



Bury Virtual School

Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher, 2023-2024



Report prepared by Catherine Hobday: Virtual School Headteacher November 2024



Artwork from the GCSE portfolio of one of our Children in Care, who has just transitioned to college.

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1. Executive Summary

This report details and evaluates the work of Bury Virtual School from September 2023 to August 2024 and to set out our key priorities for the academic year 2024-25. We also share the educational outcomes of the cohort, although the validated data will not be available until later this academic year.

All local authorities in England must appoint a Virtual School Headteacher. This person's statutory duties are set out in the 2018 legislation "Promoting the Education of Looked-after Children and Previously Looked-after Children". The Virtual School Headteacher works to promote the educational achievement of the children in care to that local authority, wherever they live or are educated. In Bury, we have a Virtual School team who support the Headteacher in fulfilling these duties.

Bury Virtual School supports children and young people in care between the ages of 2 and 18. We monitor them as if they are a single cohort of children – a "virtual school."

We have a clear focus on raising educational aspirations, closing the attainment gap between our children and their peers and being ambitious, proactive corporate parents. We do not replace the schools which our children attend and they are responsible for improving the rates of progress and educational outcomes of children in care on their roll, but via the effective use of data, targeting of advice and guidance and monitoring of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process, the Virtual School holds schools to account in relation to the following:

- the educational provision in place for our children
- aspirations for their outcomes
- setting and reviewing of high-quality SMART targets on their Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
- use of the Pupil Premium Plus Grant
- attendance
- reduction of suspensions and the need to find alternatives to permanent exclusions

We also provide advice, guidance and support to professionals and parents/guardians of previously looked-after children, such as those who are adopted or on Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, we have a non-statutory duty to oversee the education of children who have a social worker (Child in Need/Child Protection) or have had one in the previous six years. This extended duty came in force in September 2021. From September 2024, the non-statutory duties have extended again to include overseeing the education of children in Kinship Care. Kinship carers provide stable loving homes to children who cannot live with their parents such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and wider family networks.

The Virtual School sits within the Bury Education Directorate. The Virtual School Headteacher is line-managed by the Director of Education and Skills. We are accountable to the Corporate Parenting Board and in addition, we have established a Virtual School Governing Board to provide additional support and challenge to our work.

2. Introduction from the Virtual School Headteacher

I have been the Virtual School Headteacher in Bury from September 2024, following three and half years as a Deputy Virtual School Headteacher, therefore the work of the Virtual School documented in the report took place prior me being in post. I am extremely grateful to the Virtual School Team for providing me with context and case studies which showcase the amazing work of the Virtual School over the last academic year. The Virtual School was expertly led by Gemma Parkes from September 2021 and the growth and development of the team, the Virtual School offer and outcomes achieved is extremely evident. The Virtual School Team have been extremely welcoming and it's very clear that they are committed to the children and young people in our care and really know our cohort as individuals, consistently asking the key question "Is this good enough for my child?", as good Corporate Parents. Writing this report has given me an opportunity gain an understanding of our children, the challenges and priorities for further development and improvement but most importantly, the achievements to be celebrated!

Updated Department for Education guidance relating to school attendance, suspensions and exclusions has raised the profile of the Virtual School and had a positive impact in terms of joint working to promote positive outcomes for our children. Utilising positive relationships, training and support we were able to work closely with schools to avoid any Bury child in care from being permanently excluded in 2023-24. As in the previous academic year, there is still work to be done to reduce the rate of suspensions for our cohort, but it is extremely encouraging that the vast majority of Bury's maintained schools and academies have accessed the Virtual School Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer for 2023-2024. Commissioned training through Trauma Informed Schools UK, saw a further cohort of staff from Bury schools undertaking the Trauma Informed Practice diploma, coupled with schools taking up whole school and Senior Leadership Team training. The aspiration of the Virtual School remains for all our schools to be attachment-aware and trauma informed to help them meet the needs of all children who have had a social worker. Trauma Informed Practice was part of a much bigger Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer to schools in the last academic year including Personal Education Plan training, creative use of Pupil Premium, Attachment and Trauma and Autism/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in the classroom, ELKAN and bespoke training upon request.

Designated Teacher forums were held on a termly basis and the academic year culminated in another successful conference, attended by over 150 delegates with the Key Note Speaker Stephen Russell. The Virtual School also supported foster carers with training as part of the implementation of the Mockingbird Model.

Attendance had been highlighted as a priority for 2023-2024 as rates had not returned to pre-pandemic levels, reflected nationally. Working with our colleagues in the Attendance Service, appointment of a dedicated attendance officer, Sarah Bickerton, to the team on a part time basis allowed for closer monitoring of attendance and suspensions and collaborative working with social workers, carers, schools and young people to identify barriers to attendance and support to increase it. The Virtual School will continue to play its part in "Working together to Improve School Attendance".

Work undertaken to increase and sustain the numbers of our young people in Education, Employment or Training (EET) over the last academic year is a real strength. There has been positive working partnership with Organisational Development (Bury Council Human Resources) and the wider council to foster a collective commitment to support our children in care and care leavers into jobs, apprenticeships, work experience etc. 2023-24 also saw the appointment of Chris Howarth as Post 18 EET Lead for Care Leavers to support the transition from post 16 to adulthood. Aligned to this, substantial aspirational work took place to provide opportunities to our children and young people such as the Youth Leads UK programme, careers events, university trips and visits to support our children and young people to embrace higher education.

The National Tuition Programme school led tuition grant was fully utilised again and ensured that all year 6 and year 11 students had access to additional tuition to support in their end of key stage and GCSE assessments

respectively. There were some great individual results for example one child achieving a Grade 9 in English and English Literature, another 2 achieving grade 8s in science and another achieving a grade 8 in Design and Technology.

There has been extremely positive 1:1 and group support for our pupils in schools through the Wellbeing Pathway, Lego Play and transition support and the team have continued to strive for increased quality of Personal Education Plans and SMART target setting. Throughout the report, you will read examples of good practice to illustrate the work done (names have been changed but the details of their stories have not). I feel extremely privileged to be taking the Virtual School forward into this next academic year as it's team and work is already one of the recognised strengths in Bury as highlighted in the in Local Area SEND inspection, the Mark Riddell visit and the Ofsted Annual Conversation. The Virtual School will continue to strive for the very best outcomes for our children and young people and for them to be involved in our work and acknowledge and see the value in its impact.

Catherine Hobday

Bury Virtual School Headteacher

November 2024

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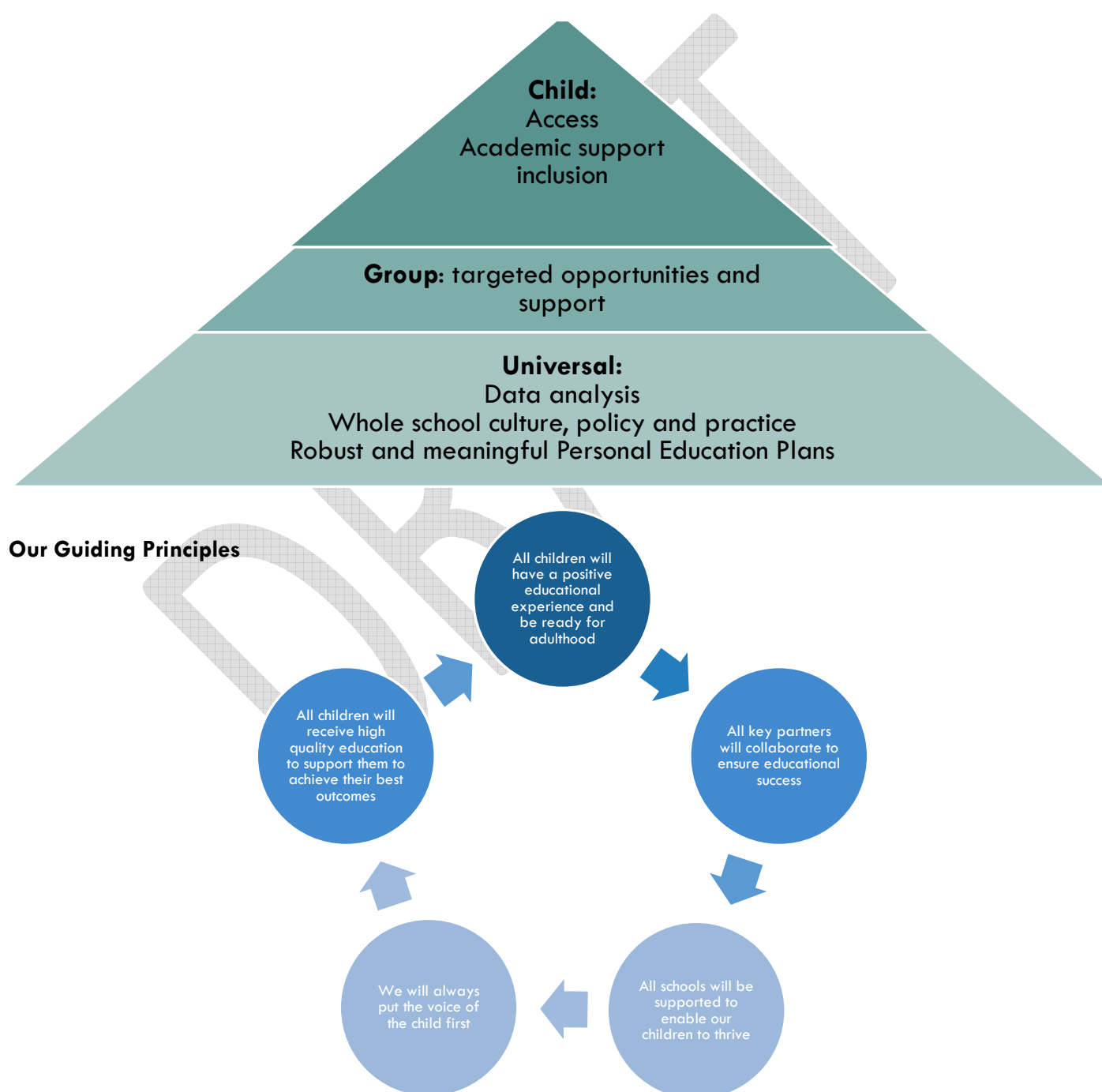
3. 2023-24 at a glance

