	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">13 April 2026</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development</p>
	<p align="center">Lead Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Employment – Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual Report September 2024 - August 2025</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council’s Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
List of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	0
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Michaela Richards, Headteacher: Brent Virtual School Michaela.Richards@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 1075

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) annual report is to outline the activity and impact of the BVS during the academic year 2024/25 in monitoring and supporting looked after children to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Data contained in this report is for looked after children who were in the care of Brent Council for the academic year 2024/25, and the report includes outcomes for all children who have been in care for a year or more as of 31 March 2025 (“the eligible cohort”).¹

2.0 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

¹ 1.1 The DfE sets the eligible cohort for reporting on external examinations as at least 13 months before the day of the first exam. This is acknowledgement of services requiring time to be able to support and affect positive changes.

2.1 This report sets out the work of BVS, the achievement of Brent's looked after children and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of the virtual school contributes to the following borough priorities:

- The Best Start in Life
- Prosperity and Stability
- A Healthier Brent
- Thriving Communities

3.0 Context

3.1 At the end of the academic year in 2024/25, 350 children and young people were on roll with the BVS. Throughout the course of the academic year this number will have fluctuated by as much as 10% in either direction due to the nature of the cohort. There were 47 under four-year-olds, 180 pupils were aged 4-16 years old and 123 were 16–18-year-olds, this figure includes a sizable number of care leavers in Year 13 who turned 18 during the academic year but are still monitored by BVS until the end of Year 13.

3.2 BVS sits within the Education, Partnerships and Strategy Department in the Children and Young People and Community Development (CYPCD) directorate. The Virtual School operates as a multi-disciplinary team focused on supporting children and young people in care to achieve their full potential and experience positive educational outcomes.

3.3 The team includes a range of specialist roles, comprising both teaching and non-teaching advisory staff, an Educational Psychologist, Education Officers, a dedicated Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Year 11 Education Officer, a Post-16 Advisor and an Enrichment Coordinator. A nominated officer in the CYPCD Performance Team also provides analytical and data support to the service, strengthening the Virtual School's ability to monitor outcomes and identify areas for targeted intervention. During the 2024/25 academic year, in addition to the core team, BVS draws on the expertise of commissioned services delivered on behalf of the local authority, including Prospects, which provides careers education, information, advice and guidance, and the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), which offered specialist support to promote emotional wellbeing and resilience.

3.4 BVS staff work in close partnership with social workers, foster carers, colleagues within the CYPCD Inclusion Service and staff across schools and educational settings. This collaborative approach ensures that children looked after receive coordinated and holistic support that addresses both their educational needs and wider wellbeing.

3.5 The priorities for BVS in 2024/25 were:

- a) To continue to work closely with schools, social care colleagues, carers and young people to further improve attendance, especially in Key Stage 4 (for progress see sections 4 and 5)

- b) To utilise the post-16, grant funding to support Key Stage 5 LAC into EET and higher education opportunities and improve EET figures from 80% to 85% or higher (for progress see section 9.1)
- c) To implement the proposed statutory strategic duty to promote the educational achievement of children with a social worker and children in kinship care (for progress see section 17.1)
- d) To ensure that BVS is aligned with the strategic direction for virtual schools as proposed in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill alongside all other relevant developments locally and nationally.

3.6 BVS successfully delivered against most of the priorities agreed for the 2024/25 academic year, the detail of which is set out within the relevant sections of this report. While progress has been made in supporting the 16-19 cohort to access education, employment or training (EET), participation rates have fluctuated during the year, reflecting the transitional nature of post-16 pathways. Strengthening EET participation and ensuring young people access sustainable post-16 destinations will remain an important area of focus for the Virtual School and its partners in the coming academic year.

3.7 A further priority for 2024/25 was to ensure that BVS remains aligned with the evolving national direction for Virtual Schools, including proposals outlined within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and other relevant policy developments. As the Bill is still progressing through the legislative process, the Virtual School continues to monitor national developments and position the service strategically to respond to any changes to the statutory role and expectations of Virtual School Heads.

4.0 Attendance and Attendance Monitoring and Intervention

4.1 Primary (Key Stages 1 and 2)

Attendance for children looked after in Key Stages 1 and 2 was 95.1% in 2024/25, compared to 97% in 2023/24. While this represents a notable decrease, it is important to contextualise this within both cohort dynamics and wider national trends.

Full national comparator data for children looked after is not currently available; however, overall attendance for primary-aged pupils nationally is 94.9%. This indicates that, despite the reduction, attendance for Brent's children looked after at primary phase remains above national averages.

The decline is reflective of a small cohort where the attendance of a limited number of pupils can significantly impact overall percentages. In addition, factors such as placement instability, emerging SEND needs, and increased emotional wellbeing needs have contributed to reduced attendance for a minority of pupils. BVS continues to work proactively with schools, carers and social workers to address these issues through early intervention, targeted support and close monitoring, ensuring that attendance remains a key priority.

4.2 Secondary (Key Stages 3 and 4)

Attendance for children looked after in Key Stages 3 and 4 was 86.3% in 2024/25, compared to 89% in 2023/24, representing a more significant decrease than seen at primary phase.

While full national attendance data for children looked after is not available, overall national attendance for secondary-aged pupils is 91.5%, indicating that attendance for this cohort remains below national averages and continues to be an area of focus.

The reduction reflects a combination of factors typically associated with older cohorts, including placement changes, school transitions, increased complexity of need, disengagement, and higher levels of persistent absence. A small number of pupils with particularly low attendance have had a disproportionate impact on overall figures, which is characteristic of this cohort.

In response, BVS has strengthened its attendance strategy, including earlier identification of pupils at risk (below 95%), regular tracking meetings, and targeted multi-agency interventions for those below 90%. This includes close partnership working with schools, designated teachers, carers and social workers to remove barriers to attendance and re-engage pupils in education. Improving secondary attendance remains a key strategic priority moving forward.

