

MERTON COUNCIL

The Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers



Annual Report 2015-2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** This is the annual report of work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers for the academic year 2015-2016.
- 1.2** It draws together the work of all LA officers involved in securing the best outcomes for LAC and Care Leavers seeking support to continue in education or training.
- 1.3** The needs of individual LAC are kept at the centre of the Council’s work, and the importance of closing the gap between the outcomes for LAC, and their non looked after peers, remains both a national and local priority. Ensuring the best educational experiences and outcomes for LAC provides them with the best opportunity to develop into active and emotionally secure adults who are able to play a full and productive role in our communities.
- 1.4** The report and its findings enable us to identify future priorities to ensure we provide the best service for all those working to improve the educational outcomes for Merton’s LAC and Care Leavers. These priorities can be found in section 10 of the report.
- 1.5** The core purpose of The Virtual School, Merton is to ensure that there are high aspirations for all children and young people in public care and to support and challenge all those who work with them to promote their educational achievement and make sure they reach their potential. This includes children looked after by Merton wherever they access education but also those children looked after by other boroughs attending schools and educational settings in Merton .Whilst the majority of the data included in this report focuses on the outcomes of children looked after by Merton, the Virtual School’s support for those children looked after by other boroughs is considerable and includes:
- work with the Designated Leads for LAC in Merton schools to ensure their work with all LAC is as strong as possible;
 - Work with the Merton School Improvement Team to ensure that Merton Schools are working to narrow the gap between the educational attainment of all Looked After Children and their non-looked after peers
 - Ensuring that continuity of education for looked after children from other boroughs is achieved by prompt admission to Merton Schools.
- 1.6** In addition, The Virtual School has responsibility for the distribution of the Pupil Premium Grant for LAC to remove barriers to learning and ensure that pupils make accelerated progress.
- 1.7** The Department for Education (DfE) collects information on the educational outcomes of LAC in Annex A of the SSDA903 return. This information is collected annually on the basis of children who have been continuously looked after for at least 12 months on 31st March. It is the data for this cohort of LAC, identified as the 903 cohort, that is used in the achievement and other relevant sections to allow valid comparisons with the national dataset.
- 1.8** The Virtual School Merton collects, analyses and evaluates data but cohort sizes can be very small and so trends in such data should be viewed with caution. It is therefore important to note that a personalised approach to ensuring that each and every child and young person, in every year group, succeeds, underpins the strategies and actions of the Virtual School.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1** During 2015/16 the academic outcomes for Merton LAC were still much below the national outcomes for all pupils nationally at each key stage, as they are for LAC across the whole country. However, there were some significant points where the Virtual School achieved success in comparison with the national benchmarks available for LAC. Importantly, the Virtual School has achieved successes at the individual pupil level, often where very challenging circumstances mean that the successes cannot be measured against national benchmarks, and which are harder to capture in a summary report. These successes were achieved as a result of individual interventions by Virtual School staff and other officers, including the use of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process.
- 2.2** The Virtual School is ambitious to ensure that all its pupils achieve the best possible outcomes, and that these are reflected in improved outcomes against the national benchmarks. In order to achieve these ever improving outcomes the school will robustly and energetically address the priorities identified at the end of this report through the School's Improvement Plan: in the coming year, these priorities will focus in particular on outcomes at Key Stages 1 and 2, where, although there are no national comparisons yet available for LAC, Merton LAC did not perform well against national averages for all pupils with regard to attainment. Average progress scores however, are strong in reading and writing at this key stage (above the LA averages, which are in turn above the national averages for all pupils).
- 2.3** At the end of KS4, Merton LAC have improved their performance in all key indicators in comparison with the previous year. The proportion achieving 5+ GCSE at Grade A*-G rose by thirteen percentage points to 46%, and the proportion achieving 5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C including English and maths rose by seven percentage points to 15%. This last figure is now just above the national average for LAC nationally.
- 2.4** There were also successes in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for the Year 1 phonics screening check, where cohorts achieved above the national averages for all pupils.
- 2.5** The proportion of Merton LAC attending good or better schools rose to 90% in 2015/16 which is just below the national average. Where Merton LAC were in schools judged to be less than good the decision was made very carefully that keeping them in these provisions was in their best interests, taking into account each LAC's individual circumstances and ensuring that they make good progress notwithstanding the Ofsted judgement for the overall effectiveness of education provision.
- 2.6** Average attendance for the whole school fell by just under one percentage point to 90.72%. However, there was success at Key Stage 3 where the average attendance rose by 7.8 percentage points to 93.9%.
- 2.7** There were again no permanent exclusions for Merton LAC. The proportion of Merton LAC experiencing fixed term exclusions fell by three percentage points to 14%. However this remains above the national average for LAC, and so will remain a priority. This is especially so in the secondary phase, where, although there were again successes this year (a drop of 2.2 percentage points) the rate is higher than nationally.
- 2.8** The Virtual School took part in a peer review process with the virtual schools in Hounslow and Barking local authorities. Merton and Hounslow visited Barnet in the summer term of 2016, with a focus on the issues of LAC school attendance in that LA. Merton drew lessons from that part of the review for itself, despite the fact that the focus was Barnet: these are reflected in the school's improvement plan for 2016/17.
- 2.9** Although not strictly falling within the remit of this report, (which covers the academic year 2015/16), Merton hosted Barnet and Hounslow in the early autumn term of 2016. The focus of the review was on improving outcomes for LAC at KS4. The outcomes identified that following strengths of the Virtual School in general:

- The Virtual School is a highly visible part of the services provided for young people in Merton, and is seen as an important service by others in the LA. It creates the impression of a 'hub' that links together services around the education of LAC, and manages to keep education as a very high priority for social workers, foster carers, YOT staff, and others. It ensures that the focus of the support for LAC is on their education as much as their other needs.
- The Virtual School Headteacher is able to work constructively to draw the necessary strands together and link colleagues from different LA services and other agencies. Relationships are such that other services want to engage with the school. There is a high degree of trust in the Virtual School's leadership and staff by other providers and partners. Those who work with the Virtual School consistently report that they find the staff of the school both accessible and approachable. Foster carers, in particular, reported that the school is very responsive to their immediate concerns and the needs of those in their care.
- The aspirations and priorities of the Virtual School are relevant and appropriate to the needs of LAC in the borough – and there are clear strategies of support to achieve them. The school takes a flexible and innovative approach to what is required for LAC, and effectively establishes provision that meets these needs.
- The Virtual School uses tutors effectively, and the school's partnership with St Mark's and the SMART Choice ESOL Provision is also making a significant difference to LAC – both in terms of the environment it can provide and the outcomes at KS4 (whether GCSE or other qualifications).
- The Virtual School advisory teachers are clearly very influential in their work – whether it is their ability to source appropriate tuition, challenge providers about quality of teaching, develop effective PEPs or advise foster carers about schools and the education system in general.
- The Virtual School monitors and analyses outcomes data for LAC, and the school's leadership is actively exploring ways to gauge impact of their work at KS4 that goes beyond progress data, or numbers of GCSE or other qualifications, and includes wider successes such as destinations, attendance, or improved engagement with education by LAC.

