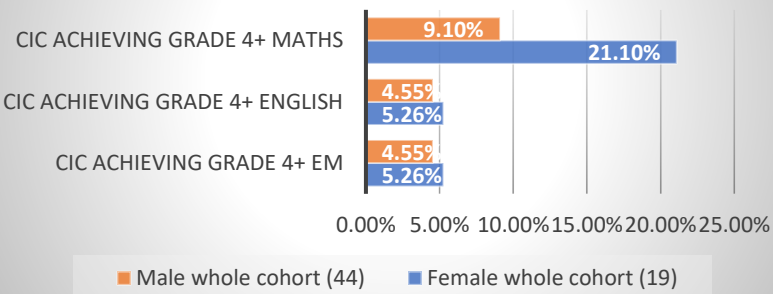




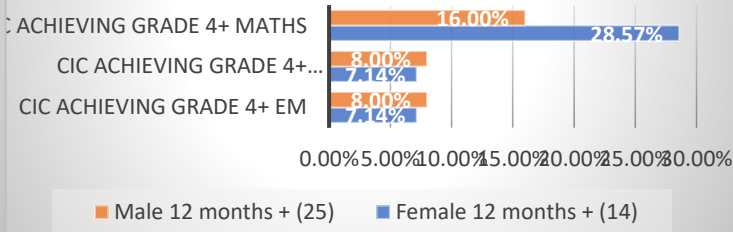
We have a low proportion of young people achieving a grade 4 or above in both English and Maths (10.7%) but this is an improvement on 2022/23 (4.76%). Increasing the English pass rate is an area to focus on during 2024/25 through targeted tutoring, revision materials and mentoring programmes for our young people. We have also seen consistently higher outcomes for children that have been in care for at least 12 months compared to children who have moved into the Virtual School within year 11.

The Virtual School has seen an increase in the number of young people achieving a grade 3 in English (46.4% compared to 18.18% in 2022/23) and maths (42.86% compared to 15.91% in 2022/23). This is an area that the Virtual School will focus on in 2024/25 with greater scrutiny, tracking and interventions to ensure an increase in the number of grade 4s achieved. This will be undertaken through interventions such as Corbett Maths revision packs, access to School Online revision and targeted revision cards as well as 1:1 tutoring if required. Progress 8 data for our children will not be available until December 2024.

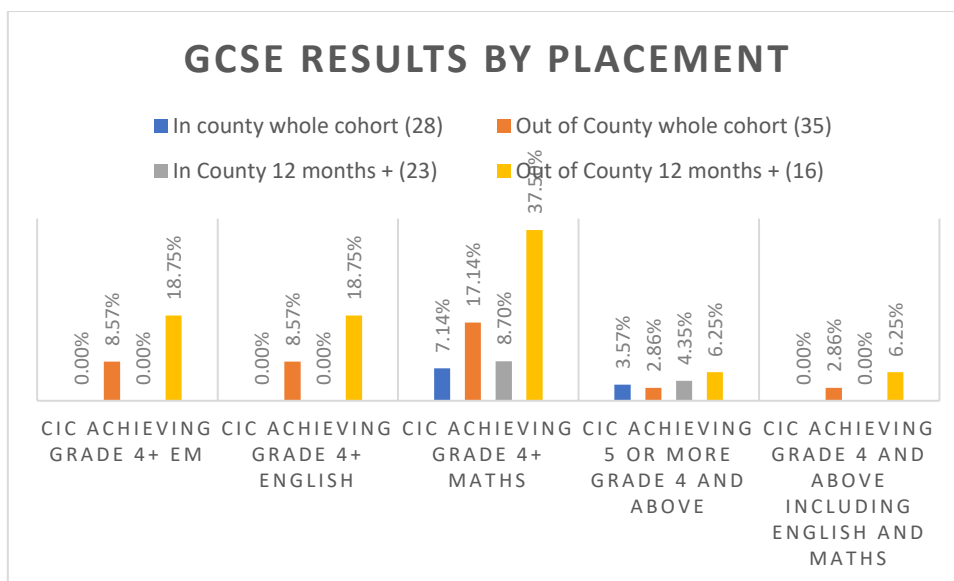
Grade 4+ results by gender 2023/24 (whole cohort)



Grade 4+ results by gender 2023/24 (Children in Care 12 months +)



Females in Key Stage 4 have performed consistently higher both for those who have been in care for 12 months or longer and for the whole cohort, particularly in maths. There have also been higher numbers of grade 4s in English and maths for children who have been in care for at least 12 months.



The graph above highlights the results by placement. Children in Care for more than 12 months living out of county performed considerably better than children living in county. This is an area for the Virtual School to evaluate in 2024/25 to ensure that our children living in county perform as well as those out of county.

Key Stage 5:

Main qualification (year 13)

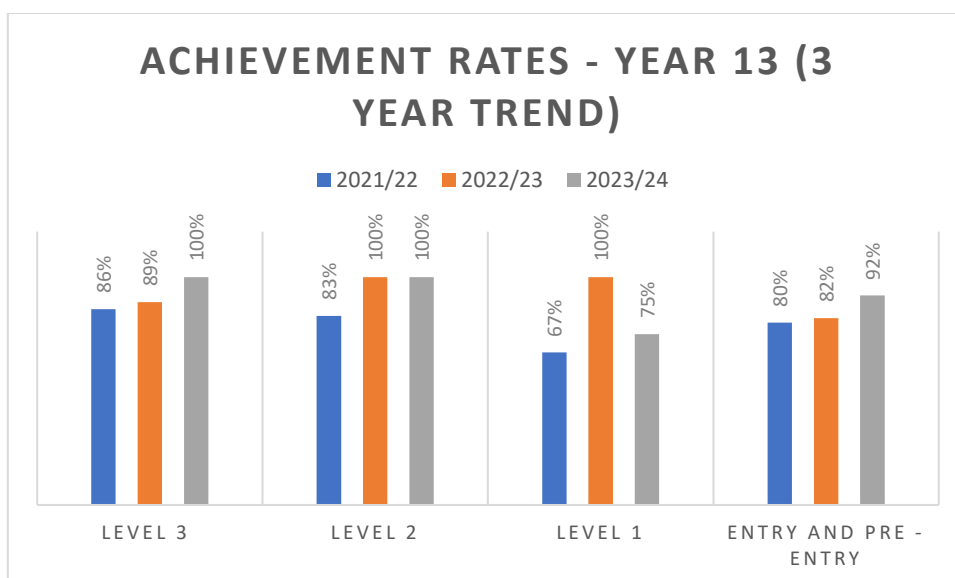
There were 80 young people in year 13, Seven of the young people are in employment with 23 young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). 64 young people were enrolled on provision in further education.

Of these 60 undertook exams from Entry level qualifications to Level 3, an increase on the previous year (94% from 56%)

The school had five young people in year 13 undertaking their final year of their level 3 qualification. 100% passed with all progressing to a university course or higher apprenticeship, ranging from an animation course to economics.

Additionally, 27 young people in year 13 are unaccompanied young people accessing ESOL courses and Functional Skills maths. Of these, 85% (23) passed their main qualification. 100% will progress onto the next level of the ESOL course.

