

Report to:	EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD
Date:	16 January 2024
Reporting Officer:	Jane Sowerby, Assistant Director of Education
Subject:	VIRTUAL SCHOOL AND COLLEGE ANNUAL REPORT
Report Summary:	A summary of the activities and outcomes of the Virtual School and College 2022/23 and improvement plans for 2023/24.
Recommendations:	That the contents of the report and improvement priorities be noted and supported.
Corporate Plan:	<p>The contents of this report links with the following elements of the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>Starting and Living Well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirations and through learning and moving with confidence from childhood to adulthood • Resilient families and supportive networks to protect and grow our young people. <p>Opportunities for people to fulfil their potential through work, skills and enterprise.</p>
Policy Implications:	There are no policy implications.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>The work of the Virtual School and College team is funded by a ring fenced Pupil Premium Plus grant, Virtual Heads Grants and Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus. The allocations for the financial year 2023/24 are:</p> <p>Pupil Premium Plus £1.290m</p> <p>Virtual Heads Grants £0.148m</p> <p>Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus £0.068m</p> <p>For the 2022/23 academic year grant funding was received for Covid Recovery Premium of £0.136m and the National Tutoring Programme of £0.044m. The expenditure against these grants is in line with grant conditions.</p> <p>The work and team costs will be contained within this financial envelope.</p>
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	None.
Risk Management:	There is a risk that our cared for children will not achieve their potential if statutory functions are not carried out.
Access to Information:	NON-CONFIDENTIAL
	This report does not contain information, which warrants its consideration in the absence of the Press or members of the public.

Background Information: The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Rachael Weeden – Virtual School and College Head Teacher



Telephone: 0161 342 4057



e-mail: Rachael.Weeden@tameside.gov.uk

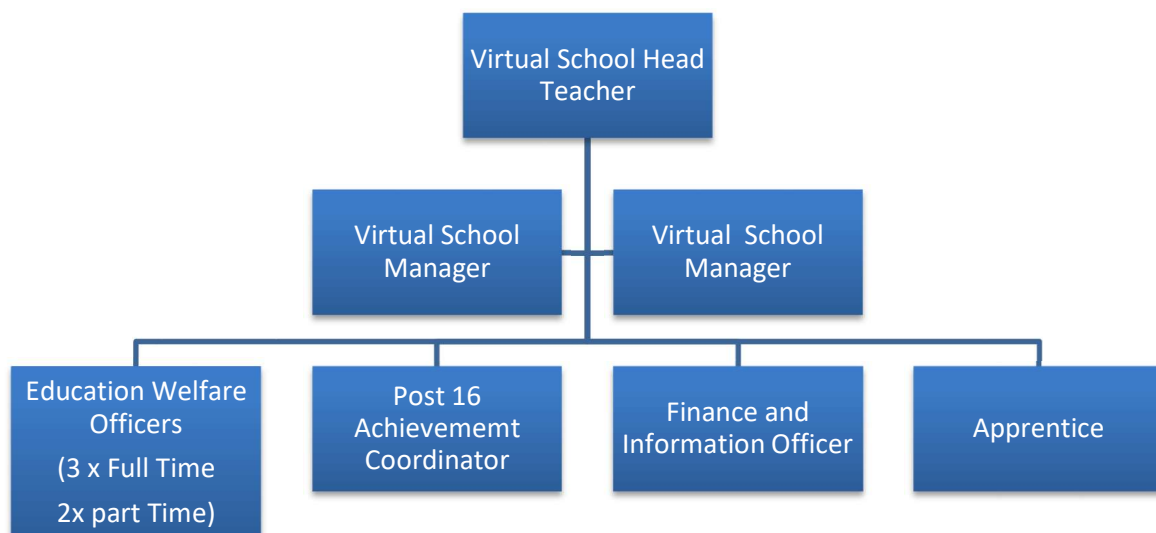
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report summarises key changes that have taken place within the Virtual School and College in the last academic year and sets out plans and priorities for the forthcoming year. The data contained within is drawn from Looked After Call, Children's Social Care Systems, Capita One and internal reports. The data is accurate but unvalidated and is therefore subject to change.

2. VIRTUAL SCHOOL CONTEXT AND OFFER FOR CARED FOR AND CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN

2.1 The Virtual School and College launched a new team structure in April 2022. This was as a result of a full service review and redesign, which was undertaken in light of the introduction of the extended duties of the Virtual School Head Teacher to include strategic oversight for children with a social worker. In order to be able to complete these duties, additional capacity was required. The recruitment process to fill the additional roles created by this restructure was completed in September 2022. In addition, in March 2023 the Virtual School experienced a change in leadership with a new Virtual School Head Teacher being appointed. The academic year 2022/23 was, therefore, characterised by the identification and implementation of new systems, made possible due by the expansion of the team and by responding to staffing and leadership changes.

2.2 The below graphic provides an overview of the team structure. There is a wide variety of experience offered by the post holders in the team, from both social care and education fields. The Virtual School Head Teacher is a qualified Teacher and SENDCo. There are two other qualified teachers within the team; three team members with experience working within attendance at both school and LA level and a member of the team with varied experience across social care. Our post 16 achievement coordinator role is a post hosted by Tameside College. More detail of this role is laid out later in the report, however this post holder has a wide range of experience within further education. Our apprentice role has recently been filled, providing additional administration capacity. The experience within the team ensures that there is a high level of expertise available to offer both support and appropriate challenge to partners.



2.3 Casework is allocated across the team with all members able to support a range of needs at all key stages, however key priorities are monitored and tracked by team members with expertise in that area. This has allowed the forging of key relationships with services and

schools and the development of procedures to support our key initiatives. Members of the team are thus allocated to monitor and have oversight of:

- Attendance
- Exclusions
- SEND
- Post 16 and care leavers
- Training and development

2.4 Members of the team are also allocated to specific schools where additional support or challenge is required. Team members provide both educational support for young people and bespoke training for staff and leaders at these schools.

2.5 The Virtual School Head Teacher reports directly to the Assistant Director for Education and is a member of the Education Management Team and Directors Management Team. This provides a good platform for influencing strategic planning. It also promotes close working relationships with Heads of Service within both Education and Social Care.

2.6 Our work to support cared for and care experienced children and young people is varied. Our team acts as a key link between social care colleagues and schools offering advice and guidance on a range of educational issues. The team support social workers and schools by attending PEP and other child-centred meetings and providing advice and strategies to address educational concerns, such as attendance, suspension, attainment, SEND needs to name but a few. We have an open-door policy, with excellent connections with both our social work colleagues and schools, who have ready access to our support. We provide suggestions and signposting for initiatives to support children and young people to access education and be successful and support and challenge schools to make the most of the Pupil Premium Plus Grant that is allocated to them. The Virtual School also facilitates access to professional support services, such as Educational Psychology, tuition and mentoring and therapeutic coaching approaches via partnerships with providers both in and out of the local authority. We take an active role in quality assuring alternative provision accessed by cared for children and support schools to ensure this is used appropriately. We facilitate a wide variety of training, which is detailed later in this report and have extended this offer over this academic year. Our training reaches social care colleagues, foster carers and schools and has been available as online training sessions, face to face networking meetings, e-briefings and newsletters and is delivered in partnership with the educational psychology service. More details of all these initiatives and plans for their development is laid out later in this report.

