



Dorset Virtual School Annual Report 2024/25

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Foreword from Miriam Leigh, Head of Children Thriving in Education

It is a privilege to be the Head of Service with responsibility for the work of the Virtual School including the extended role of the Virtual School Head.

The Dorset Virtual School Annual Report for 2024/25 reflects a year of growth, innovation, and unwavering commitment to improving educational outcomes for our children in care, care leavers, and those supported through our extended strategic role—including children with a social worker and those in kinship care arrangements.

At the heart of the work is a shared vision: that every child and young person we support thrives in a setting where they feel safe, included, understood, and empowered to succeed. This report showcases the resilience and achievements of our children and young people, the dedication of our carers and educators, and the continued strategic efforts of the Virtual School team to advocate for and champion educational equity.

Throughout the year, our partnerships, expanded our team, and implemented targeted interventions to address attendance, exclusions, and engagement have been strengthened. The data-driven approach, combined with a deep commitment to the voice of children and young people and belonging, has led to celebrating successes and identifying areas for continued development.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the work of the Virtual School, challenges, and priorities, and serves as a testament to the collaborative working practices.

Introduction

Dorset Virtual School is a proud educational advocate for our children. Our vision for our children is that they thrive in the right educational setting; they attend, feel included and listened to and are understood, to prepare them to 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 2024 – 25. 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 activity days and residential trip 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 and understand 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 Dorset Virtual School's work during the academic year 2024 – 25 and is the key educational advocacy service of Dorset's Education Service within the Children's Services Directorate for Dorset's Children in Care,

Care Leavers, children with a Social Worker, children in Kinship Care arrangements and children previously looked after.

The Virtual School is ambitious for its children and young people and ensures that our partner educational settings have high expectations and aspirations for the educational outcomes to ensure that life chances are improved. The Virtual School has strong oversight and challenge from the Virtual School Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board.

A year in summary

2024/25 has been a year of expansion and transformation within the team to support all children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements alongside our work with our Children in Care and Care Leavers and has given the opportunity to build relationships with our partners to ensure that our children and young people have the opportunity to achieve and be successful.

We have focused on highlighting and celebrating belonging and inclusion within our work and practice, implementing alternatives to suspensions and enhancements of our bespoke offers for our children alongside implementing focused monitoring and support for all children with a Social Worker within the locality teams and partners.

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. 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:

- Reduction in suspensions for Children in Care (10% of cohort vs 15% in 2023/24 37 vs 50 children)
- Ensured that there has been no increase in suspensions for children with a social worker: 8% (23 children) Child Protection and 15% (178 children) Child in Need compared to 24 children (Child protection) and 178 children (Child in Need)
- Reduction in the number of permanent exclusions for Children in Care (1 child), children on Child Protection Plans (5 children) and Children in Need (20 children)
- Proactive approach to alternative to suspensions launched
- Relaunch of the 4th Knowledge Exchange Programme in collaboration with University College London - working in partnership with a cross-phase group of specialist and mainstream providers to develop practice
- Proactive staff training offer implemented
- Increase in attendance 88% (Children in Care), 77% (children on Child Protection plans) and 80% for Children in Need
- Maintained low use of Reduced Timetables in 24/25 with 7 children currently on the register (Children in Care)
- Increase in the number of Post 16 who are in Education, Employment or Training (72.10% monthly average) (Children in Care)
- Outstanding PEP Quality Assurance (95% good or outstanding)
- Weekly celebrations of 165 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers
- Organisation of one residential opportunity for children from year 7-11, working in partnership with Jamie's Farm

- Development of our support for children in kinship care arrangements
- Organisation and delivery of a range of extra-curricular activities in response to our children's voices
- Good outcomes for phonics, year 4 multiplication check, Key Stage 2 SATs, GCSE and Post 16

We need to focus on:

- Improving attendance for those children with severe absence (50% attendance or less)
- Enhancing our offer for our children living in Kinship Care arrangements
- Embedding our children's voice within our work
- Working with locality practitioners and partners to develop good practice to reduce suspensions, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs
- Develop a robust monitoring report for children with a Social Worker who are Electively Home Educated in preparation for Children's Wellbeing Bill.
- Develop targeted programmes for young people in Key Stage 2, 4 and 5 to support education, employment and training.
- Develop the work of the wider extended role in supporting children with a Social Worker.

Virtual School Structure and responsibilities

The Virtual School is led by the Service Manager/ Virtual School Headteacher. The Virtual School team delivers their work within Dorset Council localities, enabling best practice to be disseminated and shared 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.

In November 2024, the Virtual School team was expanded to include a Team Manager with oversight for children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements and an Inclusion Lead to support these young people and families alongside locality practitioners. This ensures that the Virtual School can champion the educational attendance, attainment and progress of all children with a social worker.

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.
- One Team Manager with responsibility for children with Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements
- One Inclusion Lead with responsibility for ensuring the monitoring of attendance, progress and inclusion for children with Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements
- Thirteen Virtual School Leads (11.8 FTE): responsibilities are for a case load of, on average 45 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 settings 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 2024/25, these whole school

responsibilities led to the development of an alternative to suspension package, improved tracking processes for children with a Social Worker and a bespoke training offer for all settings to access.

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 2025/26 has set three strategic priorities with an overarching aim to ensure that all children within the Virtual School are ambitious around education and feel they belong. (further details in appendix 1):

A programme of half-termly Continuous Professional Development is in place for the Virtual School Team. CPD training themes in the academic year 2024/25 have included:

- Emotionally based school avoidance
- Understanding the Early Years Wellcom Programme
- Using Welfare Call to monitor attendance effectively
- Target setting
- Changes to children previously looked after
- New interventions to support learning
- Linking EHCP outcomes to PEP targets

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 Advisor (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.

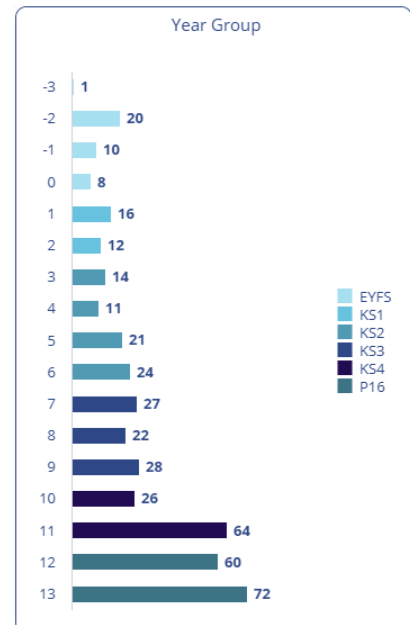
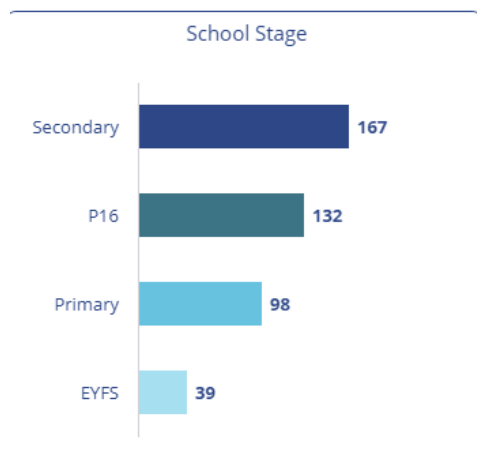


The Virtual School work with children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements or previously looked after from the age of 2 to the end of the academic year following their 18th birthday. This allows the Virtual School team to support settings and our Social Work teams to champion the educational progress and outcomes for these young people and ensure that our children's voice is heard throughout their educational career. Responsibility and oversight for the extended role of the Virtual School was moved within the team in November 2024 with a Team Manager and Inclusion Lead taking a lead to improve outcomes for this group of children and young people.

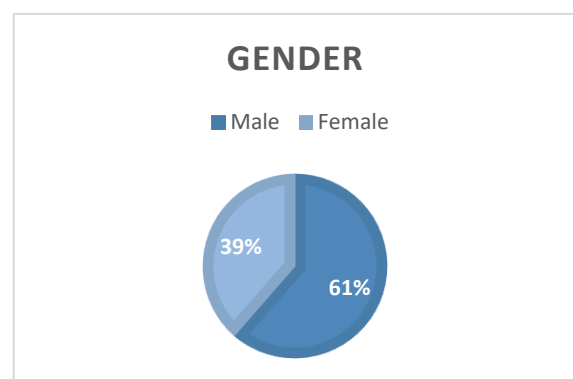
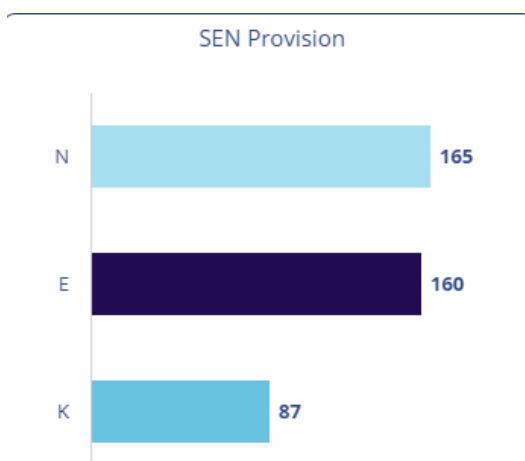
School roll

Children in Care and Care Leavers

At the end of the reporting period, 491 children and young people were part of our school as Children in Care or Care Leavers. 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 in Early Years in 2024/25. The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the number of children seeking asylum this year with 41 young people listed as unaccompanied from 8 to year 13.