Good	Improving	Not yet good enough
<p>No permanent exclusions for children in care for the third consecutive year</p> <p>81% of Bury's children in care now attend schools rated Good or better by Ofsted, an increase from 75% in 2022-23. No child is on roll in a school currently rated Inadequate by Ofsted.</p> <p>Overall PEP completion rate was 97% in 2023-24</p> <p>EET: Young people progressing into further education at college aged 16: 84%</p> <p>KS2 outcomes have improved significantly since 2023</p> <p>Reading outcomes at KS2 are significantly above the national average for CLA</p> <p>Support provided for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs via the dedicated VS Speech and Language Therapist</p> <p>Access to Educational Psychology services via VS commissioning</p> <p>The VS training offer to schools</p> <p>Tuition offer – support for Year 6 and year 11</p> <p>Involvement in the Knife Angel project to combat crime amongst young people in Bury.</p>	<p>PEP quality over time</p> <p>Analysis of attainment and progress data for all children Reception -Y11, every term</p> <p>Trauma Informed Practice being embedded within schools across the borough</p> <p>SEND support and Outreach services working together with the Virtual School and our training offer</p> <p>Implementation of Bury's Graduated Approach to SEND</p>	<p>Overall school Attendance</p> <p>Persistent and severe absence rates</p> <p>13% of children attend schools which are rated Requires Improvement by Ofsted</p> <p>9% of children had a school move in academic year 2023-24 – although this is a 2% reduction from 2022 – 23.</p> <p>Number of PEPs quality assured as Good/Green</p> <p>Number of children who were suspended from school and the impact on days lost</p> <p>Securing provision in a more timely manner for children and young people moving out of borough with EHCPs</p>

4. The Virtual School Model

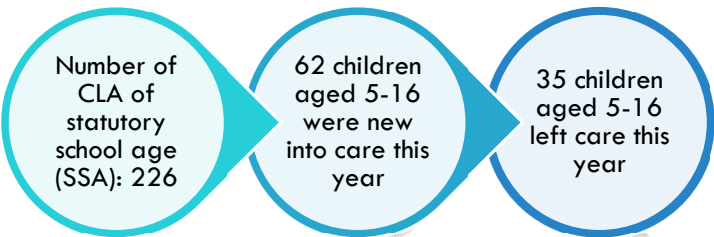
All schools in Bury, whether or not they have CLA currently on roll, can access our training offer to support attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice. All CLA are closely monitored in terms of attendance, exclusions, attainment and progress.

This analysis informs targeted opportunities for support for some of our children. At an individual level, we put in a very high level of support for children in crisis, without a school place or where there is other significant need.

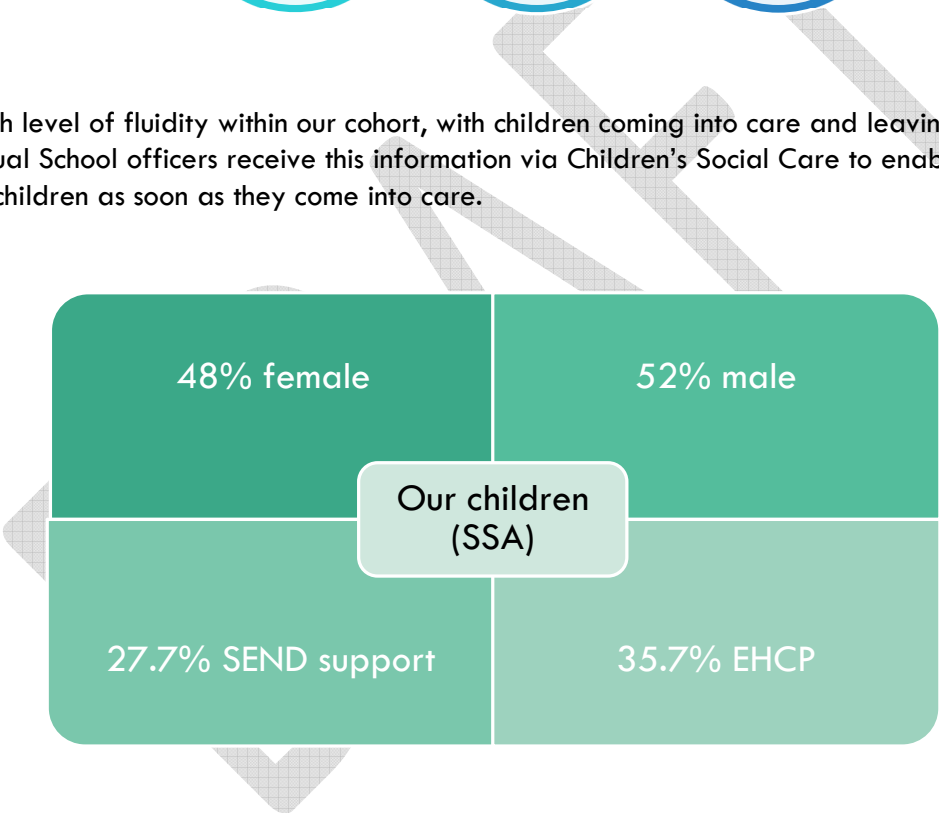


5. Children in Care Characteristics

Pupil characteristics of the children aged 5 – 16 years in Bury’s Virtual School as of 31st August 2024

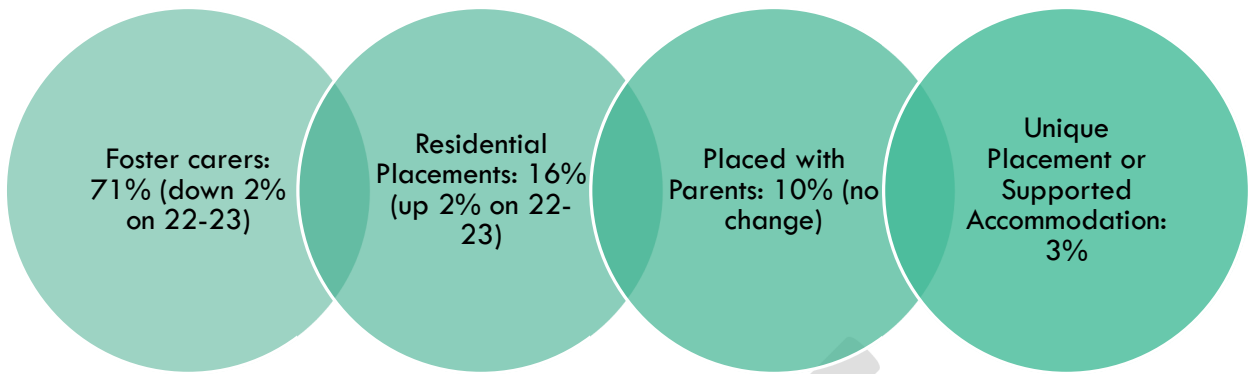


There is a high level of fluidity within our cohort, with children coming into care and leaving care throughout the year. All Virtual School officers receive this information via Children’s Social Care to enable prompt education planning for children as soon as they come into care.

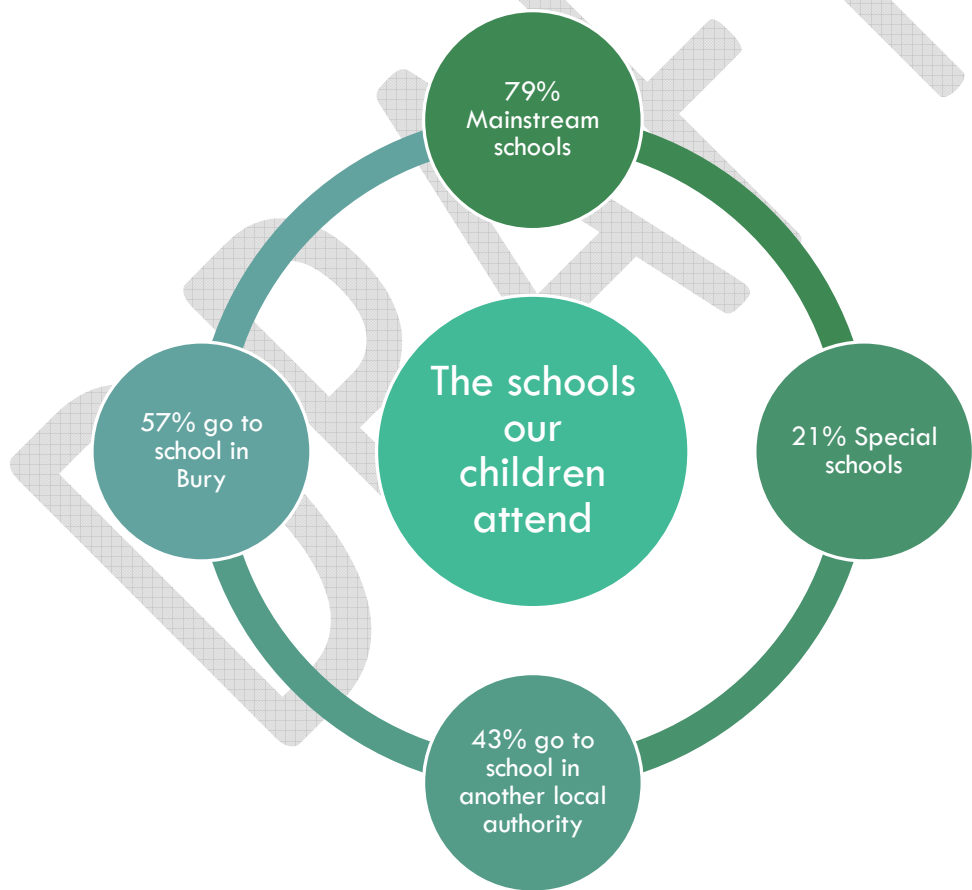


63.4% of our children overall have SEND. Nationally, 27.3% of CLA who have been in care for more than 12 months are at SEN support level, and 30.8% of CLA in care for more than 12 months have an EHCP. The most common Special Educational Need for our children is Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

The homes our children live in:



Children who live in residential placements or who are placed at home with their parents are at higher risk of persistent absence from school, so we monitor these cohorts particularly closely and they are prioritised for Virtual School Officer attendance at PEPs.