3. OUR COHORT

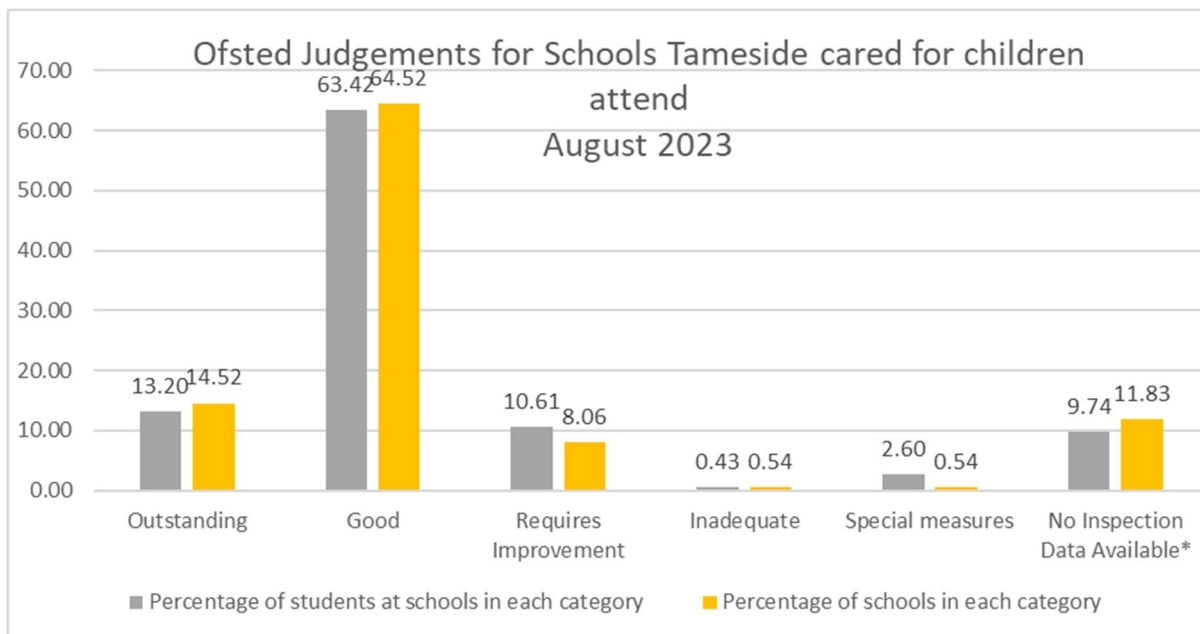
3.1 At the end of 2022/2023 academic year there were 515 cared for children on Tameside's Virtual School roll from Reception to Year 13. At the end of the academic year there were 466 cared for children in Reception to Year 11 attending 191 separate schools across 41 local authorities. The table below summarises the type of education provision attended by Tameside cared for pupils. 83% of pupils attend a mainstream setting, 15% attend a specialist setting with a further 2% attending provision at Tameside PRU, which is also the LA specialist SEMH provision for KS4. 33% of pupils attend school in other local authorities.

Cohort Data	Autumn Term 2022	Spring Term 2023	Summer Term 2023
	Total at 3.1.23	Total at 3.4.23	Total at 7.8.23
Cared for Children in Total (R – Y11)	419	405	466
Cared for Children in Total (Y12 – 13)	122	120	49
Totals	541	525	515
Number of individual schools (during each term)	170	176	191
Pupils attending Tameside schools (during each term)	295	301	316
Number of local authorities (not including Tameside) (during each term)	39	39	41
Pupils attending schools out of borough (during each term)	133	144	155
Pupils not on a school roll (on the day data was generated)	9	5	10
Number of pupils in mainstream schools	359	368	386
Number of pupils within Pupil Referral Service (White Bridge College PRS is the LA Specialist SEMH provision)	7	12	11
Number of pupils in specialist provisions	58	60	68
Number of pupils in schools attached to residential placements	6	5	4

4. OFSTED GRADING

- 4.1 At the end of the 2022/2023 academic year, 79% of Tameside's cared for children in reception to year 11 attended 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools. 13% of Tameside's cared for children attended schools rated to be 'Outstanding'. The Virtual School team prioritises attendance at termly PEP meetings for those children and young people who attend a school rated less than good. We have one school, which received a special measures Ofsted grading during the last academic year, and one with an existing inadequate judgement, both of which had children and young people already on roll at the time of judgement. These schools are allocated named members of the team to attend PEPs where needed and support with any educational concerns. Additional training and resources have been provided to both schools, by their named Education Welfare Officer, to ensure the support available to children who attend is of a high quality. One of these schools has since been re-inspected and is no longer inadequate. The other is undergoing a sponsored academy order.
- 4.2 Where a child already attends a school which is judged to be less than good before becoming a looked after child or the school receives a lower grade at inspection whilst the pupil is already at the school, the Virtual School Head must consider whether a fall in Ofsted grading would

justify disrupting a child's education with a school move. Progress of pupils attending schools rated less than good is monitored through PEP QA and the placement of new pupils at these school is carefully considered, in collaboration with social care colleagues, to ensure a child centred decision is made. Schools rated RI are also offered additional training and support by Virtual School team members and the Virtual School Head Teacher, who works closely with the Head of School Improvement and Partnership to monitor and support schools rated as less than good where cared for children attend.



*Schools that are awaiting inspection due to being a new school or academy conversion or schools with no grade that are based in Scotland or Wales.

5. TAMESIDE CARED FOR CHILDREN ATTENDANCE

5.1 The average attendance last year for all our cared for children was 87%. For children who were cared for 12 months+, the average attendance was 89%. For children who were cared for less than 12 months, the average attendance was 76%.

Average attendance by Key Stage		
	Whole Cohort	In care 12 months +
Early Years	95%	97%
KS1	94%	95%
KS2	95%	95%
KS3	88%	91%
KS4	70%	73%
Average attendance by Phase		
Primary Phase	95%	96%
Secondary Phase	79%	82%
Pupils specialist provisions (all)	78.9%	
Pupils in Tameside Specialist provision (exc PRS)	91.9%	

5.2 Persistent Absence (PA) Severely Persistently Absent (SPA)

The overall Persistent Absence rate for all Tameside compulsory school age cared for children for the year 2022-2023 was 24%. This is slightly above the national average from academic year 2021-22 PA rate, which is reported to be 22.5%. However this is the average for all children, not just cared for children, suggesting the PA rate for Tameside cared for children is broadly in line with national averages. However, we do recognise that there is a greater difference than with the Tameside PA average (reported at 20.1%). For this reason, addressing PA and SPA continues to be a priority with details later in the report on specific measures to address this.