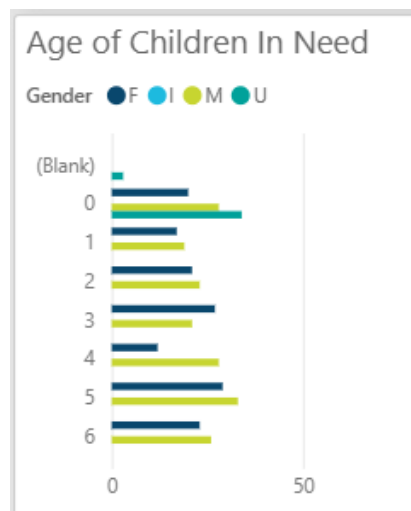
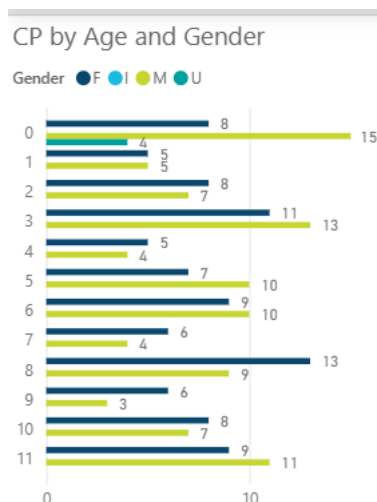


The Virtual School Children in Care cohort is 61% male, with 58% of our young people living in County. 37% of our children have an EHCP and a further 20% of our cohort have an identified SEN need. In terms of SEN, 63% of our children have SEMH listed as their primary need (55% in 2023/24) with a further 32% listing complex needs.



Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans

At the end of the reporting period, 274 children and young people on Child Protection Plans and 1165 children and young people on Child in Need plans sat within the extended role of the Virtual School.



The Virtual School has a higher number of young people across Key Stage 4 and 5 and an increasing number of children in Early Years in 2024/25. The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the number of children seeking asylum this year with 41 young people listed as unaccompanied from 8 to year 13.

The Virtual School Children in Need cohort is 54% male and on Child Protection Plans is 49% male, with 24% of our Children in Need and 14% of our children in Child Protection having an EHCP. Additionally, four children on Child Protection Plans and 22 Children in Need are currently electively home educated.

Admissions and schools attended

Dorset Virtual School aim to ensure that our Children in Care attend settings that have been rated as rated as Outstanding or Good by Ofsted. Due to changes in Ofsted inspections during 2024/25, it has been difficult to analyse the data for this. However, the Virtual School ensure that any Ofsted reports, monitoring reports and improvement plans are scrutinised prior to our children starting a new school to ensure that the school is the right choice for our children.

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. 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 2024-2025, none of our children were in or moved to existing Ofsted 'Inadequate' settings.



74% of our children and young people attend a mainstream or Learning Centre setting, 65% are in Early Years settings and 17% of our children and young people are in specialist settings.

Educational engagement

Attendance

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 2024 - 2025 is provided in Appendix 3.

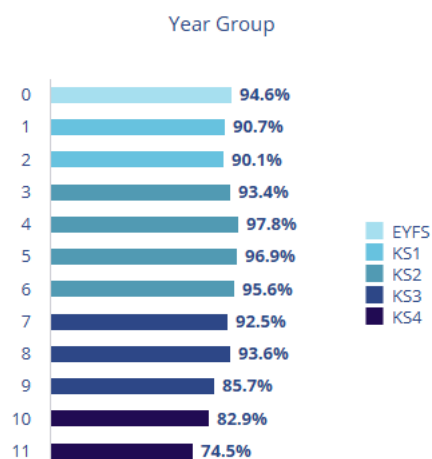
Our ambition is to ensure that all our children thrive and achieve through the targeted monitoring of and challenging of attendance within the Virtual School. This also includes the reduction of persistent absence and unauthorised absence.

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 above the Welfare Call Local Authorities average (88.0% compared to 87%) and slightly above 2023/24 (87%).

All year groups are above 90% attendance with the exception of year 9, year 10 and year 11. Additionally, there are 44 children with 100% attendance (25 in 2023/24), 160 children with above 95% attendance (54%) and 187 children with above 90% attendance (63%).

Attendance for children with an EHCP was slightly lower compared to the whole cohort (86.0%) with the lowest attendance seen in year 2 (78.4%) and year 11 (77.7%). However, the remaining year groups were all at or above 90% attendance for the year.

Attendance for children with a SEN need was higher compared to the whole cohort (91.2%) with the lowest attendance seen in year 11 (72.7%).



Unauthorised absence is defined as any absence that has not been agreed by school. Unauthorised absence has slightly reduced this year to 3.99% compared to 4.29% in 2023/24. This accounts for 133 children having at least one unauthorised mark during 2024/25. 46% of these children were in KS4 with 59% of unauthorised marks were from males and 45% having an EHCP. There has been an increase in unauthorised absence this year for children seeking asylum with 11% of the unauthorised marks for this cohort of children.

Persistent absence is defined as attending less than 90% of school sessions. Persistent absence figures have slightly decreased since the previous year. 25.8% of our children have had persistent absence compared to 28% 2023/24. Our persistent absence marks are in line with to the Welfare Call average at 29.5%. This accounts for 91 children during the year with below 90% attendance. There is particular concern for children in year 11 (39 children with below 90% attendance) and year 1 (7 children with below 90% attendance) Further analysis of year 1 children is that 6 children were new into care during the year and 14 of the 39 children in year 11 were also new into care during the year.

Severe Absence is defined as attending 50% or less. There has been an increase of children with severe absence (9% of our children) compared to 4.4% 2023/24. Dorset Virtual School have lower levels of severe absence compared to the Welfare Call average of 10.28% for 2024/25.

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 Pandemic.

Current attendance is improving overall but the Virtual School needs to focus on children with persistent absence; 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 Virtual School Inclusion Monitoring Board 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 Student Progress meetings and oversight is via the monthly Extended Leadership Performance Board. 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 Need and Child Protection Plans

National data for attendance will not be released until Spring 2026 as a comparison. Dorset Children in Need overall attendance stands at 78.68% whilst attendance for children on Child Protection plans stands at 77.12% which is a slight improvement on the previous year (76%). There are concerns around persistent absence (Child Protection 59% and Children in Need 53%) and severe absence (Child Protection 15% and Children in Need 16%) and this is an area to focus on in 2025/26, working in collaboration with locality teams to increase awareness of the impact of attendance for young people.

The Virtual School undertakes weekly cohort attendance monitoring through the Inclusions dashboard to provide tracking of trends for these children. This has enabled the Virtual School Extended Team 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 2024 - 2025 is provided in Appendix 3.

Children in Care Not in Full Time Education

Children in Care

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 Virtual School 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 80 children and young people to full time education. A further 35 young people have closed to the tracker at the end of year 13. 29 children have become a Child Missing Education during the year (reduction from 2023/24) with 9 having EHCPs and 13 being children seeking asylum new into care.

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.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

An Inclusion Monitoring Board is chaired by the Locality Learning and Belonging Service Manager 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 the Virtual School extended team supporting with this. The meeting gives clear oversight of these children and ensures that robust actions are in place to secure suitable full-time education or equivalent.

This year has seen a development of the panel to ensure there is a clear focus on Children in Need and on Child Protection plans to ensure that timely interventions occur. The team are focusing on monitoring the data monthly as on children who are in Need or Child Protection plans vary regularly due to movement in status and this can impact on the data being evaluated. The Virtual School analysis includes all children who have been on a Child in Need or Child Protection plan throughout the year at any point.

Reduced Timetables

Children in Care

The team have focussed on reducing the number of children on reduced timetables with 16 children being opened to reduced timetables in 2024/25 (20 in 2023/24) for a small period of time as a reintegration or transition period. Eleven of these children have been closed during the year with two further children planned to close in September 2025.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

The team have focussed on identifying the children within the cohort and plans to support children back into education through the locality teams. During 2024/25, there have been 25 Children in Need and 4 children on Child Protection plans opened to a reduced timetable. In July 2025, there were 20 Children in Need and one child on a Child Protection remaining on a reduced timetable. The Extended Team are working with the locality Learning and Belonging Service Managers to refocus the Inclusion Monitoring Board so that there is closer monitoring of reduced timetables for these children in 2025/26.

