



Promoting the educational achievement of looked after children, previously looked after children, children with a social worker and those in kinship care

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Introduction and objectives



The aim of this booklet is to provide you with guidance and information on the governing body's role in promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care.

You will find out more about:

- The role of the Designated Teacher
- The role of the governing body
- Best practice guidance
- Sources of further information and advice

Looked after children

A child who is being looked after by their local authority is known as a child in care. They might be living:

- with foster parents
- at home with their parents under the supervision of social services
- in residential children's homes
- in other residential settings, like schools or secure units



They might have been placed in care voluntarily by parents struggling to cope. Or, Children's Services may have intervened because a child was at significant risk of harm.

Definitions and acronyms

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked after by a local authority if he or she is in their care or is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority.

They include the following:

- children who are accommodated by the local authority under a voluntary agreement with their parents
- children who are the subject of a care order or interim care order; and
- children who are the subject of emergency orders for the protection of the child

Looked after children (LAC) are also often referred to as Children in Care (CiC) or Children Looked After (CLA). You may also see the terminology Previously Looked After Children (PLAC).

Contextual information

There are currently more than 83,500 children looked after in the UK. More than half of these children are taken into care because of abuse or neglect.

Children in care are four times more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty.

Children in care are less likely than their peers to do well at school.



There are currently around 1,800 children in care in Hampshire (July 2025)

Click [here](#) to explore more statistics.

Why do children in care underachieve?

There are a number of reasons why children in care might underachieve:

- instability
- periods of time out of school
- unmet emotional, mental and physical needs
- lower expectations and stereotyping
- greater likelihood of special educational needs

What are the life chances for a child in care?

This summary outlines key statistics and insights regarding the life chances of children in care in the UK, based on recent reports from the Children's Commissioner for England and Catch22.

Educational Disadvantage

- Only 11% of children in care for 12+ months achieved grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSEs, compared to 50% of all pupils.
- Many care leavers who are NEET at age 19 had no GCSE qualifications when leaving care.

Source: Children's Commissioner for England (2023), 'Looked After Children Not in School'.

NEET Status

- Around 38% of care leavers aged 19–21 are NEET, compared to 13% of all young people in that age group.
- Contributing factors include lack of qualifications, unstable housing, and mental health challenges.

Source: Children's Commissioner for England (2023), 'Looked After Children Not in School'.

Teenage Parenthood

- Care-experienced young people are twice as likely to become teenage parents.
- Linked to early trauma, lack of stable relationships, and insufficient access to support.

Source: Children's Commissioner & Catch22 (2024), 'In Their Own Words'.

Housing and Homelessness

- Between 25% and 33% of rough sleepers have a history of being in care.
- Many care leavers experience housing instability or unsafe accommodation.

Source: UK Parliament House of Commons Library briefing on rough sleeping.

Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

- Care leavers report higher levels of loneliness, anxiety, and depression than their peers.
- Access to mental health services is often inconsistent or delayed.

Source: Children's Commissioner & Catch22 (2024), 'In Their Own Words'.

Previously looked after children



Following amendments to legislation made in 2017, both academies and maintained schools also have responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously looked-after pupils. This means pupils who are no longer looked after in England and Wales because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order, or were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales.

It is at the discretion of the adoptive parents whether to disclose to the school if their child is adopted. Schools are encouraged to have these conversations with parents to help them understand that by knowing this information, the school can better support the child.

For a pupil to be a Post / Previously Looked After Child (PLAC), they will have been in the care of a local authority for at least one day, and to have moved to a new order of permanency through:

- Adoption
- Special Guardianship Order (SGO)
- Child Arrangement Order (CAO)

The majority of PLAC children are removed from their birth families for serious and significant reasons:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse

Children with a social worker and the extended role of the Virtual School

Since September 2021, Virtual School Heads (VSHs) have a strategic role in promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker. This includes children in need (CiN), those subject to child protection plans (CPP), and children in kinship care. Although these children are not in care, they often face similar barriers to education.

Kinship Care

Kinship care refers to children who live with relatives or close family friends due to parental absence or inability to care for them. These arrangements may be:

- Formal: through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or Child Arrangement Orders (CAO)
- Informal: without legal orders but still under social care involvement

Children in kinship care may be eligible for support from the Virtual School if they have a social worker or were previously looked after.

The Virtual School works strategically with schools and social care to:

- Improve attendance and reduce exclusions
- Promote high aspirations and attainment
- Share best practice and training on trauma-informed approaches

For more information, see the DfE guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-children-with-a-social-worker>

The Virtual School



The Children and Families Act 2014 amends section 22 of the Children Act 1989 to require every local authority in England to appoint an officer employed by the authority, or another authority, to make sure that its duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children is properly discharged.

