

VIRTUAL SCHOOL BRIEFING

Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children

The Children and Social Work Act of 2017 extended the duties of Virtual School Headteachers and Designated Teachers to include previously looked after children.

Definition (DfE)

Previously looked-after children are those who:

- are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because of an order ie an adoption order, a special guardianship order, a child arrangements order or a residence order;
- were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales.

Virtual School Headteacher's role

- To promote educational achievement through providing information and advice to parents, educators and others as required.
- Starts from when child is eligible for free early education, (start of term following 2nd birthday) to the end of compulsory schooling.
- Relates to previously looked after children in education in Northumberland irrespective of where the child lives.
- To decide on and publish the extent of our offer to parents.

Virtual Schools are expected to provide a minimum offer to:

- respond to requests for advice and information, including on school admissions, from parents, carers, providers of early education, Designated Teachers, schools, alternative provision and other providers and sign-post to other services;
- raise awareness of the vulnerability and needs of previously looked-after children and offer guidance to schools on effective use of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+);
- work with the Designated Teacher to secure evidence from parents of their child's previously looked after status.

Virtual School Headteachers are not expected to:

- monitor the progress of individual children or be held to account for their attainment;
- provide intervention without the agreement of those with parental responsibility.

This is because the local authority and Virtual School Headteacher are not the corporate parent.

Admissions and exclusions

- In all mainstream schools both looked-after and previously looked after children must have the highest priority in over-subscription criteria.
- Parents / carers and Designated Teachers should seek advice from the Virtual School on strategies to support the child to avoid exclusion.

Training Duties

- Virtual School Headteachers are responsible for ensuring that arrangements are made to meet their own training needs, as well as those of carers, adoptive parents, Designated Teachers, other school staff, social workers, and other relevant parties.
- Training will include information on school admission arrangements, SEND, managing challenging behaviour in education settings, and supporting children to be aspirational for their future education, training and employment.

SEND and Mental Health

The statutory guidance for Virtual School Headteachers makes it clear that looked after and previously looked after children are more likely to experience social, emotional and mental health issues.

Virtual School Headteachers should have awareness, training and skills to recognise children's needs and:

- know how to support them, particularly in relation to behaviour management and mental health;
- work with Designated Teachers and designated leads for mental health;
- ensure that schools can identify signs of potential mental health issues and know how to access further assessment and support;
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- ensure that schools understand the impact that issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties can have and are 'attachment aware' in both policy and practice.

Looked after and previously looked after children are significantly more likely to have special educational needs than their peers. They may struggle with:

- executive functioning skills which enable planning, attention focus, remembering instructions, juggling multiple tasks;
- forming trusting relationships;
- social skills;
- managing strong feelings;
- sensory processing;
- foetal alcohol syndrome;
- coping with transitions and change.

A significant proportion of looked after and previously looked after children with SEND will have an Education, Health and Care Plan specifically for SEMH.

Working with others for previously looked after children

Virtual School Headteachers should:

- encourage and support early education settings and schools to have high expectations;
- work with the local authority's post adoption support team;
- work with health, education and social care partners, voluntary sector organisations and others to understand the range of support available to previously looked after children;
- co-operate with other teams, organisations and the Regional Adoption Agency.

Designated Teachers

School governing bodies have a duty to designate a member of staff (the Designated Teacher) to promote the educational achievement of looked after and previously looked after children, including those aged 16-18 registered at the school, and to ensure appropriate time and training are allocated for these duties

The Designated Teacher should:

- ensure that all staff are aware of the particular needs of looked after and previously looked after children, understand the impact of attachment and trauma issues and ensure
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- school policies do not unintentionally disadvantage these children;
- be a contact point for parents and guardians and work closely with them to ensure the best outcomes for the child including the best use of Pupil Premium Plus;
- have appropriate seniority and professional experience to provide leadership and training and to ensure that school policies appropriately reflect the needs of looked after and previously looked after children;
- review whether children have made at least expected progress in line with their peers;
- review whether the behaviour policy of the school is flexible enough to respond to challenging behaviour as a result of the impact of attachment or trauma;
- promote a culture where the personal, emotional and academic needs of these children are prioritised;
- take lead responsibility for helping other staff to become attachment and trauma aware;
- promote a culture in which looked after and previously looked after children have a voice and access to a trusted adult;
- provide opportunities for looked-after and previously looked after children to participate in school activities, have high aspirations and be prioritised for one-to-one tuition;
- work with the Virtual School Headteacher to access training and keep up to date on research and good practice .

The Designated Teacher is expected to:

- have high expectations and set targets to accelerate educational progress;
- be aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) and subsequent impact on behaviour;
- be a central contact for the parent/guardian and enable their involvement in decisions impacting on their child's education including agreement on the use of Pupil Premium Plus;
- raise awareness (at admission) with parents and guardians of the support available and remind them to inform the school if their child is eligible to attract PP+;
- be aware of the VSH's duties as a source of advice and guidance.