Children missing education

Children in Care

The team have also focused on reducing the number of children who are CME with 29 children opened to the tracker in 2024/25 (Decrease from 31 in 2023/24) with 19 of these

children being CME at the point of coming into care and all being closed to the tracker having returned to school once in care.

This year, 16 of the children have had an EHCP and 13 children being children seeking asylum. 4 children remain open to CME at the end of July, all who 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 Alternative Provision (AP) whilst aiming to engage them with their educational provider.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

The Extended Role team have focused during 2024/25 on monitoring children with a Social Worker who have become CME during the year and the timeframes to return children to education. During 2024/25, 26 Children in Need and 3 children on Child Protection plans became CME. In 2025/26, the extended role team will develop a monthly monitoring system for this cohort of young people to analyse the reasons and timeframes for returning young people to education.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (Post 16)

Children in Care

54 young people have been opened to the tracker as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) during the academic year with 20 closed during the year. This has meant the EET figure for Dorset Virtual School has maintained 72% throughout the academic year. This is a further improvement on 2023/24.

32 Post 16 young people also are employed in part-time or full-time employment or accessing tutoring as their provision. 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.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

Currently, tracking for young people in Post 16 provision is monitored through the Education, employment and training team. The plans for 2025/26 are for closer work with this team considering the child's care status and working alongside the Education Challenge Leads in locality with our settings who will all have access to ALPs data for the academic year. This will ensure more robust support for children with a Social Worker.

Alternative Provision

Children in Care

During 2024/25, there have been 70 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 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

Children in Care

There has been one permanent exclusion during 2024/25 compared to 3 in the previous year (one in county and 2 out of county). The reasons for this permanent exclusion were violent behaviour towards adults and children. The young person returned to another educational setting within three weeks. 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 Virtual School Leads to reduce the risk.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

There have been five permanent exclusions during 2024/25 for Children on Child Protection plans and 20 permanent exclusions during 2024/25 for Children in Need compared to four children subject to a Child Protection Plan and 21 Children in Need in 2023/24. The Extended Team are focusing in 2025/26 on the schools that have permanently excluded children with a Social Worker to consider alternative ways to suspension and preventative approaches.

Suspensions

Children in Care

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.

With a focus on reducing suspensions, 10.43% (41 children) of children had at least one suspension during the academic year compared to the 14.45% (53 children) in 2023/24. This amounted to 41 children being suspended during the year with 83% from secondary school age (59% of these were Key Stage 4). 49% of these children had repeat suspensions during the year (62.2% in 2023/24). Appendix 4 gives a breakdown of suspensions in 2024/25.

A high proportion of suspensions were children with a SEN need (41.5% with an EHCP and 26.8% with a SEN need) and a higher proportion of boys (59%) had at least one suspension compared to girls.

There has been an increase in the number of suspensions from schools out of county with 49% of children suspended being in out of county schools. Reasons for suspensions are persistent disruptive behaviour (18 suspensions), Other (vaping and smoking) (13 suspensions) and verbal abuse towards an adult (10 suspensions).

Due to the work undertaken by the Virtual School, there has been a reduction in suspensions for young people in Dorset secondary schools in 2024/25 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.

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.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

In Dorset there were 5386 suspensions involving 1906 children (6814 suspensions involving 1913 children in 2023/24). Of these, 23 children had a Child Protection Plan (38 in 2023/24) and 190 Children in Need had at least one suspension. Further analysis identifies that 21 of the 23 children on Child Protection plans and 77 of the 190 Children in Need had multiple suspension during the year.

In 2025/26, the focus for the Extended Team will be on Alternatives to suspension training for settings, using the Knowledge Exchange Programme in collaboration with University College London to share best practice as well as focusing the fortnightly Inclusion Monitoring Board on children with a Social Worker. The team will work collaboratively with Education Challenge Leads who 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. The team will work in collaboration with locality Educational psychologists and specialist teachers to support settings with their children.

Elective Home Education

In 2024/25, there were 0 Children in Care, 4 children on Child Protection plans and 27 Children in Need who were electively home educated. Locality Learning and Belonging Teams monitor the home learning offer as part of the statutory role with Social Workers and Family Workers supporting the care aspect to the child's plan. From 2025/26, the Extended Team are collaborating with the locality teams around a focus on children with a Social Worker who are electively home educated to understand reasons for the choice and support for Social Care teams around education to prepare for the Children's Well-being and School's bill.

The experiences and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers

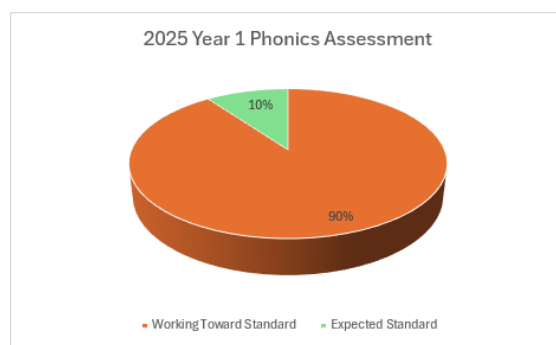
The Virtual School ensure that our children have high aspirations and equity of opportunity for making good progress. Termly progress reports for key stages is produced and this allows close monitoring of progress at a child level through to a cohort level. This allows the Virtual School team to collaborate with teams around our children to ensure that swift and robust support is in place for any child not making good progress that term.

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 2023/24.

Attainment data

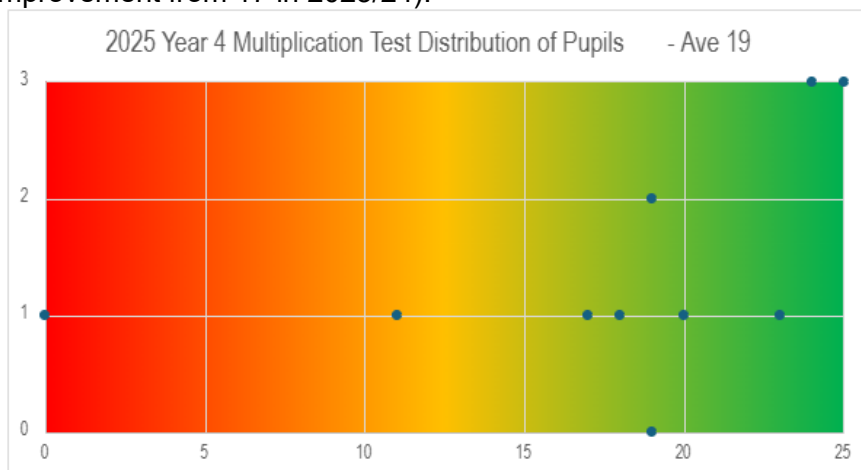
Phonics Screening

There are ten children in year 1 with 100% taking the screening test. 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 2024/25 compared to the previous year where a number of children were disapplied. Three of the children have been with the Virtual School for 12 months plus with seven children joining the Virtual School during year 1 and progress reports throughout the year from teaching staff have been positive with 70% of the children making good or expected progress.



Year 4 multiplication check:

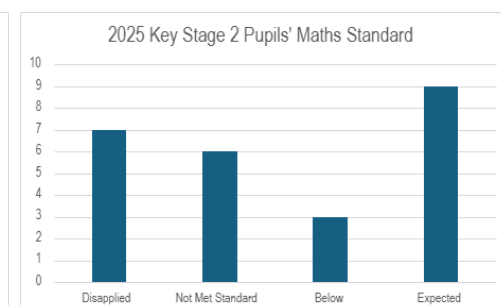
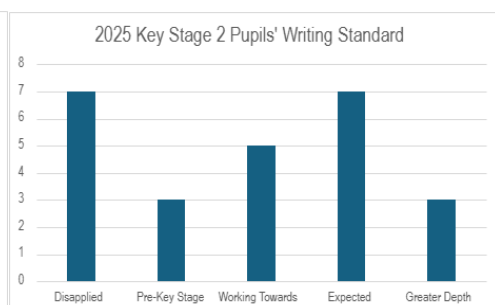
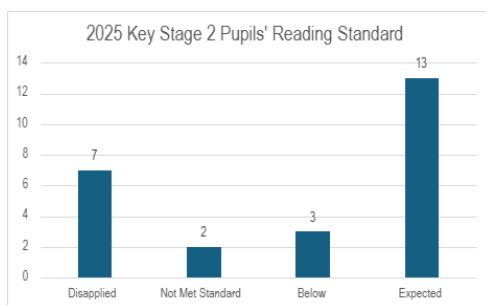
In year 4, there were 19 children on roll. Two children are in specialist provision with both unable to access and disapplied from the assessment. However, the mean average for the year 4 multiplication check for all children is 19. The mean average for Dorset Children in Care is 19 (improvement from 17 in 2023/24).