2.10 The review also provided a number of specific actions that could be considered by the Virtual School to further improve outcomes. In summary these are listed below, and actions are either already being addressed or are included within the Virtual School's improvement plan for 2016/17:

- Investigate ways in which the Virtual School can be more closely involved with edge-of-care services, early enough to develop an education presence before the young person moves into care.
- Include more specific targets for whole cohorts (at key stage level) and individual LAC in the Virtual School's medium to long term plans and documentation.
- Develop methods for how and when to record, report and celebrate all successes.
- Improve guidance for Foster Carers that covers (e.g.) educational options and pathways from KS4, raising the aspirations of LAC around their futures, and providing an improved learning environment in the home
- Develop a protocol for handling late new-into-care children, which involves the use of baseline assessments.
- Explore ways of giving PPG for tuition directly to school providers, where appropriate, so that they are able to commission the most appropriate tutors for LAC, based on their understanding of what is likely to be most effective.
- Consider methods of 'frontloading' the PPG ensuring that the strategies providers use are based on agreed standards of quality.
- Investigate options for providing tuition for LAC at venues outside the Foster Carer's home – to avoid possible distractions within the home; and to keep separate from the Foster Carer the fine details of the conversation between tutor and child about their learning.
- As already planned, widen the membership of its Steering Group to include Foster Carers and care-leavers.
- Provide and improve SLAs, or similar agreements, with all external providers, not just St Mark's – especially where the care provided is linked with educational provision.
- Further develop the use of 'voice of the child' in improving provision.

3. CONTEXT FOR THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

3.1 Merton Looked After Children

3.1.1 Any child or young person of statutory school age who is, or becomes, looked after by Merton during an academic year is added to the Virtual School roll. During 2015-2016 a total of 149 school aged children were, or became looked after. This is an increase of 20 children and continues an upward trend

3.1.2 Table - Merton statutory school age pupil numbers by key stage

	Reception	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Total
In borough school or education setting	2 (1)	5 (7)	13 (6)	9 (11)	15(18)	44 (43)
Out of borough school or education setting	0 (0)	2 (5)	15 (16)	17 (13)	22 (24)	56 (58)
Total	2 (1)	7 (12)	28 (22)	26 (24)	37 (42)	100(101)

As of 24th June 2016, point of reference for year on year comparative purposes for the Virtual School role. 2015 numbers in brackets.

There were 100 pupils on role from Reception to year 11. This represents a decrease of one pupil when compared with the number for the previous academic year as on the last Friday of June.

3.1.3 The Virtual School also keeps a roll of pre-school children (0-4); those aged 16 -18 whose education, employment and training provision is recorded under the Raising of Participation Age requirement; and the number of young care leavers aged 19 plus that may continue to require support from the Virtual School. During 2015-2016:

- there were 71 young people between the ages of 16 and 18 during the academic year 2015-2016 eligible for services and support for education or training from the Virtual School;
- there were 97 care leavers aged 19 + on 31st March 2016.

Although some involvement from the Virtual School may continue, children and young people are removed from the school roll once they cease to be looked after.

3.1.4 Children with Special Educational Needs

Looked After Children are four times more likely to have special education need than all children and are almost ten times more likely to have a statement of educational need or educational health and care plan. During 2015-16, 62% of Merton LAC had some form of Special Educational Need. This is slightly higher than the national statistic of 60.5% for Looked After Children.¹ This is much higher than in the Merton school population as a whole. Nationally, in the 2015 census, 2.8% of all children and 27.6% % of LAC had a Statement of Educational Need.

3.1.5 From September 2014, in line with the new legislation detailed in Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations, and the Statutory Guidance, Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, arrangements have been put in place to support the transition for relevant pupils from Statements of Educational Need to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Virtual School has continued to work with Merton and other authorities where pupils are placed to ensure a smooth transition.

¹DFE SFR 11/206: Outcomes for Looked After Children by local authorities in England, 31 March 2015

3.1.6 Table - Merton LAC with Statement of Educational Need or EHCP (all pupils on roll June16)

	Reception (2)	KS1 (7)	KS2 (28)	KS3 (26)	KS4 (37)	Total 100
In borough school or education setting	0	0	2	4	6	12
Out of borough school or education setting	0	0	5	6	11	22
Total	0	0	7	10	17	34

Numbers in brackets indicate the whole cohort for the Virtual School at each key stage.

34% of Merton LAC have a Statement of Educational Need or EHCP.

3.1.7 Types of School attended by Merton LAC

Merton LAC attend a variety of maintained and independent schools. Many Alternative Education Providers are now registered as independent schools. The Virtual School recognises the variety of schools and education settings now available to children and young people and seeks to ensure the setting that best meets their needs.

3.1.8 Pupils can be registered and attend more than one school or setting. Where this is the case, the Virtual School records all settings attended but the information in the table below shows the type of school or setting which is the child or young person’s main provision of registration. In other words, it records the school which is responsible for the pupil’s education, even if as part of this it has arranged some alternative provision.

3.1.9 The Virtual School expects to be consulted when any change to timetable or provision is proposed and this would normally be by way of a review of the child’s personal education plan.

3.1.10 Table - Types of education provision attended by Merton LAC

	LA mainstream	LA special	LA Alternative Provider	Academy	Free School	Independent	Independent Special	Non Maintained School	Special Alternative Provider	Total
EYs/Primary	28	0	0	6	0	2	1	0	0	37
Secondary	20	8	5	11	0	9	4	2	4	63
Total	48	8	5	17	0	11	5	2	4	100

The vast majority of Merton LAC continue to attend LA maintained, mainstream schools.

3.2. Other Borough Looked After Children attending Merton schools

3.2.1 The Virtual School strives to keep an accurate register of other borough LAC in Merton Schools so that support for them and the schools they attend is the best it can possibly be. Each term the Virtual School sends a proforma to all schools requesting details of any LAC on their roll.

3.2.2 Table - Other Borough Looked After Pupils

Other Borough LAC in Merton Schools	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Primary	27	22	-
Secondary	44	33	-
Special	6		
Total	78	55	61

3.2.3 There are 78 other borough LAC attending Merton schools. This appears to be an increase on the previous year. This compares with 44 Merton LAC attending Merton Schools. St Mark's Academy has consistently been the school with the highest number of LAC, including other borough LAC, on roll.

3.3 Looked After Children applying for schools in Merton

3.3.1 Merton School Admissions Team advises the Virtual School of applications and admissions from non-Merton LAC, which may require a follow up discussion with the headteacher of the child's 'home' Virtual School and/or carers to ensure child's need will be best matched by the school of preference. In order to discharge responsibility to all LAC within the borough, the Virtual School Head works with the Admissions Team at Merton to ensure applications to Merton Schools and Academies are processed as quickly as possible. If the School Admissions Team note any delay or concerns regarding school placement then the children's details are referred to the Children Missing Education Panel.

3.3.2 Table - time, in days, between receipt of application for a school place and the child going on school roll.

No of days	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40
Primary (9 children)	6	-	1	2
Secondary (12children)	6	3	2	1

In year applications for primary aged pupils reduced from 12 to 9 over the previous academic year and from 17 to 12 for secondary school places.

The gap between the application being received and a child joining a school roll does not necessarily mean that the child has not been in school/on a school roll. Particularly for primary aged pupils it is likely that the application to a school is part of a planned placement move.