Year group breakdown as of 31.08.24

Year Group	Number of children
Reception	13
Year 1	18
Year 2	13
Year 3	10
Year 4	13
Year 5	22
Year 6	16
Year 7	21
Year 8	20
Year 9	25
Year 10	32
Year 11	32
Total	235

55% of our cohort are secondary-aged, and 45% are primary-aged. This reflects young people who come into care as older children and teenagers, and others who leave care at a younger age.

16-17 year olds as of 01 September 2024:	Year 12:	Year 13:
78	30	48

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC): we have 9 UASC in Bury. Typically UASC are 15-17 years old when they arrive with us. If they are statutory school age, we support them into education by ensuring they are on a school roll and offering additional English tuition. If they are post-16, they typically enrol on an ESOL course at college.

Ofsted ratings of schools our children attend

Good or better	81% (up from 75% in 2022-23)
Requires Improvement	13% (up from 11% in 2022-23)
No rating	6%

The schools with no rating have no rating due to academy conversion status. Some of these schools had a previous RI rating, and one had a previous Inadequate inspection. The Virtual School attends all PEPs for these children to provide additional scrutiny and undertakes an additional visit to the school throughout the academic year.

No Bury child in care is on roll at a school with a current Inadequate Ofsted rating.

6. Supporting Teaching and Learning: Gemma Parkes

Please see Appendix 1 for detailed information for all our 2024 attainment outcomes so far.

Please note that data is not validated and there is no comparison data at this time. This data will be available later in the academic year and the Annual Report will be updated to reflect this.

We are very proud corporate parents for our children and we have some wonderful success stories this year in terms of their individual outcomes and progression to the next phase of their education or training.

We fully utilised the National Tutoring Programme's school-led tutoring funding in 2023-24 to support our children's learning, and we also worked with other agencies to raise their aspirations; projects such as Success4Life and First Star Scholars which encourage care-experienced young people to aspire to Higher Education, and agencies such as Power2, who provide specialist mentoring for disadvantaged young people to raise their aspirations and promote positive attendance and engagement with school.

We continued our programme of visits to universities with our young people, offering these to Year 10 and above. Our Learning Mentor and Post-16 EET Lead accompanied them on bespoke visits to tour campuses, find out about particular courses they are interested in and meet university staff who could inform them about financial and pastoral support available to them. The destinations of our school leavers into further education demonstrates that we are providing good support to ensure appropriate pathways are in place for our post-16 young people.

The Virtual School team reviews attainment and progress data for the whole cohort of school-aged children from Reception – Year 11, every term. This analysis is used to prioritise children for interventions and targeted use of PPG, as well as to prioritise Virtual School officer attendance at PEP meetings. We also track all use of part-time timetables and Alternative Provision and this is reviewed and monitored regularly. Sarah Metcalfe and Karen Riazi our Virtual School Advisory Teachers who attend PEPs to provide support and challenge to our schools and ensure that they are being sufficiently aspirational for our children and deploying the Pupil Premium Grant appropriately to boost their progress and attainment.

Case Studies

One of our children moved out of area and attended a short term provision whilst on roll of a local high school. He was accruing significant detentions and suspensions at the school where he attended. Fortnightly meetings were set up with school, carers, social worker and the Fostering Agency. As a result there was daily communication between school and carers, which improved significantly and contributed to settling the child. Over time the carer reached permanence & requested a move to a local high school. Positive relationships with the out of borough school were utilised to set up information sharing meetings and oversee and support the admission and transition process. Following this the child has been successful and the number of detentions/suspensions has reduced to zero.

The Virtual School was notified of a pending Permanent Exclusion for a child new to care, due to the significant inappropriate use of the internet. The use of positive relationships with school and our own teams resulted in an alternative solution to the permanent exclusion. The Virtual School has since continued to work with Spring Lane where he went on roll and we have started to pull together an EHCP application to further support this young person moving forwards.

7. Supporting Children and Young People with SEND: Joanne Foster, Virtual School SEND Lead

Over the last year I have been responsible for overseeing the children with SEND within our cohort. I support and challenge schools to be proactive using Bury's Graduated Approach and completing Assess Plan Do Review cycles to ensure that children with SEND are receiving their entitlement for education, alongside reasonable adjustments set out in the guidance of the SEN Code of Practice. I support schools and social workers with EHCP needs assessments and have very close oversight of our children who are placed out-of-borough, working with SEND teams in the Local Authorities they are placed in to avoid drift and delay in securing them education.

Case study : I am very proud of a young lady whom I have been working with over the last two years, she is currently in year 10. When I first started working with her she was in year 8 at a mainstream school and was not attending school as she could not access the curriculum; not able to write her name or recognise the alphabet. She has suffered a multitude of Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma. The Virtual school supported school in the review of her EHCP plan and worked with the SEND team to consult with specialist provision. The Virtual School commissioned rigorous assessments with the Educational Psychologist and our Speech Language therapist Sarah-Jayne Smith. Sarah has changed this young lady's life and helped the people working around her to support, communicate with, and understand, her better. She is now attending The Mill School in Bury with a very bespoke package in place, striving to complete hair and beauty courses and functional skills for both English and maths to ensure she has a post 16 pathway in Education Employment or Training.

A summary of my main duties:

- Updating and maintaining the SEND Register for the Virtual School.
- Updating and maintaining the Alternative Provision Register
- Assisting schools and social workers with EHCP needs assessment applications
- Supporting EHCP Annual Reviews
- Meeting regularly with the SEND team manager to ensure the right provision is in place for our young people and avoid drift and delay in their education.
- Help source appropriate provisions for children who are not in mainstream schools.
- Quality Assure the Alternative Provisions that our children attend and ensure this intervention is reviewed regularly.
- Ensure school attendance of children with SEND is monitored and evaluated and appropriate interventions are in place.
- Ensure progress of children with SEND is as good as it can possibly be for the individual child.
- Delivering a wide range of SEND training to colleagues, schools, parents and other stakeholders.
- Completing the SEND information report each year.
- Commissioning and facilitating Educational Psychology consultations for our children
- Working with the Bury Educational Psychology Service to provide training/1:1 work with children.
- Attend and deliver at the SENCO 2 SENCO networking meetings at Elms Bank special school
- Providing exam concessions/invigilation training to all stakeholders.
- Ensuring we have close working relationships with the SEND teams in our neighboring LAs such as Oldham, Rochdale, Bolton and Lancashire and wherever our children are placed.

- 1:1 assessments to help identify areas of need for SEND with our children, such as processing speeds.
- Participation in the North West Cluster of Virtual School SEND Leads.
- Helping children with SEND who are NEET post-16 to secure appropriate provision.
- Attending the Partnership meetings for both primary and secondary schools within the LA.
- Attending and work with the SEND support and Outreach teams to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach to supporting schools with pupils of SEND needs.

Key priorities for this Academic Year:

- In January this year Liz Foster, will be joining the Virtual School team as SEND Lead, as I have commenced my new post of Deputy Virtual School Headteacher. Liz is someone I have worked very closely with over the last two years, she brings an excellent range of knowledge and skills to the SEND Lead role and will build upon the work and processes I have implemented over the last two years, continuing to improve and strive for the best possible outcomes for our young people with SEND.
- Development of a policy with the SEND team in Bury to implement a “while you wait offer” if a child with an EHCP is moved out of area, to prevent education gaps and delays in their education offer.
- Continue with the Educational Psychology strategy implementing and working with Bury’s newly formed Educational Psychology Service.
- Continue to reach more Stakeholders with our training and Continuing Professional Development offer.
- Continue to monitor and follow processes for the Quality Assurance strategy for Alternative Provision, working closely with other Bury Education teams to jointly develop them.

Focus on Speech and Language Therapy: Sarah-Jayne Smith, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SALT)

The SALT aspect of Virtual School was implemented in January 2023. Since then, this exciting opportunity to support our children and young people has evolved and developed at a rapid rate with positive outcomes.

Together we have developed a unique arm of Virtual School that supports our children and young people to access education with appropriate adjustments so they can flourish and work towards their aspirations in an environment that is accessible and understanding of their needs and strengths.

Relationships across professions; social care, education and health domains have gone from strength to strength, ensuring that all contacts are needs led with the child or young person at the heart of all decision making. All professionals now have a deeper understanding of the role of SALT within the Virtual School and the support that is available to our learners.

Last year I pledged to undertake further training to support the development of the SALT service within the Virtual School, and I’m pleased to announce that I now have Advanced Practitioner status in Neurodevelopmental Profiling, Trauma and Mental Health Informed Practitioner Status and Accredited ADOS status. This means that for the Academic Year 2024-25, our learners have access to an expert in neurodevelopment and care planning around the child or young person will be ethical, efficient and ultimately effective.

As different agencies and professionals work alongside the Virtual School SALT service, training has been provided and the upskilling of wider stakeholders has seen positive improvements in understanding our learners and ultimately the care planning for them.

The SALT Service within the Virtual School was audited, and the feedback was 100% positive. Professionals feel that the addition of SALT in the Virtual School is a vital aspect of supporting our children and young people to access education, be truly understood and access the world around them in a way that is unique to them. Following the feedback, it was clear that professionals wanted more access to SALT and training to understand neurodevelopmental differences, so they can support the children, young people and their families in a more effective and meaningful way.

You said we did:

- Training was provided for Social Workers.
- Dates have been confirmed with an offer of training for all schools across the Bury borough.
- Ongoing training takes place during Care Planning meetings and PEP discussions.
- The SALT Service and access to the Speech and Language Therapist has increased.

Priorities for 2024-2025:

Over the next academic year, we anticipate that the SALT service within the Virtual School will evolve and develop. There are exciting plans to implement a dynamic opportunity for our learners.

Further training will take place across professional domains to upskill the workforce. Ultimately, this will allow for a greater understanding of our children and young people, their needs and their strengths. All of which should support our learners to access education at an appropriate level and allow them to meet their aspirations whilst having a better quality of life with the support of the adults around them.