Key Stage 2:

In year 6, there are 25 children with all children on roll. Fifteen of these children have either an EHCP or SEN need with six children in specialist provision. Seven children did not sit assessments and were disapplied, with six of these children in specialist settings.

36% of our children are working at expected standard in maths, 40% at reading and 52% of our children are working at expected standard for writing compared to 20% for writing and maths and 30% for reading in 2023/24.



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 small numbers of children who are working at below the standard of the test in maths in comparison to reading and this is an area to consider additional interventions when the children reach year 7.

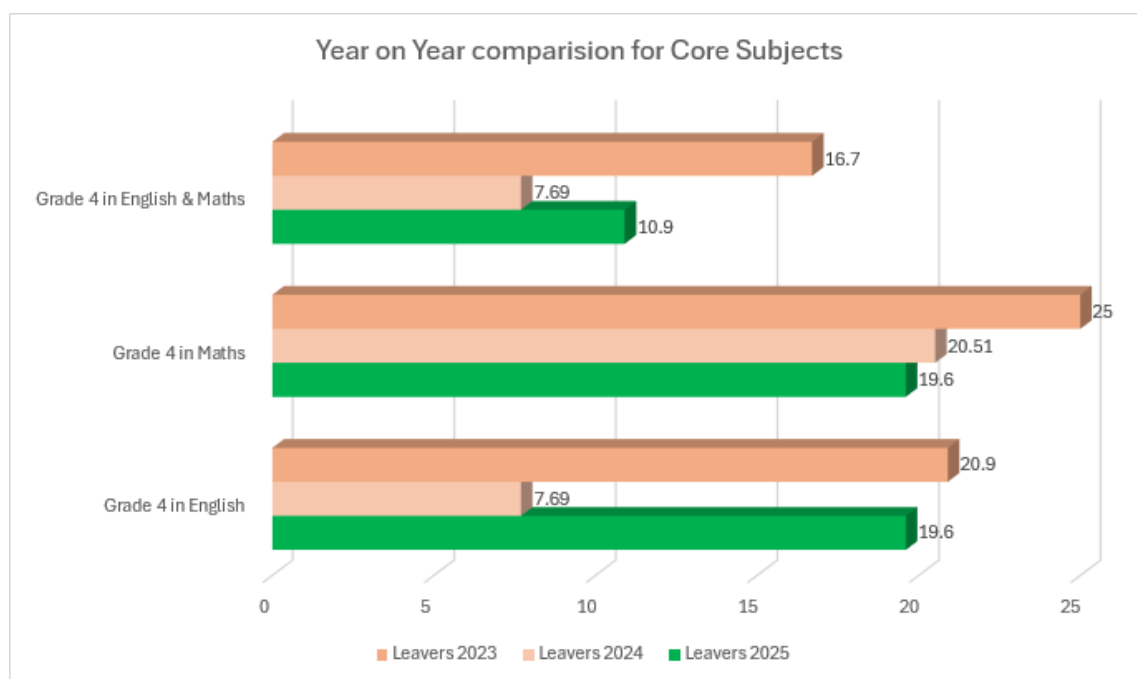
Key Stage 4:

In year 11, there were 59 children on roll during 2024/25 with 16.94% being children seeking asylum. 49% of year 11 have an EHCP and 15% have a SEN need.

67.4% of our young people are in mainstream provision and 32.6% within specialist provision. 4% of our young people (2) were not in education to take examinations.

28% of our young people (13) did not sit exams this year. This is due to six children being in specialist provision and undertaking bespoke qualifications and two children not having a school place as well as one young person seeking asylum who did not sit exams.

We have seen a sustained achievement rate with 19.6% of our cohort achieving a grade 4 or above in maths (20.51% in 2023/24) and a marked improvement with 19.6% achieving a grade 4 or above in English (7.69% in 2023/24).



There has been no discernible difference in GCSE achievement grades for children living in and out of county and this is evidence of the equitable support provided for our young people.

There has been a marked improvement in the number of children achieving grade 5 or above in English (8.7% vs 2.6%) and maths (10.9% vs 5.1%) in 2024/25 compared to the previous year and this is due to targeted interventions for young people, including tutoring, revision resources and targets set during termly PEPs that have focused on final outcomes.

The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the number of young people achieving a grade 3 in English and maths (13% compared to 16.3% in 2023/24). Progress 8 data for our children will not be available until December 2024.

Key Stage 5:

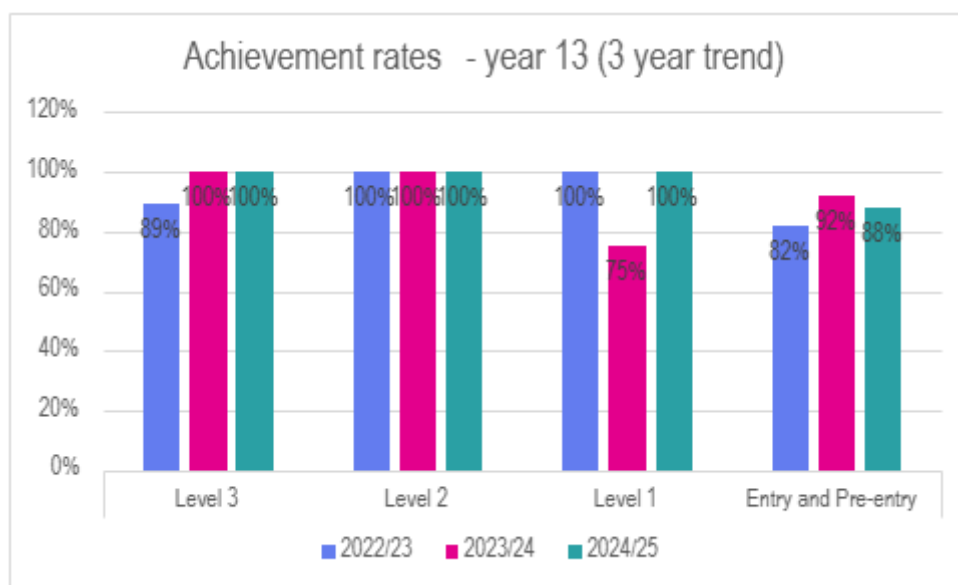
Main qualification (year 13)

There were 77 young people in year 13, Six of the young people are in employment, six are engaged with tutoring and 26 young people were not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). 39 young people were enrolled on provision in further education.

The school had six young people in year 13 undertaking level 3 qualifications with three of these in their final year of their level 3 qualification. 100% passed with all progressing to a university course or higher apprenticeship, ranging from childcare to business.

Additionally, 15 young people in year 13 are unaccompanied young people accessing ESOL courses and Functional Skills maths. Of these, 87% (13) 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, level 1, 2 and 3 programmes. 88% of our young people on Entry Level programmes passed (13 out of 15 young people).



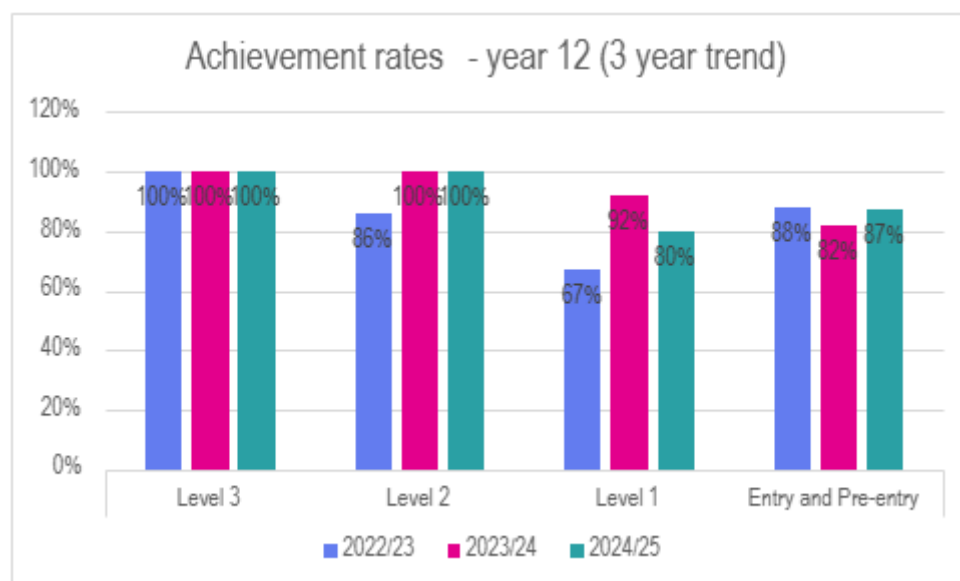
The Virtual School has seen a sustained improvement of year 13 results for our young people on their full-time programmes across all levels of programme and this has been in part due to increased monitoring of this cohort and rapid interventions to engage young people with education and support with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

Main qualification (year 12):

There were 72 young people in year 12 within the Virtual School. Seven of the young people are in employment, 12 are accessing tutoring and 17 young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). 36 young people were enrolled on provision in further education.

