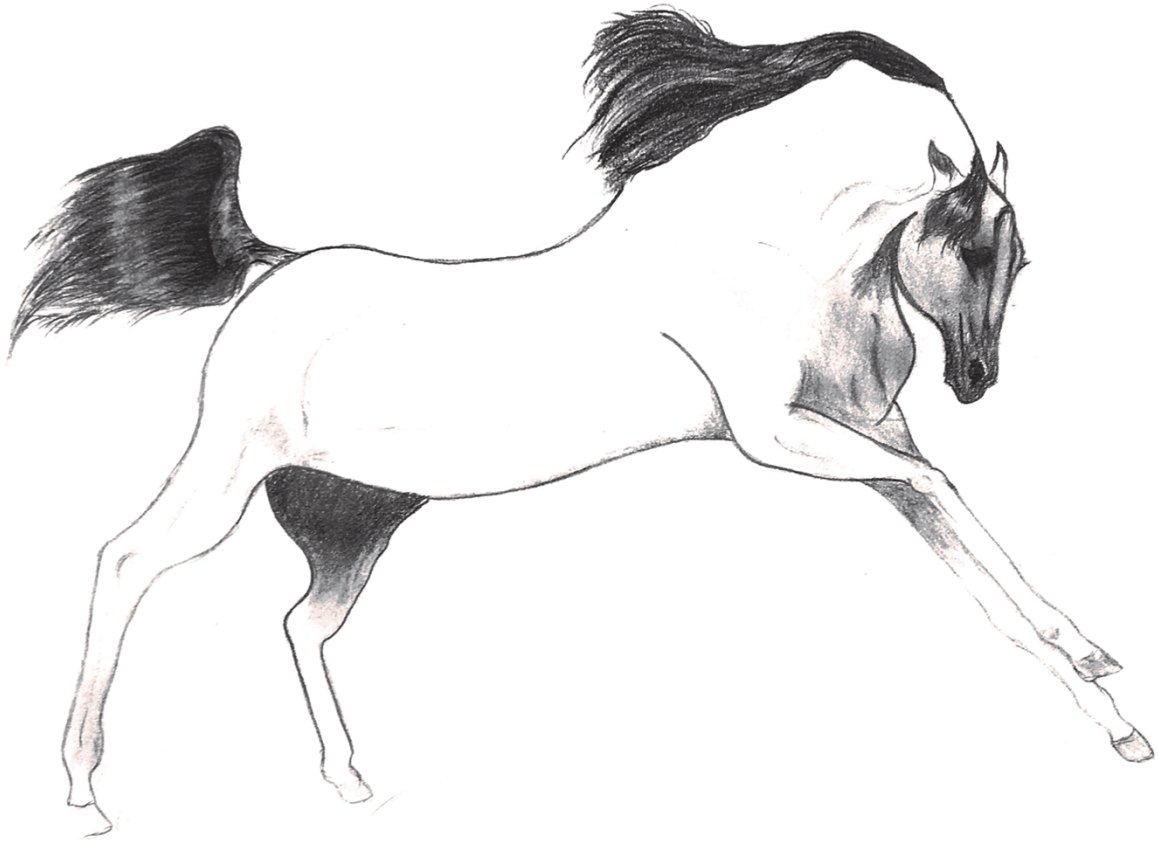
MERTON COUNCIL

The Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers



Annual report 2014 - 2015

www.merton.gov.uk

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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 2014- 2015.

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 8 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;
- tracking the outcomes of all LAC in Merton schools, including those looked after by other boroughs, and ensuring that schools are working to narrow the gaps, through the Merton School Improvement Team; and
- tracking the admissions and attendance of all LAC.

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 that is used in the achievement section of this report, to allow valid comparisons with 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. CONTEXT FOR THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

2.1 Merton Looked After Children

2.1.1 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 2014-2015 a total of 129 school aged children were, or became looked after.