Our year 13 young people performed well in their main qualifications with 100% of our young people passing pre-entry programmes, level 2 programmes, level 3 year 1 programmes and level 3 year 2 (full A Level programmes). 75% of our young people on level 1 programmes passed (6 out of 8 young people) and 89% of our young people passed Entry courses but the 11% who did not achieve the full qualification did achieve elements of the qualification and will continue with these programmes in September 2024.



The Virtual School has seen a sustained improvement of year 13 results for our young people on their full-time programmes across all levels of programme and this has been in part due to increased monitoring of this cohort and rapid interventions to engage young people with education and support with access to Post 16 provision. There has been a slight decrease in level 1 results accounting for 2 young people who have passed part of their qualification but need to complete one further element.

Functional Skills/ GCSE (year 13)

In 2023/24, there were a greater number of young people in year 13 taking functional skills English and maths in comparison to 2022/23. Year 13 saw similar numbers of young people entered at each level of maths and English programme although there was a slight increase in the number of children on entry level programmes compared to previous year. The increase in young people retaking functional skills qualifications may be due to the increase in our Unaccompanied Young People who have enrolled on ESOL courses.

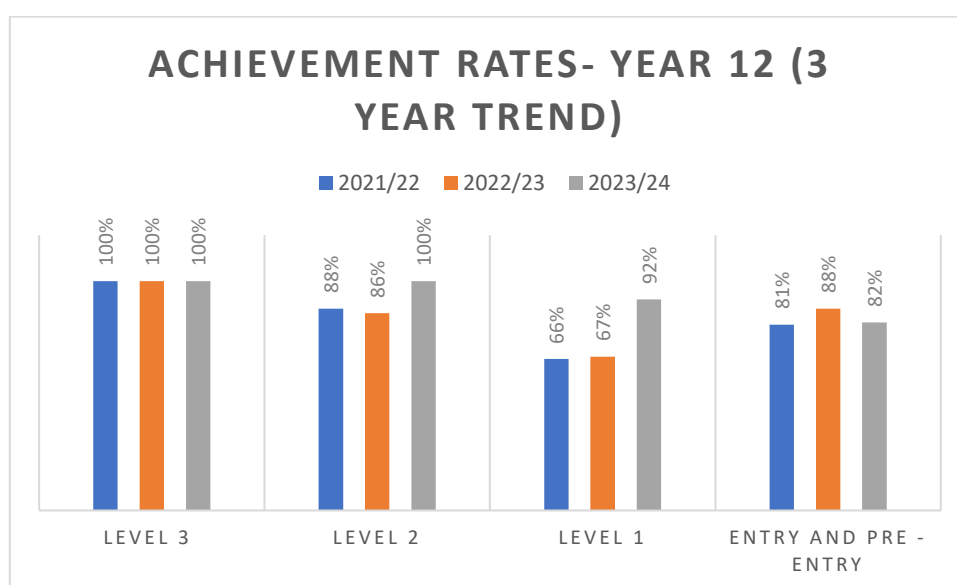
National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 13)	GCSE English (Grade 4+)	GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills English (Range E1-L2)	Functional Skills Maths (Range E1-L2)
2021-22		0%	91%	90%
2022-23	50%	0%	75%	91%
2023-24	67%	29%	59%	89%

The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the achievement of Functional Skills English compared to the previous year and is due in part to the increase in young people who are accompanied within year 13 who have attempted English exams for the first time. For the young people that did not achieve the qualification, all have passed elements of the programme that allows continuation in September 2024. Both GCSE maths and English retakes have seen an increase in achievement in 2023/24.

Main qualification (year 12):

There were 77 young people in year 12 within the Virtual School. Three of the young people are in employment with 19 young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). 55 young people were enrolled on provision in further education.

Of these 47 undertook exams from Entry level qualifications to Level 3 with the remaining eight young people on roll on a two year programme or apprenticeship with results due in 2025. In 2023/24, the Virtual School had comparable entrants on each level of full-time course but saw higher achievement rates for every level of programme in comparison to 2022/23 with the exception of our entry and Pre-entry programmes. This amounts to 2 young people not achieving their full qualification but achieving two of the three elements. The young people will progress onto the final element of their programme in 2024/25.



Functional Skills/ GCSE (year 12)

In 2023/24, there were a greater number of young people in year 12 taking functional skills English and maths in comparison to 2022/23. Year 12 saw similar numbers of young people entered at each level of maths and English programme although there was a slight increase in the number of children on entry level programmes compared to previous year. The increase in young people retaking functional skills qualifications may be due to the increase in our Unaccompanied Young People who have enrolled on ESOL courses.

National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 12)	GCSE English (Grade 4+)	GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills English (Range E1-L2)	Functional Skills Maths (Range E1-L2)
2021-22	38%	25%	60%	71%
2022-23	20%	14%	100%	90%
2023-24	40%	0%	85%	83%

The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the achievement of Functional Skills maths and English compared to the previous year and is due in part to the increase in young people who are accompanied within year 12 who have attempted English exams for the first time.

For the young people that did not achieve the qualification, all have passed elements of the programme that allows continuation in September 2024.

GCSE English retakes have seen an increase in achievement in 2023/24. However, there is still no improvement on young people retaking maths GCSE in year 12 and will be an area to focus on in 2024/25 to ensure that the small number of young people with retake GCSEs are fully supported to achieve a grade 4 through the offer of Corbett Maths revision packs, access to School Online revision and targeted revision cards as well as 1:1 tutoring if required.

Personal Education Plans and resources including Pupil Premium Plus

The Virtual School uses a PEP quality assurance process for all PEPs. There are clear quality assurance criteria and training has been delivered to the Virtual School Team on what a good PEP looks like. Training has also been delivered to Designated Teachers and there is a strong focus on the PEP in the Virtual School Handbook.

All PEPs are peer Quality Assurance (QA) reviewed. The QA outcome appears on the PEP so that all involved in the PEP are able to see the grading and any feedback given. The QA process grades a PEP red (inadequate), amber (requires improvement) green (good) or gold (outstanding). Themed audits of PEPs review specific aspects of the school development plan, such as the quality of the use of the child's voice through person centred planning, are a central part of link governor monitoring. QA outcomes are fed back to the Full Governing Body Meeting for oversight.

Governor oversight of our work around the child voice noted the impact that using the second person has had on the quality of the PEPs but also the difference between PEPs from Virtual School Leads who may not know the child as well as another Virtual School Lead. CPD was provided for the Virtual School Team around this and plans are now in place for good handovers of children to new Virtual School Leads to ensure that quality is maintained.

Comfort.

My dream is to feel comfortable.
Not nervous.
When I can't breathe, I walk off. My mind is set. I won't do it. I won't do it.
Comfort to me is different.
A mosh pit. Pushing, shoving, a release.
Lost in the music, the sound.
There are no thoughts, round and round, round and round.
With friends I feel comfortable.
In school I walk. I walk. I don't know what else to do.
Like a cat I'm scared, judgy eyes around me, teachers that don't like me, work that doesn't interest me.
Awkward.
The work's too hard but I used to be good. I used to get good grades.
Then I never missed a lesson.
English, Biology, Chemistry, Drama, Art. I knew I wasn't doing bad and that felt good.
Comfort is pride in me.
Comfort is knowing I can achieve.
Comfort is calm. Not stern. Not shouty.
Comfort is belief in me.