4. The Achievement of Pupils in the Virtual School

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) collects information on the educational outcomes of Looked After Children (LAC) in Annexe A of the SSDA903 return. This information is collected annually on the basis of children who have been continuously looked after for at least 12 months on 31st March. There were 57 such children of statutory school age identified and it is their achievements which are reported here, allowing comparisons with national datasets that are collected at the same time.

Table: Numbers of children in the Virtual School in the SSDA903 return (31/3/16)

	Reception	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Total
In borough school or education setting	0	0	5	4	6	15
Out of borough school or education setting	0	2	15	13	12	42
Total	0	2	20	17	18	57

4.1.2 The small numbers of pupils represented in each key stage (particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, at Year 1 and at the end of Key Stage 1) means that comparisons with national and local averages with such small numbers must be viewed with caution. Where data for LAC pupils nationally are not yet available this is recorded as NYA.

4.1.3 The national dataset regarding the achievement of LAC for 2016 is not yet available. The latest national comparisons that appear in this report are from 2015.

4.1.4 It should also be noted that, although their achievement is not noted in this report, the Virtual School supports all Merton LAC, however long they have been registered as such, and whether or not they are included in the SSDA903 return.

4.1.5 When a child or young person becomes looked after, the Virtual School strives to complete a retrospective chronology which includes details of schools attended and educational attainment and progress to date. This data is used to track individual and cohort performance and allows analysis against local and national indicators.

4.2 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFSP)

4.2.1 The EYFSP is an assessment against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELG). These assessments are completed and reported for each child by the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 5 i.e. Reception Year.

4.2.2 The ELGs are grouped into the following 'prime' areas: Communication and Language; Physical Development; Personal, Social and Emotional Development; and Literacy and Mathematics. Achievement at least at the expected level in all these 'prime' areas would mean that a child has achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). Assessments are also made in the areas of Understanding the World, and Expressive Arts and Design.

Table: EYFSP outcomes

EYFSP Good Level of Development (GLD)	2014		2015		2016	
	Percentage GLD	No. of Children	Percentage GLD	No. of Children	Percentage GLD	No. of Children
Merton LAC	0%	0	50%	2	N/A	0
Merton All Pupils	60%		68%		71%	
National All Pupils	60%		66%		69%	

- There were no 903 children in this cohort.
- Of the two children on roll as of 24th June 2016, both (100%) achieved the Good Level of Development.
- **This performance is above the national and Merton averages for this year.**
- No national LAC cohort information is available for comparison at this key stage.

4.2.3 The tiny number of children in this cohort mean that all data, especially when comparing with national averages, should be viewed with caution. However, this tiny number is also indicative of the success of the Borough's Early Help strategies that have either prevented children becoming looked after, or have achieved permanency for children through adoption.

4.3 Key Stage 1 (KS1)

4.3.1 The Phonics Screening Check is a reading test based on pupils' ability to recognise words and sounds using phonic decoding strategies. Pupils' performance is reported on the basis of whether they have achieved the expected standard or not. There are no grades. All pupils in Year 1 are expected to be checked unless they have no phoneme/grapheme correspondence (ie they are unable to link letters on the page to the sound they make). The small numbers of pupils that do not achieve the expected standard in Year 1 are rechecked at the end of Year 2.

Table: Year 1 Phonics Screening Check outcomes

Phonics Screening Check (Year 1)	2014		2015		2016	
	%achieving standard	No. of Children	%achieving standard	No. of Children	%achieving standard	No. of Children
Merton LAC	20%	5	n/a	0	100%	1
Merton 903 Pupils	76%		77%		80%	
National All Pupils	74%		77%		81%	

- 100% of 903 pupils achieved the expected standard.
- All pupils (three) on roll as of 24th June 2016 also achieved the expected standards.
- **This performance is above the national and local averages.**
- The performance of LAC children nationally is not released by the DfE.

4.3.2 This year changes were made to assessment at the end of Key Stage One (Year 2) at a national level, which means that pupils are assessed relative to new 'expected standards', in reading, writing and mathematics.

- Those working below the expected standards are recorded as follows:
 - Working Towards Standard = WTS; or
 - Pre Key Stage Foundation = PKF; or
 - Below standard, including achieving at P-Scales = BLW
- Where pupils are working at or above the expected standard it is recorded as EXS+.
- Where pupils are working above age related expectations it is recorded as Greater Depth Standard (GDS).

4.3.3 Please note that there is no direct comparison between 2015 and 2016 outcomes because of the changes to the assessment system nationally.

Table: KS1 outcomes READING

Key Stage 1 - READING	2014				2015				2016			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	WTS/ PKF/ BLW	EXS+	GDS	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	0%	1	83%	50%	0%	6	100%	0%	0%	1
Merton All Pupils	89%	80%	29%		90%	81%	29%		31%	74%	27%	
National LAC	71%				67%				NYA			
National All Pupils	90%	81%	31%		90%	82%	32%		33%	74%	24%	

- There was only one 903 pupil this year: that pupil did not achieve the expected standard because he has a special educational need. He is currently receiving intensive support to bring him back up to standard.
- Of the four pupils on roll as of 24th June, 50% achieved the expected standard.
- **This performance is above the national and local averages for all pupils.**

Table: KS1 outcomes WRITING

Key Stage 1 - WRITING	2014				2015				2016			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	WTS/ PKF/ BLW	EXS+	GDS	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	0%	1	83%	33%	0%	6	100%	0%	0%	1
Merton All Pupils	84%	65%	14%		87%	69%	16%		36%	64%	16%	
National LAC	61%				TBC				NYA			
National All Pupils	86%	70%	16%		88%	72%	18%		35%	65%	13%	

- There was only one 903 pupil this year. That pupil did not achieve the expected standard because he has a special educational need. He is currently receiving intensive support to bring him back up to standard.
- Of the four pupils on roll as of 24th June 25% achieved the expected standard.
- **This performance is below that of the national and local averages for all pupils.**

Table: KS1 outcomes MATHEMATICS

Key Stage 1 - MATHS	2014				2015				2016			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	WTS/ PKF/ BLW	EXS+	GDS	No.
Merton LAC	100%	0%	0%	1	83%	33%	0%	6	100%	0%	0%	1
Merton Schools All Pupils	92%	79%	24%		92%	78%	26%		27%	73%	20%	
National LAC	72%				TBC				NYA			
National All Pupils	92%	80%	24%		93%	82%	26%		27%	73%	18%	

- There was only one 903 pupil this year. That pupil did not achieve the expected standard because he has a special educational need. He is currently receiving intensive support to bring him back up to standard.
- Of the four pupils on roll as of 24th June 25% achieved the expected standard.
- **This performance is below that of the national and local averages for all pupils.**

4.4 KS2 OUTCOMES

4.4.1 This year changes were made to assessment at the end of Key Stage Two (Year 6) at a national level, which means that pupils are assessed relative to new 'expected standards', in reading, writing, mathematics, and Grammar Punctuation and Spelling.