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

	Reception	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Total
In borough school or education setting	1 (1)	7 (6)	6 (6)	11 (8)	18 (17)	43 (38)
Out of borough school or education setting	0 (0)	5 (3)	16 (15)	13 (15)	24 (17)	58 (50)
Total	1 (1)	12 (9)	22 (21)	24(23)	42 (34)	101(88)

As of 26th June 2015, point of reference for year on year comparative purposes for the Virtual School role. 2014 numbers in brackets.

There were 101 pupils on role from reception to year 11. This represents an increase of 13 pupils when compared with the number for the previous academic year.

2.1.3 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 – 21 that may continue to require support from the Virtual School. During the academic year 2014-2015:

- there were 83 young people young people between the ages of 16 and 18 eligible for services and support for education or training from the Virtual School;
- there were 93 care leavers aged 19 – 21 on 31st March 2015.

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.

2.1.4 Children with Special Educational Needs

Based on the Special Educational Needs code of Practice January 2015, around 70% of Merton LAC had some form of Special Educational Need during 2014 - 2015. This is much higher than in the Merton school population as a whole. Nationally, in the 2014 census, 2.8% of all children and 29% of LAC had a Statement of Educational Need[1].

2.1.5 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 worked with Merton and other authorities where pupils are placed to ensure a smooth transition. Some pupils continue to have statements, and the transition to EHCPs will happen in the coming months.

[1] DfE SRF 49/2014 Outcomes for Children Looked After Children by local Authorities in England as at 31 March 2014

2.1.6 Table - Merton LAC with Statement of Educational Need or EHCP

	Reception	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Total
In borough school or education setting	0	1	0	5	7	13
Out of borough school or education setting	0	0	6	5	15	26
Total	0	1	6	10	22	39

38.6% of Merton LAC have a Statement of Educational Need or EHCP.

2.1.7 Types of School attended by Merton LAC

Merton LAC attend a variety of maintained and 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.

2.1.8 With effect from this academic year many former alternative education providers have gained DfE registration as independent schools. This allows for them to accept full responsibility for the education of pupils exclusively on their roll, or to provide a service to those pupils whose needs are best met through Alternative Provision.

2.1.9 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.

2.1.10 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.

2.1.11 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	Other Alternative Provider	Total
EYs/Primary	28	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	35
Secondary	19	6	8	15	0	0	12	1	5	66
Total	47	6	8	19	0	0	15	1	5	101

2.2. Other Borough Looked After Children attending Merton schools

2.2.1 The Virtual School strives to ensure an accurate register of other borough LAC in Merton Schools is kept, 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.

2.2.2 Table - Other Borough Looked After Pupils

Other Borough LAC in Merton Schools	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Primary	22	-	-
Secondary	33*	-	-
Total	55	61	53

* This includes 23 Yr 11 students

2.2.3 There are 55 other borough LAC attending Merton schools. This is a slight reduction on the previous year and replicates the mean average of the last 4 years. This compares with 43 Merton LAC attending Merton Schools. Stanford Primary School and St Mark's Academy have consistently been the schools with the highest number of LAC, including other borough LAC, on roll.

2.3 Looked After Children applying for schools in Merton

2.3.1 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.

2.3.2 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 (12 children)	7	8	0	1
Secondary (17 children	6	7	3	1

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.

3. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PUPILS IN THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 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. This is the data that is used in this report, allowing comparisons with national datasets which are collected at the same time.

3.1.2 The national dataset regarding the achievement of LAC for 2015 is not yet available. The latest national comparisons that appear in this report are from 2014.

3.1.3 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 they are included in the SSDA903 return.

3.1.4 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.

3.2 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFSP)

3.2.1 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.

3.2.2 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.

3.2.3 Table - EYFSP outcomes

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

3.2.4 One child who was assessed using the EYFSP achieved the good level of development. The other child scored well, achieving the expected standard in many areas, but was missing achievement in a few key areas (notably in those related to social communication), meaning the GLD was jot achieved. This child has now transitioned to Year 1 and ongoing tracking of progress indicates this is accelerating.

3.2.5 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.

3.2.6 No national LAC cohort information is available for comparison at this key stage.

3.3 Key Stage 1 (KS1

3.3.1 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.