- 4.3 BVS maintains a strong strategic focus on promoting high levels of attendance for children looked after, recognising the well-established link between regular school attendance, educational progress and improved wellbeing outcomes. Attendance is monitored through a dedicated online tracking system, enabling the Virtual School to analyse patterns, identify emerging concerns and intervene at the earliest possible stage. Attendance is also embedded as a key priority within all Personal Education Plans (PEPs), ensuring that schools, carers and professionals maintain a shared focus on improving attendance outcomes and reducing absence.
- 4.4 Where attendance falls between 90% and 95%, early intervention measures are implemented to prevent further decline. This includes review through fortnightly attendance monitoring meetings, where pupils whose attendance falls below 95% are identified and targeted support strategies are agreed. Where attendance drops below 90%, the Virtual School undertakes proactive engagement with schools, carers and other professionals to address barriers to attendance and implement timely interventions aimed at securing sustained improvement. This systematic monitoring approach enables the Virtual School to maintain robust oversight of attendance across the cohort and to ensure that concerns are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

5.0 Monitoring and Securing School Placements

- 5.1 The majority of Brent's children looked after are placed in a suitable educational setting within the statutory 20-day timeframe. Where cases present additional complexity—such as placement instability, vulnerability factors or significant additional needs—the BVS leadership team works in partnership with social care, inclusion and SEND services, both within Brent and across other local

authorities, to ensure that a coordinated and holistic approach is taken to securing appropriate provision.

5.2 As in previous years, challenges remain in securing timely placements for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who reside outside of the borough, particularly where consultations with schools do not result in an offer of placement within expected timescales. To strengthen oversight and improve coordination for children looked after with additional needs, a SEN Advisory Officer joined the BVS team in March 2025. This role has provided enhanced strategic oversight of children looked after with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and has already had a significant impact in supporting this cohort. The post has strengthened engagement with schools, SEND teams and partner authorities, enabling more effective advocacy for children looked after with SEND and helping to secure appropriate educational provision in a more timely and coordinated way than previously.

5.3 Children Awaiting Educational Provision: At any point during the academic year there may be a small number of children looked after who are temporarily without a confirmed school placement. This may occur for several reasons, including children arriving from overseas as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), children entering care through emergency placements, or where a change of care placement takes place at short notice. In some cases, a school placement may also break down before a suitable alternative provision has been secured. During the 2024/25 academic year, the number of children in this position fluctuated between two and six pupils at any given time. The Virtual School maintains close oversight of this cohort to ensure that children do not experience prolonged periods without education and that progress towards securing an appropriate school placement is actively monitored. Children who are not currently on a school roll are subject to regular oversight through fortnightly monitoring meetings, where the suitability of interim provision is reviewed and progress towards securing a permanent school placement is closely monitored.

5.4 To ensure that children who are between school placements do not miss out on education, BVS commissions 1:1 tuition in the core subjects of English and Mathematics, funded through the Pupil Premium Grant. This provision is typically delivered within the home environment to ensure continuity of learning during periods of transition. For older pupils, tuition may also take place in community settings such as local libraries, providing a more independent learning environment where appropriate. This interim provision ensures that children remain engaged in learning, maintain progress in core subjects and continue to receive structured educational support while a permanent school placement is secured.

6.0 Exclusions

6.1 During the 2024/25 academic year, there was a small increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions of children looked after, with 22 recorded compared to 20 in the previous academic year. The overall number, however, remains low in comparison to previous local data and the current national data. Importantly,

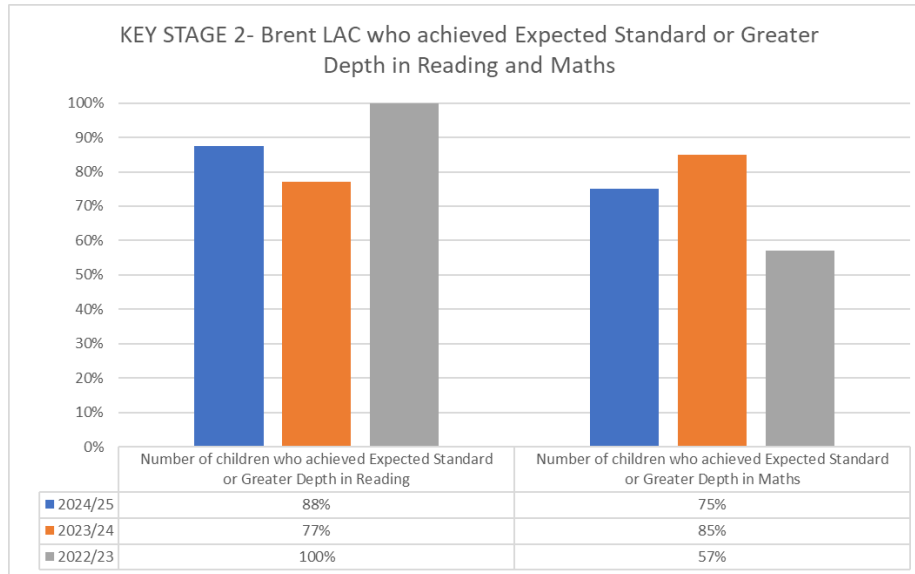
there were no permanent exclusions of children looked after during the year. This reflects the strong commitment across Brent's partnership to ensure that children in care remain supported within education and that exclusion is avoided wherever possible.

- 6.2 Through its corporate parenting responsibilities, BVS works closely with schools, designated teachers, foster carers and social workers to identify emerging risks at an early stage and implement targeted support and appropriate adjustments for children at risk of exclusion. The BVS leadership team maintains strategic oversight of behaviour and exclusion data, enabling timely intervention and coordinated planning where concerns arise. This preventative and collaborative approach supports schools to adopt inclusive practices and tailored support strategies, helping children looked after to remain engaged in education and reducing the likelihood of issues escalating to permanent exclusion. This reflects the national expectation that permanent exclusion of children looked after should be avoided wherever possible through early intervention, inclusive practice and strong multi-agency partnership working.

7.0 Progress and Attainment Key Stage 2

- 7.1 The academic year 2024/25 was the fourth year of testing since the pandemic and the results for the whole cohort are positive for all measures, showing improvement from the previous year's results. In 2024/25 Brent CLA continued to outperform LAC regionally and nationally for the same measures (Graph 1). It should, however, be noted that the number of children in the cohort is relatively small, which means that one or two children can have a significant impact either way on results.
- 7.2 At the time of the 2025 KS2 tests, Brent had 11 CLA in Year 6 for whom there are results for 8 children. Three children did not sit KS2 tests due to their level of SEND/SEMH needs (one has an Education, Health and Care Plan). Graph 1 below captures the outcomes for the 8 children and shows trend data for the last 3 years.