Total Number of PA pupils	113
Primary	15
Secondary	98
Total Numbers of SPA pupils	33
Primary	2
Secondary	31

6. ATTENDANCE ACTION PLAN FOR 2023-2024

- 6.1 Tameside Virtual School has strong practice around attendance and the team holds a wide range of experience in this field. However, we recognise that absence from school is a significant issue and poor attendance presents the biggest barrier to good attainment. As a result addressing the issue of persistent and severely persistent absence is a core focus for the Virtual School.
- 6.2 Our 2022/23 data analysis has highlighted a number of key priorities for the next academic year and as a result we have strengthened our processes for monitoring attendance and providing timely intervention when attendance is an identified concern, as well as increasing our multi-agency approach to promoting school attendance by working closely with Education Welfare on the Tameside Attendance Strategy. Priorities and actions for the next academic year include:
- Timely intervention:
 - A refined attendance procedure for the Virtual School has been produced for September 2023. This outlines how the Virtual School monitor and track attendance to ensure concerns are identified rapidly. Regular attendance triage by managers and follow up by Education Welfare Officers.
 - Multi agency practice tool with graduated approach produced to ensure all practitioners are aware of roles and responsibilities with regards to attendance.
 - Attendance at secondary phase:
 - Lower than in Primary and continuing to drop over the course of the secondary phase. Work needs to be done to ensure good attendance habits are maintained in KS3 and to understand the reason for the significant difference.
 - Attendance at KS4:
 - This is significantly lower than in other key stages. This will act as a barrier to academic attainment and EET post 16. Work needs to be done on ensuring good attendance habits are maintained into KS4.
 - Attendance in specialist provision:
 - This is lower than in mainstream provision. Recent practice guidance, which is being launched with all practitioners across education and Children's Social Care, will support in ensuring attendance is a key feature of all plans, including

EHCPs and that attendance concerns are addressed via SEND reviews as well as PEPs.

- The Virtual School and College has a close working relationship with the SEND team and meets weekly to monitor children with Education Health and Care plans, those who are under statutory assessment and those with emerging concerns. Attendance concerns and support to address these is a feature of these discussions.
- Data for Tameside specialist provision indicates better attendance (above 90%). This suggests that work must be done to monitor more closely the attendance of pupils in out of area specialist provision.
- Significantly higher numbers of PA/ SPA in secondary:
 - Multi agency practice tool has been developed to support ensuring attendance is at the heart of all plans and a multi-agency approach is taken. Increased triage of attendance and scrutiny of termly attendance data to identify emerging attendance issues and address them before they become embedded.
- Continuing close work with Educational Psychology to ensure that the Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) toolkit is utilised when supporting children and young people who may be experiencing EBSA and raising awareness of this amongst social care teams and schools via our training offer.
- Monitoring of term time holidays:
 - A number of requests for term time holidays have been noted in the last academic year. A new procedure for term time leaves of absence has been implemented which reflects the LA attendance pledge. The VSH and Head of cared for children will be monitoring this closely and ensuring requests for term time leave of absence are minimal and fall within the DfE guidance of exceptional circumstances. The issue has been raised in training for social workers and the new policy will be included in commissioning arrangements.
- The impact of school and placement moves on attendance:
 - Placement and school moves have an impact on a child's attendance, particularly when there is a delay in securing new school provision.
 - Academic year 2023/24 sees the launch of a new procedure to ensure that the Virtual School are involved at the earliest opportunity in school transfers and that these are avoided if possible. This will aim to ensure, where a school transfer is needed, it is expedited quickly and gaps in provision are minimised.
- Understanding of factors which affect attendance:
 - We intend to develop the analysis of our attendance data to identify absence patterns and contributory factors to allow for more targeted support and to inform future action plans.
 - Analysis of data to understand the needs of the cared for cohort to help ensure interventions are targeted.

6.3 Attendance of children with a social worker:

- Systems to track the attendance of this cohort need to be developed and data used to help identify and understand the factors affecting attendance, which are specific to this group.
- The Virtual School have launched a link worker scheme for safeguarding, duty and assessment teams, which provide a weekly drop in session for social work colleagues to access education advice for children and young people with a social worker.

7. SUSPENSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

- 7.1 There were no permanent exclusions in 2022/23, but there were several cases where the Virtual School Head and members of the team intervened, in line with the national guidance

on exclusions, to support or co-ordinate an alternative package of education to avoid a permanent exclusion. This included addressing the reasons for the risk of permanent exclusion, supporting both pupil and school and ensuring access to full time education, which could meet the needs of the pupils. In all cases such as this, pupils have enhanced support and monitoring, as well as an allocated Virtual School link, to address concerns and prevent the risk of exclusion reoccurring. This has been supported by positive relationships with the schools we work with and a practice of schools contacting the Virtual Head or link workers within the team prior to considering exclusion and suspension to discuss alternatives, plan packages of support and seek professional advice where needed.

- 7.2 One case study, which demonstrates the positive effect the intervention of the Virtual School achieved is below:

Student A received a number suspension in quick succession as a result of dysregulated behaviour in school. The Virtual School became aware that student A had been subject to a suspension via our attendance monitoring system which provides instant notification of suspension. An Education Welfare Officer was allocated and immediately contacted school to discuss and plan ways to prevent this from reoccurring. A multi-agency meeting was held with school, Virtual School, social worker and carers to discuss concerns and strategies to support. The Virtual School Education Welfare Officer became the key link for school and agreement was made that school would contact them directly if A present with dysregulated behaviour and if further support was needed. Pupil Premium Plus funding was directed to allow school to commission specific support for student A. Regular meetings held with all involved to keep a close eye on progress and make adjustments to provision. Voice of the child was obtained and a key worker was identified who helped to support student A and prevent suspension if they were presenting as dysregulated in school, by offering reasonable adjustments. Additional funding was provided to school to allow them to commission Military Mentoring for student A. This was very successful and the number of incidents of dysregulated behaviour decreased in school and there were no further suspensions.

- 7.3 Nevertheless, despite many examples such as the above, during the academic year 2022/23 a total of 413 days were lost to suspensions. Unfortunately our data shows a continuing rise in suspensions for cared for children with 76 pupils within 43 schools received a suspension last year. Reducing suspensions is a key priority for the Virtual School and we will continue to work closely with schools with the aim of reducing suspensions where possible.

7.4 **Moving forward – Suspension action plan for 2023/24**

- Refined and strengthened processes for monitoring suspension within the Virtual School to ensure suspensions are communicated to us promptly and support if offered to reduce their length and seek alternatives.
- Virtual School Head Teacher attends Tameside Secondary and Primary Heads' networking and the subgroups, which focus on suspension and exclusion reduction.
- The Virtual School Head actively works to encourage heads to raise concerns at an early stage so that support can be proactive.
- Virtual School Education Welfare Officers are allocated to schools with high levels of suspension to promote close collaboration and swift intervention to avoid suspension.
- Continue the close working relationship with the Tameside Head of School Improvement and the Executive Head of the Tameside Pupil Referral Service who has made the reduction of suspensions and PEX a key priority.
- Virtual School Head has undertaken training for New Heads about the role of the Virtual School with a focus on our role in preventing suspension and the impact of trauma on education.
- Continuation of training on trauma and attachment in collaboration with the Education Psychology (EPS) Service.

- Specific training for governors has been planned for this academic year around the impact of suspension and exclusion of vulnerable pupils. The first of these sessions was delivered in November 2023.
- Commissioning of LEGO Think Bricks- Therapeutic Coaching Approaches Course to build capacity in schools to implement therapeutic work to support emerging need.
- Continued close working with EP service to identify need and implement support for pupils at high risk of permanent exclusion or suspension and working with schools with particularly high suspension rates.