3.3.2 Table - Year 1 Phonics Screening Check outcomes

Phonics Screening Check (Year 1)	2013		2014		2015	
	Percentage achieving standard	No. of Children	Percentage achieving standard	No. of Children	Percentage achieving standard	No. of Children
Merton LAC	0%	1	20%	5	n/a	0
Merton All Pupils	68%		76%		77%	
National All Pupils	69%		74%		77%	

3.3.3 No Merton LAC were on roll in Year 1 as of the 31st March, and so there are no Merton outcomes for this year.

3.3.4 KS1 SATs take place in Year 2. Each pupil is teacher assessed in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of KS1, pupils are expected to achieve at least at Level 2. This level is further divided: Level 2C is just into the level; Level 2B is securely at Level 2; and Level 2A is at the top of Level 2. The performance of pupils working towards Level 1 is described as 'W'. P levels are used to describe the attainment of those children with Special Educational Need who are working below National Curriculum levels.

3.3.5 Tables - KS1 outcomes

Key Stage 1 - READING	2013				2014				2015			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	100%	1	100%	100%	0%	1	83%	50%	0%	6
Merton All Pupils	87%	76%	26%		89%	80%	29%		90%	81%	29%	
National LAC	69%				71%				TBC			
National All Pupils	89%	79%	29%		90%	81%	31%		90%	82%	32%	

Key Stage 1 - WRITING	2013				2014				2015			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	0%	1	100%	100%	0%	1	83%	33%	0%	6
Merton All Pupils	81%	62%	12%		84%	65%	14%		87%	69%	16%	
National LAC	61%				61%				TBC			
National All Pupils	85%	67%	15%		86%	70%	16%		88%	72%	18%	

Key Stage 1 - MATHS	2013				2014				2015			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100 %	100%	1	100%	0%	0%	1	83%	33%	0%	6
Merton Schools All Pupils	90%	73%	21%		92%	79%	24%		92%	78%	26%	
National LAC	71%				72%				TBC			
National All Pupils	91%	78%	23%		92%	80%	24%		93%	82%	26%	

3.3.6 83% of Merton LAC (five of the cohort of six) attained the expected Level 2c or above in reading, writing and mathematics. This is below the national averages for all pupils in each of these subjects, but above the national averages for LAC nationally in 2014. The one child that did not achieve the expected Level 2 or above made slow progress over the key stage, and will be targeted for support as they move into Year 3.

3.4 Key Stage 2 (KS2)

3.4.1 KS2 SATs take place in Year 6. Each pupil is tested in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. They are also teacher assessed in reading, writing, mathematics and science. By the end of KS2, pupils are expected to achieve at least at Level 4. This level is further divided for the subjects tested (but not teacher assessed): Level 4C is just into the level; Level 4B represents more secure achievement; and Level 4a is at the top of the level. Pupils attaining Level 5 or Level 6 are working above age related expectations.

3.4.2 Pupils' progress across KS2 is also measured at the end of Year 6. Pupils are expected to have made at least two levels progress across the key stage. Pupils making more than two levels progress have made better than expected progress.

3.4.3 Tables - KS2 outcomes

Key Stage 2 - Reading	2013				2014				2015			
	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	67%	5	100%	100%	50%	3	100%	100%	0%	2
Merton All Pupils	90%	79%	49%		91%	80%	52%		91%	82%	52%	
National LAC	63%				68%				TBC			
National All Pupils	86%	75%	45%		89%	78%	50%		89%	80%	49%	

Key Stage 2 - Writing	2013			2014			2015		
	4+	5+	No.	4+	5+	No.	4+	5+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	33%	5	100%	0%	3	100%	50%	2
Merton All Pupils	85%	33%		86%	36%		89%	38%	
National LAC	55%			59%			TBC		
National All Pupils	74%	48%		76%	52%		89%	43%	

Key Stage 2 - Maths	2013				2014				2015			
	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	67%	33%	5	100%	50%	0%	3	100%	50%	50%	2
Merton All Pupils	86%	77%	47%		88%	78%	46%		89%	79%	45%	
National LAC	59%				61%				TBC			
National All Pupils	85%	73%	41%		86%	76%	42%		89%	80%	49%	

3.4.4 Both LAC pupils in Year 6 achieved the expected Level 4 or above in all three subjects: one child achieved the higher Level 5. The percentage puts the achievement of LAC in Merton well above the national averages.

