

Virtual School Report Academic Year 2024/2025

1. Introduction

1.1 During this period the Virtual School (VS) focused on the delivery of support to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in care (CIC) and to promote the education of previously looked after children.

1.2 The VS worked in partnership with schools, social workers, local authority services, carers, and parents. All interventions were designed to meet the objectives above and used an evidence-based approach, incorporating national research and local quantitative and qualitative data.

1.3 In addition the Virtual School developed its extended duties requirement to promote the education of children with a social worker or who had ever had a social worker from ages 0 to 18. From September 2024 this has included promoting the education of children in Kinship care. This work is not yet statutory.

2. Children in care (CIC)

2.1 Last summer (July 2025) the Virtual School was supporting 463 school aged children, 224 post 16 students and 34 nursery aged children. This was a total of 721 children and young people, but numbers fluctuated throughout the year. This was a slight increase on the previous year.

2.2 23.16 % of our school aged children have an EHCP for special educational needs and 14.1% attended special schools. 14% of our school aged children were placed in schools outside East Sussex compared to 15% last year.

2.3 In July 2025, there were 119 separated young people (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) in years 7 to 13, 21 of whom were of school age.

2.4 The VS was responsible for the management and administration of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) for CIC. In the budget year 2024- 2025 each CIC was allocated £2,570 funding from the PPG, this was pooled to ensure the best outcomes for our children as outlined in 1.1 and according to the school priorities. Pupil Premium funding for PCIC was also £2,570 but is held by the child's individual school.

2.3 The principal areas of spending were staffing, home to school transport, alternative provision, inclusion projects in schools, tuition, and services to schools e.g. Educational Psychology (EP) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Services. We also funded a full-time Extended Support Assistant as part of the SEND Targeted Support Services and an EALs co-ordinator.

2.4 The Virtual School employed a Head Teacher (VHT), four full time equivalent (fte) Education Officers (Caseworkers with supervisory and additional responsibilities), one 0.6 fte Advisory Teacher, 4.8 fte caseworkers and a 0.5 fte Education Support Assistant. The Advisory teacher leads on teaching and learning, training and, with the Headteacher, on extended duties.

2.5 In addition, two Personal Advisers (PAs) were funded to work within the Through Care Service. One PA focused on working with young people who are not in education,

employment, or training (NEET) and on increasing youth participation; the other on supporting the education of separated migrant children (SMC).

2.6 We funded a VS Extended Support Assistant who worked within the East Sussex Team Around the School Service (TASS) and provided intensive support in school for 4-6 weeks enabling the school to carry out longer term planning.

2.7 We fund 1.5 days a week of a Youth Employment Service (YES) worker who starts working with students in year 10 and provides more intensive information, advice and guidance to young people who do not yet have a clear pathway into education, employment or training.

2.8 Last year we funded a Care to Work co-ordinator (0.2 fte) who sits within the Employability and Skills Team.

2.9 The VS also employed casual intervention teachers of which ten worked with us on a regular basis. These teachers offer individual tuition, mainly in English and maths to our children in care cohort.

2.10 Last year two new members of staff joined our Business Support Team on a job share basis.

2.11 The VS team has remained largely constant. Our Extended Duties Adviser, who was employed on fixed term contract to lead our work on children with a social worker, secured a secondment and then a permanent post with the Inclusion and Alternative Provision Team. In response, we implemented small changes within the team to increase capacity. This which included promoting Katherine Davies to an Education Support Officer.

2.12 Caseworkers in the VS had an average caseload of between 80 and 100 CIC each depending on the numbers of CIC and other priorities within the service. Education Support Officers also have a supervisory role and provide advice and information to social workers, school staff, staff from other services, parents of adopted children and kinship carers.

3. Personal Education Plans

3.1 Personal Education Plans (PEPs) remained critical to raising educational outcomes for our children. Any applications for Pupil Premium funding are made via the PEP. Last year we introduced and embedded our new ePEP system. There has been lots of training and tweaking along the way, but this is now well established.

3.2 In July of 2025, 100% of PEPS had taken place, 94.32% were recorded, 0.41 % were current and 5% were overdue. PEPs are also uploaded to LCS.

3.3 PEP quality audits over the last year rated 74% PEPs as green overall (good or better), 23% as amber overall (satisfactory) and therefore 97% as satisfactory or above and 2.37% as 'need for improvement'. This is a 5% improvement on last year but is also an audit of all PEPs rather than the sample that has previously been audited.

3.4 We worked with the Through Care Team, post 16 providers and young people to develop a post 16 PEP designed to inform and be informed by Pathway planning.