Local authorities appoint an officer referred to as the Virtual School Head (VSH); this officer usually leads a team known as the Virtual School.

From September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) was extended to include all children who have or have had a social worker, including children in need and those subject to child protection plans.

The virtual school approach is to work with children in care as if they were in a single school, liaising with the schools they attend.

The Hampshire Virtual School

Hampshire Virtual School Vision

Working in partnership, all children we care for will have high quality education and support so they are prepared for life.

(Hampshire Virtual School)

Purpose

The Virtual School promotes a culture of high aspirations, progress and achievements for all our vulnerable children and young people.

We will work in a child centred way to:

- ensure that children and young people's voices are sought, represented and acted upon
- put children and young people at the heart of everything we do
- always take action and deliver with their best interests in mind

The Hampshire Virtual School is responsible for raising the educational standards of Hampshire's looked after children, and having strategic oversight of previously looked after children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care.

The virtual school's role is to:

- **provide advice and guidance** to schools, social workers, parents and carers to support the education of children in this vulnerable cohort
- **deliver training** for schools and other professionals
- **track and monitor** children in care's progress towards achieving their potential
- **monitor** and track the attainment, progression, attendance and exclusion data for children in care and put in place support or targeted and personalised interventions where needed
- **Share effective practice** to improve behaviour and attendance, promote improved outcomes and school stability, and identify and address barriers to learning

Visit the Hampshire Virtual School website:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/virtual-school>

Personal education plans and education plans

Personal Education Plan (PEP)

It is a statutory requirement that a **child in care** has a Personal Education Plan (PEP).

The PEP relates to a particular child and sets out their educational targets for attainment and achievement and recommends how this will be done. The PEP captures the educational history and supports the aspirations of the child in care. It allows for a continuous record of the child's school history and identifies any additional needs that they may have and what support will need to be put in place to enable the young person to access an appropriate curriculum and reach their full potential.



The PEP remains an active document for looked-after children, as the education part of their care plan. Hampshire uses an online platform for this purpose.

Education Support Plans

Hampshire Virtual School considers it best practice for schools to undertake an [Education Support Plan](#) for **adopted**, **Special Guardianship Order (SGO)** and **Child Arrangements Order (CAO)** children. It is also recommended for **children with a social worker** and **children in kinship care**. This document is similar to a Personal Education Plan (PEP), however it is non-statutory. The key focus that makes it different from other plans is that it considers the impact of trauma.

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Education Support Plan

Principles:

- Child led and focused.
- Inclusive in practice.
- Holistic in view.
- Needs led and outcome focused.

Purpose:

- Promote attachment aware and trauma informed approach and practice.
- Add value to any other plans and provide SMART actions.
- Increase visibility and understanding of needs of children who have experienced adversity.
- Collaborative and inclusive of the views of the whole team around child.
- Dynamic and flexible; responding to need and reflective in practice.

My name is:

My education is provided by:

My year group:

SEN status: None/SEN support/EHCP (please provide the date of request or issue of an EHCP) _____

Why are we completing this plan?

I am in receipt of funding to support me. I receive £_____ every year.

People who support me:

Role	Name and contact details	Dates of involvement

A tool created by local authorities working together for all our children

 Adopt South
Finding Forever Families

 Hampshire
County Council

 Isle of Wight
Council

 Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

 SOUTHAMPTON
CITY COUNCIL

The role of the governing body



Appointment of the designated teacher (DT)

The governing body of both maintained schools and academies must ensure that:

- an appropriately qualified and experienced member of staff (the designated teacher) undertakes the responsibilities within school to promote the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, on the school's roll, and
- the designated teacher is a member of teaching staff with appropriate seniority, professional experience and status to provide leadership, training, information and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of children in care.

This appointment is a core function of the governing body, along with:

- ensuring that the designated teacher undertakes training that is appropriate to carrying out this duty, and
- holding the school to account on how it supports looked-after and previously looked-after children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care and to monitor their level of progress.

Appropriate training

Section 20(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires that the governing body must ensure that the designated teacher undertakes appropriate training, including:

- The impact of adversity and trauma on learning
- Supporting children with a social worker
- Understanding kinship care and informal care arrangements

The Hampshire Virtual School provides training for new designated teachers, and best practice advice, guidance and support for all designated teachers.

Further information on training for designated teachers is available from the [Hampshire Virtual School](#) website.

Holding the school to account

In many schools the designated teacher provides a regular report to the governing body (see the 'Useful Documents' section below for an example template for this).

The governing body and senior leadership team should consider what information the report from the designated teacher provides and what needs to be done to address any issues raised by the report in relation to:

- whether the designated teacher has sufficient time and resources to carry out their role effectively
- any training, support and development needs
- the extent to which school policies take account of the particular needs of looked after and previously looked after children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care
- whether the school is making the fullest possible use of all resources

Governing bodies should bear in mind that the way in which the role of the designated teacher will be carried out will vary from school to school and will depend on the number of children in care on roll and their individual needs.