8. Personal Education Plans: Jamila Shahzad, Virtual School PEP Officer

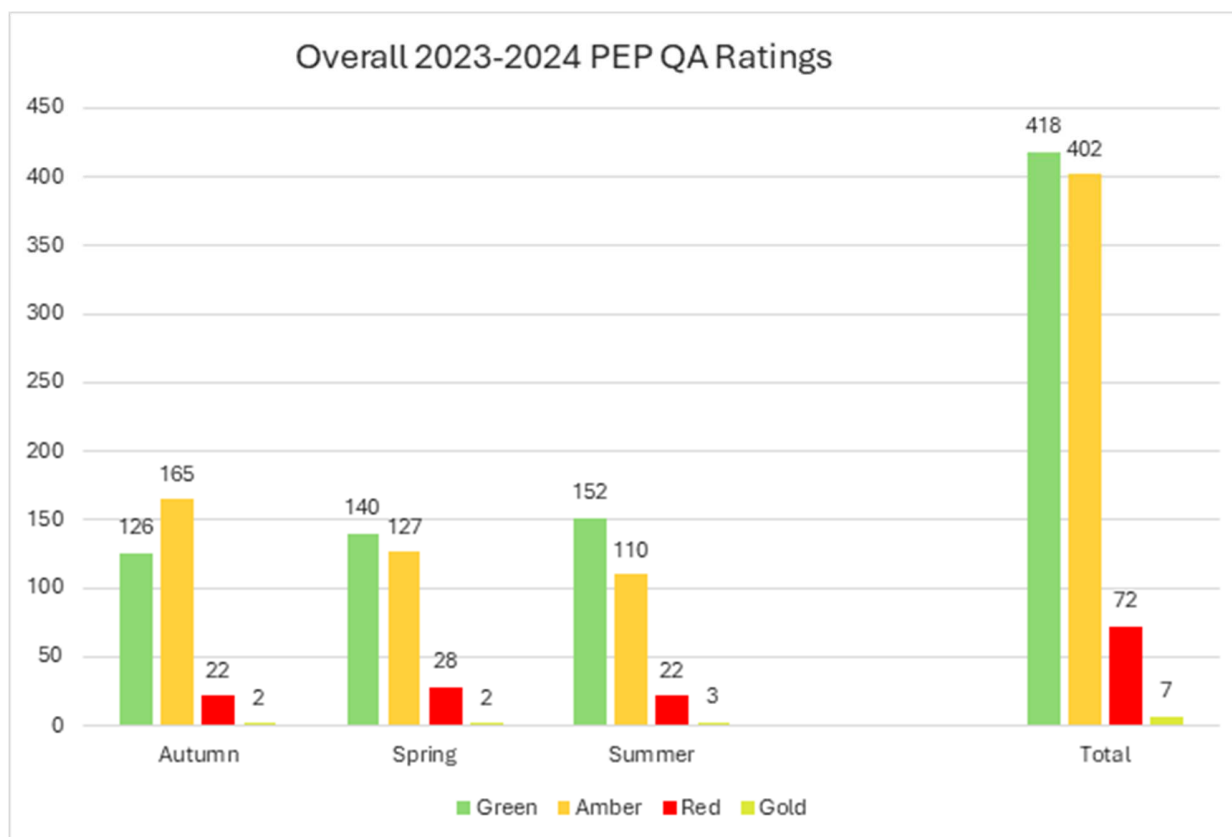
I started in post as the Virtual School's PEP Officer in September 2022. My role oversees the administration of PEPs, their Quality Assurance and liaising with the Finance team to ensure prompt payments of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) to schools following a satisfactory completed PEP for the child.

In 2023-24 we further revised and updated our Personal Education Plan (PEP) document, expanding the section for our children and young people to share their wishes and feelings and improving the Targets section to ensure that all targets set the previous term are reviewed to assess progress. Our PEP completion rate was excellent, with 98% of PEPs being completed by the deadline each term.

I am proud that since coming into post I have put systems in place to collate all PEP data, tracking which PEPs have been held, who attended the PEPs, which schools consistently have good or poor PEPs and PPG spend. This system identifies which schools need further training on submitting a good PEP and where the majority of PPG spend is going towards.

We have also set up a system of individual Quality Assurance so that every PEP is now rated using a system of Red, Amber or Green, and we award a Gold rating to exceptional PEPs. Schools and social workers receive individual feedback following QA, to identify how they need to improve PEPs if they have been rated Amber or Red. If a PEP is Red, it is sent back to the school and they are asked to improve it, with appropriate support from the Virtual School. In the Summer term when this scheme was embedded, 55% of PEPs were rated Green, 38%

Amber and 7% were Red. The most usual reason for Red PEPs is missing voice of the young person or lack of attendance by the social worker; either of these will result in an automatic Red status for a PEP.



Improving practice: a school submitted consistently 'red' PEPs with targets which were not detailed or SMART enough. Following the PEP training sessions and support from the Virtual School, the school improved further PEPs to a 'green' standard.

2024-25 are to further streamline our QA process and to ensure compliance with Virtual School and statutory timescales. We also plan to hold termly PEP training sessions for social workers and schools so we can have consistently high-quality PEPs in place for our children.

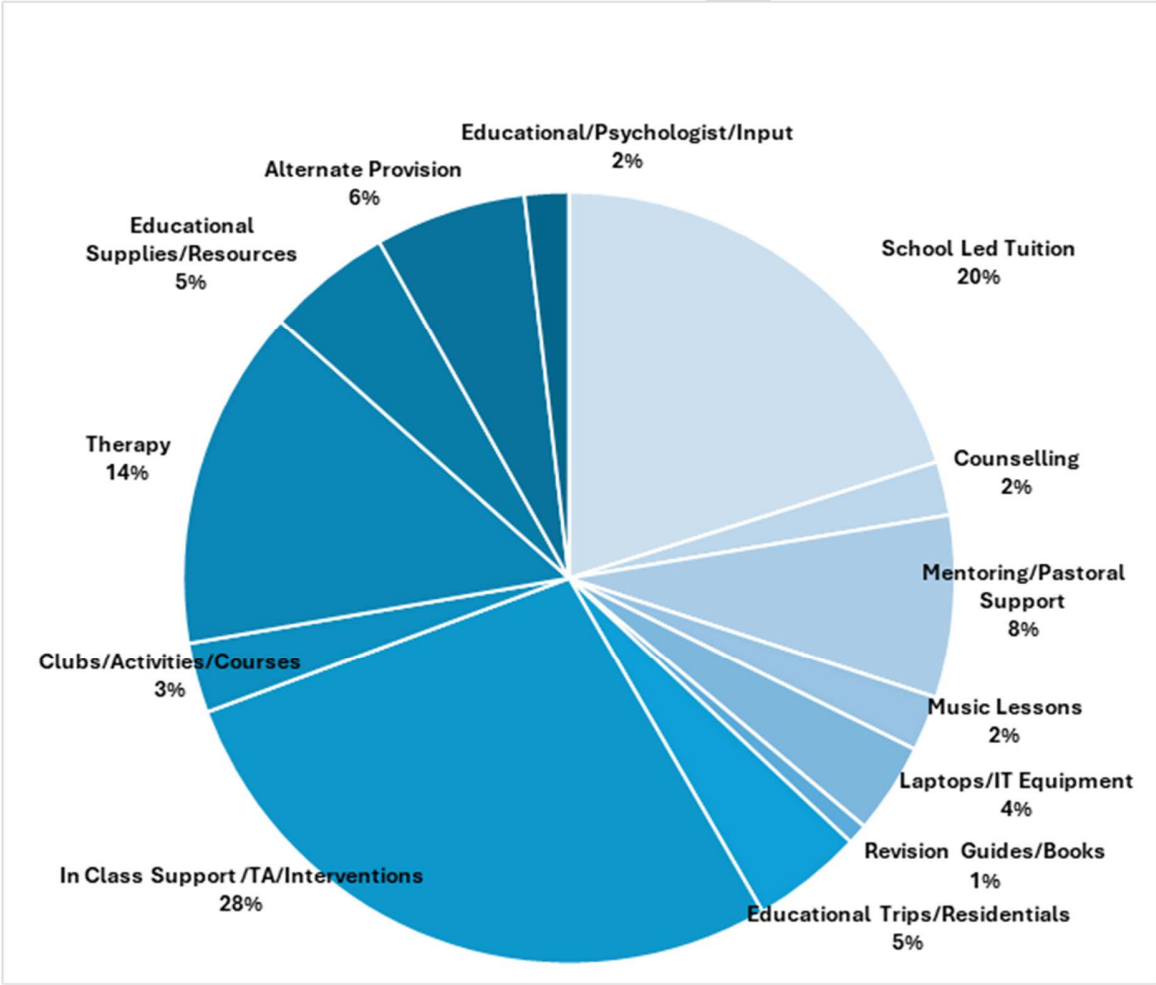
9. Pupil Premium Plus strategy statement 2024

The Pupil Premium Plus Grant (PPG) is allocated to the Virtual School Headteacher in each financial year, to be spent to improve the educational progress and outcomes for children in care in the local authority. In financial year 2023-24 the amount of PPG we received per child in care was £2530 per child of statutory school age.

The Conditions of Grant for Pupil Premium state that funding for CLA should be managed by the Virtual School Head. This means that Bury Virtual School is responsible for monitoring the use of this funding and ensuring that the money makes a real difference to the individual children looked after by Bury Local Authority. PPG for CLA cannot be carried forward into a new financial year and must be spent before the end of March or returned to the Department for Education. Therefore, this budget requires careful management.

In common with many other Virtual Schools, we top-slice our PPG and retain £730 per child centrally. The rest is reserved for schools, who can request up to £600 per term (£1800 per year) to support the educational progress and attainment of their children. Specific needs might be additional tuition, music lessons, participation in a school residential trip or they might need access to the support of a Teaching Assistant. Funding which is devolved to schools should provide “over and above” their standard offer to all children. Schools must cost the interventions and resources they wish to purchase with PPG on the child’s PEP document, linked to a target which is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). The funding is only released on receipt of a good quality PEP, completed within expected timescales with clear details of use and impact of PPG funding linked to identified needs and subsequent interventions. Schools must cost the required interventions and they must be linked to the child’s targets.

The pie chart below shows what schools spent their PPG on in academic year 2023-2024:



This does not include tuition which the Virtual School commissioned directly for our children and please note that PPG+ spend was prioritised on tuition in the first instance.