3.5 Audit findings have been used to inform planning. Strategies to improve the quality of PEPs have included individual discussions with designated teachers, caseworker modelling

within PEP meetings, newsletter articles, and a focus within professional development sessions.

4. Outcomes

4.1 These statistics cover the attainment of pupils who took assessments in summer 2025. The statistics remain provisional and will be updated with revised data as produced by the DFE. Last year this data was not available until May 2025. Cohorts vary from year to year, and all have their own stories. Along with the small size of the cohort, this means that year-on-year comparisons must be treated with caution.

4.2 Key Stage 2 provisional data suggests that outcomes are higher than last year in reading, writing, maths, and GPS. They are in line with national and regional CIC results and slightly higher than both in maths. Thirty-seven percent of the cohort had an EHCP, and another 24% were on the SEND register. This is higher than national CLA data for year 6 (30% EHCP and 33% SEN Support).

		Reading	Writing	Maths	GPS
East Sussex CIC	2019 (before COVID)	25.0%	37.5%	45.8%	
East Sussex CIC	2024	30.0 %	25.0%	15.0%	20%
East Sussex CIC	2025	44.8	41.4	48.3	44.8%
National CIC	2025	52	45	47	48%

4.3 Key Stage 4 data for children in care remains provisional, and there are no national or regional comparators. There were some good individual achievements. Students achieved level 9s in photography and Persian and Distinctions in BTEC sport and business. Also, 7s in Art, Computer Science, Science and DT, and 6s in History, Drama and Theatre.

Attainment 8 and Progress 8 headline measures will be verified later in the year. Data collected internally shows a small increase in the percentage of young people achieving a level 5 in English and maths and in English or maths but a small decrease in level 4 in both subjects. There is no national comparable data yet available.

Results %	E and M 5+	E or M 5+	E and M 4 +	E or M 4+
2025 results day (out of 60)	5 (3)	18.33 (11)	11.66 (7)	28.33 (17)
2024 (out of 33)	3	18	15	27
2019 (before COVID)	4.2		8.1	

4.4 Post 16. Students achieved A levels or equivalent in Biology, Psychology, Criminology, IT, Gaming, Computer Science Photography and Marketing

4.5 Eleven of our young people have gained university places.

4.6 Others have worked hard to achieve their core GCSEs and a range of level 1 and 2 vocational courses.

5. Exclusion and Suspensions

5.1 The Virtual School worked with schools and Local Authority services to ensure that there were no permanent exclusions of CIC last academic year. This included the funding of a range of interventions including additional adults, alternative provisions, and placement support.

5.2 47 CYP (10.60%) received one or more suspensions since September 2024. This is a 1% decrease on last year. National data is not yet available, but Autumn/ Spring data suggests that we have more CIC pupils receiving suspensions than nationally. The main reason for suspensions is 'persistent disruptive' behaviour, followed by verbal abuse to adults. This is significantly higher than the national data and continues to be an area of focus, working in partnership with schools and the Education Division and Teams Around the School.

5.3 The VS worked with all schools to support children who were in crisis to avoid exclusion where possible. This included funding Educational Psychologist consultations, Extended Support Assistant classroom support and Alternative Provision.

6. Attendance and Admissions

6.1 At the end of the year (July 2025) there were seven young people of school age recorded as NEET. Six of these young people were year 11 separated migrant YP who had arrived in the UK after February 2025. The VS funded a language course at ESCG for 6 weeks at the end of the academic year.

6.2 There were another 16 school aged children Awaiting Placement. This means that they have not yet been allocated a school but do access interim provision. All but two of these young people have an EHCP and ten are placed out of county. This reflects the challenge of finding special school placements across the country. The young person who does not have an EHCP has a high level of SEMH needs and is accessing Alternative Provision but has not been offered a school place. We asked the Secretary of State to direct.

6.3 The VS tracks attendance of school aged CIC weekly. This enables us to identify any attendance issues and intervene at an early stage. Most of our cohort have good attendance, those that have lower attendance do so for a variety of reasons, most often linked to emotional wellbeing.

6.4 Overall attendance data for children in care for one year as of March 31st, 2025, was 90.2% which is slightly below the national CIC (91%) and the same as last year. For our whole CIC cohort attendance was 88.61. East Sussex has a focus on improving attendance across all schools.

6.5 Persistent Absence (less than 90%) was 20.7 % which is slightly higher than national CIC (20%) but an improvement on last year (26%).