8. ALTERNATIVE PROVISION AND PART-TIME TIMETABLES

- 8.1 Over the last academic year, part-time timetables and alternative provision were used in exceptional circumstances where it was in the pupil's best interests to support their presenting needs and in accordance with DfE guidance.
- 8.2 In the academic year 2022/23, the Virtual School supported schools to ensure use of alternative provision was appropriate and matched to need and also monitored the use of alternative provision and reduced timetables through the attendance monitoring system. Where a reduced timetable or alternative provision was identified, a Virtual School Education Welfare Officer was allocated to follow this up and offer support to ensure provision was appropriate and steps were taken to increase learning time. The Virtual School team managers maintained a tracker of all pupils the Virtual School team were monitoring and attended regular review meetings for all these students to offer ongoing advice and guidance.
- 8.3 Over the course of the last academic year processes to monitor, evaluate and quality assure alternative provision have been strengthened, as well as the tracking of cared for children with reduced timetables. This includes a QA and Safeguarding process for provisions known to the Virtual School and attended by cared for children. The Virtual School and College has worked collaboratively with Access Services to update teacher guidance with respect to the use of alternative provision and reduced timetables. Specific steps in relation to cared for children have been included in this. In addition, the Virtual School Head has led on developing a multi-agency practice tool, which has been launched in the Autumn Term and lays out the expectations of all professionals when a reduced timetable or alternative provision is utilised. It is the expectation that, if a school wish to implement a reduced timetable or alternative provision as part of a package of support, an immediate education meeting takes place so that it is clear that all agree the provision is appropriate. The Virtual School also requests that copies of the LA alternative provision check list and or reduced timetable form are completed and returned to us. It is expected that this type of provision is reviewed at least 4 weekly and the Virtual School are involved in this process. This practice guidance has been launched with services and schools in the Autumn Term.

9. PEP COMPLETION

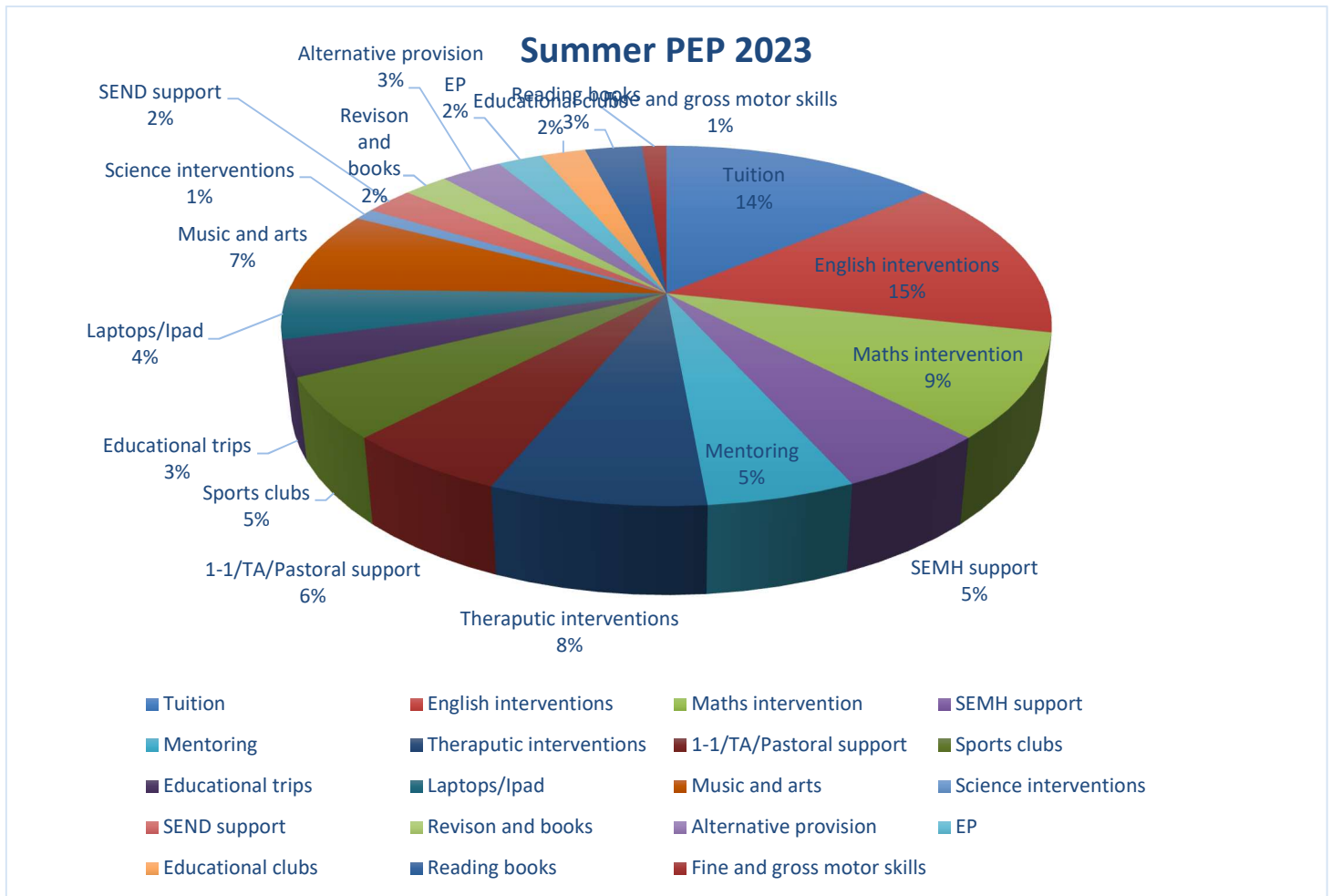
PEP COMPLETION RATES 2022/23	Percentage of PEP meetings taken place	Percentage of PEP documents returned
Autumn Term 2022	100%	95.3%
Spring Term 2023	99.3%	97.9%
Summer Term 2023	99.6%	97.3%

- 9.1 Data shows us that PEPs take place consistently with a consistently high number of meetings being confirmed and documents being received. QA data shows that the Virtual School team were recorded as attending 22% of PEP meetings to offer advice, guidance and support to schools, social workers and carers. Team members also attended a much higher number of additional education meetings to support with emerging concerns and offered advice prior to meetings where our attendance was not possible. Attendance at PEPs and analysis of QA information has shown us the wide variety of innovative ways that support is offered to our young people. This includes academic, emotional, pastoral support and extra-curricular opportunities. In 2022/23 PEPs were completed using a hybrid model with in-borough schools using a PDF document and returning via emails and out of borough schools using an e-PEP system.

