Northumberland County Council

Job Description

Virtual School Specialist

Reference: C040
Date: September 2026

Job Family:	**Children's Care/ Virtual School**
Level:	**2**
Band:	**8**
Career Track:	**Technical, Professional, Supervisory**

Job Purpose

As a member of the Virtual School, the Specialist for Progress and Achievement will support the Virtual School Head in fulfilling statutory and extended duties to improve educational outcomes and stability for vulnerable children and young people aged 0–25. The postholder will provide strategic leadership across education, children's social care and partner agencies, developing policy, strategy and effective practice in response to emerging needs and national requirements. They will use data, intelligence and professional expertise to drive improvement, influence partners and provide appropriate challenge and support, promoting inclusive, relational and trauma-informed approaches to improve educational experiences, progress and achievement.

Duties and Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership and Educational Improvement

- Provide strategic education advice, guidance, professional challenge and system leadership to early years settings, schools, academies, colleges and partner services to promote inclusive, trauma-informed practice and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people aged 0–21.
- Support the delivery and development of the Virtual School's statutory and extended responsibilities for children in care, care leavers, previously cared-for children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care.
- Lead and contribute to county-wide improvement initiatives, working with education settings and partner agencies to reduce educational disadvantage, remove barriers to learning and improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people.
- Champion high aspirations and corporate parenting responsibilities, challenging low expectations and promoting ambition, achievement and positive educational outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Performance, Data and Quality Assurance

- Analyse and interpret education and social care data, including attendance, attainment, exclusions, suspensions, SEND and transitions, to identify trends, risks, inequalities and areas of underperformance across vulnerable cohorts.
- Use performance intelligence to provide constructive challenge and hold education settings and services to account, driving improvement where outcomes for vulnerable children and young people are weak, inconsistent or declining.

- Design, develop and lead quality assurance arrangements to evaluate educational provision, identify areas for improvement and support continuous service development.
- Support performance, assurance, governance and inspection activity, providing appropriate evidence, analysis and professional input for internal governance, Ofsted and Department for Education requirements.

Education Stability, Participation and Support

- Promote educational stability and continuity, influencing admissions, transitions, school moves and placement decisions to minimise disruption to learning and secure appropriate educational provision.
- Promote improved participation, progression and educational outcomes for care leavers, with particular emphasis on successful transition into and through post-16 education, employment and training.
- Support effective educational practice for children with a social worker and children in kinship care, ensuring educational needs, attendance and emerging risks are identified early and appropriately reflected in planning and service development.

Partnership Working and Professional Development

- Work collaboratively with Children's Social Care, SEND, admissions, attendance, education providers and other partner services to align priorities, coordinate interventions and achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
- Develop and deliver professional guidance, training and resources, and where appropriate convene multi-agency working groups, to strengthen professional practice and overcome barriers to improved educational outcomes.

Service Development and Safeguarding

- Promote continuous improvement, innovation and safeguarding across the service, using initiative and leadership to develop effective systems, services and ways of working, while promoting good safeguarding practice and safe environments in which children and young people can learn.

Person Specification

Professional and Technical Requirements

Qualifications

- Degree (Level 6) in education or a related field, or equivalent relevant professional experience.
- Qualified Teacher Status, with relevant professional development or accreditation, and substantial recent experience in a senior education role, including teaching and supporting improved outcomes for children with a social worker.
- Evidence of relevant continuing professional development in education, inclusion or related professional practice.

Knowledge and Experience

- Extensive knowledge and understanding of the education system, pedagogy and the factors affecting educational outcomes across early years, statutory school age and post-16 provision.
- Comprehensive knowledge and experience of Virtual School statutory and extended duties, including the educational needs, barriers and statutory requirements relating to

children in care, care leavers, previously cared-for children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care.

- Thorough knowledge and understanding of safeguarding and inclusive practice, including responsibilities for identifying and responding appropriately to children and young people who may be at risk of harm.
- Knowledge and practical understanding of trauma-informed and relational approaches and their application in supporting vulnerable children and young people.
- Experience and Technical Skills
- Significant recent experience within education, children's social care or a related service, with responsibility for improving educational practice, provision or outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
- Experience of using self-evaluation and quality assurance approaches to assess performance, identify areas for development and plan for continuous improvement.
- Demonstrable experience of analysing and interpreting complex education data to identify trends, risks and underperformance and using evidence to inform improvement activity.
- Experience of designing, delivering and evaluating training and continuing professional development for relevant professional audiences.
- Competence in using ICT and information systems for purposes such as case management, progress and performance tracking, record keeping and report production.

Core Competency Requirements

Communication: Communicates across services to influence outcomes. Adapts style across organisational contexts and manages sensitive communications.
Collaboration: Facilitates collaboration across teams, services, and external partners to deliver joined-up solutions.
Service Delivery: Aligns delivery with strategic priorities and maintains high performance. Improves services using innovation and effective use of resources to deliver value for money.
Decision-Making: Balances risk and impact in decision-making across teams or projects.
Digital & Data Literacy: Uses digital systems to manage performance and inform decisions. Applies ethical judgement and explores new data sources. Analyses complex data to improve service outcomes.
Adaptability: Leads teams through change using structured approaches that support clarity and resilience. Builds team cohesion and sustains service culture during transitions.
Problem-Solving: Enables collaborative problem-solving and challenges existing practices to address cross-service challenges.
Community & Customer Focus: Applies community insight and customer feedback to shape responsive and inclusive services.
Leadership: Aligns team capability and resources to deliver meaningful outcomes. Leads projects and services within areas of expertise and across disciplines

Strengths

Analytical: You seek and analyse information to inform your decisions, based on the best available evidence.
Challenger: You can bring a fresh perspective whatever the situation or context. You see other people's views and appreciate that there are many different angles to consider.
Change agent: You are positive and inspirational in leading and supporting others through change.
Influencer: You influence others, you articulate the rationale to gain their agreement.
Strategic: You look at the big picture. You consider the wider factors and long-term implications of decisions.

Desirable

- Qualified Teacher Status, with relevant professional development or accreditation, and substantial recent experience in a senior education role, including teaching and supporting improved outcomes for children with a social worker.
- Comprehensive knowledge and understanding of education and children's social care, including multi-agency working and the Ofsted inspection frameworks, with relevant experience of Ofsted inspection and securing improvement in schools.
- Strong organisational capability, including the ability to prioritise and manage a demanding workload, meet deadlines and demonstrate a clear commitment to improving and levelling up outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.