6.6 Severe Persistent absence (less than 50%) was 5.8 % compared to 6% national CIC.

6.7 Most of the absence is authorised and the main type is illness. The other main type is 'other.' This code is used when a child or young person is unable to attend because they have moved.

6.8 The percentage of Children in care (CIC) participating in education, training, or employment (EET) at (Year 12) and (Year 13) (March 2024) was 85% for year 12 and 78% for year 13. This includes children or young people who are awaiting a special school place and have an interim education package. We are working with NEET individuals, in partnership with YES to secure appropriate provision.

6.9 Evidence from YES casework shows positive outcomes for young people. One young person was in care and educated out of area and became NEET on return to East Sussex. YES worked with the VS, Through Care Team, Assessment and Planning and colleges to explore options. The young person secured employment with training.

7. Interventions - Teaching and Learning

7.1 The Virtual School agreed 468 funding requests for tuition last academic year. This included blocks of 12 sessions arranged by the Virtual School, EALs tuition, school-based

tuition where schools used their own tutors and online providers. Over the year 216 children and young people received tuition.

7.1.1 Most tuition is provided by our own tutors, but we also use private tutoring companies, both locally and nationally. 68% of tuition last year was face-to-face tuition. Online tuition continued for those where it was effective and efficient.

14 secondary age young people accessed Academy 21 online lessons, attending English and maths lessons every day.

7.1.2 All tutoring sessions have targets. 100% of young people achieved at least one target and partially met the others. 60% of the young people achieved all three targets. 99% of children and young people reported that their confidence against their targets had increased

7.1.3 Verbal feedback on tutoring is positive: **DT to tutor:** I just wanted to let you know, **B** received the highest maths score in her class, and she is also moving up a set. I just wanted to share the great news!

7.2. Language and Literacy

7.2.1 Literacy development remains a key focus of our work. Children in school years reception to Year 6, receive a book parcel. Last year we sent out 742 book parcels. These were sent out in 4 parcels; one of which was provided by the charity Prospero. The number of book parcels has been reduced because of reduced funding.

7.2.2 Our literacy focus group has produced guidance on a trauma informed approach to literacy and organised catch up literacy training for carers.

7.2.3 Our language focus group is asking schools to assess all our pupils in year 4 and is ensuring that all PEPs have a focus on language.

7.2.4 We recognise the challenge for children who do not have a school when they first move home. Last year, we ensured that all residential settings received a home learning pack so that they could support children's education from day one. The pack includes a variety of resources including on-line English and maths programmes.

7.2.5 We offer residential homes support to deliver ASDAN (an education awarding organisation) course. Last year young people completed 'Life Skills Challenges' in chairing their own PEP, Minecraft, planning a charity event, wildlife, and photography.

7.2.6 Last year we changed the format of our transition work with children joining reception, as take up for the annual Summer School had been low. This reflects the strengthening in transition work across the Local Authority; many of our children are involved in transition organised by the schools they are going to join. Instead, we visited families on request, so that we were able to have detailed discussions with carers.

7.3. Alternative Provisions (AP)

7.3.1 Partnerships between the VS and local providers continued throughout the year. These organisations delivered services to young people who were struggling to manage school or who were awaiting a school place. The focus of all provision is a positive re-integration into full time school.

7.3.2 We had 94 requests for Alternative Provision for 56 young people. There is an ongoing increase in the request for AP.

7.3.3 We worked with 21 different Alternative Providers covering a range of subjects and activities including working on a farm, martial arts, forest skills, and music.

7.3.4 We ask that schools set clear targets for AP and that providers rate engagement.

- 100% of the young people achieved at least one target and partially met the others
- 75% of the young people achieved all three targets.
- 77% of sessions children or young people's engagement was rated excellent
- 18% of sessions children or young people's engagement was rated good

8. Participation, enrichment, and aspiration

8.1 In October 2024 the Children in Care Council (CICC) presented to a group of professionals at an event around the views of looked after children. Representatives began their presentation by asking the audience to think about the word - *listening* and asked us to think about what that word means to us? They then told us that *they think listening has 3 parts:*

1. *Listening to what has been said.*
2. *Hearing what we are saying or communicating.*
3. *And then acting on it.*

8.1.2 The event was attended by Local Authority staff from care, health and education, school representatives, and foster carers.

8.1.3 Young people and staff led activities designed to explore findings from previous child voice surveys. This led to the creation of a series of 'We Will' Statements which have been shared with colleagues across the service, and which inform all our work with schools. See appendix 1.