Graph 1: 2025 KS2 All CLA in KS2 cohort

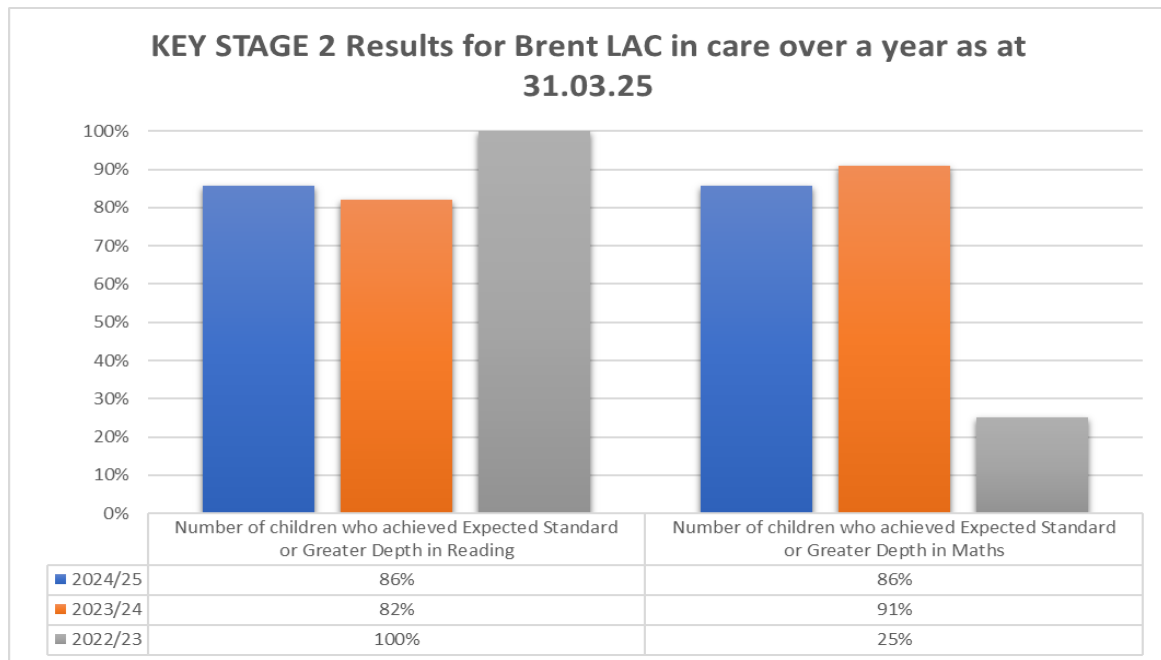


7.3 Of the 11 pupils in the overall cohort, seven had been in care for at least one year as of 31 March 2025, forming the eligible cohort for statutory reporting. Graph 2 presents the outcomes for this group. In reading, attainment improved by 4 percentage points compared with 2024, reflecting continued progress in this area. In mathematics, outcomes were 5 percentage points lower than the previous year.

Given the small cohort size, year-on-year outcomes can fluctuate and should be interpreted with caution, as the performance of individual pupils can have a notable impact on overall percentages. It is also recognised that, more broadly, increased length of time in care is often associated with greater educational stability and improved outcomes, as children benefit from consistent support, placement stability and sustained engagement in education.

Brent Virtual School continues to work closely with schools, designated teachers and carers to ensure that targeted support in core subjects is in place and that pupils are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Graph 2: 2025 KS2 CLA in care at least one year at 31/03/2025



7.4 During 2024/25, as with previous academic years, the BVS subscribed to the Letterbox Club – a subscription that delivers books and educational games to children aged 5 to 12 years. Subscription to Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library that offers a book subscription that covers babies to 4 years old. A book club was led by the primary advisory teacher. BVS again supported tuition intervention for students and booster programmes for year groups sitting external exams (Year 6 and Year 11). In total 43 children engaged in either booster programmes or tuition throughout the academic year, whilst a further 26 had access to Maths and/or Literacy subscriptions during the academic year.

Year 7 Case Study

BN is a year 7 student who has been in local authority care since 2022 and is in a stable long-term foster placement. She is supported by her carer, social worker, BVS Advisory Officer and Designated Teacher. In September 2023, while in Year 6, an Educational Psychologist observed BN following concerns around possible ASC traits. The assessment found that BN is academically able but experiences some social communication difficulties, including challenges with empathy and understanding others' perspectives.

In summer 2024, BN's birth mother sadly passed away. To ensure appropriate support during this time and ahead of her transition to secondary school, BVS arranged an early PEP meeting. Strategies from the EP report were shared with the school to support her learning and social development. Weekly art therapy was commissioned by the Designated Teacher to provide a safe space for BN to process her bereavement and support her emotional wellbeing.

BN was identified as a gifted and talented pupil with Maths being a particular strength. PPG funding supported her participation in robotics club through the purchase of a coding kit and Robots in Motion building set. A laptop and handwriting resources were also provided to support her academic progress.

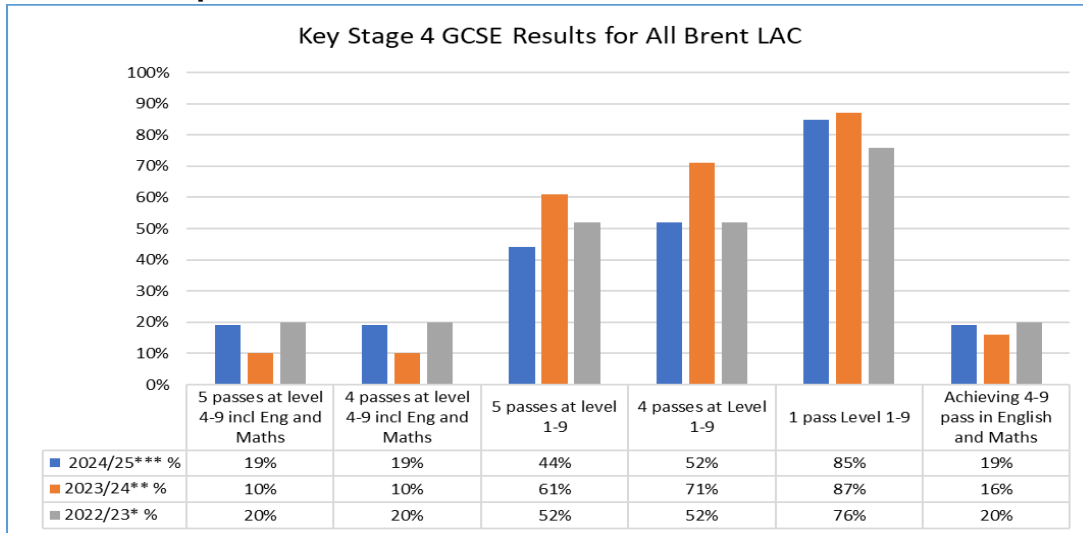
With coordinated support from BVS, the school, and her carers, BN has transitioned successfully into Year 7, engaged well with enrichment opportunities, and is making positive progress both academically and emotionally.