By Maisie

Governor feedback also commented on the consideration of the cultural identity of the child and the whole person being considered within PEPs alongside an increase in the number of child-led PEPs in 2023/24.

The impact of the work to strengthen the PEP process can be seen in the PEP QA results with 93% of PEPs found to be good or better (92% 2022/23) with an increase in the number of gold PEPs being awarded (28). As a breakdown, each cohort has seen an improvement in PEP quality with a maintaining of quality for Post 16;

- Early Years 98% good or outstanding
- Primary 97% good or outstanding
- Secondary 93% good or outstanding
- Post 16 89% good or outstanding

Further analysis of the Post-16 cohort highlights some queries raised around young people not in education, employment and training and capturing

their voice so this will be an area to focus on in 2024/25.

Completion of PEPs has been an area for the Virtual School to focus on during the academic year with all PEPs being completed, signed off by the Designated Teacher, Social Worker and Virtual School Lead and quality assured within 20 days of the PEP date. In the Autumn term this stood at 63% timeliness and the team ensured that due focus was given throughout the remaining terms. This has led to 93% of PEPs in the Spring Term and 95% of PEPs in the Summer Term being completed and quality assured within 20 days of the PEP date.

Term	Number of PEPs completed	Average number of days to be signed off by the Designated teacher, Social Worker, Virtual School Lead and quality assured.
Autumn 2023	475	26 days
Spring 2024	470	12 days
Summer 2024	498	15 days

Attendance to PEPs has also improved in 2024/25 with termly feedback given to our Social Care teams so that they can further support our children and young people at the next PEP. There appears to have been a decrease in attendance to PEPs by our Social Workers in the summer term, particularly for children within specialist settings and this will be an area to focus on in the Autumn term.

Term	Child/Young Person	Social Worker/ Personal Advisor	Designated Teacher
Autumn 2023	55%	72%	95%
Spring 2024	54%	74%	96%
Summer 2024	61%	69%	92%

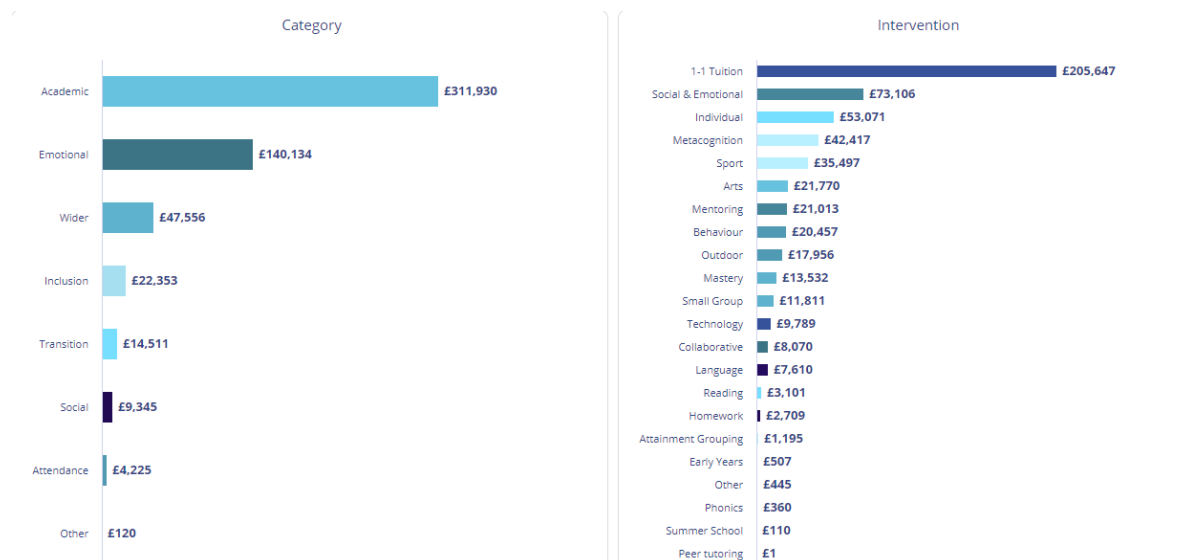
Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium Panel meet on a weekly basis to consider requests for funded interventions. These decisions are recorded and shared with Children's Services Accountant. The document is reconciled with the Council's Financial Ledger each month. This ensures that payments have been allocated correctly and it is clear how much of the Grant is available to use to inform future funding requests.

The Virtual School Service Manager, Virtual School Specialist Teacher leading on data, and Children Services Accountant meet monthly to review the Virtual School budget and evaluate the effectiveness of spend on types of intervention. Outcomes from the meetings are reported to the Virtual School Governing Body.

During 2023/24, £550,174 of interventions were approved with 57% being spent on secondary school children. The average pupil premium cost per child of PEP outcomes achieved was £1392 (£364 per outcome). 59.10% was spent on academic achievement and progress, 25.00% was spent on emotional health and wellbeing and 7.7% on wider achievement.

Interventions that were set for our children during the summer term will be fully assessed for their impact by January 2024 so this evaluation is based upon Autumn and Spring term targets. 56% of the interventions were either graded as met or partially met during the Autumn and Spring terms. Of the targets achieved, 54.8% were for academic tutoring, 27.5% was based around emotional and mental well-being and 7.7% based on wider achievement including visits, trips and musical intervention.



Of the targets marked as not achieved 45.4% of these were tuition targets and analysis of this with VSLs has highlighted some schools marking tuition as not achieved in order to request additional funding at the next PEP as well as a capacity issue in terms of tutor availability. Fortnightly meetings have been placed in diaries with the tutoring agency to ensure that timely referrals occur.

12.5% of the not achieved targets were based on social and emotional interventions. On closer scrutiny, these were not achieved due to a delay in starting therapy for some young people.

Within the specific interventions, 37.4% was spent on 1:1 tuition, 9.6% spent on individualised instruction whilst 13.3% spent on social and emotional intervention. The Virtual School saw an increase in spending on social and emotional interventions throughout the year with a sharp increase in the Spring term (£19,898 in Autumn, £27,627 in Spring and £25,590 in Summer). This was predominantly for children in year 3,5 and 8 although there was an increase in requests from children in year 2 also. These social and emotional interventions ranged from sensory toys and aids to support in class to ELSA and KORU therapy, residential visits for social well-being, walk and Talk therapy and drama therapy.

There was an increase in reduction under the category of behaviour at 3.7% (5.6% previous year) of spending and an increase in spending around mentoring (£21,013) and outdoor learning £23,912. This was an area that the Virtual School focused on during 2023/24 to ensure that children were being supported with mentors to re-engage with education rather than educated at external provider for behaviour reasons.

Prior to April 2023, the Virtual School received no funding from the DfE for post-16 young people. In order to be able to allocate funding the Virtual School's policy is to allocate some of the Year 11 funding to support good transition into post-16 and to support committed post 16 students who did not achieve their Key Stage 4 English and / or Maths in Year 11. In 2023/24, this funding has supported tuition for maths and English and laptops for young people. Funding has now been approved for our Post 16 young people and this has been used to support interventions such as gym memberships for health and well-being, swimming lessons for our young people and support towards college residential trips. This has resulted in an increase in spending from £18,022 in 2022/23 to £63,309 in 2023/24.