10. PUPIL PREMIUM FUNDING

- 10.1 In 2022/23 schools continued to be able to claim up to £1800 per year for each looked after child on roll. It was expected that school demonstrate their intended use of this funding within the PEP and breakdown costings, linking them directly to SMART targets within the PEP document. If a child or young person required support which necessitated funding above this amount, designated teachers and social workers were encouraged to discuss these requests with the Virtual School so that they could be considered on a case-by-case basis. This approach has allowed us to ensure that funding is directed appropriately and timely to meet emerging needs. The Virtual School has also actively promoted schools utilising Pupil Premium Plus to provide cared for children with enriching experiences beyond the classroom. Some of our young people this year have accessed exciting extracurricular and residential experiences, such as visits to Barcelona, school Ski trips, regular horse riding and music lessons and access to programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh. We have also engaged in a successful partnership with the Tameside Music Service and accessed bespoke music offers for young people struggling to attend school, with academic tuition

10.2 The following table provides an overview of the summer term pupil premium spend.



11. PEP QUALITY ASSURANCE

11.1 In the summer term of 2022/23 the Virtual School Head reviewed our PEP and quality assurance processes in order to continue to improve practice in this area. A quality assurance framework has been introduced and shared with designated teachers, which provides clear expectations for PEPs and has them categorised by the Virtual School as Red, Amber and Green. Where PEPs are designated as less than Green, actions to address this are implemented, via continued communication with schools and social workers. It is planned to carry out a dynamic review of this framework in the next academic year. A variety of training sessions for social workers, designated teachers and carers were delivered over the course of the academic year, all of which focused on the importance of quality PEPs. A revised training programme has already commenced for academic year 2023/24 with an aim to build on the number of training opportunities made available to all partners. Bespoke training has also been offered to new designated teachers to support them in excelling in their vital role. Feedback from this offer has been positive and has further strengthened the Virtual School’s relationship with schools in Tameside.

11.2 Moving forward – PEP Completion and Quality Assurance 2023/24

For academic year 2023/24 a new e-PEP has been launched with all schools, both in and out of borough. The new system, which is hosted by our attendance monitoring system Looked After Call, will be rolled out for all PEPs from pre-school to post-16 over the course of the Autumn Term. This year will see us continue to review and amend the layout of our PEP to ensure it is fit for purpose and an effective tool for recording and supporting academic progress

of our cared for children. The move to an e-PEP marks an exciting change in our PEP process and initial feedback from schools and social care using the system has been positive. This system will also support our drive to improve the quality of feedback given to designated teachers about PEPs and in-turn, support improvement in the overall quality of PEPs submitted.

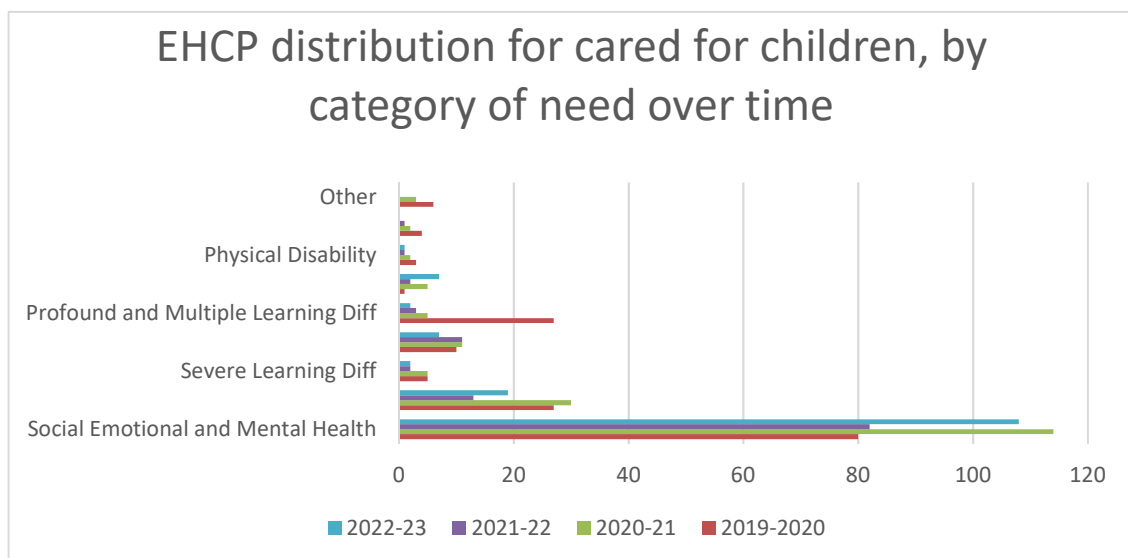
11.3 PEP Quality Action Plan 2023/24

- Work with schools and social care partners to continue to review and improve our quality assurance framework to allow us to reach a shared understanding of what a “Good” PEP is.
- Deliver an enhanced training packaged for schools, social workers and carers around how to hold a quality PEP.
- Scrutinise PEP quality assurance data to target areas which require further support and to inform the focus for training sessions.
- Audit our quality assurance to ensure consistency of judgement within the service and implement training where needed.
- Add a specific quality assurance section to our PEP to ensure feedback is clear and robust, demonstrating how individual PEPs could be improved.
- Continue to offer bespoke training and support for schools and obtain feedback on this.

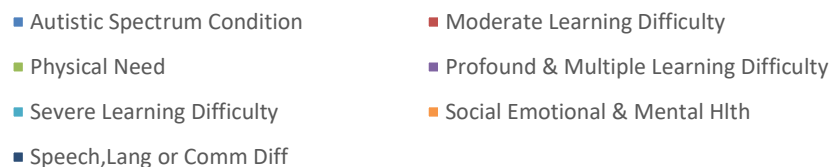
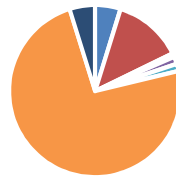
12. THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL AND SEND

12.1 Data from July 2023 shows that 146 school age cared for children were in receipt of an EHCP. Meaning 31% of our Summer Term school age cohort have an EHCP. A further 91 school age children, 19%, have been reported to us by schools as being supported at SEN support. The means approximately 50% of our cared for children have been identified as having a Special Educational Need.

12.2 As the graphics below shows, the vast majority of cared for children in Tameside identified as requiring an EHCP have a primary need of Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH). This has been the trend over a number of years. The Virtual School has increased its efforts to offer further support and training for schools on SEMH and strategies to support SEMH presentation in schools. This has included specific training commissioned by the educational psychology service.



Distribution of Category of Need for cared for children Summer 2023



12.3 The Virtual School continues to have a close working relationship with Tameside SEND and has also forged links with SEND teams in other local authorities where our children reside. This has allowed us to be more proactive in preventing delay for children with SEND when they are placed out of area. A Virtual School member attends statutory assessment panel and meets with SEND managers weekly to monitor and review our SEND children and promote multi agency and collaborative working to support these young people.

12.4 In the academic year 2022/23 Virtual School Education Welfare Officers accessed training delivered by the Tameside Educational Psychology service to increase our team's confidence in offering advice to schools supporting children and young people presenting with SEMH, trauma and attachment needs. This training was also offered to schools and designated teachers were encouraged to attend. The Virtual School continues to work closely with Tameside Educational Psychology Team and utilises an SLA with the service to help ensure cared for children in need of Educational Psychology support receive this in timely way. Further details of this arrangement are described below.