In 2024/25, 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 2023/24 with

the exception of our level 1 programmes. This amounts to 1 young person not achieving their full qualification but achieving two of the three elements. The young person will progress onto the final element of their programme in 2025/26.



Outcomes for Children in Need and children on Child Protection plans

This is the first year that Dorset Virtual School have monitored outcomes for Children in Need and on Child Protection plan and children have been listed based on the most recent census data linked to care status.

Key Stage 2

Children in Need are doing less well in year 6 than their peers and compared to national data with 50% working at or above expected in reading, 38% for maths and 33% for writing.

Group	Expected					Higher				
	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing
National All	62%	75%	73%	74%	72%	8%	33%	30%	26%	13%
Dorset All	56%	72%	69%	70%	69%	7%	30%	24%	21%	12%
Dorset CIN	21%	42%	41%	35%	33%	0%	8%	1%	3%	0%

Children on Child Protection plans are doing less well in year 6 than their peers and compared to national data with 52% working at or above expected in reading, 22% for maths and 43% for writing.

Group	Expected					Higher				
	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing
National All	62.1%	75.0%	72.6%	74.0%	72.2%	8.4%	33.3%	29.6%	26.3%	12.8%
Dorset All	56.3%	72.3%	69.5%	69.8%	69.4%	7%	30%	24%	21%	12%
Dorset CPP	17%	48%	43%	22%	43%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%

Support for families and education settings is a focus for the Virtual School Extended team in 2025/26, including liaison with other Local Authorities about tracking data as part of the network boards. The team will also collaborate with Education Challenge Leads within localities to ensure that there are focused interventions such as the Oracy project focusing on our children with a Social Worker.

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 feedback also commented on the consideration of the cultural identity of the child and the whole person being considered within PEPs as well as the improvement in linking PEP targets to EHCP outcomes for our children.

The impact of the work to strengthen the PEP process can be seen in the PEP QA results with 95% of PEPs found to be good or better (93% 2023/24) 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 100% good or outstanding
- Primary 98% good or outstanding
- Secondary 94% good or outstanding
- Post 16 93% good or outstanding

Completion of PEPs within 20 days of the PEP date 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. Overall, 93% of PEPs were completed within 20 days of the PEP date with the remaining PEPs being completed within 25 days.

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 2024	442	18 days

Spring 2025	459	16 days
Summer 2025	495	16 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 2024	55%	72%	94%
Spring 2025	55%	72%	95%
Summer 2025	51%	68%	94%

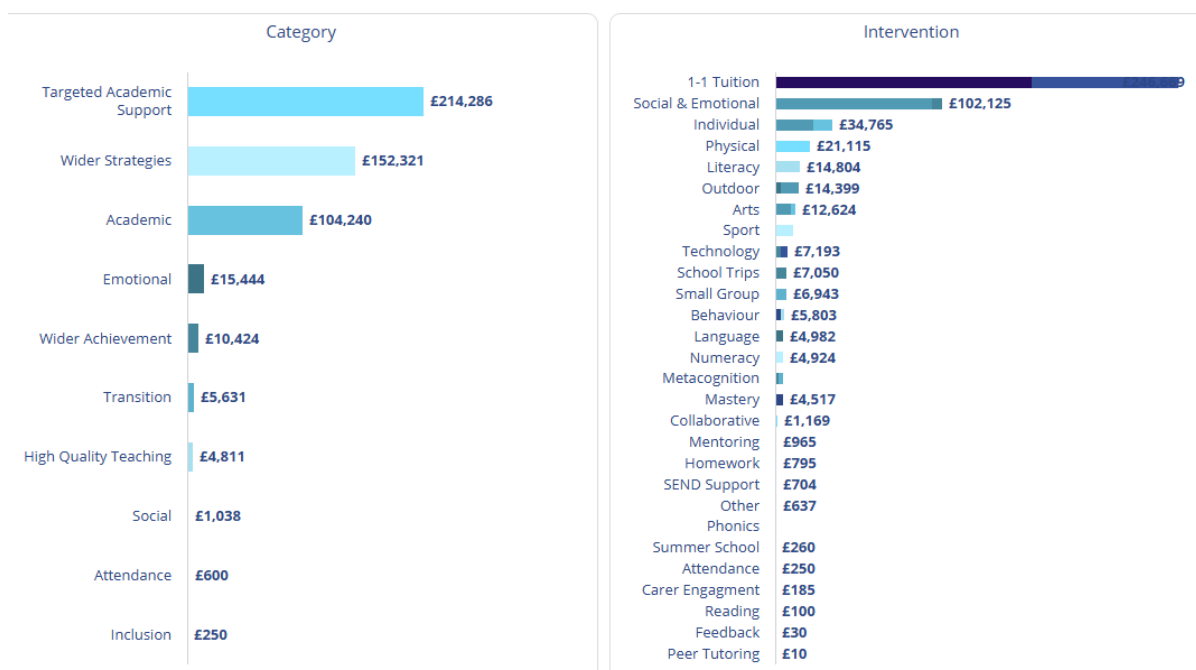
Pupil Premium Plus

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, 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 2024/25, £509,045 of interventions were approved with 58% being spent on secondary school children, 25% on Post 16 young people and 18% on primary and Early Years children. The average pupil premium cost per child of PEP outcomes achieved was £1325 (£383 per outcome). 62.10% was spent on targeted academic support and 29.90% was spent on wider strategies. Targeted academic support interventions include tutoring and small group sessions whilst wider strategies include social, emotional support, trips and arts interventions.

Interventions that were set for our children during the summer term will be fully assessed for their impact by January 2025 so this evaluation is based upon Autumn and Spring term targets. 77% of the interventions were either graded as met or partially met during the Autumn and Spring terms. Of the targets achieved, 57.7% were for academic tutoring, 33.5% was based around emotional and mental well-being and 2.0% based on wider achievement including visits, trips and musical intervention.



23% of the funded targets were marked as not achieved during the year. Of these, 49.5% 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.

16.3% 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.

Funding for our Post 16 young people 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. 67.7% of funding has been used to support 1:1 tutoring and small group lessons, whilst 6.7% has been used to support sport and physical education and 4.9% has been used to support social and emotional well-being interventions. This has resulted in an increase in spending from £63,309 in 2023/24 to £120,080 in 2024/25.

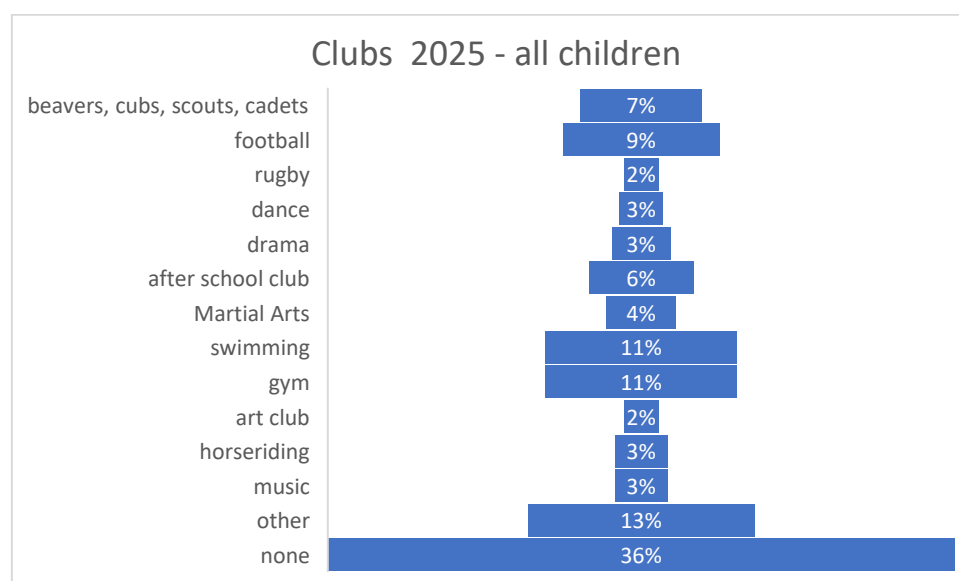
Pupil Voice / Belonging

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 7 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. 95% of children have said that they feel safe in school and now who to talk to if they have worries.

We have used feedback from Coram Voice to impact on our work, including setting out plans to support belonging in schools through the development of a reading list for Children in Care and setting out a reminder for how our young people would like their voices to be heard within their PEP meetings.

Work has been undertaken this year to understand our young people's voice and their interests with 65% of children and young people engage in some form of extra-curricular activity or club outside of education.