- Where pupils are working below the expected standards it is recorded as follows:
 - Working Towards Standard = WTS; or
 - Not Achieved Standard = NS; or
 - Below standard, including achieving at P-Scales = BLW
- Where pupils are working at or above the expected standard it is recorded as follows:
 - Working at the expected standard = EXS+; or
 - Achieved Standard = AS+
- Where pupils are working above age related expectations it is recorded as follows:
 - Greater Depth Standard = GDS; or
 - High Score = HS

4.4.2 Changes were also made to the process in which pupils' progress across KS2 is measured. The national average progress score for all pupils is 0.

4.4.3 Where pupils were disapplied from the assessments because they had not yet finished the key stage it is recorded as DIS. Please note that there is no direct comparison between 2015 and 2016 outcomes because the assessment system nationally has changed.

Table: KS2 READING

Key Stage 2 – READING	2014				2015				2016				
	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	NS	DIS	AS+	HS	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	60%	3	100%	100%	0%	2	74%	13%	13%	13%	8
Merton All Pupils	91%	80%	52%		91%	82%	52%		32%		68%	21%	
National LAC	68%				71%				NYA				
National All Pupils	89%	78%	50%		89%	80%	49%		34%		66%	19%	

- 13% of pupils achieved at or above age related expectations.
- 50% of the cohort had a Statement of Educational Need or an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Of the nine pupils on roll as of 24th June 2016:
 - 11% were disapplied;
 - 38% achieved at or above age related expectations.
 - 45% had Statements of Educational Need or Education, Health and Care Plans. One of the pupils did sit the tests and although he did not achieve the expected standard it is commendable that he was entered.
- **This performance is below that of the national and local averages for all pupils.**

Key Stage 2 – WRITING	2014			2015			2016				
	4+	5+	No.	4+	5+	No.	WTS	DIS	EXS+	GDS	No.
Merton LAC	100%	0%	3	100%	50%	2	62%	13%	26%	13%	8
Merton All Pupils	86%	36%		89%	38%		29%		71%	16%	
National LAC	59%			61%			NYA				
National All Pupils	76%	52%		89%	43%		26%		74%	15%	

Table: KS2 WRITING

- 26% of pupils achieved at or above age related expectations.
- 50% of the cohort had a Statement of Educational Need or an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Of the nine pupils on roll as of 24th June 2016:
 - 11% were disapplied;
 - 38% achieved at or above age related expectations;
 - 45% had Statements of Educational Need or Education, Health and Care Plans. One of the pupils did sit the tests and although he did not achieve the expected standard it is commendable that he was entered.
- **This performance is below that of the national and local averages for all pupils.**

Table 5c KS2 MATHEMATICS

Key Stage 2 - MATHS	2014				2015				2016				
	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	NS	DIS	AS+	HS	No.
Merton LAC	100%	50%	0%	3	100%	50%	50%	2	74%	13%	13%	0	8
Merton All Pupils	88%	78%	46%		89%	79%	45%		25%		75%	24%	
National LAC	61%				64%				NYA				
National All Pupils	86%	76%	42%		89%	80%	49%		30%		70%	17%	

- 13% of pupils achieved at or above age related expectations.
- 50% of the cohort had a Statement of Educational Need or an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Of the nine pupils on roll as of 24th June 2016:
 - 30% were disapplied;
 - 22% achieved at or above age related expectations;
 - 45% had Statements of Educational Need or Education, Health and Care Plans. One of the pupils did sit the tests and although he did not achieve the expected standard it is commendable that he was entered.
- **This performance is below that of the national and local averages for all pupils, and below the 2015 national average for LAC.**

4.5 KS4 OUTCOMES

4.5.1 The data collected uses the headings from the 2015 performance tables, allowing comparison with previous years.

Table: GCSE outcomes

GCSE	2015					2016				
	Any passes	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-G or equivalent	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs Grade A*-C incl En/maths	No. of Children	Any passes	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-G or equivalent	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs Grade A*-C incl En/maths	No. of Children
Merton LAC	75%	33%	8%	8%	12	77%	46%	15%	15%	13
Merton Schools All Pupils		94%	69%	58%						
National LAC			18%	14%						

- 15% of Merton LAC achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent: this is an improvement on 2015 performance and just below the national average (2015) for LAC of 18%.
- 15% of Merton LAC achieved 5+GCSEs A*-C including English or maths: this is an improvement on 2015 performance and just above the national average (2015) for LAC of 14%.
- This is a strong performance in the context of these students SEN needs: five students had statements/EHCP, and in addition, four had Special Educational Needs
- Performance is not so strong for all 24 LAC students on roll as of the 24th June:
 - 13% achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent – below the national average (2015);
 - 8% LAC achieved 5+GCSEs A*-C including English or maths – below the national average (2015).

Table: Progression to education or training in Year 12 (September 2016)

Academic Year	No of young people	No of young people in education/training at the start of the academic year (Sept)	Proportion of young people in education/training at the start of the academic year (Sept)
15-16	13	12	92.3%
14-15	12	12	100%
13-14	5	4	80%

- One young person removed himself from care, with the result that the Virtual School was unable to track his destination.

4.6 POST 16 OUTCOMES

4.6.1 There were no 'A' Level students during the academic year 15-16. 59 of 62 young people aged 16 or above have pursued and were successful in a range of courses, from Entry Level to Level 3.

4.6.2 12 young people studied for degrees. Whilst 10 continue their studies into the new academic year, two graduated: one with a first class honours degree In pharmacology, and the other with a social work degree. Both are now in employment in their chosen field.

4.6.3 There will be eight Care Leavers starting at university in September 16. This includes two students who have received the Sanctuary Award at Kingston University. This award is for students who are seeking asylum and cannot access student finance. It funds university fees and provides an annual bursary of £3000.

5 Actions undertaken by the Virtual School to secure improved outcomes

5.1 Quality of Schools-Ofsted

- 5.1.2** The Virtual School continued to strive to ensure that all children and young people attend good or outstanding schools. Where a LAC remained in a school judged to be less than good in its most recent inspection, very careful consideration was given to the child's situation, and it was decided that a move would not be in the child's best interest, and monitoring of the pupil's progress increased through the PEP process.
- 5.1.3** During 2015 – 2016, 90% of statutory school aged LAC attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better. This is a greater proportion than in the previous academic year.
- 5.1.4** In the primary phase 84% of pupils attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better. This is higher than in the previous year but remains lower than the LA average for all pupils. Of those attending other borough schools 76% attend good or better schools. This is an increase of 5 percentage points in comparison with the previous year.
- 5.1.5** In the secondary phase 93% of students attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better. Of those students attending in borough schools where a grade was known, 100% attended schools that are good or better. One student had a bespoke timetable provided by quality assured Alternative Education. Of those pupils attending other borough schools, 89% attended good or better schools. This difference reflects the current high standards in Merton secondary and special (with secondary age students) schools where 100% are judged good or better by Ofsted.

5.1.6 Table – Quality of schools attended by Merton Looked After Children

	At school in	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/ RI	No school roll/no current category	Total
EY/Primary	Merton	2	12	1	5	20
	Other borough	4	9	4	0	17
Secondary	Merton	6	17	0	1	24
	Other borough	12	20	4	3	39
Total		24	58	9	9	100
% of Merton LAC		24%	58%	9%	9%	

5.2 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

- 5.2.1** All LAC must have a care plan, of which the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is an integral part. The PEP is an evolving record of what needs to happen to ensure each child or young person makes expected progress and fulfils his or her potential. During the PEP process, the achievement of LAC is carefully tracked, and where they are falling behind, schools are challenged to identify how they might be supported to make accelerated progress, including how the Pupil Premium Grant for LAC might be best used to secure improved outcomes.
- 5.2.2** The Virtual School worked in close partnership with social workers to coordinate meetings and record and administer PEPs.