Governing bodies are required to ensure the appointment of a designated teacher, even if there are currently no children in care on the school roll.

A model policy

All schools should consider having a policy for looked-after and previously looked-after children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care that is subject to review and approval by the governing body.

The policy should set out not only the ethos of the school in its approach to meeting the needs of children in local authority care, but also the procedures that will ensure participation in high quality learning and progress.

You can see Hampshire's model policy in the 'Useful Documents' section below.

The designated teacher



The role of the designated teacher is set out in detail in [statutory guidance](#) and includes:

- taking lead responsibility for helping school staff understand the things which affect how looked after children learn and achieve
- playing a crucial role in ensuring that looked-after and previously looked-after children have a positive experience of school and are at the centre of all action to improve educational attainment

Designated Teachers should be aware of the non-statutory guidance for children with a social worker and in kinship care. [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK](#)

The designated teacher should:

- be a central point of initial contact within the school
- have a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every looked-after and previously looked-after child on the school's roll
- take lead responsibility for ensuring school staff understand how looked-after and previously looked-after children learn and achieve
- contribute to the development and review of whole school policies and procedures
- promote a culture in which looked-after and previously looked-after children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care learn and achieve
- be a source of advice for teachers
- work directly with looked-after and previously looked-after children and their carers, parents or guardians
- have lead responsibility for the development and implementation of looked-after children's PEP within school

- work closely with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead to ensure that any safeguarding concerns are quickly and effectively responded to and that the educational outcomes of children with a social worker and children in kinship care are promoted in line with KCSiE.

The designated teacher should be given the **appropriate level of support** in order to fulfil their role.

In partnership with the headteacher, the governing body should ensure that the designated teacher has the opportunity to acquire and keep up-to-date the necessary skills, knowledge and training to understand and respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

Governing bodies and the senior leadership team should also make sure that the designated teacher role contributes to the deeper understanding of everyone in the school who is likely to be involved in supporting looked-after and previously looked-after children to achieve.

The governing body, in partnership with the headteacher, is responsible for monitoring how well the role is working. The governing body is *not* responsible for the performance management of the person undertaking the role, unless the designated teacher is the headteacher.

The governing body, headteacher and senior leadership team will also want to consider:

1. Does the designated teacher have appropriate seniority and professional experience to provide leadership, training, information, challenge and advice to others?
2. Does the designated teacher have appropriate seniority and skills to work with the school's senior leadership and governing body to ensure school policies and approaches reflect the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children?
3. How does the senior leadership team have oversight of this role and the progress of / issues for looked-after and previously looked-after children?
4. Does the school adopt a relational approach and trauma-informed approach and is this reflected in school policies?
5. Has the Designated Teacher (DT) had appropriate training to carry out their statutory role?
6. Does the DT have training opportunities, including time away from timetable commitments, to acquire and keep up-to-date the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children, including a good knowledge of SEN?

7. What arrangements are in place to allow the DT sufficient time and resources to discharge their responsibilities as set out in the statutory guidance? e.g. to chair the PEP meetings, attend the review meetings, liaise with staff etc.
8. What monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that the role of the DT is providing appropriate support for looked-after and previously looked-after children on the school roll?
9. How does the DT manage the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings? (The DT should chair all review PEP meetings, gathering the information ready for the meeting, talking to the child to obtain their views and following up on the PEP action plan after the meeting. Where there are a significant number of PEP meetings, has a nominated member of staff been trained to support, and is there sufficient oversight from the DT, particularly around the use of Pupil Premium Plus)
10. How does the DT contribute to the deeper understanding of everyone in the school who is likely to be involved in supporting looked-after and previously looked-after children to achieve? How are staff informed about looked-after and previously looked-after children?
And how do they find out about:
 - the name of the Designated Teacher and who else performs elements of this role?
 - the children in their class (if any) who are looked after and previously looked after?
 - personalised strategies to use in class and around school?
11. What training have whole school staff had in relation to Attachment and Trauma?
12. How does the school support a child who is in care and new to the school to quickly feel at home?
13. How are additional resources that come into the school for looked-after and previously looked-after children used to raise achievement?
14. Are there any school related issues that prevent looked-after and previously looked-after children from achieving?
15. What resource implications might there be in supporting the DT to carry out their role?
16. What expertise can the DT call on within and outside the school such as SENCOs, health and mental health support?
17. What arrangements are in place that have contributed to successful provision and /or looked-after children and previously looked-after children making good or better than expected progress?

Keeping the governing body informed

In addition to considering and acting on a report from the designated teacher, governing bodies should make sure that there are arrangements in place to **keep themselves informed** about provision for, and attainment of, looked-after and previously looked-after children, children with a social worker, and children in kinship care on the school's roll on a regular basis.