The Virtual School plan to enhance this work through using Welfare Call's system to support Post-16 interventions in the same manner as for Statutory School age children to ensure

clear oversight and monitoring of these interventions, further analysis of 0 spends termly to ensure that this figure is reduced and termly evaluation of the impact of interventions to ensure impact.

Pupil Voice / Belonging

Dorset Virtual School have worked hard to ensure that our children and young people feel that they belong within the educational settings and also belong to the Virtual School. At every PEP, work is undertaken with our young people to collect their views and be curious about their interests. Children within our school aged cohort scored school as 8 out of 10 this year, young people in our post 16 providers scored education a 6 out of 10 and children within specialist provision said that they felt score was graded as 4 out of 5.

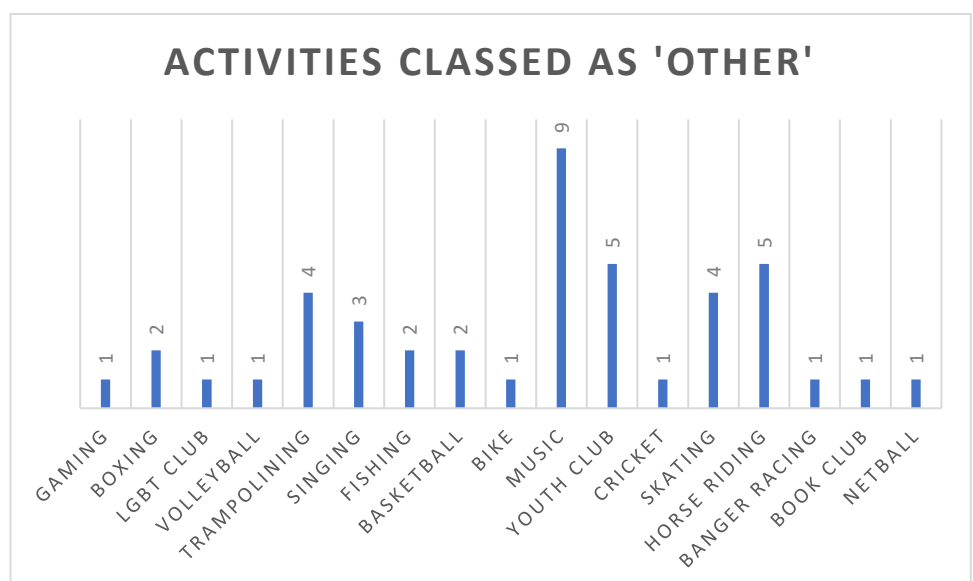
Work has been undertaken this year to understand our young people’s voice and their interests with 84% of young people engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity.

Beavers, cubs, cadets, brownies, guides, scouts	Football	Tennis	Rugby	Dance	Drama	After school club	Martial arts	swimming	gym	Gymnastics	Art club	other	none
33	31	3	5	13	15	23	8	35	20	3	9	44	89

44 children engage in an extra-curricular activity classed as ‘other’. Further work to understand this was undertaken and a range of activities are accessed including scootering, youth club and fishing.

Of those who are not accessing an extra-curricular activity, 25 are in primary education and 64 are in secondary education. Interest for other clubs available was raised around coding clubs and further access to AUB arts club.

Through this analysis, the Virtual School has offered a range of activities this year that link to the views of our children and young people.



Celebrating Child Successes

The Virtual School has a strong focus on celebrating child successes and sharing these widely including with the extended Children’s Services leadership team to ensure that our children’s lived experience is in everyone’s minds in a positive, strengths-based way and also to celebrate good practice from teams working with our children.

Children's successes are celebrated weekly within the team, with each identified child receiving a £10 book voucher. During 2023/24, 160 children and young people were celebrated for a variety of reasons, including leading their PEP, accessing education full time after missing education for one term completing their ESOL qualification and moving to the next qualification. The positive acknowledgement of children's successes in the PEP meetings was recognised in governor monitoring as a strength of the PEPs.

The 2024 Virtual School Awards took place in July 2024 at the Odeon Cinema following young people's feedback around the type of event they would like where they would be able to spend time with their families.



156 children and young people were nominated and celebrated at this event with five children and young people having an additional celebration from the Virtual School Headteacher and Director of Children's Services. Additionally, three Designated Teachers were nominated for their hard work and commitment to our young people and celebrated at the award this year alongside our 12 Designated Teachers of the month awards.

Digital Day workshop

The Virtual School have worked in collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) and Bournemouth University (BU) on a digital day on the campuses. This encouraged 9 children to undertake a series of workshops delivered by AUB and BU academics around the use of Artificial Intelligence, coding, digital photography and the use of creative apps in design work.

Both AUB and Dorset Virtual School are keen to progress this partnership with an enhanced offer for our young people in 2024/25 culminating in a larger exhibition around the idea of 'seeing me'. To enhance the oversight and challenge for the Virtual School we have been pleased to invite a member of the AUB staff and a staff member of a Further Education college to be members of the Virtual School governing Body during this academic year.

Residential visits for Children in Care

The Virtual School recognises the importance of building relationships and resilience for our children and during 2023/24 have funded two residential visits.

Each visit centred around a theme; transitions and inclusion and belonging. The residential visits have allowed the Virtual School to take 20 children to Jamie's Farm in Monmouthshire for a residential week at the farm. Prior to the visit, none of the children knew one another and came from different schools across the county and outside of the county. The children ranged in age from year 5 to 11 during the different trips. During the visit, our young people herded cattle, fed the pigs and sheep, moved a flock of sheep to a new field, went on very long walks (!), looked after horses and cooked all meals. This year, one residential was targeted towards our young people seeking asylum and this visit allowed our young people to meet peers living across the country and share in their cultures, cooking and music throughout the week. The evidence from this week was instrumental in supporting two of our young people to be given school places in January 2024.



In terms of well-being, the young people undertook a survey prior to attending the visit and at the end with all young people seeing an improvement in their well-being (18%), social and emotional feelings (12%) and self-awareness (20%). Perhaps, most importantly, they have made new friends during this week and become more resilient and confident young people.

These visits have been a highlight of the year for both the Virtual School staff and wider Children's Services staff who attended to support our young people. The Virtual School plans to continue this offer into 2024/25 and further enhance this provision with consideration of the Dorset outdoor learning sites.

Supporting Learning

During 2023/24, the Virtual School supported 94 children and young people to have access to the Letterbox Literacy Club to encourage and foster a love of reading and to improve literacy. Feedback from this project was positive with one carer noting 'how excited our young person was to receive his first parcel. It is in his bedroom, by his bed waiting to be read!'



The Virtual School has also invested in a range of support materials and online learning packages for our children and young people to support with maths and English learning at Key Stage 2 and 4. This has been offered to 26 children with 9 staff supporting during 2023/24 to be used as an additional revision resource for examinations. Further evaluation is being undertaken in 2024/25 to ensure the effectiveness of this programme before it is rolled out to the wider cohort.

During 2024/25, the Virtual School would like to be involved with the Imagination Library, a specific Early Years programme to improve literacy.

Creative Writing Course

Dorset Virtual School offered a one-day creative writing course in collaboration with the Dorset History Centre for our younger children to share a love of reading and creative writing. 9 children from year 4-6 took part in the activities with children creating quills, and becoming detectives around the centre to learn to write letters to someone special about their day.