8.0 Progress and Attainment Key Stage 4

- 8.1 At the end of the academic year 2024/25 there were 43 Year 11 students of whom 8 were UASC. The Statistical First Release (SFR eligible cohort) was 20, of whom 2 were children with an EHCP who had significant needs which meant that they did not sit exams. 18 students therefore sat exams and are counted in the SFR results.
- 8.2 To support both the primary and secondary cohorts, Pupil Premium funding was utilised in several ways. Primarily, funding was sent to all schools to ensure that PEP targets were achieved. The funding that was retained by BVS supported the enrichment programme that had a focus on attainment and wellbeing. Where required, schools received the full Pupil Premium funding to support children and young people who had significant barriers to learning. Several children accessed mentoring and/or tuition at key points in the year.
- 8.3 The proportion of children looked after achieving the headline measure of five GCSE passes at grades 4–9 including English and Maths was 19% in the 2024/25 academic year. This represents an improvement of almost 10 percentage points compared with the previous year and brings outcomes back in line with those achieved in 2022/23.
- 8.4 Performance against the Statistical First Release (SFR) cohort measure also improved significantly. This year's figure was 28%, representing a substantial increase of almost 20 percentage points compared with the previous academic

year and a 4-percentage point improvement on 2022/23 (Graph 3). This positive trend reflects the continued strategic focus of BVS and partner schools on raising attainment at Key Stage 4, including targeted academic support, robust monitoring through the PEP process, and strong collaboration between schools, carers and professionals to support children looked after to achieve their potential.

Graph 3: Achievement rates for GCSEs 2022/23 - 2024/25

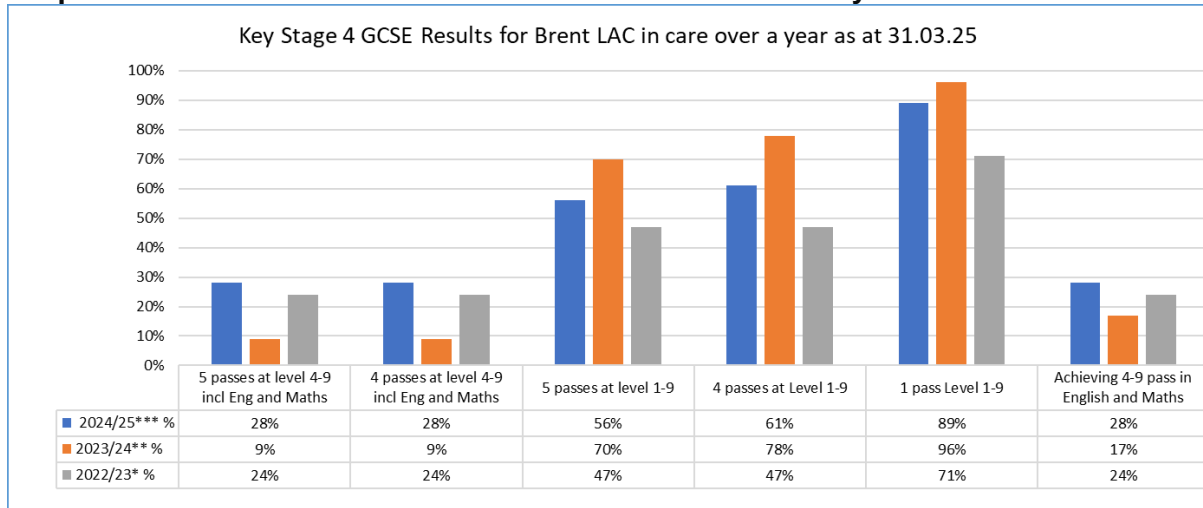


*The above data is for the whole LAC cohort minus SEN/disabilities and ESOL (10 LAC) - total cohort- 35

**The above data is for the whole LAC cohort minus SEN/disabilities and ESOL (12 LAC) - total cohort- 43

***The above data is for the whole LAC cohort minus SEN/disabilities and ESOL (5 LAC) - total cohort- 32

Graph 4: GCSE achievement rates for LAC in care for over a year 2022/23 -2024/25



*The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (5 LAC) - total SFR cohort-22

**The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (6 LAC) - total SFR cohort-29

***The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (2 LAC)- total SFR cohort-20

8.5 All five pupils, who had been in care for between 5 and 15 years and achieved the headline outcome of five GCSE passes at grades 4–9 including English and Maths, had experienced long-term care stability. Four of these pupils were living in stable long-term foster placements, while one pupil was in residential care and

attending a grammar school outside the borough. One pupil within the group also had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and was educated in a specialist setting. All five pupils had previously met or exceeded age-related expectations at Key Stage 2, highlighting the importance of sustained educational support and stability over time.

- 8.6 A few common factors were evident across this group. Each pupil demonstrated significant resilience, linked not only to stable care placements but also stable school placements from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4, and support from aspirational carers and committed education professionals. These protective factors were instrumental in enabling the pupils to maintain strong engagement in learning and achieve positive educational outcomes.
- 8.7 All pupils who achieved five GCSE passes at grades 4–9 including English and Maths benefited from targeted academic support throughout Key Stage 4. Each pupil had access to 1:1 tutoring in core subjects, delivered either through their school or externally through the Lumina Programme in partnership with Harrow School. In addition, all pupils attended school-led booster and intervention sessions and maintained strong attendance throughout Key Stage 4, which further supported their academic progress.
- 8.8 Several pupils also accessed wider enrichment and aspiration-raising opportunities. One pupil participated in the Brunel University Scholars Programme, while two pupils took part in John Lyon's Charity and BVS enrichment activities. The Lumina Programme provided a combination of academic tuition and pastoral mentoring, supporting pupils to build confidence, resilience and aspiration alongside improving attainment. As one tutor involved in the programme commented:

"It has taken a bit of time to get to know my tutee, and for her to get to know me; my main feeling is that she needs confidence in her own ability more than anything, so I see my role as very much to support that confidence, celebrating successes within the tutor sessions, and setting her up for success in classes so that she can sustain this confidence in school."