12.5 **Moving forward – The Virtual School and SEND 2023/24**

The Virtual School will continue its close working partnership with both the SEND team and Educational Psychology team. Inclusion and support for vulnerable pupils with identified SEND needs is a key priority. This was a focus for the Inclusion conference held in the Autumn Term 2023, with the Virtual School Head Teacher having a key planning role. The Virtual School will continue to be represented at statutory assessment panel and hold regular operational meetings with SEND managers to review cared for children who are also known to SEND services. A key area we are looking to further improvement is the existing communication between out of area SEND teams and the Virtual School, where pupils have EHCPs which are maintained out of area. This has been identified as a key reason for delay for securing our pupils appropriate provision and systems are being developed to improve this, including reaching out to Virtual School colleagues in other LAs to ensure communication lines are open, and offering challenge where delays are apparent. The Virtual School Head Teacher is working within children's services and with education colleagues to develop more joined up information sharing with regards to SEND.

13. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

13.1 Tameside Virtual School have a strong working partnership with the Tameside Educational Psychology service. Via an SLA, we utilise grant funding to pre-purchase Educational Psychology time to allow us to offer timely advice and interventions for cared for children who require this. 39 cared for children received individual Educational Psychology input in the last

academic year. The Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist for Tameside is a key link for the Virtual School providing both advice on cases and formal consultation, both with professional groups and as part of wider assessments. The Educational Psychology service has also supported in providing training for schools, foster carers, social workers and the Virtual School on trauma and attachment and emotionally based school avoidance to help promote inclusivity for our children who face these barriers.

- 13.2 The following case study demonstrates an example of how the Virtual School Head has utilised their close partnership with the educational psychology service to support a young person with significant emotionally based school avoidance.

Upon entry into year 10 student B's attendance at school rapidly declined. The Virtual School became aware of this both as a result of attendance monitoring and via contact from the student's social worker, who raised their concerns. The Virtual School began attending regular education meetings, with school, and social care to try and unpick the reason for the attendance decline and support with implementing strategies to support. Pupil Premium Plus was used to implement a variety of strategies which were regularly reviewed and evaluated. It became apparent that strategies suggested were not achieving the desired result and educational psychology advice was sought. The allocated EP began with consultation with professionals and offered guidance on support in utilising the EBSA toolkit. It was identified that a personalised learning offer was needed which built on B's interests and was rooted in a strong 1:1 relationship. The allocated EP completed direct work with B to discuss their concerns about school and what their ideal schooling would look like. A multi-agency request for statutory assessment was made and B was issued with an EHCP. Following consultation, specialist education was secured for B whose attendance has risen from 22% (all tuition) in academic year 2022/23 to 78% so far this academic year.

13.3 Moving forward – Educational Psychology

The Virtual School will continue the close working partnership with the Educational Psychology service and, in academic year 2023/24, has already begun extending our joint training offer to incorporate other key areas, such as preventing suspension and exclusion. We also plan to utilise grant funding to expand capacity to provide easier access to Educational Psychology time for children and young people who are being supported at early help, CP and CIN.

14. ATTAINMENT OF TAMESIDE CARED FOR CHILDREN 2022/23

14.1 Early Years and Key Stage 1

The data below shows the outcome data for cared for children, who had been in care for more than 12 months. Analysis of this compared to 2021-22 shows that outcomes in the academic year 2022/23 were improved.

- 14.2 There has been an increase in the number of children achieving the expected standard in phonics, reading writing and maths at the end of year 1 and achieving Good Level of Development at the end of early years and foundation stage.

- 14.3 The following tables summarise the attainment data for cared for children in Tameside at different key stages

KS1 % at expected standard	Reading EXS+ 2022/23	Writing EXS+ 2022/23	Maths EXS+ 2022/23
	53.3% (2021-22 -47%)	46.7% (2021-22 – 35%)	66.7% (2021-22 – 35%)

Y1 Phonics working at Expected %	72.2% (2021 -22 – 64%)
% achieving a good level of development EYFS	50.0% (2021-22 – 18%)

14.4 Key Stage 2

The following data summarises published outcomes for KS2 for the academic year 2022/23, compared with 2021-22 and 2018-19. It suggests that at KS2, children who had been in care for more than 12 months performed better in reading writing and maths, than the same cohort last year. This is both individual subjects and combined scores. Analysis of this data suggests that while we are seeing a recovery from Covid in this area, outcomes have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels.

% RWM EXS+			% Reading EXS+			% Writing EXS+			% Maths EXS+		
2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23
56%	18%	40.0%	63%	48%	60.0%	67%	36%	48.0%	74%	42%	56.0%

Reading progress			Writing progress			Maths progress		
2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	2018 - 19	2021 - 22	2022 - 23
+3.38	+1.72	+0.40	+0.63	-0.38	-1.09	3.01	0.46	+0.09

14.5 Key Stage 4

The following data summarises the GCSE outcomes reported from summer 2023 for cared for young people who had been in care for more than 12 months. These results represent the hard work and dedication of our young people and the people who support them, despite facing difficult personal circumstances. Last academic year saw an increase in the number of pupils achieving at least 1 higher grade (6 or above). There has also been an increase in the number of pupils achieving grade 4 or above in English and Maths. In addition to these pleasing cohort results, we saw several of our young people gaining excellent individual achievements and we wish them all the very best for their post 16 endeavours.

	2023 12 month +		2022 12 month +	
	Number	%	Number	%
Number of year 11s cared for 12 months +	56		48	
At least 1 grade 1-9	40	71	28	58.3
at least 1 grade 4+	23	41	26	54.2
at least 1 grade 5+	13	23	12	25
Grade 4+ Eng or Maths	19	34	18	37.5
Grade 4+ Eng & Maths	14	25	10	20.8
Grade 5+ Eng or Maths	12	21	9	18.8
Grade 5+ Eng & Maths	5	9	4	8.3
1 or more grade 6+	11	20	6	12.5
1 or more grade 7+	5	9	1	2.1
EHCP	29	52	22	45.8
Number not entered to sit GCSE exams	17	30	17	35.4

14.6 Moving Forward - Attainment and Progress

Analysis of KS2 outcomes show that a large proportion of cared for children are not meeting the expected standard at KS2. This is placing them at a further disadvantage at KS3 and KS4. As a result of this trend, over the coming years, a focus needs to be on promoting the use of Pupil Premium Plus at KS3 to close gaps in learning for those pupils not meeting the expected standard at Key Stage 2. It also needs to be a focus to ensure those pupils at risk of not meeting the expected standard at KS2 are identified early and schools are supported to ensure interventions are precisely and swiftly targeted to address this.

14.7 Following a review of our PEP and QA processes in 2021-22, it has become clear that the quality of data we receive about in year attainment and progress is inconsistent and incomplete. QA shows us that while progress towards academic targets is discussed at meetings, it is not always recorded in such a way to allow cohort analysis. As a result, for 2022/23, we have planned further developments in our QA and data gathering processes to allow us to monitor the reported attainment and progress of cared for children in year more effectively. This includes amending the PEP to allow us to more easily identify children not making expected progress during the year and then work with schools to target existing or additional Pupil Premium Plus spend more effectively if needed. The move to an e-PEP will also provide a more accurate data picture and reporting of progress is a planned focus for designated teacher network and training. A further review of the quality and quantity of data

obtained will be undertaken in the spring term, after a full cycle of the e-PEP process has been completed.