To do this, governing bodies could consider **appointing a nominated governor** (also known as a link governor) to champion these vulnerable cohorts of children, who would conduct school visits and report back to governing body meetings. You may find it useful to have a role profile for this - an example is in the 'Useful Documents' section below.

Practical **activities** for this link governor to undertake with the designated teacher could include:

- share training and reading on attachment and trauma
- review school policies to ensure LAC / PLAC, children with a social worker, and children in kinship care are represented
- discuss multi-agency support available
- attend a Virtual School Corporate Parent visit
- discuss the key principles for supporting LAC / PLAC, children with a social worker, and children in kinship care with an exclusion profile
- working through the suggested questions (in Useful Documents, below) together

It is important that governing bodies consider appointing a champion even if there are currently no looked after children or previously looked after children on the school's roll

Key questions all governors should know the answers to (even if your school currently has no children in care):

- Who is your school's designated teacher?
- How many LAC / PLAC are on your school roll?
- What procedures are in place to ensure all looked after children have up-to-date Personal Education Plans?
- How are resources allocated to match priorities for looked after children and previously looked after children, including the use of [Pupil Premium](#)?
- How are LAC / PLAC performing compared with their peers?
- Has raising the attainment of LAC / PLAC been included as a school improvement priority?

Governors should also monitor how the school identifies and supports children with a social worker, whether staff are aware of the extended role of the Virtual School, and how the school engages with kinship carers.

Monitoring and evaluation



The needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children may have implications for almost every school policy and consideration may want to be given to ensure that policies are effective in reflecting their needs. Governors should consider the following:

- that there are no unintended barriers to the **admission** of looked-after and previously looked-after children either at normal transition or any other point of the school year
- whether looked-after and previously looked-after children have made the **expected or better levels of progress** over the past twelve months in line with their peers
- whether the pattern of **attendance and exclusions** for looked-after and previously looked-after children is different to that of other children at the school
- whether any looked-after or previously looked-after children face **additional safeguarding challenges** of which the school's designated safeguarding lead should be aware
- whether any looked-after and previously looked-after children have **special educational needs (SEN)** and whether those needs are being identified and met at the appropriate level
- whether any looked-after and previously looked-after children have **mental health needs** and whether those needs are being identified and met
- whether the school's **behaviour management policy** is sufficiently flexible to respond to looked-after and previously looked-after children's presenting behaviours in the most effective way for those children
- how the **teaching and learning** needs of looked-after and previously looked after children are reflected in school policies, in particular in relation to interventions and resources
- what the **impact is of any of the school's policies**, e.g. on charging for educational visits and extended school activities, on looked-after children; and
- what impact **Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)** has in supporting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children

Funding for children in care

Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+), also called Looked After Children Premium is **additional grant funding** from the DfE for those pupils who are looked after.

The purpose of the grant is to **close the attainment gap** for this cohort of children and improve their educational outcomes.



It is provided for each child who is looked after for at least one day as recorded in the **March census**.

Pupils from **Year R to Year 11** are eligible for Pupil Premium Plus.

Pupil Premium Plus is **paid to local authorities** who determine distribution.

The DfE have authorised Virtual School Headteachers in all local authorities to be responsible for the distribution and the subsequent outcomes from this pupil premium.

Further information and resources on funding is available on the [Hampshire Virtual School](#) website.

Best practice



What has worked well

- Ensuring that children have access to Ordinarily Available Provision and high quality teaching
- Balancing high levels of support with real challenge
- Skilfully linking each child to a key person they relate well to
- Making it a priority to know the children well and to build strong relationships
- Adopting a trauma-informed, relational approach
- Developing strong partnerships with carers, local authorities and specialist agencies
- Ensuring consistency as well as discrete flexibility
- Recognising and enabling the potential of each child
- Planning in partnership for future transitions

What do I need to do now?

- Ensure your governing body has appointed a Designated Teacher.
- Ensure a record of the training attended by the Designated Teacher is maintained.
- Agree a policy for looked after children.
- Appoint a governor to champion looked after children.
- Review school policies to ensure they take account of the particular needs for looked after and previously looked after children.
- Discuss with the Designated Teacher what information your governing body will receive and when.



Further advice and guidance

Please contact the Hampshire Virtual School team if you would like any further information.

Email: virtuelschool@hants.gov.uk

Further guidance and resources are available by following the links below:

Useful Documents

[Model Policy](#)

[Template Report](#)

[Questions for Governors](#)

Useful Links

Hampshire Virtual School website - [Hampshire Virtual School | Education and learning | Hampshire County Council](#)

Statutory Guidance - [Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children](#)

Statutory guidance - Designated teacher for looked after and previously looked after children [Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK](#)

DfE Guidance - [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK](#)