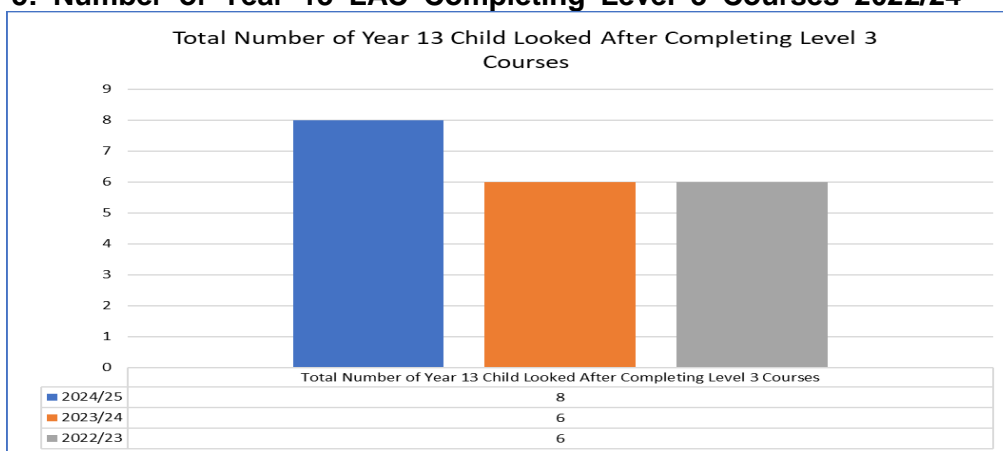
9.0 Post-16:

- 9.1 The proportion of care leavers aged 17–18 who are participating in education, employment or training (EET) can fluctuate throughout the academic year due to the transitional nature of post-16 pathways and the individual circumstances of young people as they move between courses, training opportunities and employment. During the past academic year, Brent's EET rate has ranged between 77% and 83%. These fluctuations are often associated with key transition points, including the completion of courses, changes in placement, or young people reassessing their next steps before re-engaging with education or training. As Corporate Parents, the Council remains committed to supporting care leavers to achieve positive and sustainable destinations. BVS works closely with social workers, personal advisers, post-16 providers and careers services to closely track participation, identify young people who may be at risk of becoming NEET at an early stage, and put in place targeted support to help them re-engage quickly and access appropriate opportunities that raise

aspirations and support long-term independence. During the 2025/26 academic year, the Virtual School commenced work on embedding the Family Business Model across services, aimed at strengthening collective responsibility and ensuring that all parts of the Council play an active role in supporting care leavers to access and sustain positive education, employment and training pathways.

9.2 In 2024/25, a total of eight Year 13 students successfully completed Level 3 qualifications, representing an increase on the previous academic year. Of these young people, three have progressed to university, while the remaining five have secured employment. This includes one young person who has begun a Teaching Assistant Apprenticeship with a pathway into teaching.

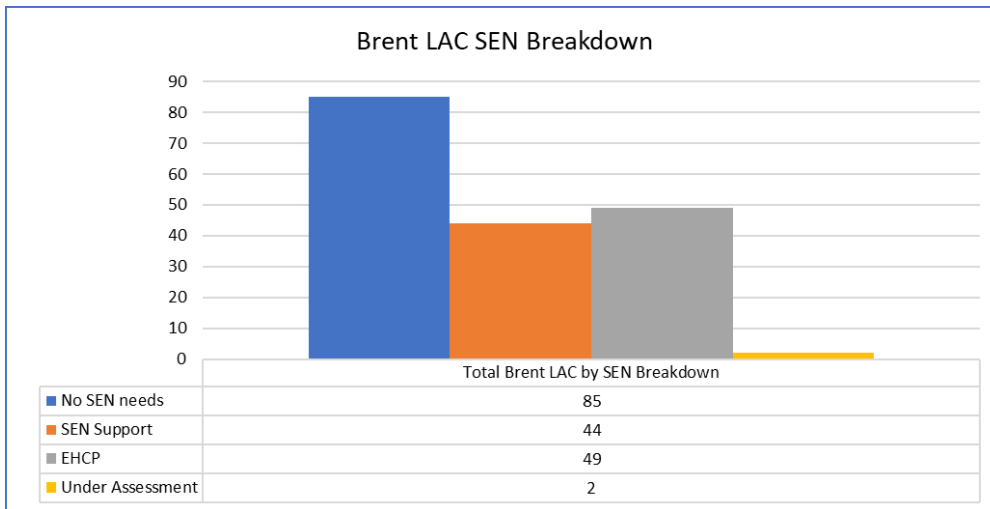
Graph 5: Number of Year 13 LAC Completing Level 3 Courses 2022/24 – 2024/25