15. POST-16 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

- 15.1 The following data summarises the further and higher education, employment and training activities of our post 16 cared for young people and care leavers as recorded at the end of the summer term.

POST 16 EDUCATION CFC AND CARE LEAVERS (16-18)	2022/2023 (Summer Term)
Enrolled in Further Education provision	66
Enrolled within FE in Tameside	37
Enrolled in FE out of area	29
Enrolled in Higher Education	20

Cared for children and care leavers that are NEET, in Work or Work Based Training (16-18)	2022/2023 Summer Term
NEET	20
WORKING	12
WORK LEARNING SCHEME & APPs) (YES)	12

- 15.2 Academic year 2022/23 saw a continuation of partnership working between the Virtual School and Tameside College to promote the achievement and engagement of cared for and care experienced pupils post 16. The position of Post 16 achievement coordinator has continued, which provides the Virtual School and College team with invaluable experience and expertise of post 16 offers. Over the course of the academic year, this member of staff has worked increasingly closely with social workers, personal advisors, young people and members of the employment and skills team to identify opportunities for young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training and support them to progress. The post 16 achievement coordinator also leads the attendance at PEPs for year 11 pupils to offer support in identifying next steps and planning post 16 pathways, as well as offering support at enrolment at Tameside College where appropriate. A tracker is maintained of year 11 intended destinations, which is cross referenced with young people on results day, when results data is collected. The Post 16 Achievement coordinator then works, through the enrolment period to record all known enrolments in college and offer support where needed. This support includes personalised meetings during enrolment to encourage a positive start to post 16. In addition to this, the Virtual School Post 16 Achievement Coordinator also attends the dedicated drop in for young people, which is run by the Economy, Employment and Skills team, to provide specialised support for cared experienced young people seeking employment opportunities.

- 15.3 One example of support offered to one of our cared for young people is described below:

Student B did not wish to engage with any form of education or employment. Carers, social worker and Virtual School met regularly to discuss Student B's needs and wants as well as their interests. Virtual School post 16 coordinator researched different provisions that were available to her which would meet their wishes. Student B did not want to go to a big college with lots of people but did show interest in a short course/traineeship with a view to gain employment. Virtual School identified a suitable provision which offered 16 week rolling courses for plastering, brickwork & groundwork. At the end of the 16 week the provision offer employment on a working site for them. The post 16 coordinator arranged for a tour and meeting for Student B and carer. Student B was very positive and enjoyed the look around. She is now fully engaged in a course offered at this provision and is on track to gain qualifications which will offer a pathway into work.

- 15.4 Academic year 2022/23 saw our highest number of students entering into university. These include students studying at Cambridge University, Huddersfield University, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Liverpool, University of York and Salford University, to name a few. Courses being accessed include, Paediatric Nursing, Computer Science, Biomedical Science and Business Law. Personal advisors are aware that the Virtual School and College can be approached for support for our students at university if needed and our Post 16 link worker makes regular contact with the team to offer this service.
- 15.5 Tameside MBC also commits to providing opportunities for care leavers within the Tameside family. We have 4 of our care leavers currently accessing employment within the family firm. We have a corporate pledge which ring fences 5 apprenticeship opportunities within the Council for care leavers. 3 of these are currently filled, with 2 others in recruitment stage. We also have included the protected characteristic of 'Cared for Children and Care Leavers' as part of the [Equality-Strategy-2023-27 1.pdf \(tameside.gov.uk\)](#) which adds to the existing protected characteristics within the Equality Act 2010 thereby ensuring guaranteed assessment to candidates who declare this and meet the essential criteria of job roles advertised.
- 15.6 **Moving forward - Post 16 2023/24**
The number of pupils who are not accessing Education, Employment or Training remains a key focus and 2023/24 sees a renewed and increased focus on multi-agency working to address this. Current data shows that 54% of 17- 18 year olds and 48% of 19-21 year olds are accessing EET opportunities.
- 15.7 In order to strengthen outcomes the Virtual School partnership with Tameside College is continuing and has been extended in the academic year 2023/24 to further increase expertise in post 16 in the Virtual School team. A new contract has been agreed with Tameside College and recruitment to this position will be completed in December. This contract has been extended to include a 52 week post, as opposed to a term time only position, and the new post holder will work closely with an existing team member with post 16 experience.
- 15.8 Early data for the Autumn term 2023/24 sees more post 16 PEP's completed than in previous terms. A dedicated member of the team tracks and hosts PEPs for cared for young people up to the age of 18. Where a student is accessing college, this is carried out by the designated teacher at the institution and submitted to the Virtual School for QA. Our achievement coordinator attends these meetings where support is needed. Where a young person is NEET the Post 16 achievement coordinator hosts the PEP and works collaboratively with social workers and PAs to support young people to accessing appropriate services. This includes supporting them to access the young person's drop in, hosted by the Economy, Employment and Skills team, or supporting them to identify appropriate pathways. The increased capacity described earlier, will support with further improving the number and quality of post 16 PEPs received.
- 15.9 Furthermore, the extension of the Pupil Premium Plus for post 16 has allowed an e-PEP and attendance monitoring system for post 16 pupils to be introduced. This is being rolled out in the Autumn Term. This will allow for more accurate data on the EET activities of 16-18 year olds and swifter intervention for young people accessing college, who are at risk of becoming NEET by providing us with the means to identify concerning attendance patterns more swiftly.
- 15.10 In addition to this, both the Virtual School Headteacher and the Post 16 Achievement coordinator attend a newly established EET panel. This meets twice per month with representatives from Leaving Care, Cared for Children, Economy, Employment and Skills, Youth Justice and Education to review and advise on next steps for young people identified as NEET. Cared for children and care leavers are a specific focus group at this panel.

Representatives from the staying close project, which is a further channel of support for our post 16 young people to access EET opportunities also attend this panel.

- 15.11 One example of the effectiveness of this panel, work with staying close and evidence of improved support as a result of these initiatives is detailed in the case study below:

Student C successfully completed year 1 at college however expressed the wish to move into a more practical based course. She tried a number of apprentices, however was unhappy with these offers. The availability of a ring fenced, L3 apprenticeship opportunity within the council was discussed at EET panel. Staying close representatives, who were aware of C's desire for this kind of opportunity supported her to apply for the role and attend an initial interview and work trial. This was successfully completed and C has commenced her employment as a L3 apprentice within the council. She is well supported by members of the team she works for and has continued support from staying close if needed.

- 15.12 The is also a dedicated project manager, with the Economy, Employment and Skills, with a directive to lead on NEET work. Supporting care experienced young people who are NEET is key to this work and this project matches opportunities to young people via the Young Person's Drop in which takes place weekly. This project manager also attends EET panel to offer advice and suggestions to PAs and social workers, presenting young people to panel who are seeking support.

- 15.13 Other plans for this academic year include introducing a dedicated drop in time each week from the Virtual School where social workers and PAs of post 16 students can access support for education, employment and training queries. It is also planned for a portion of Pupil Premium Plus to be retained to allow for targeted support and interventions as identified in post 16 PEPs. So far this has included targeted access to tuition to support exam re-sits, specific equipment and access to training related courses as part of a planned route into work. This work is in its infancy and a full review of post 16 Pupil Premium Plus and its impact will be reported at the end of this academic year. It is also intended to work with the Economy Employment and Skills to seek other corporate commitments to support our young people into work, employment or training.