- 81% of primary aged children are engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity
- 73% of secondary aged children are engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity
- 52% of Post 16 young people are engaged in some form of extra -curricular activity



54 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 fishing, table tennis, young farmers, badminton, Duke Of Edinburgh, volunteering, youth voice, World War Two enactments, cookery classes, fishing and diving. 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 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 2024/25, 165 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 2025 Virtual School Awards took place in July 2025 at the Tivoli Theatre following young people's feedback around the type of event they would like where they would be able to spend time with their families.

Dorset Virtual School Awards 2025

128 children and young people were nominated and celebrated at this event with five children and young people having an additional celebration from the Corporate Director for Education and Director of Children's Services.

Additionally, twelve 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. The awards provided a valuable opportunity to show our young people, our Designated Teachers, and their supporters just how much they are appreciated and how proud we are of all they've achieved.

Virtual School Book list

In response to our young people's voice about further understanding in education settings about being a child in care, the Virtual School have produced a reading list for all settings with stories about different types of families as well as key themes that our young people wanted to see within their libraries. This has been shared with all settings and Virtual School have utilised its PP+ funding to support some settings to purchase some of the books from the list. Additionally, this resources has been shared with the Dorset Library Service to ensure that our children's voices are heard.

Dorset Virtual School Booklist for Schools



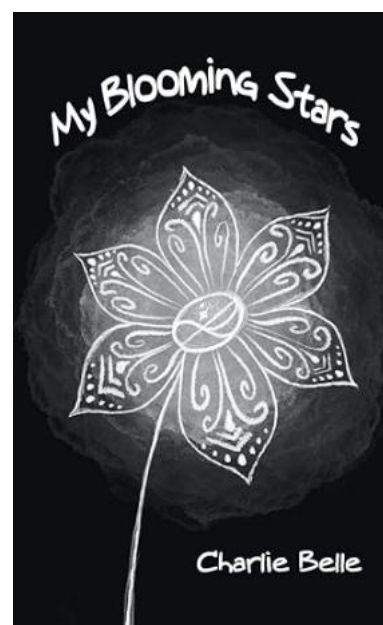
Book Title	Author	Publish Date	Form	Primary/Teen	Topic
Strong and Tough	Rico Hinson-King	August 2022	Picture Book	4-7	Adoption
The Visitors who came to Stay	Annalena McAfee & Anthony Browne	April 1993	Picture Book	2-6	Amalgamating Families
Where the Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak	May 2000	Picture Book	2-6	Angry Feelings

Publication of work

The Virtual School has supported one of our young people to produce and publish their own poems using Pupil premium Plus funding to support the process of meeting with a publishing company and design team to ensure that their work would be recognised. This has been shared with all of our Dorset settings to ensure that our children's voices are being heard. Our young person has said 'This book was built from the words I wrote to help me find solace in a time when all I had was paper and pen. I turned the hurt I was feeling into something that can be shown, to be understood in the only way I knew how. As a lifeline, or simply a release, I used a pen to tell my story. This book is filled with my hardest goodbyes, my most welcome hellos, simple recollections of times past and a telling of a more hopeful future.'

Digital Day workshop

The Virtual School have worked in collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) Health Sciences University



and Bournemouth University (BU) on a digital day on the campuses. This encouraged 10 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 2025/26, culminating in a shared piece of work with the Dorset Music Service alongside.

Residential visits for Children in Care

The Virtual School recognises the importance of building relationships and resilience for our children and during 2024/25 have funded one residential visit to Jamie's Farm in Monmouth, Wales with a focus on children with Emotional Based School absence.

The residential visit allowed the Virtual School to take 6 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 7 to 11 during the trip. 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.

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 (8.2%), 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 2025/26 and further enhance this provision with consideration of the Dorset outdoor learning sites.

Oracy Project for children with a Social Worker

The Extended Team have collaborated with the Education Challenge Leads to implement a bespoke oracy programme aimed at children in Key Stage 2 to improve literacy and oracy. This started on 25th April 2025 involving 12 settings in Chesil. The intended aims of the programme are to improve implementation climate for settings; Develop Accountable Talk knowledge and practice; Begin reflecting on how to support talk more systematically through the curriculum and to have improved knowledge of how to structure and support talk.

There is much research into the significant benefits for disadvantaged pupils where schools have a strong focus on oracy and deliver this in a high quality and consistent way. Outcomes for this work will be seen with the 2025/26 series but progress is being monitored termly by the Extended Team and Education Challenge Leads within the project.

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.

Virtual School and the Network

The Virtual School has evolved its work with its young people from a school council to the Network Board alongside the Youth Voice team, using feedback from the Coram Voice surveys to support. In the academic year 2024-2025 the Virtual School have worked with our young people through the Network and through the Mockingbird constellations to develop an understanding around uniform concerns, views about identity and self and young people have supported the coproduction of the new Kinship handbooks for families and settings. This has led to amendments to the annual awards ceremony with a focus on activities with the family as well as introducing a guide to PEP meetings written by our young people.

Virtual School Projects

Supporting Learning

During 2024/25, the Virtual School supported 81 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 37 Children in Care and 13 Children with a Social Worker to be used as an additional revision resource for examinations with 23 young people making use of the programme during the year.



Supporting our children with SEN

Dorset Virtual School have embedded the learning packs designed for children with a SEN need in 2024/25. These packs have been designed for children in homes with new carers who are waiting on a school place and allow learning to 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. Feedback for the resources has been positive with one family commenting; 'He loves the packs! We are still on the Gruffalo, but it has proven to be an excellent starting point for learning opportunities at home. He is able to talk about the activities we do together with the staff at his Ap. This is proving helpful during the transition in drop off and collection.'

In 2025/26, the Virtual School plan to adapt the resources with a different range of books and resources for older children.

Knowledge Exchange Programme with University College London

The Virtual School partnered for the fourth 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).



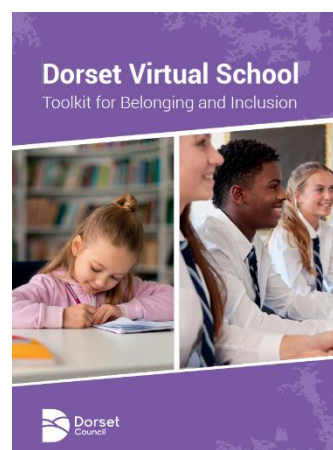
The Knowledge Exchange (KE) programme seeks to support practice in schools and colleges to improve outcomes for children within the Virtual School. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for this group of children and young people. The 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.

This year, seven settings are involved with the project and are focusing on a range of initiatives including a supervision package for staff and subject champions for children within the Virtual School.

A set of case studies is due to be published by UCL demonstrating the impact and learning from each of the projects and the school/college lead for each project will be sharing their work through workshops in the Virtual School Conference in January 2026. The Virtual School is continuing the project with settings in 2025/26, focusing on our expanded role working with children with a Social Worker and those in kinship care arrangements.



As part of the Knowledge Exchange Programme, the participants are contributing towards a Belonging strategy for the Virtual School that can be shared with all settings in 2026.

Dorset Virtual School were invited to be a peer mentor on an advisory panel for University College London supporting another Virtual School with a focus on Post 16 progression and pathways leading to shared practice and improved outcomes for these young people.

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 fourth year running. This initiative encouraged settings to bid for funding to implement a project or creative idea that would support our children within the Virtual School as a cohort within the school to achieve and be successful.

During this period 34 bids were received (27 from Dorset schools) with 21 successful. Projects ranged from resourcing for ELSA and literacy rooms, sensory equipment, indoor and outdoor sensory spaces, table tennis tables for regulation to Virtual Reality headsets for wider learning opportunities and training courses for staff to support emotional well-being of children.

Feedback from settings involved has been positive; 100% said the project had very good or good impact on their children and 100% said the project had an impact on attendance of our children. One setting commented that the funding provided an 'enhancement of our space which we use for direct work with our Children in Care pupils. It is now a private space where they can get ELSA but also other types of interventions, i.e. play therapy and support from social workers'

In terms of impact of the 21 settings that were successful, 5 settings have suspended a young person this year. Of those five settings, 6 children out of 13 children within those settings had 1 suspension this year. In 2025/26, the Virtual School will use the Big Bids process to further support raising the profile of our young people's voice and to support interventions that offer alternatives to suspension.

Virtual Reality training

To support the Extended Role of the Virtual School and children with a Social Worker, we introduced a new training offer in 2024/25, using the Cornerstone Virtual Reality training programme which allows the user to experience the impact of our conversations and interactions with children who may have experienced trauma through the eyes of the child. This is a clinically led, technology enabled behaviour change tool. It is designed to enhance the adults understanding of a child's emotions, trauma and potential triggers with the aim to improve the care, support and guidance they provide, thus improving educational outcomes for our children.