The PPG+ which the Virtual School holds centrally is spent on the following:

- Alternative Provision and tuition to support children temporarily without a school place (e.g. following a placement move) or who are at risk of exclusion
- Educational Psychology and Speech and Language Therapy for our children

- IT equipment such as laptops
- Literacy resources such as the Booktrust Letterbox Club scheme
- Holiday activities such as Art Workshops
- A contribution towards the staffing costs of the Virtual School team

Examples of impact of spend of PPG

Year group	Target on PEP	PPG spend	Impact when target was reviewed
Reception	Harry will be able to blend 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and CVC words accurately	Daily 10 minute intervention plus additional phonics resources to use at home	This has been achieved as evidenced by Harry's latest reading assessment
Year 4	To be able to accurately recall times tables to 12.	1:1 Maths intervention/tuition, 10 mins daily, plus use of TT Rockstars	Rebecca's speed with her times tables has increased and she is much more confident with basic multiplication decimals. These skills are not yet embedded so this intervention will continue.
Year 7	Rachel's reading age to improve from 8 years and 4 months to at least 9 years by her next PEP	Literacy intervention in school: 20 mins x 3 times per week. Additional reading books to read at home with a reading age of 9 and above, chosen to match Rachel's interests with her input	Improved reading age by 13 months from September 2022 to May 2023
Year 11	Lucy's English grade is currently a 3. It will improve by at least 1 grade by her next PEP	1:1 tuition in English, 1 hour per week for 12 weeks	Lucy has made excellent progress as shown in her recent mock and is now working at grade 4

10. Supporting Stability for our Children and Young People

Our mission is to improve stability in school places. Children in care have all experienced trauma; separation from birth family, experience of abuse or neglect and attachment disorders can all mean that they feel an internalised sense of rejection and shame which can result in an inability to self-regulate or to feel safe in school. Being in a constant state of fight-flight-freeze is all too often the reality for our children, and this can lead to them showing their trauma via extremely challenging behaviour. This puts them at risk of poor attendance, suspension and even permanent exclusion – all of which further increase their feelings of rejection. The more we can do to stabilise their education placements, the better their outcomes.

The Virtual School is involved in the local authorities' strategic planning for permanence and stability for our children and members of the team sit on the following Panels:

- Fostering Panel
- Adoption Panel
- Long-term Permanence Panel
- Legal Gateway Planning

We ensure that educational stability is a key part of permanence planning for children. 22 of our children had in-year school moves last year; this number is still too high. In some cases it is unavoidable, for example if a child moves a substantial distance away and would not be able to travel to school, or if they need to move to a special school which can better meet their needs.

Focus on Learning Mentor Support: Deb Vine

I have been in my current role since July 2012, however my job has changed considerably during this time as we have developed our offer from the Virtual School. I have brought my previous experiences of working in a local high school in supporting young people to access the curriculum using various strategies to ensure they reach their full potential.

My role is to support our children and young people to overcome their barriers to learning by offering 1:1 support. I help raise their attainment and academic achievement particularly at KS2 and KS4. My main focus is to support effective transitions to their new settings, making these as smooth as possible for them. My practice takes a trauma informed approach which helps me to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on our children's lives. After being awarded the diploma in Trauma and Mental Health in 2022 I have grown in confidence which has helped me share my knowledge with schools and parents/carers when offering advice and support. I receive ongoing supervision from a Trauma Informed School supervisor throughout the year. I find this is a great help and support as it provides the contained safe space needed when facing the challenges and impact of working with our young people. It enables me to reflect on my practice and consider the emotional impact of trauma in supporting our young people.

In 2023-2024 I have supported our year 6 children by 1-1 sessions to prepare them for high school. I supported over 50% of the children with bespoke enhanced transition support according to their specific need and:

- Attended PEP meetings
- Liaised with primary and high school, parents/carers, social workers, other agencies
- Information sharing to new setting
- Supported children to attend the open days
- Encouraged children to attend summer school

- Set up bespoke visits to the high schools to meet key people and a tour of the school



- Prepared a transition bag, containing essential stationery, learning materials, etc. 1:1 sessions focusing on their worries or concerns; addressed them as the worries emerged using various strategies e.g. working through transition booklet together, Lego play to show their hopes & dreams of what high school might look like, scrap book making, creating a memory booklet including photographs of primary school and their high school.
- Learning Mentor Visits in their Year 7 high school settings during Autumn term

The virtual school held a transition day in July for all our Year 6 children in the Elizabethan suite. We had various transition activities in the morning followed by a visit to Bury College for a tour. The children had a chance to have a go at barbering and cutting hair in the Hair and Barbering Suite. We then went back to the Elizabethan suite where we enjoyed a pizza lunch, before we had an Art session with Claire from Don't Burst My Bubble Art Events. Claire is a qualified art teacher who specialises in therapeutic art sessions. The children all had lots of fun as they focused on their transition and memory making. They all took home a piece of art. They also took their transition bag as they left to go home.

Feedback from two of our year 6 children who attended:-

Child A

I really want to go to the Elizabethan coz it was really fun. I enjoyed the activities and everyone being together. I enjoyed the art work, making friends, playing together and going to college. At the end of the day I felt like we all knew each other, it was really good fun!

Child B

I want to do another day with the virtual school because I had so much fun playing with my friends and going out to Bury College doing hairdressing. Personally I think it was better than my residential. I also liked doing my art when dipping the tea bags and I loved seeing the happy faces when I gave them the pictures I made them. It was great!



Child B was due to move placement, so he made a piece of art for his current carers to say thank you and he also made one for his new carers. The day helped his transition not only to high school but also his transition to new carers.

Year 11 support

I supported Year 11 young people during Year 11. Again, offering support according to their need. This year was a particularly challenging year for many of our Year 11's. Many of them struggled with anxiety and mental health issues which was difficult for schools to manage. I supported our young people and schools in many different ways to overcome the barriers which enabled them to gain the best outcomes in their GCSE's.

- Attended PEP meetings
- Liaised with school, parents/carers, social workers, PA's, other agencies e.g CLA nurse, CAMHS, connexions, colleges
- 1:1 visits to our young people in school in and out of borough
- Supported young people to attend college open days
- Supported young people to research courses/apprenticeships and to complete college applications
- 1:1 sessions – completing coursework, revision techniques, mindfulness sessions, in school support
- Set up bespoke visits to college, tour of the college, meet key people
- Information sharing
- Prepared bespoke transition bags containing stationery needed for college, learning materials and a voucher to say well done for completing their GCSE's taken to each of our Year 11 young people.



Over the past few years I have developed our transition support to include our KS1 children as they move into Reception class. Each child received a reading cushion with a selection of books for starting school.

Other areas I have supported this year include:-

- In year transitions
- Attendance support
- Support to avoid exclusions
- Bespoke college visits
- Bespoke university visits
- Supporting young people to attend children in care council

- Praise certificates. At the end of each term many learners receive a star award certificate. I send well done certificates out throughout the year for children who have done particularly well in any area of their school journey.
- Supporting our children struggling by using Reading Heros
- Primary school children receive a monthly Letterbox parcel
- I have supported coffee mornings for carers to come and meet the team and share any concerns. This is an area for development in the next academic year, to encourage higher and consistent attendance
- Support with our virtual school training offer to schools and carers



- Supported the knife angel activities by offering Banksy art sessions to schools in the Elizabethan suite

This was a piece of art work by one of our learners with an EHCP who struggled to concentrate for any length of time.

Lego play sessions

Lego play sessions are put together using Lego based SEMH interventions. This powerful therapeutic approach gives children the support they need for positive wellbeing, so they can become the best creative, reflective, active, collaborative learners they can be. The intended outcomes for the children are and increased ability to manage emotions, improve communication skills, build confidence and improve friendships by working together.

I have worked jointly with Lauren our Virtual School Inclusion Advisor with our CLA, CIN and CP children to run Lego play sessions with small groups of children. We held a session in a high school during the summer term and are currently working with a group in a primary school. We find the children are really enthusiastic each week ready to start the session!

Feedback from High school designated teacher:-

The children report that they are really enjoying the sessions and we have seen an increase in confidence in a couple of our children. Another child has improved their attendance. If you are ever in a position to offer the programme to us again, we would be very happy to accommodate it!

Feedback from a child:-

I loved the Lego session. I was excited every week to go. The teachers were very nice and the other people in the group were as well. The teachers helped me learn about myself e.g. teamwork, healthy living and they helped me explore what my future could look like. I was very proud of my models and my favourite was the big build at the end.



I am really proud of my work this year in particular the work I have done to support our Year 6s and Year 11s. I have attended all year 6 PEP meetings and have visited them in their high school settings and I can report that they have all settled in extremely well in September.

The Year 11 young people had some amazing GCSE outcomes. They worked really hard I am particularly proud of this Year group as they started in Year 7 during the pandemic year which was difficult for many of our children starting a new school.

During this year priorities will include:

- Improving the transition support currently offered to our nursery children as they transition into Reception
- Continuing to offer Lego play sessions to our schools, expanding our current offer to more schools
- Continuing to offer bespoke university visits, expanding our offer to different universities
- Lauren Warburton and I are currently working on an offer to schools based on exam stress. We are just beginning to develop these sessions with the intention of starting the sessions after Christmas. This has arisen from my concerns as I supported Year 11s prepare for their GCSE's. We would also then like to roll out a similar offer to primary schools.

We are a hard working team who work together to gain the best outcomes for our children and young people we support. It's a great privilege to be part of the team and for me particularly to be able to support our children as the transition. It's wonderful to see them when they are happy and confident in their new settings!

11. Training in 2023-24

We are really proud of our 2023-24 training offer to colleagues. This year we formalised our offer into a Training Calendar which was shared with all Bury schools (whether or not they have CLA on roll) and out-of-borough schools with our children on roll. We offered a mix of commissioned online training from AC Education and in-person and online training delivered by the Virtual School. The training topics on offer this year were as follows:

PEP training for education and social care colleagues (several sessions offered over the year)

The Role of the Designated Teacher

Creative Use of the Pupil Premium Grant

Supporting Children affected by Attachment Disorder and Trauma in the Classroom

Supporting Behaviour De-Escalation in the Classroom

Promoting the Achievement of Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children

Supporting Relational Practice in Schools

The Impact of Trauma on Sensory Processing

Working with Children who have been Sexually Abused

Promotive Positive Educational Transitions

Managing Challenging Behaviour in the Classroom

Supporting Children with Unmet Attachment Needs

We also offered in-person training which schools could book for their settings, on topics such as Attachment and Trauma, Autism, ADHD and Emotion Coaching. These were very popular with schools.