8.2 The Children in Care Achievement Awards took place at Bedes School in October 2024, and we were delighted that Jacqueline Wilson returned to present the awards. Ninety-five children and young people were nominated in the categories of educational achievement, positive contribution, personal achievement and skills and talents.

8.3 In March, we held our Achievement Awards for our younger cohort. 22 children took part in an arts session and visited Bede's School Zoo before receiving their awards from Carolyn Fair. It was wonderful to hear of so many achievements linked to learning.

8.4 Our annual Autumn Film School was held over two days In October 2024. Participants learnt to plan, shoot, and edit short films at the Depot cinema in Lewes.

8.5 In the Autumn term we also took a group of young people to watch 'Il Turco in Italia' at Glyndebourne Opera House.

8.6 During the Easter break, young people visited Brighton University Engineering department for the day and took part in robotics activities.

8.7 The Virtual School organised a one-day film making event with Benbow Arts Centre, part of the Bright Foundation Trust (an arts education charity). The event was for separated migrant young people and was attended by those with first languages of Vietnamese, Kurdish Sorani and Farsi.

8.8 In April 2025 we arranged for a group of separated migrant children to spend a week at Jamie's farm. The farm made a film of the week which evidences the friendship that

developed and the enjoyment the young people had. Jamie's Farm has raised money to jointly fund this event.

9. Working in partnership

9.1 We continued to work strategically with partners in the local authority to develop mental health and emotional wellbeing support. We were involved in planning the ISEND Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing conference which took place in Summer 2025.

9.2 The Virtual School attends LACAMHs monthly referral and case discussion meetings to support partnership working between health, care, and education. Last year we were also able to link MHEW teams in schools with LACMHS to ensure our children and young people have access to all levels of support.

9.3 The Youth Employability Scheme (YES) offered a universal service to all young people from year 10 and worked intensively with those who required more support in identifying future pathways. YES, staff worked in partnership with the Through Care Team and Virtual School caseworkers.

9.4 Our post 16 work has continued to develop. Our post 16 termly meetings are well attended by colleges, trainers, University staff, YES workers and the Through Care Team. This ensures that looked-after children and care leavers are always a focus. We have been able to develop the post 16 PEP with college colleagues such that they are better integrated with college and care systems and work for young people.

9.5 Last year we focussed on removing barriers to access to Widening Participation (WP) activities. We were also pleased that 15 young people attended the Uni and U event at Sussex University. This event launched a Widening Participation (WP) programme for 12- to 18-year-olds.

9.6 Our Care to Work group met three times a year to explore the opportunities available to Care leavers and how best to ensure that they were able to access these opportunities. Also, to develop employment and training opportunities from both within and outside the LA. The group consists of staff from across departments e.g. HR, Employability and Skills and Procurement. We have continued to work with the John Lewis Partnership and with Balfour Beatty (BB). We have had our first young person employed by BB and others have attended employment events.

9.7 We also work closely with the Educational Psychology Service who have supported the team and provided consultation on children who are struggling in school.

9.8 We have worked in partnership with the Fostering Placement Team to ensure that we are able to start planning for education as soon as possible when a child moves out of East Sussex.

9.9 We continue to work closely with the Assessment and Planning team to support our children with EHCPs in county but also to set up processes that reduce the chances of drift and delay when children with EHCPs move out of county.

9.10 We continue to fund an Extended Support Assistant within the Team Around the School Team (TASS) as well as time with TASS advisers and practitioners. This enables us to offer more intensive short-term support to children who are struggling to manage school.

9.11 Our work with the English as an Additional Language (EAL) Service is embedded. Our EALS co-ordinator has been able to develop our work with separated migrant children and has been supporting this cohort within NEET group sessions.

9.12 We have continued to work with CLASS to promote literacy and language support for our children and to ensure that, as a team, we are up to date with understanding the needs of our cohort and are knowledgeable about the support available.

9.13 Last year we presented at the 'East Sussex Nurture network' meeting organised by TASS. We focussed particularly on the use of assessment to support a trauma informed approach in schools.

9.14 As part of Children we Care for service, we meet regularly with managers of other parts of the service so that education is an embedded part of all care planning and that the VS can be responsive to wider issues within the service.

9.15 The Headteacher attends Valuing Care meetings to ensure that education supports and is supported by wider care planning. Valuing care meetings are multi agency meetings held to support care planning and remove barriers to a stepdown from high-cost placements and towards heading home.

9.14 We work with Adoption Southeast and neighbouring Virtual Schools to support the education of adopted children across the region. We are currently looking at training on attendance for Adoption SE staff to ensure that they are aware of the education support available in each Local Authority.