11 staff were trained to deliver sessions with settings, focusing on the impact that adult interactions have with young people. Since January 2025, 24 settings have had the training delivered onsite, with a further 30 participants at the annual conference. 100% of participants said that they session met its aims with high or very high impact and 96% of participants stating that it made them think differently about their practice. One participant feedback that the training was 'excellent; I would definitely recommend this training, and I feel every adult working with children should do it in order for them to have a deeper understanding and

awareness of the needs of children'. In 2025/26, the Virtual School plan to widen this training offer to focus on work with our knowledge exchange settings to consider training for all staff within the setting to encourage cultural changes towards suspensions and belonging. This will be measured over the three terms following the training, considering suspension, attendance and progress data for young people within settings.

Mentoring

Dorset Virtual School recognise the importance of a safe person for our young people in their lives. In 2024/25, we have offered targeted mentoring through Insights Wellbeing to eight young people around next steps in education. Six young people have been referred and mentoring has been offered. In 2025/26, the team will review the offer through half termly meetings.

The Virtual School offered Higher Education mentoring to those young people who have aspirations to study at University. In 2024/25, there was a small uptake from young people who felt that they were able to access the offered programme through alternative methods. In 2025/26 the team are developing a new offer of HE experiences to give the young people some hands on time, rather than the planned virtual meetings.

Pre-16 provision

Building on the 14-16 Programme at Kingston Maurward College in 2023/4, Dorset Virtual School implemented an SLA to work with Weymouth College for a group during 2024/25. The plan was for the young people to access a range of vocational subjects with a view to achieving a qualification; building the confidence of the young people and giving young people a working knowledge of the college and their courses.

The programme needed to be adapted during the year and Dorset Council Outdoor Education Team supported sessions until the GCSE examination period. In spite of the disruptions, the young people achieved Outcomes 2 and 3. The young people developed a confidence between themselves and formed a strong sense of belonging within their own group. The young people were confident to attend and engaged in activities and performed well as a group. All of the young people in year 11 had a progression pathway into year 12. In September 2025, Virtual School have collaborated with Dorset Trade Skills to deliver the intervention. This year the group will be working through Asdan short courses to enable young people to gain academic outcomes in addition to their current school provision. Virtual School staff support the sessions weekly with half-termly monitoring of progress for all young people.

Communication with stakeholders

Dorset Virtual School work with a wide variety of stakeholders to ensure that our children and young people thrive and are successful. During 2024/25, Dorset Virtual School have worked with 39 Local Authorities across the country and 197 provisions for children in Statutory school aged placements and a further 20 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.

Virtual School training

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

During 2024/25, these have included:

- Using Strength Based Language
- PEP interventions and Target setting
- Emotionally based school absence
- Supporting children within the Extended Role
- Hear My Voice (voice of our young people)
- Using Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire to support children



Based on feedback from Designated Teachers, the Virtual School offered its third Virtual School Annual Conference in January 2025. This conference benefitted from Gareth Morewood as our Keynote Speaker who considered how to support all children within the classroom environment 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 considering the physical space as part of inclusive classrooms, changing environment and changing practice, the language that we use and using Virtual Reality to understand relationships.

Feedback from this event was excellent

with 95% stating that the CPD would have a good or significant impact on their practice. The Virtual School are planning a fourth Conference in January 2026 around the concept of 'building belonging'.

Alternatives to Suspensions

The Virtual School have implemented a proactive approach to reducing suspensions for our children and young people. Training has been offered to all locality Child Protection and Child in Need Teams to raise the profile of suspensions and their impact and guidance on reintegration meetings with 80% of team undertaking the training by July 2025 with final teams met in Autumn 2025.

A working group has created a flow chart for schools for decision making around suspensions, a clause for schools to add to behaviour policies when considering children within the Virtual School, created a workplan and 'model lesson' for learning around reason for suspension and produced a new format for the reintegration process.

The team have met with wider colleagues and external stakeholders in the Summer Term 2025 to present the plans with feedback provided.



The team plan to implement these changes during 2025/26 following feedback from our young people in the Autumn Term 2025.

Support for children who are adopted, Post Looked After or in Kinship Care arrangements

The Virtual School aims to ensure outstanding educational achievement for our children who have previously been in care. 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.

The Virtual School has responsibility for supporting educational progress for children in kinship care arrangements. This tracking began in the Summer Term 2025 and has led to support being monitored through the half-termly board meeting in place for children previously looked after. This has led to 95 enquiries from families and settings for children previously looked after and 13 request from families and settings around kinship care. The key queries were related to SEN and admissions. A new handbook to support families and settings around kinship is being implemented from September 2025.

Additional CPD will be delivered to the Virtual School Leads in September 2025 around support for our children previously looked after and the changes to Special Guardianship orders and kinship care. The Virtual School have delivered phase transfer 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. The Virtual School have implemented a one page summary for every child who becomes Previously Looked After in addition to any final PEP.

Support for our Early Years Children

One priority in 2024/25 was to embed the best practice for our children within early years settings. The Virtual School offered targeted CPD for our Virtual School staff in September 2025. The training focused on using Wellcom to support our Early Years children and has led to detailed conversations within PEP meetings to look at the impact of this for our children.

The Early Years PEP in collaboration with Welfare Call has been utilised throughout 2024/25 to excellent effect and this has led to an improvement in the quality of PEPs for our youngest children with 100% of Early Years PEPs being classed as good or outstanding. 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. Plans for 2025/26 to refine this priority will consider how to support all children within the Virtual School in Early Years with focused improvement projects for settings alongside the Best Start in life team as well as working alongside the VSEND programme to produce holistic overviews of our children within the Virtual School that support their educational journey.

Support for our Unaccompanied young people

The Virtual School have built upon its support for our increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people during 2024- 25. 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 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.

Appendix 1: School Development Plan 2025/26

AIM	To ensure that Children within the Virtual School are ambitious around education and feel that 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	(1.1) Improve attainment for Children in Care at Key Stage 2 maths and Key Stage 4 in maths and English and attainment for children with a Social Worker at Key Stage 2 reading, writing and maths (1.2) Reduce the use of suspensions for Children in Care with a SEN need and reduce the number of suspensions for children with a Social Worker (1.3) Develop and deliver a programme of CPD for professionals working with Children within the Virtual School, including collaborative work with UCL (1.4) Improve the attendance of SSA children and remove barriers to belonging in school (1.5) Reduce the number of children missing education, use of reduced timetables and young people who are NEET (1.6) Improve progress and outcomes for children with a SEN need	(2.1) Provide a sense of belonging for Early Years children (2.2) Promoting a sense of belonging for children seeking asylum (2.3) Provide support for settings to better meet the needs of children previously in care and children in Kinship Care arrangements (2.4) Collect and respond to child feedback to improve our service	(3.1) Embed a structured programme for young people with aspirations for higher education (3.2) Embed a personalised programme of mentoring for young people to develop a sense of belonging and resilience in education (3.3) Develop wider learning opportunities and positive experiences (3.4) Embed clear plan to engage with Locality teams through Pathfinder
OUTPUTS	75% engagement with OLEX English and maths programme for all children 75% engagement with online and face to face 1:1 tutoring for Children in Care 65% Children in Care making expected progress in KS2 maths 25% Children in Care achieving grade 4+ in English and maths at KS4 40% Children with a Social Worker making expected progress in KS2 reading, writing and maths - Development of a monitoring system for educational progress for all children with a Social Worker - Development of a package of interventions for English and Maths for all children - To develop/amend recording systems that accurately record <u>attainment</u> for children with a Social Worker - Less than 10% of suspensions in the academic year for Children in Care with SEN 100% Virtual School attendance at reintegration meetings for Children in Care - Less than 13% of suspensions in the academic year for children with a Social Worker	- Implementation of bespoke training for Early Years setting - Implementation of method of capturing the voice of our early years children via most appropriate method 100% of children needing additional support with communication is being monitored through the PEP process. - Collaborate with VSEND operational group on Early Years to reception pathway to implement a next steps pathway for Children in Care and all children with a social worker. 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. - Develop process for targeted handbook and Pupil Premium+ funding - Register of children previously looked after and in kinship care arrangements includes record of advice, guidance or support provided by the Virtual School - Review handbook for children Previously Looked After - Identification and resourcing for children in kinship care arrangements	- Target group of 6 (child in care) young people to participate in initial HE <u>programme</u> and evidence of impact via child voice feedback - Introduce an annual list of University and Post 18 visits - 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 - Implementation of education mentors for children with a Social Worker - Development of an Annual programme of events linked to belonging and child voice - Every child is celebrated at least once during the year - Development of planned collaboration with locality teams to enhance monitoring of children with a Social Worker - Implement monitoring for children supported by the Youth Justice Service