We continued to deliver termly Designated Teacher forums this year, with guest speakers including Social Care Managers, colleagues from the Youth Service and our Educational Psychology team. In addition, we offered whole-school training for Bury schools on topics such as attachment, trauma, ADHD, autism and emotion coaching, and we were also requested by schools to deliver training for parents and carers. We regularly attend LA SENCO networks and give advice regarding inclusive classrooms.

As part of our commitment to trauma-informed practice, we offered funded places on the 11-Day Level 5 Diploma in Trauma and Mental Health-informed Schools and Communities provided by Trauma-Informed Schools UK, for the third year. Feedback from delegates is hugely positive and we know that the skills they learn while completing this qualification are transformative in terms of the impact on children. We also funded training in use of Lego as a therapeutic intervention.

We funded ELKLAN training for both primary and secondary schools in Bury to support children with speech, language and communication needs.

We provided training for Bury school governors on the role of the Virtual School and schools' statutory duties towards children in care and previously looked-after children, and we also provided training for managers in the wider Council on supporting Care Leavers in the Workplace, as part of our commitment to corporate parenting.

In July 2024, we held our second Virtual School Conference. 120 delegates from the Education and Social Care sectors joined us for a day focusing on improving educational outcomes for children in care and those with a social worker. We were joined by Steven Russell from Elements Support as our keynote speaker, who spoke passionately about his own experience growing up as a child in care and also delivered a workshop with practical strategies for staff to build relationships with children – “Connection B4 Correction”.

Delegate Feedback from the 2024 Conference

“A perfect day. Everything was valuable. Thank you.” (DSL)

“The whole conference was excellent. The raw emotions and reflective thought processes listening to Steven Russell was mind blowing. Will take so much away into my work.” (Family Support Advisor)

“Really useful to hear the Virtual School information, support and statistics for our Bury cared for children. Elements segment was excellent and so powerful!! Steven is such an inspiration (IRO)

“You could hear a pin drop in the room because everyone was listening intently.” (Attendance Service team)

“So good to have the chance to reflect and reignite the passion of why we do this job.” (Headteacher)

12. Pupil Voice

In Autumn 2023, following the audit of pupil voice in the previous spring term, the PEP form was updated to ensure capturing of pupil voice was better supported. There are more questions and prompts on the form itself to promote discussion with our children and young people either within the PEP or with a trusted adult prior to their meeting if they don't feel comfortable to attend. There is also now a focus on preparing for transition and post 16 education, employment and training to ensure that our children and young people are better equipped to make decision in line with their aspirations about their options for post-16 EET.

In addition to the changes to the PEP form and PEP meetings, the Virtual School team have used opportunities to capture pupil voice during 1:1 work, trips and visits and activities.

How Deb supported one of our young people during Year 11 with a focus on pupil voice:

Amber struggled throughout Year 10 and Year 11. Her attendance dropped dramatically as she struggled with complex needs and severe mental health issues. This became more severe as the exams approached. Despite her attending school as often as she could her attendance remained low. Many key agencies were involved in her care. Regular meetings were held to make sure we were supporting her various needs. We had regular home visits to Amber where we discussed her learning and ways to support her to continue working towards her GCSE's. She really benefitted from these sessions and was able to speak openly with us about her struggles. I liaised closely with school deputy head and head of year 11 throughout the year. I also liaised with individual teachers and supported our young person to access the work. Amber found this particularly difficult, so I was able to break down the tasks to enable her to complete the work. She worked very hard and was extremely self-motivated when her health enabled her. I supported her with lifts to school during the exam period which helped her to arrive at school in a calm, relaxed manner. School set up a meet and greet system when she arrived. Her GCSE outcomes were amazing, she is now studying at Holy Cross College which was her ultimate choice for Post 16.

How Marion Supported one of our young people in applying for an apprenticeship with a focus on pupil voice:

In Yr12, Alice attended college and completed her Level 2 qualification in Education and Health but was unsure if she wanted to continue this pathway as did not enjoy the course. Alice's views were shared at her PEP meeting and captured on the PEP form. Marion met with Alice to discuss all the Post 16 options available. Alice decided to apply for Level 3 Public Services at another college, as from being small she had wanted to be a police officer. Alice started on the Level 3 Public Services course in September 2023, however by December 2023 Alice had realised this course was not for her and felt she would be better doing an apprenticeship, so she would be able to earn a wage and gain qualifications at the same time. Alice was supported with her apprenticeship search, registering with Find an Apprenticeship website and helped her to create a quality CV. Marion contacted Alice to inform her an apprenticeship vacancy had become available within Bury Council for an Early Years Support Worker in one of the Early Years Childrens Hubs. Alice was very interested and was encouraged to make an application, but once Alice had secured an interview, she became very anxious and doubting her ability. Alice was supported with interview practice sessions to help her build her confidence. Alice was successful with her interview and was offered the role of Early Years Support Worker and started in February 2024! Alice was supported for the first 6 weeks after starting her apprenticeship, to ensure she settled in and to discuss any issues/ concerns she had.

13. Supporting Education, Employment and Training for our Post-16 young people: Marion Düzgün, Virtual School Post-16 EET Lead

Marion has been in post since November 2021, is a very committed corporate parent and takes her responsibility of championing the best educational outcomes for our children very seriously.

My role as Post 16 EET Lead is very challenging, however rewarding, and I am always very proud to celebrate with our young people when they achieve their best outcomes. I caseload approximately 75 young people aged 16- & 17-year-olds in years 12 and 13, support with transition for Year 11 and organise aspiration events for years 9+.

Key duties:

- To oversee PEPs, ensuring PEP meetings have been arranged, held and electronic PEP documents completed within timeframe.
- Identify who the designated teacher/mentor is when young people transition into college/ training/ apprenticeships, to ensure the PEP document is correctly delegated.
- Offer support and training to new designated teachers/mentors in relation to completing the PEP.
- Develop working relationships with designated teachers and PEP/ pastoral mentors in all post 16 provision to ensure the quality of PEPs, especially ensuring all SMART targets are linked to aspiration academic targets.
- Attend PEPs when required to support social workers, colleges and training providers with advice and guidance to ensure our young people are being supported to achieve qualifications, skills and to work towards their aspirations.

- Overseeing EHCP for our SEND Post 16 Cohort, ensuring EHCPs are up to date, annual reviews have been held and ensuring EHCPs are transferred out to appropriate LAs when any of our young people move placement.
- Work to reduce NEET figures, by offering 1:1 support to our young people with information, advice and guidance to access further education, employment, apprenticeship and training opportunities that meet their interests, aspirations and needs. Where needed, I will support with visits to colleges, training providers, universities and provide practical help such as writing CVs, helping with job applications and supporting with interview preparation.
- Oversee the transition for our Year 11 into Post 16 education, employment and training options to ensure they have an offer of education or training for the start of Year 12. I liaise with colleges, designated teachers and providers of careers advice and guidance in schools.
- To increase the aspirations for our young people from Yr9 to Yr13, through working with partner agencies offering various events and opportunities they can participate in.
- Oversee spending of Post-16 PPG+ funding and ensure it is in line with the conditions of grant from the DfE.
- Work in partnership with newly appointed Post 18 Care Leavers Lead to ensure effective transition for our young people once they reach 18.
- Attend regular Strategy meeting and Care Planning meetings for our post-16 cohort.
- Attend 6 weekly Bury Council Job opportunities support to Care Leavers Focus Group meetings.
- Attend the termly Bury NEET Reduction Group with the LA 14-19 Team and local training providers to develop our local offer of provision.
- Attendance at the following meetings:
 - the termly Greater Manchester Care Experienced Education Network termly meeting
 - the termly Northwest Post 16 Virtual School Subgroup
 - the termly NAVSH UASC Focus Group meetings.

What's Working Well:

- Improvement in the quality of Post 16 PEPs, especially the quality of the SMART targets. An example SMART target document was developed and sent out to all designated teachers/mentors in post 16 provisions where our young people attend.
- Low NEET figures for 16-17yrs olds 16% (12 young people, 2 of them are young mums caring for child)
- Good working relationships with Connexions, through regular catch ups with the Team Manager and now having an allocated Connexions Personal Advisor who will support our NEET young people with their education, employment and training options.
- Post-16 PPG+ funding has been excellent in supporting our young people individually, for example with purchase of Chrome Books and resources needed for their individual academic courses.
- Positive relationships with foster carers, staff at residential and semi-independent accommodation to improve education outcomes and wellbeing for all our young people.

- Improving relationships with designated teachers, pastoral staff and PEP mentors at colleges. I have regular termly meeting with Bury and Bolton College to identify if any of our young people are struggling with attendance, attainment and behaviour and explore what support could be offered.
- Positive connections with lots of training providers and alternative provisions in the areas.
- Positive working partnership with Organisational Development (Bury Council Human Resources) and Chris Howarth Post 18 Care Leaver EET Lead around our collective commitment to support our CIC and Care Leavers into job opportunities, apprenticeship and work placements.

Aspiration events: -

- Youth Leads – Care Experienced Leadership Programme, targeting Yr11, Yr 12, Yr 13 and care leavers. Five successfully completed the course.
- Aspirational visits to University of Bolton for Yr11 & 12 in February and March 2024.
- “Try it Tuesday”, in February 2024, 10 of our young people from Yr9-Yr13 participated in work shadowing various Bury Council Employees for the day.
- Supported Bury Childrens Rights with a visit to MUSE Developments for an aspirational career event with 12 of our Yr9 to Care Leavers cohort.
- Yr 10 Aspiration Day, June 2024 visit to University of Salford, 9 of our young people enjoyed a fun packed day of activities to gain a better understanding and knowledge of what’s it like to go to university and what support they will receive being an eligible care leaver.
- Career Carousel Event at Bury Town Hall in October 2024 for our young people Yr9-Yr11 to have the opportunity to talk with various Bury Council and partners employees about the job role.
- I also undertook various 1-1 visits with some of our Yr12 cohort to various universities such as Manchester Metropolitan University, Water Bear University College of Music in Sheffield and University Academy 92 in Salford.