Outdoor learning day

Dorset Virtual School have offered a one-day outdoor learning day in collaboration with Weymouth Outdoor education centre. This enabled 10 young people to take part in a variety of water-based activities, including kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding on a mega SUP board. The day targeted young people from ages 9-11 and fostered a sense of resilience and team building with young people that did not know one another prior to the activity. Feedback from the young people was positive with suggestions for further activity days in 2024/25 to include an outdoor learning day again.

Virtual School Council and child voice

The Virtual School Council has evolved in 2023/24 to work alongside the Youth Voice team in collaboration to support our children, using feedback from the Coram Voice surveys to support. In the academic year 2023-2024 there were four family day events including outdoor learning at a local outdoor education centre and a family day at the beach. These sessions have enabled the Virtual School Leads to hold Virtual School Council meetings and gain views from our young people which have included:

- The look of the Annual Awards and rebranding of this event
- Further extra-curricular opportunities to include digital technology and outdoor learning.
- Views and ideas for the Dorset Virtual School Recipe Book about belonging

Virtual School Projects

Supporting our children with SEN

In November 2023 a report was published entitled 'Improving the Effectiveness of Virtual Schools'. The report closed by describing principles of effective virtual schools - effective virtual schools are able to rapidly secure school places for children in care and work with schools to avoid suspensions and exclusions wherever possible, thus ensuring that the young person is spending as much time as possible engaged in education in an environment where they feel wanted and respected, and they have a strong relationship with the SEND team in their own local authority, but are able to smoothly navigate the regulations to ensure that care placement moves outside the local authority area do not compromise or delay the support that young people need to engage in learning.

Dorset Virtual School decided to create a SEN Transition Pack of learning resources that do not require a teacher so new Carer and child can bond and learning still take place for up to four weeks. Each pack included resources based on *The Gruffalo*, *The Snail and The Whale* and *Room on the Broom* with activities based around literacy, numeracy, geography, art, music, science,

cooking, outdoor education and drama opportunities. Each pack was designed to be flexible in terms of ability and there are enough activities to stretch beyond the four weeks planned

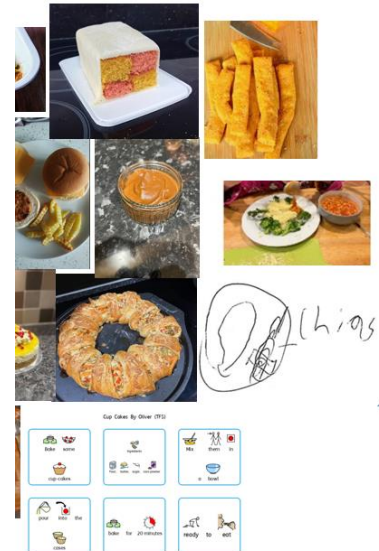


should sourcing an appropriate provision take longer. Each 'book' comes with a soft toy and an audible book and is accompanied by other art resources provided by the publishers.

By providing our resource following a move, Dorset Virtual School are ensuring there is education in place for up to a month while SEN process is followed, and appropriate and welcoming provision secured.

Belonging Recipe Book

This year, the Virtual School chose to work with our children and young people on coproducing a recipe book around the idea of belonging and how food can help this. Our children and young people have given their views during each event during the year and the team have requested recipes and photographs of meals that our young people like and feel show their identity and culture. 32 recipes were collected with images and these were part of the Recipe Book for belonging that was given to each child at the annual awards.



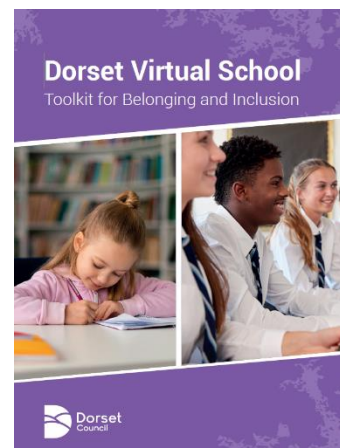
PALAC/PACL Project

The Virtual School partnered for the third year running with University College London (UCL) to deliver their Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) Project and Promoting the Achievement of Care Leavers Project (PACL).

PALAC/PACL is a Knowledge Exchange (KE) programme that seeks to support practice in schools and colleges to improve outcomes for students in care and Care Leavers. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for this group of children and young people. The collaborative relationship between practitioners in settings and university researchers seeks to improve our collective understanding of how students in care can thrive in school.

We identified settings that covered all phases of education to be included in the trial. The programme engaged the settings and Virtual School in a collaborative year long programme through access to research findings, a comprehensive school/college audit tool and regular support from facilitators with research and school practitioner backgrounds. Participants had the opportunity to share and evaluate their findings at the end of the academic year.

A set of case studies is due to be published by UCL demonstrating the impact and learning from each of the projects and we have been invited to be part of the PALAC/PACL Conference in the next academic year. These have been incredibly successful and the school/college lead for each project will be sharing their work through workshops in the Designated Teacher Conference in January 2025. The Virtual School is planning to replicate the project with a new set of settings in 2024/25, focusing on our expanded role working with children with a Social Worker and those in kinship care arrangements.



Big Bids

Following feedback from our colleagues within schools and settings around 'dream projects' if funding was available, the Virtual School has continued to offer its Big Bids process for

schools and settings for the third year running. This initiative encouraged settings to bid for funding to implement a project or creative idea that would support our Children in Care as a cohort within the school to achieve and be successful.

During this period 54 bids were received with 43 successful (37 in 2022/23). Projects ranged from providing resources to support a well-being room within two schools, mentors for children in care, resources for an outdoor 'calm' space for children, differentiated reading resources that include resources around being in care and care experiences to training for whole staff groups around Lego therapy, total communication and support to set up a peer mentoring programme for children in care in schools.

Lonely heart crying in the night
 Looking for love on a cold winter's night
 Memories now distant and cold
 Thinking of things that I have been told
 The dreams that I had, are fading fast
 And soon realise, they will stay in the past
 This pain I bear is my regret
 Forever feeling this is what I am dealt
 These cries of mine will slowly die
 I want to escape, I want to fly
 I am finally free from this prison
 My thoughts are clear and I have a vision
 Never will I return to that same place
 Which fills my head with doubt and haze
 That cold, lonely winter night
 Was I ever right?

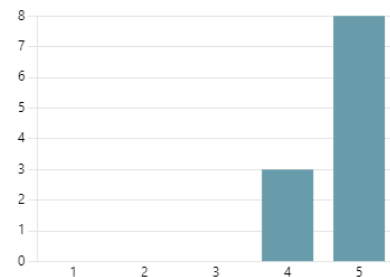
By Amelia

Feedback from settings involved has been positive with school stating that the funding 'boosted self-esteem and supported relationship building. It provided a good platform on which to build and was great for transition', 'It has changed the environment from a traditional 'Victorian' classroom to one in which children feel safe and secure' and 'It has had a huge impact - it has given us a well-resourced space in order to support those in care (and care leavers) who may need space to regulate or calm. It has also had an excellent impact on the wider school too as selected other children also use these spaces'.

4. How would you rate the impact of the project on Children in Care and/ or Care Leavers? (0 point)

[More Details](#) [Insights](#)

4.73
Average Rating



In terms of impact of the 43 settings that were successful, 5 settings have suspended a young person this year. Of those five settings, 6 children out of 32 children within those settings had 1 suspension this year. In 2024/25, the Virtual School will use the Big Bids process to further support those schools who are more likely to suspend our young people with a SEN need in order to consider alternatives.