10.0 SEND

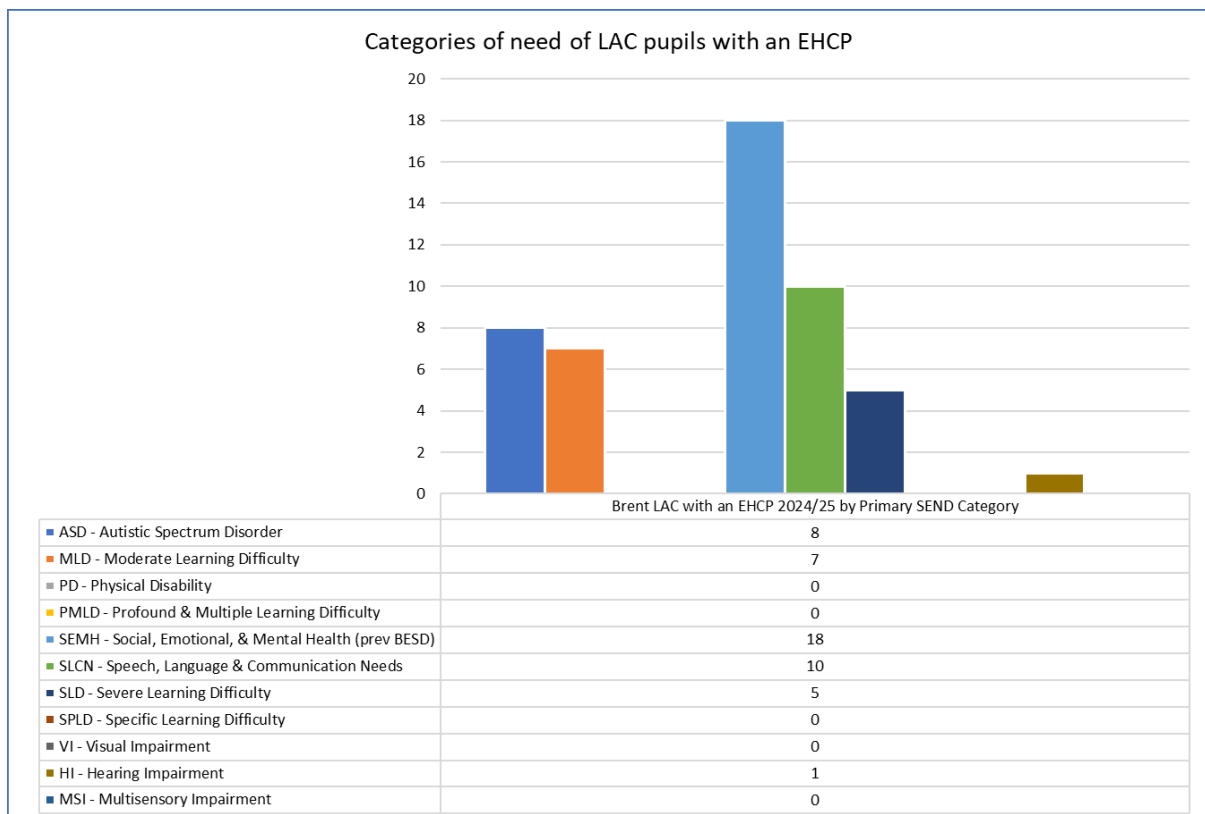
10.1 The number of statutory aged young people in care under the BVS with an EHCP is 49, equating to 27% of the cohort. In comparison, as of July 2025 4.6% of the general population on roll in Brent schools had an EHCP (which was similar to the national rate). Seven of this group were in a residential setting or secure unit and 12 were placed in SEN special schools. 36 of the 44 in schools were educated outside of the borough.

Graph 6: Looked After Children with SEND



10.2 Graph 7 outlines the categories of need of LAC pupils with an EHCP. The highest area of need in the LAC cohort continues to be social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). These figures reflect the vulnerability of young people becoming LAC and the complex trauma and challenging environments many experienced prior to becoming LAC.

Graph 7: Categories of need of LAC pupils with an EHCP



11.0 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

- 11.1 During the 2024/25 academic year, 7 new statutory- aged UASC entered the care system, consistent with the number admitted in the previous year. All young people in this group were in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, 10 UASC entered the care system in 2024/25, compared with eight in the preceding year, representing an increase in older arrivals. The BVS worker continued to provide dedicated support and advocacy for this cohort, ensuring that each young person gained swift access to education and enrichment opportunities immediately upon entering the care system.
- 11.2 Generally, UASC are disapplied from KS4 assessments as new arrivals into the country. For most their entry into education is through one of the three local ESOL provisions in Brent schools. There is often a keen interest in education and language acquisition for this cohort. With the new funding stream for Post-16, BVS has been able to deliver a wider tuition resource including Saturday school in a neighbouring borough.

UASC Case Study

MD, a 12-year-old unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC), was referred to Brent under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) after arriving in the care of Kent County Council. Upon transfer, he was placed with an experienced foster carer. However, the placement was not culturally compatible. The foster carer was of Jamaican heritage while MD was Syrian, leading to differing expectations around food, routines, and household norms. MD preferred to prepare his own meals and struggled to adapt to the carer's rules, particularly regarding curfew and boundaries. As tensions escalated, MD made a number of allegations against the carer. A stability meeting was convened to address these relational difficulties and explore ways of improving the placement, although challenges persisted.

At school, increasing concerns emerged around the MD's engagement and wellbeing. Attendance had fallen to 89%, comprising both authorised and unauthorised absences. He arrived late due to reported transport issues and became involved in several conflicts with peers. MD expressed feelings of isolation and disconnection within the school environment. In response, school staff and professionals began implementing measures to support his emotional wellbeing and reinforce his sense of safety and belonging.

MD had two uncles residing locally in Brent. Social care explored the feasibility of a kinship placement; however, both uncles were unable to assume care responsibilities due to their own family circumstances. One uncle subsequently identified an aunt who might be able to care for the YP. Following a positive assessment, a kinship arrangement was formalised, and MD moved into his aunt's care.

BVS was notified of the planned transition. As part of proactive educational planning, the social worker received support to submit an application to the secondary school closest to the aunt's home.

Following the move and the transition to a new school, notable progress was recorded at the autumn PEP meeting. MD's attendance improved significantly, rising to 97%. Teaching staff confirmed that he had settled well, with no concerns relating to behaviour, academic participation, or peer relationships. This represented a substantial improvement from earlier challenges involving isolation, and inconsistent access to learning. The move to his aunt's care, coupled with a collaborative, multi-agency approach - including BVS, school staff, and the social worker - proved instrumental in addressing barriers and enhancing the MD's educational experience. This demonstrates the positive educational impact of a nurturing, stable, and culturally attuned home environment.

12.0 Personal Educational Plans (PEP)

- 12.1 During the academic year 2024/25 the PEP completion rate was 98%. For several years PEP completion has been above 90%, indicating a consistency of strong practice. As a result, the focus over the past three years has been on the quality of PEPs. The PEP process is key to capturing the educational pathway and voice of looked after children and young people, so it is imperative that this is a quality document. Monthly PEP training is ongoing for new social workers and where necessary individual training was also offered. There are still schools, predominantly out of borough, that do not always maintain Brent's expected standard and where this becomes an issue this is addressed with school leadership and through training with school governors.
- 12.2 The quality of PEPs is reviewed each term. The foci changes dependent on current workstreams with at least one audit focused on LAC with EHCPs or SEN Support.