Next steps and key priorities for 2024 – 25

- To ensure all Post 16 PEP designated teachers/ mentors have attended our inhouse PEP training by end of Spring Term 2025.
- Developing robust processes with Connexions and Post-18 Care Leaver EET Lead to ensure effective transition for our young people once they turn 18.
- Working with Bury Council Organisational Development, Louise Goldfinch, to ensure all our Yr10 cohort have an offer of 1 week’s quality work experience within one of Bury Council departments.

Destinations of our young people, September 2024

Number of young people	College	Training Provider	Apprenticeship	Employment	Hospital – receiving education	NEET seeking specific course	NEET young parent
75	56	3	1	2	1	10	2

Courses our young people are studying at college:

Entry Level: 27 young people

10 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children who are enrolled on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses upon arrival into the UK. 12 are young people with SEND who are enrolled on courses including Entry Level Prospects course in construction or childcare and business courses.

Level 1: 9 young people

Courses include, Construction, Childcare, Joinery, Plastering, Business, Sports, Health & Social Care and Public Services

Level 2: 9 young people

Courses include Applied Science, Brickwork, Health and Social Care, Childcare, Games Design, Painting & Decorating, Public Services and English and Math's GCSE resist.

Level 3: 11 young people

4 young people are enrolled on A Levels with subjects such as Mathematics, Economics, Business, Photography, Art and Design and English Literature. 7 are enrolled on Level 3 Diplomas in subjects such as Health and Social Care, Equine Studies, Public Services, Science, Professional Cookery and Performing Arts.

5 of our Yr13 cohort from 2023-2024 have progressed to university colleges this September 2024, with courses including Sports Physiotherapy, Music Production, Geography, Business Studies, and Performing Arts.

We are incredibly proud of our post-16 cohort, who are fulfilling their aspirations and looking forward to successful futures.

14. School Attendance and Exclusions

Locally generated data for 2023-24 shows the overall attendance of Bury CLA as 87.16%. This figure is subject to change when reported by the DfE as only the qualifying cohort will be reported. Our qualifying cohort overall attendance figure was 89.00%.

The attendance data below was supplied by WelfareCall. It includes children who were only in care for a short time during 2023-24. Due to the small number of pupils in each year group, one or two who are persistently absent skew the results so individual year group data should be viewed with caution.

Overall attendance:

Primary: 95.26%
Secondary: 86.08%

Qualifying Cohort

Overall: 89.00%
Primary: 95.35%
Secondary: 88.13%

By Year Group:

Reception	94.58%
Year 1	95.73%
Year 2	92.00%
Year 3	95.30%
Year 4	97.58%
Year 5	96.69%
Year 6	93.87%
Year 7	86.58%
Year 8	86.53%
Year 9	89.05%
Year 10	80.69%
Year 11	75.86%

EYFS	94.58%
KS1	94.24%
KS2	95.91%
KS3	87.44%
KS4	78.38%

Attendance by cohort

In-borough mainstream	91.16%
Out of borough mainstream	93.44%
Special/specialist schools	82.30%

Persistent Absence

Persistent Absence is defined by the Department for Education as attendance below 90%. In 2023-24, our persistent absence rate for our qualifying cohort (those in care for 12 months or more as of 31.03.2023) was 22.5%. The national rate of persistent absence for all children in 2022-23 was 22.3% according to the Department for Education's statistics so this is broadly in line with this measure.

42% of the children who were persistently absent last year attended special schools or Pupil Referral Units; nationally, rates of persistent absence are much higher in these vulnerable cohorts than for children in mainstream schools. This reflects the complex circumstances and special educational needs of these children, which we certainly see in our own cohort. In addition 15% of the persistently absent cohort were placed with parents, that is, had Care Orders in place but lived at home with their families, and 25% lived in children's residential homes. Both placed with parents and children's homes are known risk factors for persistent absence from school, as is demonstrated by the fact that 40% of our persistently absent cohort lived in one of these settings.

Attendance for the cohort is reviewed weekly and all children whose attendance is problematic are reviewed, with follow-up action and liaison with social workers and schools as required. The Virtual School Learning Mentor and Inclusion Advisor provide 1:1 support for some children and PPG is used to commission mentoring, tuition and appropriate Alternative Provision if this is required. In 2023 – 24, we have established a monthly meeting with children's social care team managers to review children whose attendance is a concern and ensure this is reviewed in social worker supervision. We have also commissioned a dedicated Attendance Officer from the Attendance team who will work with us for two days a week to support CLA with attendance concerns.

Exclusions

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Number of children receiving permanent exclusions	0	0	0
Number of children receiving suspensions	36 (13.5%)	28 (12.6%)	30 (13.5%)

15. The Virtual School's Extension to Role: Children with a social worker (new duties)

We know that nationally, children with a social worker are some of the most disadvantaged children in England. They fall behind their peers who have not been known to social care in every educational measure: they have worse attendance, they are more likely to be excluded and their attainment and progress are much lower. Given that approximately 10% of all children in England will have a social worker at some point in their childhood, this is a significant cohort of children who are at huge risk of not fulfilling their potential.

Following the 2019 Children in Need review, in 2021 Virtual School Headteachers were tasked with being the national strategic leads to improve educational outcomes for this cohort. In Bury, this is approximately 610 children. (data correct as of November 2024).

We have two members of staff for our children with a social worker cohort, Catherine Riley (strategic lead for children with a social worker) and Lauren Warburton (inclusion advisor). Catherine's role is strategic one, developing practice and having a birds eye view of how we support our children on child in need and child protection plans. Lauren's role involves direct work with children focusing on emotional health and wellbeing.

Catherine has been on maternity leave in the last academic year and this role has been covered on a part-time basis by Suzanne Ross from our attendance team. Suzanne has picked up some of the work started by Catherine. This has included:

- Continuation of education audit for child in need and child protection cases
- Weekly drop-in for social workers to discuss educational barriers for CWSW
- Attending family resource panel as a source of advice and guidance
- Visits to schools to discuss CWSW cohort, signposting to services and checking data is correct and up-to-date

Due to this role being covered on a part-time basis the work had to become more streamlined. Catherine returned to work at the end of August therefore some of the strategic priorities will be back up and running.

From November 2024 Catherine will be covering a role in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) as education lead, this is an interim role until a permanent member of staff is recruited. This role is mainly information gathering to form part of the wider picture of families when social workers are ranking cases on the 'continuum of need'. This will further develop our links with social workers and give us a broader understanding of how children move through social care from the 'front door' all the way to being looked after.

Priorities for 2024-2025

- Continue weekly drop in for social workers to discuss educational queries
- Continue to attend social work team meetings to raise profile of this cohort
- Work as part of the multi-agency audit team to improve quality of CIN & CP plans with a particular focus on education

- Work alongside principal social worker to deliver training for social workers (attendance, SEN and exclusions)
- Visits to in-borough schools to complete educational audits on support for CWSW
- Regular attendance at DSL (designated safeguarding lead) panels
- Attend neglect strategy toolkit training and deliver this training to the wider Bury workforce as part of Bury's wider neglect strategy
- Organise and deliver celebration event for children with a social worker
- Develop systems to track attendance and attainment data for cohort
- Offer advice and guidance to schools: training for schools and individual conversations about children and young people

Training for 2024-2025

- Neglect Strategy Toolkit Training – part of Bury's Integrated Safeguarding Partnership wider neglect strategy.
- Attendance training for social workers

Role of the Inclusion Advisor: Lauren Warburton

The role of the Inclusion Advisor is to maintain and improve the attendance and attainment of young people in Bury who have a social worker (CIN/CP/CLA).

Lauren's background in Mental Health has meant there has been a focus on helping children and young people manage their emotional health and wellbeing, using mixed disciplines such as mindfulness, CBT, trauma informed practices and talking therapies. Lauren continues to build on and promote "The Wellbeing Pathway" established in 2023; this is a dedicated pathway for professionals to book on to if they have concerns for a child or young person who has a social worker and who is struggling with their emotional health and wellbeing. They book a 1:1 consultation with the inclusion advisor and following that the outcomes can vary, they include signposting to appropriate services, targeted group work, bespoke recommendations and a small cohort of young people that can access 1:1 weekly intervention with the inclusion advisor. The feedback from professionals regarding The Wellbeing Pathway has been overwhelmingly positive and the children and young people who have benefitted have also given positive feedback and have demonstrated improved school attendance. This last academic year the feedback form has been updated to a Microsoft form so that professionals can feed back quickly and effectively allowing the inclusion advisor to make quick and effective adjustments to the pathway as required.

There have been lots of opportunities for Lauren to join and help shape different areas across children's social care and education. Including attending Family Resource Panel in partnership with the Youth Service so that children, young people and their families can access the right service for them. Also joining the LA's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Task & Finish group created in response to our young people's views to help create easier access to Mental Health support in the borough.

Lauren has made strong connections with schools and social workers across the LA strengthening the relationship between the two. She has been able to deliver trauma informed training to school staff and share information regarding the inclusion advisor role and the Virtual School's role as a whole. This year Lauren completed a post-

graduate study in professional practice in the education of children within the remit of the Virtual School with Bath Spa University in partnership with NAVSH, she passed the course with a 1st and is now deeply aware of the outcomes of our vulnerable children and fully equipped to make informed decisions when advising professionals.

Further to this Lego play which is run by Lauren and Deb Vine has successfully been completed in one local High School and the second cohort is almost finished in a local primary school. Schools are offered six group sessions for their children to explore emotional regulation via the medium of Lego, these sessions have been greatly received and children have fed back how much they enjoy them, and the routine outcome measures show a quantifiable reduction in stress and improved wellbeing*.

Key priorities for the next year are to continue to promote the education, attendance, attainment and emotional health and wellbeing of our vulnerable young people. A main area of focus is to continue to develop a range of group interventions such as exam stress (planning is underway with Deb vine, VS Learning mentor) also areas such as managing anxiety and bereavement & loss with the aim being able to offer group sessions to schools so that young people can make positive progress*.

*Cross-reference to section 10 for further detail.