3.5 Key Stage 4 (KS4)

3.5.1 Table - KS4 outcomes

GCSE	2014					2015				
	Any passes	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-G or equivalent	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs Grade A*-C (or equivalent) 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 (or equivalent) incl En/maths	No. of Children
Merton LAC	60%	60%	40%	0%	5	75%	33%	8%	8%	12
Merton Schools All Pupils	97%	92%	71%	64%			94%	69%	58%	
National LAC			16%	12%		To be published 2016				

3.5.2 8% of Merton LAC achieved 5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C including English and mathematics (this represents one child). This is below the 2014 national average for LAC of 12%. The achievement of students at this key stage will be an ongoing priority for the Virtual School in the coming year.

3.5.3 Of the 12 students in this cohort, eight (67%) had special educational needs, including seven with statements. These proportions are well above national averages, and well above the proportion of LAC students last year with SEN (20%).

3.6 Post 16

3.6.1 Three young people followed A level/ A level equivalent courses.

Young Person	Courses and grades as shared by student	Destination
A	Btech Performing Arts (Distinction) Btech Art (Merit) 'A' level Sociology	Roehampton University to read psychology
B	'A' level English Literature, Psychology and Sociology (grades CDE)	Christ Church Canterbury
C	3 A levels	Gap year

3.6.2 52 out of 67 young people aged 16 or above have pursued were successful in a range of courses, from Entry Level to Level 3.

3.6.3 Six young people have completed their degrees (three in nursing; one in Computer Science; one HND in Health and Social Care; one HND in Event Management (Hospitality).

4 Actions undertaken by the Virtual School to secure improved outcomes

4.1 Ofsted

4.1.2 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.

4.1.3 During 2014 – 2015 81% of statutory school aged LAC attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better. This is the same as the proportion attending such schools in 2014.

4.1.4 In the primary phase 76% of pupils attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better.

4.1.5 In the secondary phase 87% 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, 93% attended schools that are good or better. Of those pupils attending other borough schools, 81% attended good or better schools. This difference reflects the current high standards in Merton secondary and special (with secondary age students) schools: 92% were judged good or better by the end of the academic year 2014 – 2015. Since then that proportion has risen to 100%.

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

	At school in	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/ RI	No current category	Total
EY/Primary	Merton	1	6	3	4	14
	Other borough	1	14	6	0	21
Secondary	Merton	6	20	2	1	29
	Other borough	10	16	6	5	37
Total		18	56	17	10	101
% of Merton LAC		17.8%	55.4%	14.6%	11.9%	

4.2 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

4.2.1 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.

4.2.2 During 2014/15 281 initial and review PEPs were completed. Statutory guidance requires that a child's PEP is reviewed each term. 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

4.2.3 Much work was undertaken 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. The Virtual School worked in close partnership with social workers to coordinate meetings and record and administer PEPs.

4.2.4 Table – Timescale of PEP Completion

	Autumn 14	Spring 15	Summer 15	Academic Year 14-15
No. who became LAC	24	16	24	64
Ceased being LAC before PEP	5	3	0	8
PEP completed within 20 days	16	11	20	47
PEP completed after 20 days	3 (one by one day)	2	4	9

4.2.5 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. 64 initial PEPs for children new into care were required during the academic year but eight children ceased to be LAC before the PEP due date. 47 of the required 56 initial Personal Education Planning meetings (84%) were completed within 20 days of a child becoming Looked After. 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 the school holiday period;
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children arriving very late in school year in Year 11.