	• Development of process to support children with a Social Worker with more than 3 suspensions in the year. • Develop an annual programme of CPD for professionals (education and Children's Services, Journey to Fostering)) • Collaborate with UCL on their Knowledge Exchange programme • Expand the Virtual Reality training programme for Children's Services • At least 92% statutory school age attendance for Children in Care and 85% for Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans • Less than 3% Unauthorised Absence (all children) • Improve KS4 attendance to at least 90% (all children) • Less than 50% <u>Persistent</u> Absence (Children in Need), 55%(Child Protection) 15% (Children in Care) • 100% of children who are EHE with a Social Worker have timely monitoring • Less than 10% <u>Severe</u> Absence (Children in Need), 7%(Child Protection) 9% (Children in Care) • Monitoring and updating of registers on Welfare Call • 0 CME for longer than 6 weeks • 0 Children on reduced timetables for longer than 6 weeks • At least 80% Post 16 EET • Monitoring of children with a Social Worker with a • Permanent exclusion to ensure that education is in place in a timely manner • embed VSEND within the Virtual School • Develop a monitoring system for children with a Social Worker who receive EOTAS or attend an AP • Develop a monitoring system for Children with a Social Worker who are EHE.	• Development of kinship care handbook • Undertake membership of the Kinship Care Forum • Implementation of a training programme available to families around supporting children previously in care and those in kinship care arrangements. • At least 65% attendance of children at PEPs • At least 75% attendance of SW, PA and EYSAO at PEPs • Implement a guide to our children's voice for our meetings • Review the capturing of our child's voice	
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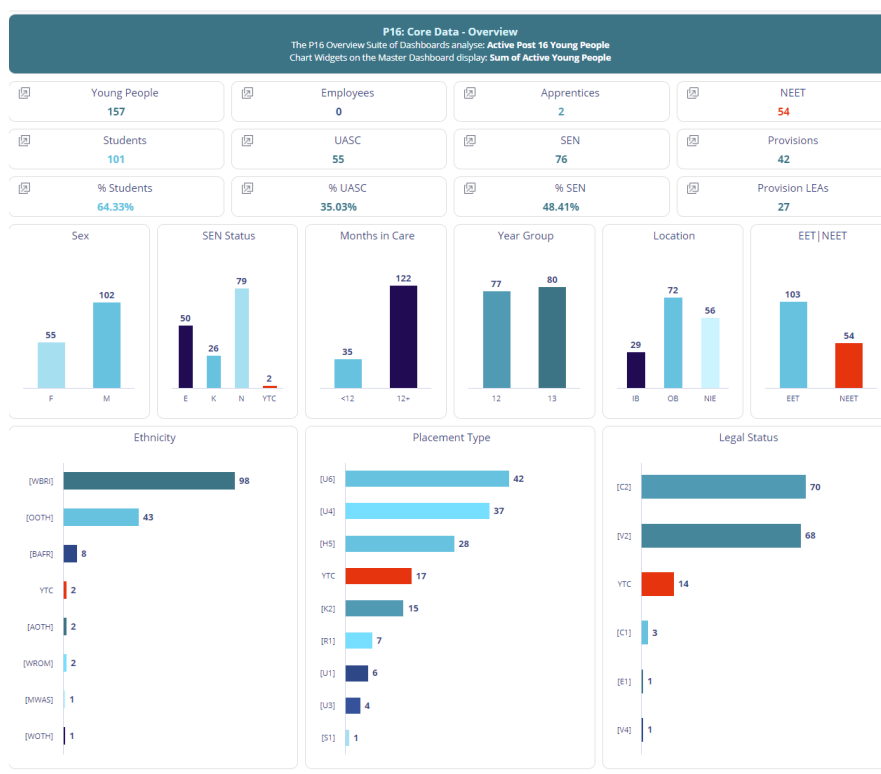
Appendix 2: Virtual School Cohort Statutory School Age and Post 16 2024/25

Please note that the cohort details change regularly and therefore this is a snapshot in July 2025.

Statutory School Age



Post-16



Appendix 3: Attendance for 2024/25

Attendance Trend

Year	Overall absence (%)
2020/21	14.5%
2021/22	11.43%
2022/23	13.3%
2023/24	13.0%
2024/25	12.0%

2024/25 Attendance

Cohort No. @ 31.8.2025	2024-25 (Internal Data)	Sep-24	Jul-25	Overall Attendance
296	Whole Cohort	90.74%	87.10%	88.01%
12	Reception	95.3%	93.2%	94.60%
11	Year 1	94.6%	94.0%	90.70%
12	Year 2	91.7%	86.2%	90.10%
11	Year 3	97.3%	97.3%	93.40%
18	Year 4	98.6%	98.4%	97.80%
23	Year 5	97.4%	96.8%	96.90%
25	Year 6	93.4%	94.9%	95.60%
20	Year 7	95.9%	90.7%	92.50%
25	Year 8	90.1%	93.1%	93.60%
25	Year 9	85.7%	84.8%	85.70%
57	Year 10	86.8%	77.4%	82.90%
57	Year 11	84.8%	46.7%	74.50%
	Persistent Absentees (No.)	55	27	27
	Severe absence (No.)	17	66	91

2024/25 Unauthorised absence

Year	Overall absence (%)
2021/22	2.9%
2022/23	4.44%
2023/24	4.29%
2024/25	3.99%

2024/25 Persistent and Severe Absence

Year	Persistent absence (%)	Severe absence (%)
2022/23	31.3%	4.4%
2023/24	28.0%	6.0%
2024/25	25.8%	9.4%

Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans weekly attendance

Academic year 24/25 starting 2.9.24	Overall Attendance %	Attendance %		
W/E	EH/CIN/CP	CIN	CP	CIN EH
10/01/2025	92.54%	76.53%	75.23%	
17/01/2025	92.58%	76.42%	75.15%	
24/01/2025	92.40%	76.57%	75.12%	
31/01/2025	90.98%	75.04%	77.22%	
07/02/2025	92.45%	75.20%	76.19%	
14/02/2025	92.39%	77.25%	76.50%	
21/02/2025	92.38%	77.25%	76.52%	
28/02/2025	92.39%	77.19%	76.46%	
07/03/2025	92.45%	77.43%	76.68%	
11/3/25 (OFSTED)	92.45%	78.11%	76.74%	
14/03/2025	92.43%	80.06%	73.05%	
21/03/2025	92.41%	79%	76%	
28/03/2025	92.40%	79%	76%	
04/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	
11/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	
18/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	
25/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	75.82%
02/05/2025	92.44%	80.65%	77.89%	75.69%
09/05/2025	92.42%	80.58%	78.01%	75.61%
16/05/2025	92.39%	80.51%	77.87%	75.53%
23/05/2025	92.30%	80.32%	78.35%	75.43%
30/05/2025	92.30%	80.32%	78.35%	75.43%
06/06/2025	92.17%	80.19%	78.26%	75.21%
13/06/2025	92.06%	80.09%	78.48%	75.08%
20/06/2025	91.87%	79.93%	78.42%	74.98%
27/06/2025	91.70%	79.43%	78.38%	74.82%
04/07/2025	91.63%	79.39%	78.85%	74.70%
11/07/2025	93.71%	79.60%	79.23%	74.73%
18/07/2025	93.69%	79.57%	79.57%	74.69%

Appendix 4: Exclusions

Suspensions 2024/25

Year		Episodes	Children	Male	Female
Primary	0	0	0	0	0
	1	3	2	2	0
	2	0	0	0	0
	3	1	1	1	0
	4	2	1	1	0
	5	0	0	0	0
	6	4	3	3	0
Secondary	7	8	2	2	0
	8	3	3	2	1
	9	36	10	4	6
	10	29	11	6	5
	11	25	8	3	5
Sum		111	41	24	17

Suspensions by cohort educated in Dorset Suspensions by cohort educated outside Dorset

Year		Episodes	Children	Year		Episodes	Children
Primary	0	0	0	Primary	0	0	0
	1	3	2		1	0	0
	2	1	1		2	0	0
	3	0	0		3	0	0
	4	0	0		4	2	1
	5	0	0		5	0	0
	6	3	2		6	1	1
Secondary	7	7	1	Secondary	7	1	1
	8	0	0		8	3	3
	9	19	5		9	17	5
	10	20	5		10	9	6
	11	8	5		11	17	3
Sum		61	21	Sum		50	20

Suspensions with SEN detail

SEN Status	Episodes	Children	% Suspended Children
Education Health and Care Plan	49	17	41.5%
Recorded SEN (inc EHCP)	93	28	68.3%
No SEN	18	13	31.8%

Total	111	41	
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NB - Based on Roll Yr R- 11 (322 Pupils)

Suspensions by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Episodes	Children	% Suspended Children
WBRI - White British	105	35	85.4%
MWAS – White and Asian background	2	1	2.4%
MOTH -	1	1	2.4%
MWBA -	1	1	2.4%
WOTH - White Any other background	1	1	2.4%
OTH - Any Other	1	2	2.8%
Sum	111	41	

NB - Based on Roll Yr R- 11 (322 Pupils)