16. Previously looked-after children (PLAC)

For children who were previously looked-after but left care via a formal route such as adoption or a Special Guardianship Order, the Virtual School's duty is to provide advice and information to professionals and parents. We do not have corporate parenting responsibility for these children so do not do direct work with them or casehold, but we offer advice and guidance on all aspects of education and specific training for schools on supporting the needs of these children. Our intention in 2023 – 24 and beyond is to increase the training on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder we offer to schools, in recognition of the probability that at least 70% of adopted children had prenatal alcohol exposure. We also want to improve our support to adoptive parents by offering more training via the Regional Adoption Agency

Jo Foster has been working closely with one of our new specialist provisions in Bury, helping them to embed trauma informed approaches. We were alerted to a PLAC pupil in the school who they were really struggling to meet the needs of. Sally was at risk of permanent exclusion, so Jo visited school, devised bespoke trauma and **PACE** (Playfulness Acceptance Compassion Empathy) training and delivered to whole school staff. Alongside whole school training, a consultation was held with the Senior Leadership Team using recent specialist assessment reports and recommendations and to support their implementation. Unfortunately school continued to struggle with Sally as she was not reacting well to the changes in interventions and support, which began to impact on her safety and the safety of other peers and staff. However, we worked again with the school and the SEN team in Bury to find an alternative to a permanent exclusion and consultations are underway to source a more different, trauma informed provision, able to meet her complex needs and that will help her flourish and meet her goals in the future.

17. What are we going to do next?

Improvement Plan headlines for 2024-25

Improvement Priority	Areas of focus
Improve attendance	<p>Reduce persistent absence by increased multi-agency working</p> <p>Integrated working with the local authority Attendance Service</p> <p>Further training for social care, schools and foster carers</p> <p>Emphasis on school stability within permanence planning</p>
Improved attainment and progress for our children	<p>Focus on SMART, aspirational academic outcomes in PEPs and Quality Assurance of these</p> <p>Analysis of the impact of the NTP grant on the attainment of pupils in year 6 and 11 to inform how the VS delivers academic support going forward for these year groups</p> <p>Incorporate the Multiplication Tables Check into the PEP to allow for enhanced progress tracking in Mathematics. The MTC purpose is to test fluency of recall of times tables up to 12.</p> <p>Reduce suspensions and improve attendance</p> <p>Strategies to accelerate progress: tuition, mentoring, strategic use of PPG</p> <p>Supporting children into independent schools via routes such as the Springboard Foundation</p> <p>More training on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder for schools</p> <p>Work with our Multi-Academy Trusts – establish termly meetings with CEOs to review KPIs for CLA across the Trust</p> <p>Termly meetings focusing on PEP data with Head of Service</p>
Improved PEPs	<p>Termly training offered to all stakeholders</p> <p>Schools with Red or Amber PEPs asked to complete mandatory training</p> <p>Annual quality assurance visits to schools with higher numbers of CLA on roll</p> <p>PEP training to be part of the core training for all new social workers</p>
Improved working with foster carers	<p>Increased training offer</p> <p>Mandatory education training for all newly approved foster carers</p> <p>Regular engagement events such as coffee mornings</p>
Improved offer of interim education for children and young people who move out of borough	<p>Development of a policy in conjunction with the SEND team in Bury to implement a “while you wait offer” for all our children and young people including those with an EHCP to reduce time out of education</p> <p>Regular attendance at SEND resource panel to ensure CIC are prioritised.</p>

Appendix 1: Glossary of terms used in this report

CIN: a child on a Child in Need Plan. A Child in Need is defined by the Children Act 1989 as a child who needs additional help and protection as a result of risks to their development or health. These children are supported by social workers.

CLA: a child who is looked-after by their local authority, who become their corporate parents. The legal term for our children is looked-after child or LAC, but we choose not to use this term in line with the wishes of our children. A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 ours is a looked-after child according to the legal definition.

CP: Child Protection. A child is placed on a CP Plan if they are at risk of significant harm, as set out in the Children Act 1989. They are supported by a social worker and a team of professionals.

DSL: Designated Safeguarding Lead. The teacher in a school who takes the lead responsibility for overseeing safeguarding in the school.

DT: Designated Teacher for children in care and previously looked-after children. It is statutory for all schools to have a Designated Teacher, whether they currently have children in care on roll or not.

EYFS: the Early Years Foundation Stage, which comprises the Nursery and Reception years.

EET: education, employment and/or training

EHCP: education, health and care plan

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages – courses in ESOL are offered by many colleges

GLD: good level of development (outcome measured at the end of the EYFS when children are 5)

KS: Key Stage. Key Stages are split as follows:

Key Stage One: Years 1-2 (age 5-7)

Key Stage Two: Years 3-6 (age 7-11)

Key Stage Three: Years 7-9 (age 11-14)

Key Stage Four: Years 10-11 (age 14-16)

Key Stage 5: Years 12-13 (age 16-18)

NEET: not in education, employment and/or training

NAVSH: National Association of Virtual School Heads

PEP: Personal Education Plan. All CLA must have a PEP, which should be reviewed every term (three times per year).

PPG: the Pupil Premium Grant. This is a grant allocated to the Virtual School Headteacher to be spent on resources, interventions and support to improve educational attainment and progress for CLA.

Progress 8: shows the progress GCSE students have made from KS2, across 8 subjects. The average expected progress score for all pupils is 0.

SALT: Speech and Language Therapy/Therapist

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

UASC: Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child

Appendix 2: 2024 Attainment Outcomes

All CLA includes children who were in care for a short period of time or left care during the year. The “qualifying cohort” are those children who had been care for at least 12 months as of 31st March 2024. It is the qualifying cohort who are reported on nationally. At present the national data is not available for comparison but should be by the end of the Spring Term 2025.

Primary School Data Headlines

Early Years Foundation Stage: children reaching a Good Level of Development

At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage: Summer term of Reception, children are defined as having reached GLD (Good Level of Development) if they have achieved the expected level for the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in the prime areas of learning* and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.

There were 12 children in the qualifying Reception cohort, 4 of them with SEND (1 EHCP). Please interpret results with caution.

*communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development

Bury CLA 2024: all	Bury qualifying cohort 2024	Bury CLA with SEND 2024	Bury CLA no SEND 2024	CLA national data 2023
38%	42%	25%	33%	41%

Year One Phonics: children working at Age-Related Expectations

Phonics is the accepted most effective current method of teaching children to read and the national screening check allows schools to check phonics knowledge, confirm that children are making expected levels of progress in line with the National Curriculum and ensure that additional support early to limit children falling behind in this vital skill.

There were 13 year 1 children in the qualifying cohort, 8 with SEND (4 EHCP). Please interpret results with caution.

Bury CLA 2024: all	Bury qualifying cohort 2024	Bury CLA with SEND 2024	Bury CLA no SEND 2024	CLA national data 2023
71%	62%	37.5%	100%	61%

Key Stage Two attainment

Pupils in Year 6 are assessed in Reading and Maths via externally-marked tests, with an optional externally-marked Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling test. Their Writing is assessed via teacher assessment. Pupils are assessed as working towards the expected standard, working at the expected standard or working at greater depth. Some children with SEND are not entered for the tests.

This was a cohort of 14 in the Qualifying cohort, of whom 10 had SEND. Figures should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Cohort	Reading: working at the expected standard	Writing: working at the expected standard	Maths: working at the expected standard	Reading, Writing and Maths at expected standard
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Bury CLA 2024: all	69% (including 19% Greater Depth)	50%	56% (including 19% Greater Depth)	46%
Bury CLA 2024: qualifying cohort	64% (21% Greater Depth)	43%	50% (7% Greater Depth)	36%
Bury CLA with SEND 2024	60% (20% Greater Depth)	40%	40%	30%
Bury CLA no SEND 2024	75% (25% Greater Depth)	50%	75% (25% Greater Depth)	50%
CLA national data 2023 (qualifying cohort)	55%	48%	51%	37%

Attainment at Key Stage Four

There were 32 pupils in the year 11 cohort, 21 of them in the qualifying cohort. 18 of the total cohort took exams in GCSEs but the remainder were on alternative pathways including functional skills, ESOI as they were new to the country or disappled do to health reasons. This was a complex cohort with 20 having identified SEND, 11 of which have EHCPs, therefore these results must be interpreted with caution. There were however, some excellent individual results and 59% achieved at least 1 GCSE (grade 1-9) and 72% of the total cohort achieved at least one recognized qualification.

	Average Attainment 8 score	Average Progress 8 score	English average progress score	Maths average progress score
Bury CLA 2024 (qualifying cohort)	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet available
2023 CLA national (qualifying cohort)	19.4	-1.26	-1.39	-1.03

Attainment information

	% grade 9-4 in English	% grade 9-4 in Maths	% grade 9-4 in English and Maths	% 5 or more GCSEs grade 9-4 including English and Maths
2024 Bury: all CLA	16%	16%	13%	13%
2024 Bury: qualifying cohort	24%	24%	19%	19%
2023 CLA national (qualifying cohort)	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

	% grade 9-5 in English	% grade 9-5 in Maths	% grade 9-5 in English and Maths	% 5 or more GCSEs grade 9-5 including English and Maths
2024 Bury: all CLA	13%	9%	9%	9%

2024 Bury: qualifying cohort	19%	14%	14%	14%
2023 CLA national (qualifying cohort)	Not available	Not available	9.5%	Not available

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Appendix 3: the Virtual School team

Bury's Virtual School Headteacher is managed through the Education service and line-managed by the Director of Education and Skills. She is also a member of the Senior Leadership Team in Children's Services in the Local Authority and attends the social care Extended Managers' Meetings. Bury's Virtual School is a member of the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH). Members of the team attend the Primary Inclusion Locality Meetings.

Position	Name
Virtual School Headteacher	Gemma Parkes until 31/08/24 Catherine Hobday from 23/09/2024
Virtual School Deputy Headteacher	Joanne Foster from 01/07/2024
Advisory Teacher and PEP co-ordinator	Sarah Metcalfe
Advisory Teacher	Position currently vacant from 01/09/2024
SEND Lead	Position currently vacant
Learning Mentor	Deb Vine
Post-16 EET Lead	Marion Duzgun
PEP Officer	Jamila Shahzad
Lead for Children with a Social Worker (CP/CIN)	Catherine Riley
Inclusion Advisor	Lauren Warburton
Post 18 EET Advisor	Chris Howarth
Speech and Language Therapist (2 days per week, term-time)	Sarah-Jayne Smith
Attendance Officer	Sarah Bickerton (2 days per week, term-time)