5.2.3 Statutory guidance requires that a child’s PEP is reviewed each term. In order to meet this requirement the Virtual School normally attends at least two meetings and consults for the third. During 2015-2016, 254 initial and review PEPs were completed. The Virtual School has robust systems and processes to track, monitor and report on their timeliness and quality. Equal regard is paid to the education of children who are placed out of borough as well as those who live in Merton and the Virtual School ensures the challenges of distant placements are met, including attendance at Personal Education Planning Meetings.

5.2.4 Work has continued during the academic year to ensure that the PEP embedded within the new Social Care Information System meets developing needs for planning and tracking progress.

5.2.5 Table – Timescale of PEP Completion

	Autumn 15	Spring 16	Summer 16	Academic Year 15-16
No. who became LAC	28	14	27	69 (64)
Ceased being LAC before PEP	10	5	7	22 (8)
PEP completed within 20 days	14	6	16	36 (47)
PEP completed after 20 days	4 (one by two days)	3 (one by one day)	4 (one by two days)	11 (9)

Numbers in brackets indicate numbers from 2014 -2015.

5.2.6 There is a statutory requirement for Personal Education Planning meetings to take place within 20 days of a child becoming looked after, or after a change in school placement. 69 initial PEPs for children new into care were required during the academic year but twenty two children ceased to be LAC before the PEP due date. 36 of the required 47 initial Personal Education Planning meetings (77%) were completed within 20 days of a child becoming Looked After. This is 7% fewer than in the previous year. Reasons for the remaining initial PEPs not being completed within the specified time scales were:

- no school place available but tuition provided whilst school being sourced;
- children becoming LAC during or very near the school holiday period;
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children arriving very late in school year in Year 11.

5.2.7 Table – Timescale of PEP Review

	Autumn 15	Spring 16	Summer 16	Academic Year 15-16
No of PEPS to be reviewed	72	70	65	207 (228)
Completed within 6 months of previous PEP	59	70	65	194 (218)
% reviewed within time scales	82% (93.5%)	100%	100%	94% (95.6%)

Numbers in brackets indicate numbers from 2014 -2015.

5.2.8 94% of PEP reviews were completed within six months of the previous PEP which meant that they were updated in time for the child’s Care Plan Review. This was a slight reduction over the previous academic year, attributable to staff sickness during the autumn term.

5.3 Pupil Premium

5.3.1 For each Looked After Child, the government allocated a pupil premium grant of £1900. This grant was passed to schools in the maintained sector and non-maintained special schools attended by LAC, to remove barriers to learning and to accelerate progress. Qualifying schools received £600 per LAC per term during

2015-2016. This allowed for the grant to follow the child if a school move occurred. Payment of the grant was dependent on the implementation of interventions to support the child’s education plan, which were detailed in the PEP. The PEP document includes a finance sheet to track provision available to and accessed by our pupils, and funded by Pupil Premium. The Virtual School monitors the impact of pupil premium funded interventions on pupils’ academic progress via the Pupil’s Education Plan.

5.3.2 The grant was used for:

- Academic intervention programmes
- Behavioural, emotional, mental health Interventions
- Additional 1:1 support
- Learning Resources
- Out of school learning including educational visits
- Technology – hardware/software
- Specialist tuition/equipment e.g. music lessons
- Subject tuition
- Clubs and activities

5.3.3 Analysis of pupil premium expenditure in schools shows that the grant was used for behavioural, emotional and mental health support for nearly 50% of pupils in eligible schools. 40% of pupils received academic interventions funded by pupil premium and just over 30% of pupils received additional one to one support or access to clubs and activities via the grant.

5.3.4 The grant was also used to fund requests for additional resources for exceptional need and in several instances has helped a pupil to retain a mainstream school place during particularly difficult times.

5.4 One to One Tuition

5.4.1 The Sutton Trust research data shows that One to One Tuition is particularly effective in accelerating progress for children, particularly at KS2, and particularly in English and mathematics. Short, regular sessions of about 30 minutes, 3-5 times each week, and over a period of time (6-12 weeks) has optimum impact. In order to secure the best educational outcome for all Merton’s LAC 1:1 tuition was considered as part of each child’s or young person’s Personal Education, or Pathway, Plan.

5.4.2 Tuition funded by The Virtual School was provided in the majority of cases by two key agencies: Harrison Allen Tutors and Fleet Tutors, and normally delivered in the care setting. Occasionally, but increasingly, schools are also providing 1:1 tuition outside the school day, delivered by school staff or their own commissioned tutors.

5.4.3 Table - Number of LAC accessing 1:1 tuition

Key Stage	Total students recorded as having tuition 2015-16	Tuition for less than one term	Tuition for one to two terms	Tuition for more than two terms and ongoing
KS1	1 (1)	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (1)
KS2	6 (5)	3 (0)	3 (0)	0 (5)
KS3	8 (10)	2 (0)	3 (1)	3 (9)
KS4	17 (19)	11 (1)	4 (0)	2 (18)
Post 16	16 (30)	5 (0)	5 (2)	6 (28)
Total	48 (65)	22 (1)	15 (3)	11 (61)

Numbers in brackets indicate numbers from 2014 -2015.

5.4.4 48 Merton LAC received 1:1 tuition over the course of 2015/16. Generally the focus for tuition in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 was English and mathematics. The range of subjects broadened at KS4 to include GCSE examination subjects. The focus for post 16 pupils was generally for additional sessions for English for Speakers of Other Languages although there have been some requests for tuition to improve grades in English and Maths.

5.5 Pupil Voice

5.5.1 The Virtual School continued to seek to develop a relationship with all its pupils and students and encouraged them to participate in their Personal Educational Planning meetings either by attending for some or all of the meeting, or by completing a view sheet.

5.5.2 An analysis of pupils' and students' contribution to PEP meetings indicated the following:

- They were aware that the purpose of school is to learn academically and socially.
- 45% of primary pupils and 76% of secondary students had no worries at school.
- All were able to identify at least one adult who could help them at school, and all but one could identify friends.
- Children's concerns for bullying were much reduced with only one secondary pupil for whom bullying was an issue and one primary child reporting feeling bullied sometimes. In all incidences of reported bullying the Virtual School followed up concerns to ensure the physical and emotional safety of our pupils.

5.5.3 This year, in addition to undertaking a detailed analysis of children's responses in the pupil view sheet completed as part of the PEP process, the Virtual School asked pupils from Year 6 to Year 11 to complete a questionnaire in order to seek their views on Personal Education Plans and the work of the Virtual School. In summary the findings were that the majority of pupils agreed that having a PEP helped:

- to overcome problems at school;
- teachers to understand them;
- focus on their learning;
- carers to help with learning;
- support out of school learning and activities.

Although a significant part of the PEP process is the setting of targets, interestingly, pupils told us that although they discuss their target with teachers, carers and social workers, only a fifth said that they remembered them. While 46% indicated they were happy to have targets on display at home or in their diaries or journals, they were not happy to save these to their phone or media device.