9.15 The VS continued to work closely with Bedes school as part of the Springboard boarding project. Five students attended Bedes last year. A further student joined in September 2025. Bedes continues to offer our students a high level of academic and pastoral support. Placement at Bedes enables young people to remain with carers and has supported young people to return home.

10. Training

10.1 The Virtual School delivered and organised a range of training last academic year. Training focused on developing staff understanding of the needs of children in care, including attachment and trauma, on the role of the designated teacher and on effective personal education planning. Training was provided for designated teachers, foster carers, and social workers.

10.2 Training has been very well received with 100% of participants saying that they found the courses delivered by the Virtual School very useful or useful.

10.3 The Empowerment Approach, delivered by Changing Chances (CC), is a research-based approach designed to support children and young people to develop the skills they need to succeed at school and in adult life. CC previously delivered training on the Empowerment Approach to all East Sussex maintained residential homes. CC have continued to provide ongoing support to all residential home staff and have identified champions within the homes who are working to embed the approach into children's individual plans. The Virtual School also offers a monthly drop-in session to support this work.

11. Extended Duties and Strategic Partnerships

11.1 Since September 2021 Virtual School Heads have had a non-statutory strategic duty to promote the educational outcomes of all children with a social worker; a cohort of children who have poorer outcomes in all areas.

11.2 In September 2024 the role was extended to include children in Kinship care. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will make this role statutory, ensuring that every local authority must have a dedicated officer (VS) to champion the educational outcomes of these Children, helping to improve their school attendance, engagement, and overall achievement.

11.3 The extension of the Virtual School Head role to children with a social worker includes:

- raising awareness and improving visibility of the needs of this cohort.
- increasing schools' and social workers' understanding of the educational needs of these children by delivering training on areas such as trauma-informed practices, care experience, and effective interventions and strategies to improve educational outcomes.
- helping kinship carers navigate the education system, manage behaviour, and address issues such as exclusions and admissions.

11.4 The Virtual School worked closely with other Local Authority services to develop policy and practice across East Sussex. This strategic work focusses on children in care as well as the cohorts we support as part of our extended duties. For example, Virtual School staff attend Inclusion Partnerships meetings and TASS meetings where possible. Both groups support the inclusion of vulnerable students, including all the cohorts included in the extended duties.

11.5 We met with the Designated Safeguarding Leads Network and have started to attend SENCo hubs.

11.6 The Virtual school is represented within the transformation developments. The Headteacher is part of the Family Network and Kinship Care Workstream group and will start attending the Family Help working group meetings with a view to ensuring effective partnership working within the transformations.

12. Extended Duties Training

12.1 We reviewed and developed our education series of webinars for social workers on key issues including attendance, suspension and exclusions and SEND. All webinars have been recorded and are promoted within the care teams.

12.2 In the last year, we have worked with colleagues in Early Help to ensure that the content is relevant and accessible to their teams.

12.3 We delivered training to new social workers as part of their induction.

12.4 We visited individual social care teams to promote our service, so they are more able to support the educational needs of those on their caseloads.

13. Information and Advice

13.1 We provided advice and information to social workers, other support services, schools, parents of adopted children and kinship carers. Between January and July 2025, we responded to 50 formal requests for information and advice. These were mainly from parents of adopted children, social care, and other East Sussex services. The remainder were from other Virtual Schools, Kinship carers, and school staff.

13.2 We joined our first Kinship carers support group to listen to their concerns and offer general advice

13.3 We have worked met with the Family and Friends Team to look at information on kinship available to schools and continue to offer education advice to the service.

14. The wider National context

14.1 The Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) collaborated with the national cohort of VHT's on a range of national priority areas. Last year ML chaired the Southeast Virtual School group and will go on to be the Southeast regional rep.

14.2 The VS Head Teacher and Designated Teacher from Bedes School are members of the Broadening Educational Pathways Programme Expert Advisory group. The invitation was in recognition of the well-established partnership between Bedes and East Sussex which has been in existence for 10 years.

15 Governor priorities for the Virtual School 2024/25

15.1 To further improve the educational and wider outcomes for Looked After children.

15.2 To improve educational outcomes, including attendance and attainment, for children and young people with a social worker, previously looked after children, and children in kinship care through partnership working across the LA, training and information and advice.

15.3 To improve outcomes for post 16 children in care and care leavers.

15.4 To increase the knowledge and understanding of the social care system by education staff and education by care.

15.5 To develop further partnership working between social care and education to the benefit of all vulnerable groups.