Communication with stakeholders

Dorset Virtual School work with a wide variety of stakeholders in order to ensure that our children and young people thrive and are successful. During 2023/24, Dorset Virtual School have worked with 41 Local Authorities across the country and 161 provisions for children in Statutory school aged placements and a further 27 Local Authorities for our Post 16 young people. This collaboration has included supporting children with an EHCP as well as children and young people seeking asylum who may not live in Dorset.

Designated Teacher training

The Virtual School provides an extensive training and development programme via termly Designated Teacher training, new to the Designated Teacher role training and bespoke training on themes identified from cohort need.

During 2023/24, these have included:

- Understanding Early Years
- PEP interventions and Target setting
- Emotionally based school absence
- Support and expectations for children with SEN
- Developing the cultural identity of our children within PEPs

Based on feedback from Designated Teachers, the Virtual School offered its second Designated Teacher Conference in January 2024. This conference benefitted from Mark Finnis as our Keynote Speaker who considered restorative practice as well as the opportunity for our teachers to participate in a range of workshops that considered how to support our children further. These workshops included advice and guidance from our youth justice team, supporting children with a social worker and how to write good SMARTER targets. Feedback from this event was excellent with 44% stating that the CPD would have a good impact on their practice and 56% having a significant impact on their practice. The Virtual School are planning a third Conference in January 2025 around the concept of 'Knowing Me'.

Imogen saves the match!

The jelly-bean-like stadium was filled with hundreds of thousands of voices. I was surrounded by howling monkeys, neighing donkeys and snorting pigs. It was the match of the year. Man United vs The Giggling Animals. The tension was unreal. Everyone was invited. Man U's top fan, Imogen was chanting from her seat. Looking out at the pitch, she could see a certain player's feet. Marcus Rashford was his name. He saw Imogen across the crowd, And saw her talent. He was wowed. 'Let's welcome the newest member of Man U, Imogen, striker number two.'

By Imogen

Support for children who are adopted or Post Looked After

The Virtual School aims to ensure outstanding educational achievement for our children who have previously been in care. The introduction of the updated two handbooks has seen a reduction in requests for advice and support from settings in 2023/24.

We have amended our tracking system that monitors enquiries to the Virtual School that are allocated to locality based Virtual School Leads who provide support and guidance to families, schools and settings. This tracking is now incorporated in a half-termly board meeting, giving Virtual School Leads to discuss children and settings that they have worked with and to consider next steps.

Additional CPD will be delivered to the Virtual School Leads in September 2024 around support for our children previously looked after and the changes to SGO and kinship care and this will be delivered to our Designated Teachers in January 2025.

The introduction of the PLAC Handbook has reduced the number of queries and this is currently being updated. The Virtual School have developed the way we record our work with this cohort by running two half termly meetings. The Virtual School have delivered transition meetings for children applying for reception and year 7 in conjunction with Aspire Adoption Agency and will provide support and guidance for parents with children in choosing their next steps.

Having a governor to represent children Previously Looked After on the Virtual School governing body has allowed the Virtual School to focus its efforts to support this cohort of young people and their families

There are plans to develop our work and support for our children previously in care during 2024/25 including;

- The handbook to be updated during summer holidays to reflect change of PP+ and other policies.
- Kinship Care and Belonging to be incorporated within the handbook.
- Decision to instigate a one page summary (template with aide memoir to be developed) for every child who becomes Previously Looked After in addition to any other 'final' writing.

Support for our Early Years Children

One priority in 2023/24 was to improve the experience for our children within early years settings. The Virtual School offered targeted CPD for our Early Years staff in August and September 2024.

The Early Years PEP in collaboration with Welfare Call has been utilised throughout 2023/24 to excellent effect and this has led to an improvement in the quality of PEPs for our youngest children with 98% of Early Years PEPs being classed as good or better. Governor oversight of this priority noted that the child is well considered in the PEPs sampled with a good attempt at capturing the child voice in creative ways.

Targeted CPD for the Virtual School Team around Early Years Goals was undertaken and delivered by an industry expert in January 2024 and this has led to an increase in targets set that are linked directly to the Early Years goals for our children. There are plans to build upon the Early Years successes through targeted CPD for Early Years settings in collaboration with the Early Years team in Children's Services as well as the introduction of the Imagination Library for our children under the age of 5.

Support for our Unaccompanied young people

The Virtual School have built upon its support for our increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people during 2023- 24. Our specific handbook has been translated into 4 different languages based upon the cohort of children within our school and this has been shared at initial PEPs as an opportunity for language learning and support to settle into new communities. The additional 'Welcome Pack', providing language learning resources and games that can be used within the family settings to encourage immersion in the English language has been offered to all of our unaccompanied young people this year. Each young person is also provided with a laptop and language tuition as part of their welcome package. Our Unaccompanied young people are funded during the summer holiday to take part in the International Care Network (ICN) summer package that focuses on language learning and community visits if they live locally to Bournemouth with 100% of the children living locally taking part in this offer. As a result of these interventions, 100% of our unaccompanied young people in year 11,12 and 13 have a college course to progress onto. The celebration of cultural identity for all of our children and young people has supported the Virtual School Leads to consider the individual and community identity of each child with one young person requesting language learning in their original language as well as ESOL to support a sense of belonging in their local community.

Extended Role of the Virtual School

The Virtual School has extended its role to include the strategic responsibility for children with a social worker as per Promoting the education of children with a social worker (publishing.service.gov.uk). A Service Manager for Inclusion has been in post since January 2022.

A Service Manager for inclusion ensures there is high visibility of this group of children and young people. Our inclusion dashboard highlights children with a social worker who are not in full-time education which enables us to take swift and robust action to ensure they are returned to full-time education quickly. This data also informs our weekly updates to Children's Senior Leadership Team, monthly reporting to the Education Performance and Practice Board and discussions at our fortnightly inclusion oversight board.

There is a specific focus on children with a social worker within Dorset's attendance strategy and plan. Dorset's average school attendance for the 2023/24 academic year was 90.23%, however the attendance of children with a social worker was 78.94% and the attendance of children who ever had a social worker was 87.74%. We are working with school and families to understand and resolve barriers to good attendance for families with a social worker so that legal intervention is only used as a last resort and where it is clear that it will change behaviour. Dorset's belonging strategy has been coproduced and also has a focus on this group of children and young people.

There has been liaison between the Service Manager for Inclusion and colleagues involved with the Safeguarding Families Together project in relation to attendance. Further CPD for social workers is planned with social work colleagues, with a focus on ensuring social workers have a deeper understanding of school attendance and educational outcomes and strengthening collaboration with education and early help colleagues. The aim is for all Children in Need (CIN) and Child Protection Plans (CPP) to have clear educational targets alongside the safeguarding targets. CPD is also being planned for school staff in relation to good practice when working with children with a social worker.