5.6 Development & Training of the Workforce

5.6.1 The Virtual School continued to contribute to the development and training of education workers, including school governors, social care, youth justice workers and foster carers.

5.6.2 The Virtual School gave a presentation at the bi-monthly meetings for a newly appointed children's social care and youth justice staff and six monthly refresher courses for those wishing to update their knowledge of developments in education.

5.6.3 The Virtual School gave a brief presentation on the role of the Virtual School for newly qualified teachers annually at their Induction Day.

- 5.6.4** During 2015-16, 41 Merton schools and academies had LAC on their roll. This included LAC from other boroughs, as well as Merton LAC. To ensure that all schools (whether they currently host LAC or not) were prepared to support LAC, the Virtual School supported the designated teachers for LAC in all Merton schools, academies, independent schools and alternative providers. A particular success this year was the inclusion of Alternative Providers and Independent schools in the network meetings. The network and training sessions across 2015/16 for the designated leads focused on the following:
- the statutory responsibility of the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children and the introduction of a tool kit for self review;
 - the use of pupil premium and measuring its impact.
- 5.6.5** The Virtual School Headteachers for Merton and Sutton worked collaboratively to deliver a training session for Governors with responsibility for LAC. The training included understanding their statutory responsibilities and how to support and challenge schools to meet children's needs.
- 5.6.6** The Virtual School led training for all new foster carers and those requiring updates on how they can support their young people to achieve in education. This training was extended to include a contribution from the Early Years Team.
- 5.6.7** In addition to support for learning at home, foster carers also used the Virtual School as a resource for advice, guidance and support for educational matters. This means that Advisory Teachers provided telephone support; gave advice with regard to the choice of school; and accompanied carers to school meetings.
- 5.7 The Virtual School Newsletter & Young Merton Together**
- 5.7.1** The Virtual School kept partners informed via news letter and regular contributions to Young Merton Together, an e-magazine that features key aspects of the work of the Children's Schools and Families Department and Children's Trust partners.

6. SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME AND ENRICHMENT

6.1 The Virtual School believes that all children should be given the best opportunity to achieve their potential. Schools and education settings need foster carers, key workers and all professionals to encourage the children and young people to aspire to, make progress and achieve academic success. As we also believe that education is more than academic performance alone the Virtual School encourages pupils to participate fully in school life and to develop extra curricular hobbies and interests. The Virtual School discusses and records these as part of the PEP.

6.2 Enrichment support

6.2.1 To support out of learning at home the Virtual School has:

- funded participation in the Letterbox project for 16 pupils from Key Stages 1 & 2 pupils. Each child enrolled received a parcel of books, mathematics activities, games and puzzles once each month from May to October;
- funded a pilot project to extend the Letterbox project to nursery and reception children (five children);
- supplied resources for learning including puzzles, games CDs, DVDs and art materials;
- encouraged library membership for all LAC and actively promoted Merton Library's summer challenge the "Big Friendly Read"; and
- funded laptop computers for secondary aged pupils who have been in care for 6 months (14 students). This was with exceptions for some young people generally related to safeguarding concerns.

6.3 Aim Higher/Raising Aspirations

6.3.1 The Virtual School supported the widening participation agenda promoted by a range of universities, and contributed to the continuation of the local Aim Higher Project which organised and ran visits to local universities specifically for looked after young people. Three university visits were arranged during the year. The themes were Film Making (at Kingston University), Art (at St Mary's University) and Clinical Skills (at St Georges Medical School).

6.3.2 Three Merton looked after young people attended these visits. Their evaluation of the visits showed that they would be more likely to aspire to university as a result of the visits, and that the visits had motivated them to work harder to achieve the grades they would require.

6.3.3 One young person attended the post 16 conference and one took up the opportunity for coaching by an undergraduate ambassador.

6.4 Art

6.4.1 The Virtual School held an exhibition of work completed by children and carers at the Room 13 art project. The exhibition featured individual and collaborative pieces. One particularly bold and colourful piece now hangs in the office of the Director of Children Schools and Families.

6.4.2 Children's art work was featured in the Virtual School Christmas card and notelets.

6.5 Theatre

6.5.1 The Virtual School organised a trip to the Polka Theatre in Wimbledon for a performance of Beauty and the Beast. It was attended by eleven children and nine carers.

6.6 Music

6.6.1 The Virtual School continued to fund out of school music lessons for three children who express an interest in learning the keyboard, guitar and drums.

6.7 Dance

6.7.1 One student continued to attend out of school dance lessons funded by the Virtual School.

6.8 Sports

6.8.1 The Virtual School encourages all LAC to develop healthy lifestyles and participate in sport or other physical exercise. In particular we have set ourselves the challenge to ensure that all pupils of the Virtual School have the opportunity to learn to swim. We are pleased that the take up this year has seen 23 pupils attended swimming lessons.

6.9 Educational Visits

6.9.1 The Virtual School assists with funding for looked after children to participate in residential educational visits organised by their school.

6.9.2 This year the Virtual School supported a Year 11 unaccompanied asylum seeking young person to spend a weekend at an activity center in Portsmouth. The trip included a visit to Portsmouth University and raised this young man's aspiration to be a student there.

6.9.3 We were fortunate to secure a mentor supported place for one of our students on The National Citizens Service programme. The programme is a government funded scheme that offers 15 and 16 year olds the opportunity to try new things, learn new skills and meet new people.

7. ATTENDANCE

7.1 Overview

- 7.1.1** Good school attendance is essential for children and young people to make academic progress. Regular school attendance is also linked to effective safeguarding, and a reduced risk of anti-social behaviour and crime. Children whose attendance falls below 90% are identified as persistent non-attenders.
- 7.1.2** The Virtual School has robust and rigorous processes to track and monitor pupil attendance via a commissioned service. After a rigorous commissioning process, this service transferred from Welfare Call to Contact Group: Looked After Call, at the beginning of the financial year 2016-2017. The significant difference between the two companies is that information about pupil attendance is collected from schools via a data extractor rather than by telephone call. With access via a secure portal, the Virtual School is able to see in real time whether the student has registered at school and the attendance codes being used, and therefore to intervene in a very timely manner when attendance is an issue. Where the school does not have an electronic system for recording attendance or a child is educated off site, a telephone call is made to check attendance. Welfare Call and Looked After Call collaborated to ensure transfer of data so that the Virtual School could report on attendance for Merton Looked After Children across the academic year.
- 7.1.3** Children who do not value learning or find the learning they receive inaccessible, will often absent themselves from school. The Virtual School Advisory Teachers monitored their attendance and addressed any emergency or emerging issues. This included working with education welfare officers, carers, schools, social workers and other professionals to develop a plan to improve engagement, attendance and punctuality. Where pupils' attendance was below 90%, this was then monitored strategically by members of the Virtual School Steering Group.
- 7.1.4** The Virtual School celebrates 100% attendance, or a significant improvement in attendance, with personal letters and vouchers to spend at W.H. Smith.

