

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;

The Governing Body has a duty to:

- designate a member of staff for promoting the achievement of previously looked after children, including those aged 16-18 registered at the school;
- ensure the designated person undertakes appropriate training;
- ensure they and the Designated Teacher has regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

The governing body along with the head teacher and school leadership team should consider the following to support the Designated Teacher role:

1. Does the Designated Teacher have appropriate seniority and professional experience to provide leadership, training, information, challenge and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children?
2. Does the Designated Teacher have appropriate seniority and skills to work with the school's senior leadership and governing body to help ensure school policies and approaches appropriately reflect the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children and act as a champion for them?
3. Does the Designated Teacher 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 SEND?
4. How does the Designated Teacher role 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?

- 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

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.



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5. What resource implications might there be in supporting the Designated Teacher to carry out their role?
6. What expertise can Designated Teachers call on within and outside the school such as SENCOs and health and mental health support?
7. What monitoring arrangements might be appropriate to ensure that the role of the Designated Teacher is providing appropriate support for looked-after and previously looked-after children on the school roll?

The Governing Body should also ensure that the needs of looked-after children and previously looked-after children are reflected in school policies and consider:

- whether there are 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 (i.e. educational, social and emotional progress);
- 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 and previously looked-after children are identified as gifted and talented and how those needs are being met;
- 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 challenging behaviour in the most effective way for those children.

The Governing Body can support the provision for looked-after and previously looked-after children by monitoring:

- whether the school's policies are sensitive to their needs, eg in accessing out of school hours learning, respecting the children's wishes and feelings about their care status or generally meeting their needs as identified in their personal education plans (PEPs);
- 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, eg on charging for educational visits and extended school activities, on looked-after children; and
- what impact PP+ has in supporting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

The Governing Body should, through the Designated Teacher, hold the school to account on how it supports its looked-after and previously looked-after children (including how the PP+ is used) and their rate of progress.