4.2.6 Table – Timescale of PEP Review

	Autumn 14	Spring 15	Summer 16	Academic Year 14-15
No of PEPS to be reviewed	78	70	80	228
Completed within 6 months of previous PEP	73	67	78	218
% reviewed within time scales	93.5%	95.7%	97.5%	95.6%

4.2.7 95.6% 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.

4.3 Pupil Premium

4.3.1 The Virtual School was allocated a pupil premium grant of £1900 for each Looked After Child by the government. 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 2014/15, allowing 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 via the Pupil's Education Plan.

4.3.2 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

4.3.3 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.

4.4 One to One Tuition

4.4.1 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.

4.4.2 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, 1:1 tuition was provided outside the school day by school staff.

4.4.3 Table - Number of LAC accessing 1:1 tuition

Key Stage	Total students recorded as having tuition 2014-15	Tuition for less than one term	Tuition for1 to 2 terms	Tuition for more than 2 terms and ongoing
KS1	1(1)*	0(0)	0(0)	1(1)
KS2	5(15)	0(0)	0(0)	5(15)
KS3	10(10)	0(1)	1(1)	9(8)
KS 4	19(19)	1(0)	0(0)	18(19)
Post 16	30(29)	0(0)	2(1)	28(28)
Total	65(74)	1(1)	3(2)	61(71)

*2013-14 figures in brackets.

4.4.4 65 Merton LAC received 1:1 tuition over the course of 2014/15. 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 number is larger for post 16 pupils as this includes additional sessions for English for Speakers of Other Language.

4.5 Pupil Voice

4.5.1 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.

4.5.2 This year the Virtual School undertook a piece of work to identify any common themes voiced by the young people. Views were collected either at PEP meetings or through a completed pupil view sheet. Themes emerged regarding friendships for the primary aged pupils; and behaviour, concentration and organisation for secondary aged pupils. 10 students raised bullying as a concern: six primary aged children and four secondary aged pupils. In all incidences the Virtual School followed up concerns to ensure the physical and emotional safety of our pupils.

4.6 Development & Training

4.6.1 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.

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

4.6.3 During 2014-2015 30 Merton schools 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 leads for LAC in all Merton schools. The training sessions across 2014/15 for the designated leads focused on the following:

- The requirements of the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and its implications for schools.
- Joint training of teachers, careers and social workers with the London Fostering Association.
- Promotion of the role of the Designated Teacher (with Croydon Virtual School and Merton's Commissioning Manager for Alternative Education).

4.6.4 The Virtual School Heads 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.

4.6.5 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.

4.6.6 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.

4.6.7 Through the 2015 Merton Foster Carer Survey, 92% of respondents stated that the support provided by the Virtual School was good or excellent.

4.7 The Virtual School Newsletter & Young Merton Together

4.7.1 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.

5. SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME AND ENRICHMENT

5.1 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.

5.2 Enrichment support

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

- funded participation in the Letterbox project for 15 pupils. Each child enrolled received a parcel of books, mathematics activities, games and puzzles once each month from May to October;
- 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 "Record Breakers"; 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,

5.3 Aim Higher/Raising Aspirations

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 Clinic Skills (at St Georges Medical School). Eight 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.

5.4 Art

5.4.1 During 2014/15 the Virtual School worked in partnership with Room 13 on an art project at Aragon Primary School. The project was attended by eight children and six foster carers who worked together in a relaxed and supported way to explore a variety of art techniques and learn new skills. There is to be an exhibition of their work in spring 2016.

5.4.2 As in previous years, the Virtual School produced a desk calendar for the coming academic year. The calendar featured art work from children and young people across the school age range, including those with special needs. It also featured the work of a foster carer who attended the Room 13 art project.

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

5.5 Theatre

The Virtual School organised a trip to the Polka Theatre in Wimbledon for a performance of Peter Pan. It was attended by nine children and eight carers.

5.6 Music

The Virtual School continued to fund out of school music lessons for those who express an interest. For two children it also assisted in the purchase of a guitar and keyboard, to encourage their music making.