7.2 Whole School Attendance Data

- 7.2.1** The Virtual School roll changes frequently as children become, or cease to be, looked after. Statistics for previous years are included to help identify any trends.
- 7.2.2** During the year, there were two school refusers with very low attendance scores (less than 10%) whilst they were in care. As such, these figures are statistical outliers and have been excluded from the data set when calculating average attendance. The next lowest score for attendance was 22%.
- 7.2.3** Of the two school refusers:
- One student came into care as a school refuser in the summer term of 2016. She had a mental health condition which prevented her attending school. The Virtual School tried to secure attendance at the medical SMART provision, but this was refused as well. She is no longer in care.
 - One student, in Year 11, had two care placements during the year (following significant disruption in previous years) and a number of missing episodes. The Virtual School liaised regularly with carers and the settings he was placed in, as well as directly with the student himself, but the multiple interventions were unfortunately not successful.

7.2.4 Table - Attendance Data

Academic Year	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Total Pupils number of pupils	100	101	88	98
Average attendance	90.72%	91.7%	90.67%	87.14%
Pupils with 25+ days absence	14% (14)	12% (12)	17% (15)	21.4% (21)
Pupils with attendance >90%	72% (72)	75% (75)	70.4% (62)	67.3% (66)
Pupils with attendance >95%	63% (63)	55% (55)	55.6% (49)	54% (53)

School roll as at last Friday in June. Pupil numbers are identified in brackets after the proportions. There are no national comparators for this cohort.

7.2.5 Average attendance is calculated as the number of sessions actually attended as a percentage of the sessions available during pupils' time in care. This year the average attendance dropped by less than one percentage point, with out of borough attendance just under 3% higher than for in borough schools.

7.2.6 There was a two percentage increase in the number of pupils with absences of more than 25 days. 28% of the cohort would be described as persistent absentees and a reduction in this figures needs to be a priority for action. However, the increase by 8% percentage points of pupils with attendance greater than 95% is very pleasing.

7.3 Attendance by Age Phase/Key Stage

	EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	Yr 10	Yr 11
Total number of pupils 100	2	7	28	26	13	24
Average attendance 15-16 (14-15 figures in brackets)	98.9% (98.2%)	91.8% (98.7%)	96.3% (96.5%)	93.9% (86.1%)	80.8% (79.5%)	84.6% (87%)
Pupils 25 day absence as a %age of cohort (cohort size in brackets)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	15.3% (4)	23% (3)	29% (7)
Pupils attendance > 90% as a %age of cohort	100% (2)	71.4% (5)	89.2% (25)	84.6% (22)	53.8% (7)	45.8% (11)
Pupils attendance > 95% as a %age of cohort	100% (2)	71.4% (5)	82.1% (23)	69.2% (18)	46.1% (6)	37.5% (9)

Pupil numbers are identified in brackets after the proportions.

7.3.1 The average rate of attendance in the Primary Age Phase is 94%. This is 3.6 percentage points less than the previous academic year and below the national average for all pupils in this phase. The falls in attendance at KS1 were attributable to illness and days out of school at the end of the summer term when three children were placed for permanence/adoption. Unusually in this age phase one child received fixed term exclusion at the point of becoming looked after.

7.3.2 The increase of 7.8 percentage points in KS3 attendance and the increase in the average rate of attendance to 86.4% in the Secondary Age Phase is pleasing but this has not yet returned to the 2013-2014 rate of 87.3%. However, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of pupils achieving above 95% in

the secondary phase, which is notable. Attendance for all phases will be a focus for improvement in the coming year.

7.3.4 Absences at KS4 were attributable to:

- a challenging and mobile cohort prone to absconding;
- mental health based school refusal behaviours among a small group;
- days out of school waiting for a new school place to be found when the school has advised that they are no longer able to meet need.

While tuition is always offered where a search for a school is being undertaken in such circumstances, there can be a delay in finding a tutor with the appropriate skills to match the child's learning or behavioural need.

7.4 **Change of schools**

7.4.1 It is well established that for many children school provides a consistent structure to their daily lives. Apart from the expectation of academic learning it is where they develop their sense of self, their social skills and make friendships. Wherever possible, a child becoming looked after should retain his or her place at school or college. During 2015 – 2016 LA officers across a range of departments worked in partnership to ensure continuity of schooling wherever possible. The Virtual School worked to ensure that where changes to schooling became necessary as a result of care placement move, the best school or setting was identified to meet the child's needs.

7.4.2 During 2015-2016, 21 children and young people changed school as a result of becoming looked after or of changes in care placement. This represents 14% of the total of school aged children on the roll of the Virtual School and an increase of 3.2 percentage points over the previous academic year. Nine children (6%), changed care placements without disruption to school place: this is a small reduction in comparison with the proportion in 2014-15.

8. EXCLUSIONS

8.1 Overview

- 8.1.1** The Virtual School works with Merton’s Educational Psychologists, the Virtual Behaviour Service and the School Inclusion Coordinator to reduce the need for fixed term and permanent exclusions for LAC, seeking to minimize the negative impact such sanctions can have on this particularly vulnerable group of pupils.
- 8.1.2** The Virtual School’s Advisory Teachers encourage schools and foster carers to contact the Virtual School if a pupil is at risk of exclusion and exclusions are always followed up by the Virtual School.

8.2 Exclusions for Merton Looked After Children

- 8.2.1** The following tables include any Merton LAC who was excluded during their time in care in 2015 -2016, who was on roll as of 24th June 2016. The national averages however refer only to those children who have been in care for at least 12 months.

8.2.2 Table - number of exclusions

	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
No on roll (Merton)	100	101	88
Permanent Exclusions (Merton)	0%	0%	0%
Permanent Exclusion (National)	Not yet available	0.13%	0.11%
Fixed Term & Lunchtime Exclusions (Merton)	14% (14)	17% (17)	11% (10)
Fixed Term Exclusion Rate (National)	Not yet available	10.25%	9.77%

8.2.3 Table - patterns of exclusion per pupil with one or more fixed term exclusion

	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
1 fixed term exclusion	4%(4)	7%(7)	6%(5)
2 fixed term exclusions	5%(5)	3%(3)	3%(3)
3 fixed term exclusions	5%(5)	2%(2)	2%(2)
4 fixed term exclusions	0%(0)	3%(3)	0%(0)
5 or more fixed term exclusions	0%(0)	2%(2)*	0%(0)

Proportions expressed as a percentage of the total Virtual School.

** Each with 7 fixed term exclusions*

- 8.2.4** The most recent DfE Statistical First Release: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England 2014 to 2015(SRF26/2016) reports that 0.07% of the school population were permanently excluded and suggests that LAC are twice as likely to be excluded, In this context, it is very pleasing that the LA has sustained the record for eight years of no Merton LAC child being permanently excluded.
- 8.2.5** Since the number of children on roll is very small, each exclusion features significantly as a percentage. This year, it is pleasing that not only did the percentage of children receiving fixed term exclusions decrease, but the frequency and duration of these exclusions were reduced.
- 5% of primary age LAC were given fixed term exclusions. However, unusually, this included one child in a Merton Primary School who was excluded at the point at which he became looked after. Subsequently the child’s timetable and curriculum were changed in order for him to access more nurture support.
 - 19% of secondary age LAC received a fixed term exclusion during the academic year: this is a reduction of 2.2 percentage in comparison with the previous year.
 - Five of the 24 LAC attending Merton secondary provision (21%)were excluded which is a reduction of 13% over 2014-15
- 8.2.6** Among the school population in general, the most common reason for fixed term inclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour. Others are as a consequence of physical assault, fire setting, damage to property,

possession and use of illegal substances and suggests schools' understanding of the need to keep the use of exclusion to a minimum.