13.0 Mental Health and Wellbeing

- 13.1 During the academic year 2024/25, the mental health and wellbeing of LAC was supported by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), a service commissioned by the Local Authority and delivered by the Anna Freud Centre.
- 13.2 The WEST team worked with 46 children looked after in 2024/25. In terms of ethnicity, the highest proportion were Black/Black British (39%), and the most frequently referred age was 14-16. There were 31 females (67%) and 15 males (33%). 132 sessions were delivered, comprising 92 direct sessions and 40 indirect sessions. 51 sessions were delivered face to face. The rate of attendance at sessions was 97%. Alongside direct interventions with LAC and young people, WEST provide weekly consultations and indirect intervention programmes supporting social workers, foster carers and other members of the child or young person's professional network to best support them.
- 13.3 A Reflective Fostering Group (RFG) for Foster Carers and Kinship Carers (online) ran in 2024/25 consisting of 6-8 two-hour workshops, developed by the Family Trauma Team at Anna Freud and specifically adapted by WEST Child and Family Specialists experienced in working with children in care to best meet the needs of Brent's kinship and foster carer populations. 10 foster carers were invited to attend the group and 4 foster carers attended. Content included: mentalising for self and others and techniques to support this; an exploration of the carer's experience of being parented/cared for and how this influences their approach to caring; an overview of trauma and how this impacts emotions and behaviour and reflecting on parenting styles. Evaluative feedback collected from participants was very positive; they gave high scores for the sessions' quality, delivery and effectiveness, and the average "How Helpful" score was 9.5 out of 10.

Feedback from carers

"I find that being in the group and the talking and learning has shown an amazing example of talking and learning, listening and building trust, which is what we're trying to do with these children."

"It touched on actual feelings ... I could connect to this course as it was real to me and my experiences."

- 13.4 In partnership with the Kinship Care Team a 30-minute session was delivered reflecting on the challenges of being a kinship carer and offering some wellbeing support. A WEST Child and Family Specialist delivered the session to 18 kinship carers at the Chalkhill Community Centre, facilitating a discussion on the impact of trauma disrupted early attachments upon children in kinship care, in which participants could share and compare their experiences of being a kinship carer. The Child and Family Specialist then talked the participants through some grounding and breathing exercises which offered a moment of relaxation in the session and provided strategies that could be used in future to self-regulate. Feedback from kinship carers was positive:

"We get so focused on the children we forget about ourselves. The breathing technique was very good."

"We're all going through the same thing but in different ways. We're all in this together but in different circumstances."

Case Study

M is a 14-year-old girl (mixed/dual background) referred to WEST by her school for anxiety and low mood. She is a child in care, living with foster carers. She has previously been cared for by her mother, grandmother and aunt at different times.

At the start of the intervention M was attending a Pupil Referral Unit due to behavioural difficulties. She said that was not always able to manage her frustration and it could come across as being rude and insolent. Goals for the intervention:

Goals:	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
To manage my frustration	2/10	7/10
To communicate better with others	4/10	7/10
To have a better understanding of myself	3/10	8/10

Intervention sessions were held in school and included follow-up meetings with pastoral staff as part of the reintegration plan. M presented as wanting to be accepted and liked by others, but her emotional expression, often led to contradictory responses from others. The intervention focused on exploring the link between experiences, emotions and behaviour. Beneath feelings of anger and frustration lay sadness often. By finding alternative, healthier ways of expressing sadness, M reported feeling calmer and less reactive in difficult situations.

Consequences were also explored. M was helped to consider how her actions might influence the thoughts, feelings, and responses of others. Improved communication helped to minimise avoidable consequences. Throughout the sessions, M engaged in developing a new narrative about who she is and how she wishes to present herself.

Intervention outcome measures: RCADS saw a decrease in both anxiety and low mood. M reported to finding all the sessions useful as she was heard and felt understood and was able to implement changes to improve communication with others. By the end of the intervention, M was attending mainstream school 3 days a week with a clear plan to return full time.

14.0 Pupil Premium Spend

- 14.1 BVS retains 50% of the Pupil Premium Plus grant (PPP) which is used to fund several resources and activities including mentoring, residential trips, enrichment activities, online and face-to-face training and 1:1 tuition for students out of school. The remaining 50% is allocated to schools to support the progress of children and young people looked after by Brent, the use of which is monitored through the PEP process. The enrichment programme is one of the BVS's priorities and offers LAC a wide range of opportunities both local and further afield and the Virtual School is constantly looking at ways to improve the offer.
- 14.2 Some of the retained PPP is used for BVS staff to provide a comprehensive training programme to a range of professionals working with vulnerable students. The content of these sessions includes:
- Governors' Training, promoting positive outcomes for disadvantaged groups and the effective use of pupil premium.

- Governors Training-Supporting LAC and disadvantaged children
- Online workshops for foster carers and kinship carers delivered by WEST (monthly)
- Education Online Training Programme (Click Learning) for Designated Teachers, school staff and social workers
- Designated Teacher Forum (2nd July 2025).
- EPEP training for new social workers (half termly).
- WEST reflective practice for SW
- Foster Carer Training-Supporting the Learning and Achievements of Young People in Care (1st July 2025)

15.0 Enrichment Programme

15.1 BVS is proud of the enrichment programme and the variety of experiences that it offers young people. Within Brent work occurs with Brent Care Journeys (BCJ 2.0) on the coordination of enrichment activities as well as promoting the work of BCJ 2.0. The relationship with John Lyons Foundation and the Harrow, Ealing, Barnet, and BVSs means that Brent LAC have continued to engage in a wider range of activities. Over the past academic year, 105 LAC attended enrichment, cultural and aspiration-raising opportunities as follows:

- Thorpe Park – 15 young people
- The Lion King theatre trip – 10 young people
- Woburn Safari Park – 10 young people
- Disney on Ice – 10 young people
- Toca Social – 8 young people

A number of young people also engaged in education and aspiration-focused programmes, including:

- Transport for Learning – West London Universities programme – 7 young people
- Imperial College outreach programme – 6 young people
- Harrow Study Club – 6 young people
- Springboard Youth Academy – 7 young people
- Brunel Urban Scholars programme – 3 young people

In addition, smaller group activities provided opportunities for creativity, skills development and outdoor learning:

- Creative Futures – 5 young people
- Ceramics workshops – 2 young people
- Music Lessons and Hear My Voice programme – 4 young people
- Floating Classroom experience – 3 young people
- A Slice of Nice – cake baking and decorating workshop – 4 young people
- Phoenix Outdoor Centre – 2 young people

16.0 Celebration of Achievement

- 16.1 A key element of BVS's enrichment and achievement programme is the annual Celebration of Achievement evening. This event provides an opportunity for the Brent community to come together and recognise the accomplishments of children looked after over the previous academic year. It enables those who support young people—including carers, social workers, school staff and corporate parents—to celebrate their successes, reflect on progress and encourage continued aspiration for the future.
- 16.2 The event is funded through the retained Pupil Premium Grant (PPG). The celebration held in December 2025, recognising achievements from the 2024/25 academic year, was themed 'Winter Wonderland'. The event celebrated the diversity of Brent's children looked after and the wider Brent community, with all children aged 3 to 18 recognised in some way for their achievements. Approximately 250 people attended, including children and young people, carers, school staff and members of the Brent Corporate Parenting Committee, creating a positive and inclusive environment in which the achievements of Brent's young people could be celebrated collectively. The event also reinforces the council's corporate parenting commitment to champion the achievements of children looked after, raising aspirations and ensuring that young people feel recognised, valued and supported to pursue their future ambitions.