5.7 Dance

Two students continued to attend out of school dance lessons

5.8 Science

The Virtual School funded a science workshop which was incorporated in the Children in Care Council's celebration event for primary aged children. The workshop had originally been intended as an opportunity to encourage children and carers to participate in science activities in the home but although the activities engaged and enthralled the children the event fell short of achieving its intended purpose.

5.9 Sports

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. During the academic year 12 pupils attended swimming lessons.

5.10 Educational Visits

The Virtual School assisted with funding for educational visits and was able to support the fund raising efforts for one of our pupils who attended the World Scout Jamboree in Japan.

6. ATTENDANCE

6.1 Overview

6.1.1 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.

6.1.2 The Virtual School has robust and rigorous processes to track and monitor pupil attendance via a commissioned service, Welfare Call. During 2014 – 2015, with the exception of children in hospital schools or remanded in custody, Welfare Call contacted every school or education setting daily and recorded attendance for each LAC on an Individual Pupil Record (IPR). This record was accessible through a secure portal from anywhere, 24 hours a day, enabling close monitoring by the Virtual School team. In particular, the Virtual School continued to be careful to ensure that accurate attendance data was recorded where a child was on the roll of a school but educated off site. The Virtual School also commissioned Welfare Call to collect attendance data for Other Borough LAC on roll of maintained schools in Merton.

6.1.3 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.

5.1.4 The Virtual School celebrated 100% attendance, or a significant improvement in attendance, with personal letters and vouchers to spend at W.H. Smith.

6.2 Whole School Attendance Data

6.2.1 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, but need to be viewed in the context of the changing size of roll.

6.2.2 One pupil was very unwell during the year and achieved only 6.1% school attendance. As such, this figure is a statistical outlier and has been excluded from the data set, which equals 100 students in the table below.

6.2.3 Table - Attendance Data

Academic Year	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
Total Pupils (number)	100	88	98	80
Average attendance	91.7%	90.67%	87.14%	89.39%
Pupils with 25+ absence	12% (12)	17% (15)	21.4% (21)	24% (19)
Pupils with attendance >90%	75% (75)	70.4% (62)	67.3% (66)	68.8% (55)
Pupils with attendance >95%	55% (55)	55.6% (49)	54% (53)	48.8% (39)

As at 26th June 2015. Pupil numbers are identified in brackets after the proportions. There are no national comparators for this cohort.

6.2.4 Average attendance is calculated as the number of sessions actually attended as a percentage of the number of session available to attend. Overall, the underlying upward trend in attendance continues. This year the average attendance for Merton Looked After Pupils attending Merton Schools or settings was slightly

below that of pupils attending schools out of borough, but of no real statistical significance. The reduction in the number of pupils with 25 or more days absence continued.

6.2.5 The range was from 6% attendance for one young person (excluded from data set) to 100%. The next lowest attendance was 35%.

6.3 Attendance by Age Phase/Key Stage

	EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	Yr 10	Yr 11
Total number of pupils	1	12	22	23	20	22
Average attendance 14-15 (13-14 figures in brackets)	98.2% (94.7%)	98.7% (89.9%)	96.5% (97.4%)	86.1% (93.2%)	79.5% (91.3%)	87% (77.6%)
Pupils 25 day absence as a proportion of cohort	0% (0)	0% (0)	4.5% (1)	7.6% (1)	25% (5)	23% (5)
Pupils attendance > 90%	100% (1)	100% (12)	77.2% (17)	70.8% (17)	45% (9)	63.6% (14)
Pupils attendance >95%	0% (0)	100% (12)	77.2% (17)	52.2% (12)	35% (7)	27.3% (6)

Pupil numbers are identified in brackets after the proportions.

6.3.1 The average rate of attendance was 97.3% in the Early Years and Primary Age Phase: this demonstrates an improvement on rates in 2013 - 2014 when the figure was 94%, and is above the national average rate of attendance for all pupils in this phase. The average rate of attendance was 85.6% in the Secondary Age Phase, a drop on the 2013 - 2014 rate (87.3%). This will be a focus for improvement in the coming year.