In the academic year 2023/24 there were 72 permanent exclusions from Dorset schools. Four children were subject to a CPP and five were CIN (three of these children had an Education and Health Care Plan). 28 of the children with a permanent exclusion had social care involvement in the last 6 years. In Dorset there were 6814 suspensions involving 1913 children. 38 of these children had a CPP and 494 had had social care involvement in the last six years. Education Challenge Leads will lead the co-ordination in their localities of working with primary phase schools where a child has had one suspension and secondary phase schools where a child has had more than two suspensions. There will be a focus on embedding Therapeutic Thinking in schools and our aim is for all our schools and settings to be inclusive for all our children and young people through thinking therapeutically. This involves using a variety of person-centred tools to explore, consider and understand emotionally distressed behaviour. Our SEN Commissioner is leading a review of Alternative Provision (AP) to ensure there is a stronger focus on educational outcomes.

There is currently one children with a CP plan being electively home educated (EHE) and 14 who are identified as CIN. The children identified as CIN are prioritised for suitability checks to ensure that they are being educated in a safe environment, are receiving education that is suitable to their age and aptitude and are making progress. Where education is found to be unsuitable swift action is taken to return them to a school setting.

With the changes to Dorset's structure through the Pathfinder programme, from September 2024, the oversight of children with a Social Worker will fall under the remit of the Virtual School and Service Manager for the Virtual School. As part of this change, the Virtual School

will expand its staffing structure to include a Team Manager, Inclusion Lead and a further three Virtual School Leads to ensure that every child and young person is given equitable opportunity to achieve and be successful in education.

As part of this change, the Service Manager for the Virtual School has produced priorities on a page for our children with a Social Worker to ensure that Dorset Virtual School supports this cohort of vulnerable young people as well as Children in Care and Care Leavers (Appendix 1).

Appendix 1: School Development Plan 2024/25

Priorities on a page: Dorset Virtual School Development Priorities 2024 – 25

AIM	To ensure that all Children in Care and Care Leavers are ambitious around education and feel they belong.		
STRANDS	Achieving educational stability	Improving how children are represented in our work	Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions
PURPOSE	To provide children and settings the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 - 18	To provide children with the best support led by them	To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success and belonging
12 MONTH GOALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children with EHCPs have termly targets linked directly to their EHCP outcomes Improve attainment for children at Key Stage 2 maths and 4 in maths and English Reduce the use of suspensions for children with a SEN need Develop and deliver a programme of CPD for professionals working with Children within the Virtual School, including collaborative work with UCL Improve the attendance of SSA children and remove barriers to belonging in school Reduce the number of children missing education, use of reduced timetables and young people who are NEET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver ambitious plans for children in Early Years Provide support for settings to better meet the needs of children previously in care Collect and respond to child feedback to improve our service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed a structured programme for young people with aspirations for higher education Embed a personalised programme of mentoring for young people to develop a sense of belonging in education Enhance KS4 programme of learning for a targeted group of young people to develop practical vocational experience Promoting a sense of belonging for children seeking asylum Develop wider learning opportunities and positive experiences
OUTPUTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% of all termly PEPs for children with EHCPs have clear links made between targets and EHCP outcomes Embedding of an educational SEN package to support transitions 75% engagement with school online programme 75% engagement with online and face to face 1:1 tutoring 65% making expected progress in KS2 maths 25% children achieving grade 4+ in English and maths at KS4 Less than 10% of suspensions in the academic year for children with SEN 100% attendance at reintegration meetings Develop an annual programme of CPD for professionals Collaborate with UCL on their PALAC programme At least 92% stat school age attendance Less than 3% Unauthorised Absence Improve KS4 attendance to at least 90% 0 CME for longer than 6 weeks 0 Children on reduced timetables for longer than 6 weeks At least 80% Post 16 EET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% EY PEPs have targets linked to 3 core EY goals Deliver targeted CPD for practitioners in Early Years Transition meetings with Aspire and families around supporting children previously in care Register of children previously looked after includes record of advice, guidance or support provided by the Virtual School Development of one-page final PEP with aide memoir Review of PLAC handbooks At least 65% attendance of children at PEPs At least 75% attendance of SW, PA and EYSAO at PEPs Development of an Annual programme of events linked to belonging and child voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target group of 6 young people to participate in initial HE programme and evidence of impact via child voice feedback Target group of 10 young people to participate in initial belonging programme and evidence of impact via child voice feedback 100% of children will have a confirmed destination place for Post 16 from the KS4 programme 100% of children undertaking the KS4 programme will achieve unit accreditation 90% of young people seeking asylum engage with the welcome pack and induction booklets Implementation of a responsive roll-on programme of tutoring for UASC. Develop a targeted programme of extra-curricular activities for our UASC. Development of an Annual programme of events linked to belonging and child voice Every child is celebrated at least once during the year

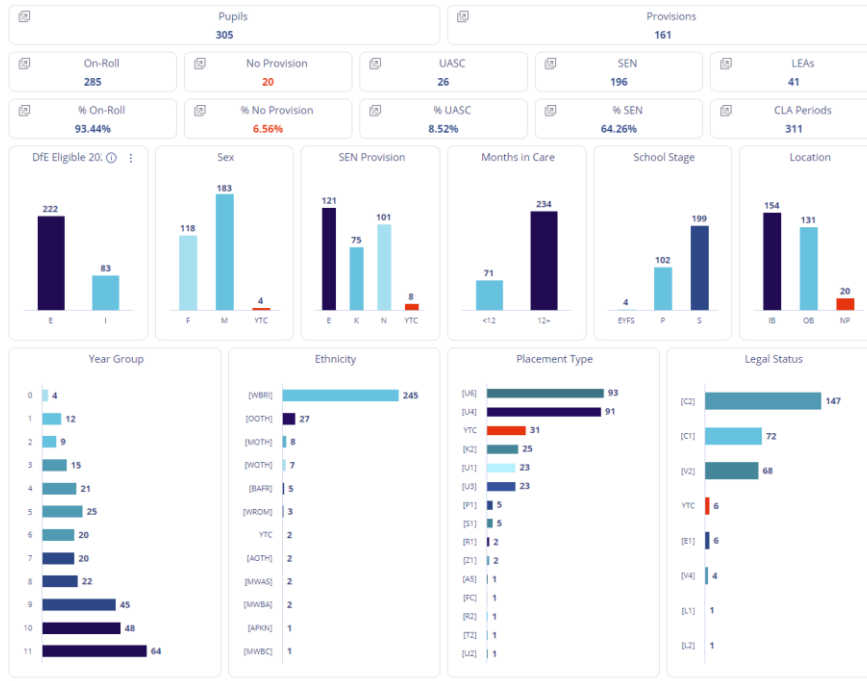
Priorities on a page: Dorset Virtual School Development Priorities 2024 – 25