- 15.14 A cross Directorate team, of which Virtual School are a part, has also been created to provide additional NEET support to all young people but with a key focus on our Leaving Care cohort. Previously, NEET support has been commissioned to external providers with little impact on the Tameside NEET position. Utilising UK Shared Prosperity Fund People & Skills work stream monies, via GMCA, an internal team has been established to link with young people directly and via existing contact with professionals such as Virtual School, social workers and Youth Justice team. The aim is for better engagement and, therefore, more impact on our young people.

16. SCHOOL-LED TUITION GRANT

- 16.1 As in previous years, during 2022/23 Tameside Virtual School was able to utilise the School Led Tutoring Grant (which is part of the National Tutoring Programme) to provide tutoring intervention to support catch-up for lost education due to the pandemic for Tameside cared for children. Tuition was sourced by schools directly and also by Tameside Virtual School through a tuition partner agency. One to one and group tuition was provided in a range of subjects to help pupils catch-up with their lost learning. Use of the School Led Tutoring Grant was demonstrated in the termly PEPs for cared for children, which are quality assured by managers in the Virtual School.

- 16.2 The following table summarises the number of students who benefitted from school led tuition and the number of hours received. The Virtual School managers and Education Welfare

Officers promoted the use of this grant with designated teachers throughout the year and 2022/23 saw an increase in the number of pupils receiving tuition and in hours delivered.

	Total No of CF pupils (Mainstream)	Total No of CF pupils (Specialist)	Total No of CF pupils	Total No of Hours (Mainstream)	Total No of Hours (Specialist)	Total No of Hours
Autumn Term	71	8	79	1079	100	1179
Spring Term	93	4	97	1697	55	1752
Summer Term	68	3	71	1595	104	1699
Totals for 22/23	232	15	247	4371	259	4630

16.3 Moving forward - School Led Tuition 2023/24

As this grant will continue to be available, the Virtual School will continue to promote its use and value and to use information gathered from PEP QA process to target specific students where data suggests this may be of benefit.

17. OTHER INITIATIVES FUNDED VIA PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS AND COVID RECOVERY GRANT

17.1 2022/23 saw the Virtual school offer a revised reading initiative for cared for children to encourage reading at home, either independently or with carers. This included two year groups – Year 5 and Year 7 – receiving a book each term. In the Spring Term, the Year 5 cohort received the book ‘Twitch’ by M.G. Leonard and Year 7 received ‘The Marvellers’ by Dhonielle Clayton. We worked with Madeleine Lindley, receiving some recommendations for books suitable for two year groups, which helped us choose each one. A letter was included in the parcel that was sent home, which included an overview of the new scheme. To make the initiative more interactive, the children were asked to write a book review after they had finished reading the book, in which they sent in to us for a reward. The children who submitted a book review received a certificate from the Virtual School team. The image shows one example of a book review we received in the Spring Term.



17.2 In the Summer Term another book for each cohort was carefully selected and sent out for students to read over the summer holidays – children have been encouraged to write a book review again. We chose the book ‘The Good Turn’ by Sharna Jackson for the Year 5 cohort and the Year 7 group have been sent ‘Tyger’ by SF Said.

17.3 Alongside this scheme, a recommended reading list for all age groups was created and distributed to carers/parents for support, as a starting point to help them choose suitable books for their children and young people. A ‘Virtual School Reading Support Page’ was also created this year, which includes useful resources and advice for parents/carers to support children with reading at home.

17.4 In addition to this reading initiative the Virtual School also purchased and sent home transition packs for year 6 children moving to year 7. These packs contained key equipment and useful academic materials to support our new year 7s. They were also provided with a further reading book and a personalised good luck message.

17.5 The Virtual School have plans to provide a similar pack for year 11 students at the beginning of the spring term, to support their revision activities in the run up to GCSEs.

18. TRAINING

18.1 2022/23 saw the Virtual School provide a comprehensive calendar of training opportunities for schools, social workers, foster carers and governors. The Virtual School also deliver training as part of the corporate induction program for new employees. The 2022/23 training calendar can be viewed here:



Training
calendar.docx

18.2 This plan has been built upon and extended for the new academic year with training opportunities already delivered for social workers, schools and governors on key themes. Sessions delivered and commissioned so far this year have included:

- Designated teacher training and networking
- How to use the e-PEP for schools and social workers
- Weekly drop in sessions on the new e-PEP
- The role of the Virtual School for social workers
- The impact of suspension and exclusion for governors
- DSL update from the Virtual School
- Briefing for Primary Heads on the role of the Virtual School and our offer
- Briefing for new Heads on the Tameside Virtual School offer
- Bespoke 1:1 training for individual designated teachers who are new to the role or require additional support
- Promoting good attendance
- Introduction to multi agency practice guidance – promoting full time education.
- LEGO Think Bricks - Therapeutic Coaching Approaches Course.

18.3 A full calendar of training is under development and is designed to be flexible and responsive to need as well as accessible. Training for Foster Carers and further networking events are planned for the new year, with scoping exercises carried out to inform their focus. We are also exploring opportunities to commission external training in accordance with needs of partners.

19. VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD TEACHER EXTENDED DUTIES

19.1 Academic year 2022/23 saw a continuation of the Virtual School Head Teacher's extended duties for children with a social worker or involved with the youth justice system and Tameside Virtual School continued to offer both training opportunities for wider social care colleagues on educational matters and advice and guidance to social work teams facing educational challenges. Access to this support has been extended this year with Virtual School Education Welfare Officers being linked to individual social work teams with a dedicated time slot each week to drop in for advice. A review of this initiative will be undertaken later this academic year. In addition the Virtual School Head Teacher has continued to work with access services to promote school attendance for vulnerable students and has collaborated across services to produce a multi-agency practice tool, aimed at supporting colleagues to work together to ensure all students are accessing an appropriate full time education offer. This guide provides

expectations of challenge and support of all professionals who are working with children who are not attending school full time, be that through the use of alternative provision, reduced timetables or as a result of persistent or severely persistent absenteeism.

20. CELEBRATING SUCCESS

20.1 The Virtual School is committed to celebrating the success of our young people and are keen, in this academic year to increase opportunities to do this on a more systematic basis. This will include recognising attendance, progress and achievements. Designated teachers are encouraged to share student's successes with us via the PEPs and also email and certificates and praise post cards are sent in recognition of this. Plans are in place to send certificates to recognise students achieving 100% attendance from the autumn term.

21. CONCLUSION

21.1 As outlined in this report, the Virtual School has been through a period of change in the last academic year and work is ongoing to continue to improve and develop our service to meet the needs of the young people with whom we work.

21.2 For academic year 2023/24 we will continue to:

- develop our offer for care leavers and work to reduce NEET,
- improve the quality of PEPs,
- promote good outcomes,
- reduce suspensions,
- improve attendance,
- develop our offer to fulfil our wider duties for children with a social worker or involved in the youth justice system.
- develop our wider support for cared for children and our means of recognising their achievements.

22. RECOMMENDATIONS

22.1 As set out at the front of the report.