6.3.2 Overall, there was an increase in rates of attendance for Early Years and KS1. The falls in attendance at KS2, KS3 and Year 10 were attributable to:

- the increased number of fixed term exclusions awarded to pupils in these age groups;
- 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; and
- school refusal among a small group.

While tuition is always offered 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.

6.3.3 Attendance for Year 11 pupils has improved. The increased attendance both reflects the number of students in specialist settings whose timetable continues throughout the summer term, and schools' increasing response to supported study during the summer term examination period.

6.4 Change of schools

6.4.1 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 2014 – 2015 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.

6.4.2 During 2014 – 2015, 14 children and young people changed school as a result of becoming looked after or of changes in care placement. This represents 10.8% of the total number of school aged children on the Virtual School roll during the academic year. Nine children (7%) changed care placements without disruption to school place.

6.5 Other Borough LAC attending Merton Schools

6.5.1 Welfare Call monitored and collected attendance data for other borough children and young people attending Merton schools.

Other Borough LAC in Merton Schools	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Total Pupils	55	61	53
Average attendance	90%	92%	84%
Pupils with 25+ days absence	10% (9)	6.5% (4)	32% (17)
Pupils with attendance >90%	67.2% (37)	80.3% (49)	58% (31)
Pupils with attendance >95%	54.5% (30)	54% (33)	43% (23)

6.5.2 Average attendance for other borough LAC in Merton Schools was slightly lower than the average attendance of Merton LAC in all schools. The Virtual School Head (VSH) liaised, as required, with other Virtual School Heads regarding issues such as attendance and behaviour.

7. EXCLUSIONS

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 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.

7.1.2 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.

7.2 Exclusions for Merton Looked After Children

7.2.1 The following tables include any Merton LAC who was excluded during their time in care. For the 2014-2015 figures all the children with fixed term exclusions were in care on 26th June 2015.

7.2.2 Table - number of exclusions

	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
No on roll	101	88	98
Permanent Exclusions	0%	0%	0%
Fixed Term & Lunchtime Exclusions	17% (17)	11% (10)	9% (9)
National (DfE 1st Statistical Release)	Not yet available	Not yet available	9.79%

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

	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
I fixed term exclusion	7%(7)	6%(5)	2%(2)
2 fixed term exclusions	3%(3)	3%(3)	4%(4)
3 fixed term exclusions	2%(2)	2%(2)	1%(1)
4 fixed term exclusions	3%(3)	0%(0)	1%(1)
5 or more fixed term exclusions	2%(2)*	0%(0)	1%(1)

Proportions expressed as a percentage of the total Virtual School Population.
** Each with 7 fixed term exclusions*

7.2.4 The most recent DfE Statistical First Release: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England 2013 to 2014 (SRF28/2015) reports that 0.06% of the school population were permanently excluded. In this context, it is very pleasing that the LA has sustained the record for seven years of no LAC child being permanently excluded.

7.2.5 Since the number of children on roll is very small, every exclusion features significantly as a percentage: it is nevertheless disappointing to notice the increase in fixed term exclusions over the year.

- 8.6% of primary age LAC were given fixed term exclusions. All LAC involved attended out of Borough schools: no child was given a fixed term exclusion from a Merton Primary School.
- 21.2% of secondary age LAC received a fixed term exclusion during the academic year. 10 out of the 29 (34%) secondary age LAC attending Merton Secondary Provision were excluded.

7.2.6 The reasons for fixed term exclusions included physical assault, unacceptable behaviour including possession and use of illegal substances, and disruptive behaviour.

7.2.7 Of the children receiving a fixed term exclusion:

- 29% had been in care for less than a year;
- 41% had at least one change of change of care placement during the academic year;
- 41% had statements of educational need; and
- 59% were attending special schools or alternative education.

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

8. PRIORITIES FOR 2015-16

8.1 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.

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

8.3 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.

8.4 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

8.5 To further improve the attendance of LAC and Care Leavers, especially in the secondary phase.

8.6 To improve the ability of care givers to support children's learning and development

8.7 To reduce fixed term exclusion rates for all LAC.

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