17.0 Extended Duties for all Children with a Social Worker

- 17.1 The Extended Duties Team differs from the Virtual School in both its cohort and function. While the Virtual School focuses specifically on children looked after and care leavers, the Extended Duties Team works more broadly with children who have a social worker, including those on Child in Need or Child Protection plans, as well as those previously known to social care. Their role is more preventative and advisory, aiming to intervene early to reduce risk, prevent exclusion, improve attendance and attainment, and remove barriers to education before children enter care. The team works directly with families, schools and social workers, providing consultation, guidance and, where needed, hands-on support and multi-agency coordination. In contrast, the Virtual School has a statutory responsibility for promoting the educational outcomes of children in care, whereas the Extended Duties Team operates as an early intervention and system support function, strengthening educational outcomes for vulnerable children at the edge of care.

The Extended Duties Team delivered direct work with 151 children during 2024/25, with the team maintaining a maximum caseload of 50 children at any one time. This group includes children educated out of borough, those who have experienced the most fractured education, children with extremely low attendance and children who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Children on the waiting list are seen within two weeks for assessment of needs and work will typically start within three weeks.

- 17.2 Approximately 40% of all referrals are listed as attendance concerns due to mental health issues (social anxiety disorders). In addition, the bulk of the other

60% of referrals relate to social and emotional issues, previously undiagnosed learning difficulties, gang affiliations and parental issues (parents with mental health problems, parents keeping children off school or parental lack of engagement). Almost 20% of the referrals relate to children at substantial risk of permanent exclusion from out-of-borough schools. A rise is also being seen in the numbers of children's parents needing support to help their children to access education and educational support. Examples of the work undertaken include:

- Preventing the exclusion of a Year 8 pupil attending an out of borough academy school by working with the Brent Inclusion Team to facilitate a managed move to a Brent school
- Working with a school to review an exclusion and getting them to subsequently rescind it and recognise the young person had unmet medical needs. School was supported to make an application for an EHCNA and the young person transitioned to a specialist provision, with an EHCP.
- Running workshops and consultation sessions for Social Workers at both Willesden Library and the Civic Centre, to upskill them in education related matters (Admissions; suspensions and exclusions; SEN; EBSA; supporting children with unmet needs; understanding elective home education and off-rolling).

17.3 As of September 2024, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) has further expanded to include promoting the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care. Brent Virtual School provides strategic, tailored support to carers, including advice on school admissions and special educational needs (SEN), and works to strengthen partnerships between schools and social care to improve outcomes, under the direction of the VSH.

While this duty has now been formalised through national expectations, this is not a new area of practice for Brent. The Virtual School has already been actively supporting children in kinship care and their carers, and this expansion of the VSH role reflects and reinforces existing practice within the service.

These duties sit alongside the VSH's statutory responsibility to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children (PLAC), including those adopted or subject to special guardianship or child arrangement orders. This work continues to be delivered through the Extended Duties Team, under the direction of the VSH, providing advice, guidance and information to parents, carers and schools to support improved educational outcomes.

18.0 Strategic Priorities for 2025/26

18.1 The core values of BVS—attendance, achievement and aspiration—remain central to the work of the service. Building on the progress achieved during the 2024/25 academic year, the Virtual School will continue to strengthen its strategic leadership role in improving educational outcomes for children in care and other vulnerable cohorts. In line with national policy developments and the evolving role of Virtual Schools, the priorities for the 2025/26 academic year are as follows:

a) Strengthen strategic oversight of attendance and inclusion for children looked after

Continue to work in partnership with schools, social care, carers and young people to improve attendance across the cohort, with a particular focus on Key Stage 4, where the risk of disengagement can increase. This will include strengthened monitoring of attendance data, early identification of emerging concerns and targeted intervention to support sustained engagement in education and reduce the risk of exclusion.

b) Improve post-16 participation, progression and destinations

Maximise the use of Post-16 Pupil Premium and associated funding streams to support young people to access and sustain education, employment or training (EET) opportunities, including pathways into further and higher education, apprenticeships and vocational training. The Virtual School will work with partners to increase the proportion of young people in EET from 80% to at least 85%, while continuing to raise aspirations and broaden progression opportunities.

c) Embed the Family Business Model

During the 2025/26 academic year, BVS will provide strategic leadership in embedding the Family Business Model across Children and Young People's Services, strengthening shared accountability across the Council and partner agencies for improving the educational outcomes, attendance and aspirations of children looked after and care leavers.

d) Align BVS with national policy developments and legislative change

Ensure that the work of the Virtual School remains fully aligned with emerging national expectations and legislative developments, including proposals outlined within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, SEND and Alternative Provision reforms, and wider national developments relating to attendance, inclusion and support for vulnerable children.

e) Strengthen strategic oversight and support for children looked after with SEND

Continue to improve outcomes for children looked after with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This will include strengthening partnership working with SEND services, schools and partner authorities, improving oversight of placement and provision, and ensuring that children with additional needs are able to access appropriate education provision without delay.

f) Use data and insight to drive improvement in educational outcomes

Further develop the use of data, performance monitoring and cohort analysis to identify trends, address emerging risks and target support where it is most needed. This will enable BVS to provide strong strategic oversight of outcomes, inform service development and ensure that resources are directed effectively to support the children and young people who need it most.

19.0 Stakeholder consultation and engagement

19.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.

19.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their linked advisory teacher/worker, PEP, and Support Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on the work of the Virtual School.

19.3 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, school or linked advisory teacher/worker, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, and Participation activities.

20.0 Financial Considerations

20.1 There are no additional financial considerations arising from this report.

21.0 Legal Considerations

21.1 There are no additional legal considerations arising from this report.

22.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

22.1 There are no specific climate change or environmental considerations.

23.0 Communication Considerations

23.1 There are no specific communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director: Children, Young People and Community Development