AIM	To ensure that all Children with a Social Worker or in Kinship Care arrangements are ambitious around education and feel they belong.		
STRANDS	Achieving educational stability	Improving how children are represented in our work	Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions
PURPOSE	To provide children and settings the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 - 18	To provide children with the best support led by them	To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success and belonging
12 MONTH GOALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the use of suspensions for children with a Social Worker Develop and deliver a programme of CPD for professionals working with Children within the Virtual School, including collaborative work with UCL Improve the attendance of SSA children and remove barriers to belonging in school Reduce the number of children missing education, use of reduced timetables and young people who are NEET Improve attainment for children at Key Stage 2 reading, writing and maths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support for settings to better meet the needs of children in kinship care arrangements Collect and respond to child feedback to improve our service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance KS4 programme of learning for a targeted group of young people to develop practical vocational experience Develop clear plan to engage with Locality teams through Pathfinder
OUTPUTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than 11% of suspensions in the academic year for children (CiN) 100% attendance at reintegration meetings Develop an annual programme of CPD for professionals Collaborate with UCL on their PALAC/SWIRL programme At least 92% stat school age attendance Less than 52% Persistent Absence (CiN) and 60% (CP) 0 CME for longer than 6 weeks 0 Children on reduced timetables for longer than 12 weeks At least 75% Post 16 EET 100% of children who are EHE with a Social Worker have timely monitoring 40% making expected progress in KS2 reading, writing and maths Development of a monitoring system for educational progress for all children with a Social Worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification and resourcing for children in kinship care arrangements development of kinship care handbook Undertake membership of the Kinship Care Forum Development of an Annual programme of events linked to belonging and child voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target group of 10 young people to participate in initial belonging programme and evidence of impact via child voice feedback Development of planned collaboration with locality teams to enhance monitoring of children with a Social Worker

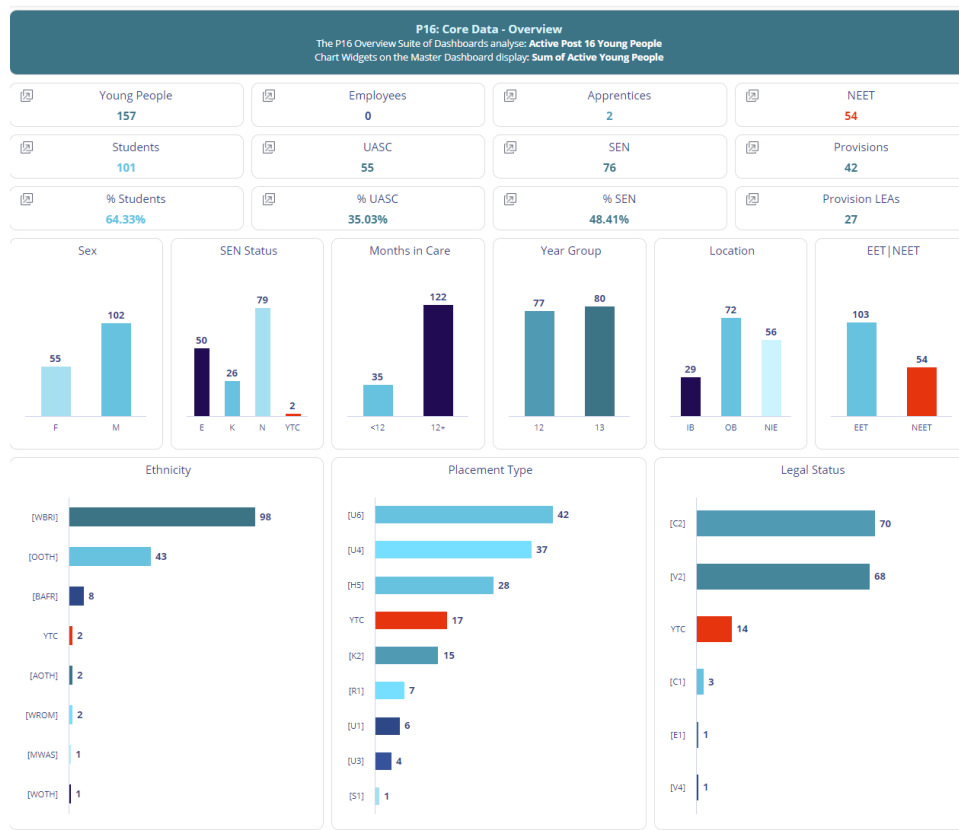
Appendix 2: Virtual School Cohort Statutory School Age and Post 16 2023/24

Please note that the cohort details change regularly and therefore this is a snapshot in July 2024.

Statutory School Age



Post-16



Appendix 3: Attendance for 2023/24

Attendance Trend

Year	Overall absence (%)	National figure
2020/21	14.5%	-
2021/22	11.43%	9.10%
2022/23	13.3%	
2023/24	13.0%	

2023/24 Attendance

2022-2023 (Internal Data)	Cohort No.	Overall Attendance (%)	National Attendance
Whole Cohort	304	87.0%	87.7%
Reception	4	82.5%	
Year 1	12	86.0%	
Year 2	9	93.80%	
Year 3	15	91.9%	
Year 4	21	93.0%	
Year 5	25	94.1%	
Year 6	20	97.7%	
Year 7	20	96.5%	
Year 8	22	85.5%	
Year 9	44	88.0%	
Year 10	48	85.5%	
Year 11	64	70.2%	

2023/24 Unauthorized absence

2021/22 Unauthorised absence		2022/23 Unauthorised absence		2023/24 Unauthorised absence	
Whole year average	2.90%	Whole year average	4.44%	Whole year average	4.29%
December 2021	2.54%	December 2022	4.44%	December 2023	3.8%
March 2022	2.37%	March 2023	5.22%	March 2024	4.4%
July 2022	3.68%	July 2023	3.92%	July 2024	4.7%

2023/24 Persistent and Severe Absence

2023/24 Persistent absence (Dorset)	2023/24 Persistent absence (National)	2023/24 Severe absence (Dorset)	2023/24 Severe absence (National)
28%	29.5%	6.0%	9.5%
2022/23 Persistent absence (Dorset)	2022/23 Persistent absence (National)	2022/23 Severe absence (Dorset)	2022/23 Severe absence (National)
31.25%	29%	4.4%	8.4%

Appendix 4: Exclusions

Suspensions 2023/24

Year		Episodes	Children	Male	Female
Primary	0	1	1	1	0
	1	1	1	1	0
	2	0	0	0	0
	3	12	2	1	1
	4	0	0	0	0
	5	4	4	4	0
	6	5	2	2	0
Secondary	7	0	0	0	0
	8	17	6	3	3
	9	33	13	10	3
	10	38	13	8	5
	11	32	11	5	6
Sum		143	53	35	18

Suspensions by cohort educated in Dorset Schools

(186 children educated in Dorset Schools)

Year		Episodes	Children
Primary	0	0	0
	1	0	0
	2	0	0
	3	12	2
	4	0	0
	5	2	2
	6	5	2
Secondary	7	0	0
	8	9	3
	9	20	6
	10	14	7
	11	22	7
Sum		84	29

Suspensions by cohort educated outside Dorset Schools

(149 children educated in Dorset Schools)

Year		Episodes	Children
Primary	0	1	1
	1	1	1
	2	0	0
	3	0	0
	4	0	0
	5	2	2
	6	0	0
Secondary	7	0	0
	8	8	3
	9	13	7
	10	24	6
	11	10	4
Sum		59	24

Suspensions with SEN detail

SEN Status	Episodes	Children	% Suspended Children
Education Health and Care Plan	75	26	49.10%
Recorded SEN (inc EHCP)	132	20	86.80%
No SEN	11	7	13.20%

NB - Based on Roll Yr R- 11 (325 Pupils)

Suspensions by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Episodes	Children	% Suspended Children
WBRI - White British	138	49	92.4%
MWAS – White and Asian background	3	2	3.8%
WOTH - White Any other background	1	1	1.9%
OTH - Any Other	1	1	1.9%
Sum	143	53	

NB - Based on Roll Yr R- 11 (325 Pupils)