8.2.7 Of the children receiving a fixed term exclusion:

- 43% had been in care for less than a year;
- 50% had at least one change of change of care placement during the academic year;
- 57% had statements of educational need; and
- 71% were attending special schools or alternative education.

The continued reduction in the need for and use of fixed term exclusions is to be a priority for The Virtual School.

9. REVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR 2015-16

9.1 The purpose of The Virtual School is to improve the educational outcomes for Merton's Looked After Children and Care Leavers and sits within the overall strategy of the Children, Schools and Families Directorate. Such improvement is a continuing process.

9.2 Performance data is collected and analysed, much of which is included in this report, and In order to secure the best outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, priorities for improvement are identified. These priorities, as set out below, form the basis for the Virtual School Improvement Plan for the coming year. Each priority in the plan describes and identifies a lead officer and links within the Directorate and beyond. Progress, in terms of actions to be taken and outcomes sought and achieved is monitored through both the line management structures within the Directorate and the Virtual School Steering Group. Impact and outcomes with regard to each priority for 2015 -2016 are summarised below.

9.3 **Priority 1** - To review the membership and terms of reference of the Virtual School Steering Group/Governing Body to ensure strategic and operational decisions and processes support good educational outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Outcomes - Membership now reflects the wide variety of officers involved in the CSF overall strategy for LAC & Care Leavers. Terms of Reference have been agreed and an annual cycle of review and development is in place, allowing close cooperation and scrutiny of outcomes and provision for LAC.

9.4 **Priority 2** - To improve the educational outcomes for Looked After Children and reduce vulnerability to spending time not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Outcomes (educational outcomes) - These outcomes have been summarised in Chapter 3 in this report (the Achievement of pupils in the Virtual School). Particular successes include improvements at KS4; and all pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check. A key area for improvement for the Virtual School will be about improving outcomes at the end of KS2, although progress across KS2 for this year's cohort was strong in reading and writing.

Outcomes (NEET) -The Virtual School staffing complement now includes a designated keyworker for NEETs whose role is to support Looked After Children and Care Leavers to access Education, Training or Employment (ETE). The Virtual School has worked closely with Children's Social Care to ensure systems and processes for tracking and reporting are strong. Work has been undertaken with individuals and there is an underlying trend of reduced numbers of care leavers who are NEET. This work will be ongoing and needs to be developed to ensure all available support is accessed.

9.5 **Priority 3** - To improve understanding of progress made by LAC by further developing the PEP and education section of Pathway plans to ensure that all LAC and Care Leavers achieve their potential.

Outcomes - This has been the first year of assessing the attainment and progress for pupils in KS1, 2 & 3 without the requirement to use National Curriculum levels. The PEP template has been revised in order to capture each school's approach to assessment and to ensure a focus on progress during the meetings with schools. The forms have also been adapted to capture more closely the use and impact of the Pupil Premium Grant. A subcommittee of the steering group has been established to monitor and report on the quality of plans and their effectiveness, in addition to the quality assurance carried out by the Virtual School Headteacher. For older children there is now an agreed format for completing the Education and Training section of the Pathway Plan. This practice now needs to be embedded and quality assurance processes agreed.

9.6 Priority 4 - To extend partnerships with the Early Years and Social Work and Intervention Services to ensure quality Personal Education Plans for children aged two and above, including registration at Children's Centres where appropriate.

Outcomes - There is now a designated early years officer working in partnership with the Virtual School. Monitoring shows an improvement in the quality of PEPs for our younger children. Processes for ensuring payment of the Early Years Pupil Premium to Early Years providers are in place. There is further work to be done to extend relationships with the Private and Voluntary Sector to understand and meet the needs of Looked After Children. The Early Years team now provides training for Merton Foster Carers and their contribution to children's learning needs to be incorporated into the PEP. This work needs to extend to include children with disabilities.

9.7 Priority 5 - To further improve the attendance of LAC and Care Leavers, especially in the secondary phase.

Outcomes - Chapter 6 gives an overview of attendance for 2015-16 and notes some improvements including an increase in the proportion of pupils attaining 95% attendance or above. The Virtual School participated in a peer review of Barnet Virtual School, which focused on attendance, particularly at KS4. The outcomes of the process gave Merton some ideas for improvement and actions will be incorporated into the improvement plan for 2016-17. A peer review of Merton Virtual School took place in early 2016 – 17, and will be reported on in the next annual report.

As also noted in Chapter 6, the newly commissioned service for monitoring pupil attendance is becoming embedded into the Virtual School systems and processes. Information sharing agreements are being sought from post 16 providers and students in preparation for extending this service to include 17 and 18 year olds.

9.8 Priority 6 - To improve the ability of care givers to support children's learning and development.

Outcomes - The Early Years team has delivered training to Merton Carers, and the Virtual School has delivered training to foster carers on developments in education for statutory school aged children. Actions for carers are specified on PEPs and the Virtual School signposts and provides resources. Details are included in chapter 5. When foster carers are evaluated (as part of their regular reviews by Social Care), their engagement with schools is a key part of the process. There is scope to develop this work further and so this priority will be on going.

9.9 Priority 7 - To reduce fixed term exclusion rates for all LAC.

Outcomes - The expectation of the Virtual School, and one that is clearly communicated, is that understanding the child's needs and triggers, seeking appropriate referrals and developing alternative strategies reduces the need for the use of exclusion. During this past year, schools and settings have become increasingly aware of this expectation and consult with the Virtual School to try and avoid exclusion where possible. Also the newly commissioned attendance monitoring service gives prompt alerts to the Virtual School about exclusions and allows for immediate discussion. Chapter 7 gives an overview of exclusions for 2015-16 which shows fixed term exclusions to have reduced in frequency and duration, as a result of the tenacious activity of the Virtual School. This work will continue to be a priority, as LAC are more vulnerable to exclusion than the general population.

10. PRIORITIES FOR 2016-17

- 10.1 **Priority 1** - To continue to strengthen governance of the Virtual School, ensuring increased membership (to include a care leaver, foster carer and headteachers) and developing ever deeper understanding of the aims and impact of the Virtual School.
- 10.2 **Priority 2** – To embed the PEP process and processes for supporting LAC achievement so that strong educational outcomes for Looked After Children are secured, especially at KS2 and building on the improvements at KS4 using the outcomes from the peer review.
- 10.3 **Priority 3** – To reduce vulnerability to spending time not in employment, education or training (NEET), by ensuring the Education Pathway Plans identify clear next steps for all young people, so that the proportion of NEETs reduces amongst the 16/17 year old LA population, and post 18.
- 10.4 **Priority 4** – Drawing on the learning from the recent peer review, to further improve the attendance of LAC and Care Leavers, especially in the secondary phase.
- 10.5 **Priority 5** - To improve the ability of care givers to support children’s learning and development.
- 10.6 **Priority 6** – Building on the strengths of the advisory and business support teams, further develop its capacity to ensure sustained impact with regard to the analysis and use of data.

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