

Improving educational outcomes for children and young people (0-18) who are (or have been) in care.

The **Virtual School Team** offer advice and guidance for children in care and previously looked after children and in kinship care whether they are adopted, living with a special guardian or are subject to a child arrangement order. The responsibilities of the Virtual School team have recently been extended to encompass strategic advice and guidance relating to 'children with a social worker'.

Social workers have a key role to play in promoting high aspirations and working with others to secure the best educational outcomes for each care experienced child and young person. Social workers have a joint responsibility for ensuring timely provision of a suitable education placement that is best suited to a child's needs. Social workers also have statutory responsibilities in relation to children and young people's Personal Education Plans (PEPs) since this is the education part of the care plan. The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the LA that looks after the child and the school. Social workers, designated teachers, carers, the Virtual School team, and as appropriate, other relevant professionals will therefore need to work closely together to assure this.

Independent Reviewing Officers should ensure that the PEP's effectiveness is scrutinised in sufficient detail in order to feed in to the statutory review and other meetings if necessary. The IRO should raise any unresolved concerns about a child's PEP or education provision with social workers and the VSH. Independent Reviewing Officers have a key quality assurance role by ensuring that the care plans for children in care are legally compliant and in the child's best interest. PEPs are an integral part of the child's care plan and should detail what needs to happen to help the child fulfil their potential. The IROs do this by making sure that the PEP is completed termly, is up to date and available for discussion at each review meeting.

Designated Teachers (DTs) are the central point of contact within the school for carers, social workers and all the teams and services who form the support network around care experienced children. The DT is a statutory role in every school – they have lead responsibility for the development and implementation of looked after children's PEPs in partnership with social workers, carers, and other key professionals. DTs have a crucial leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every looked after and previously looked-after child on the school's roll. Full details of these responsibilities are detailed in [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and [The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). The Headteacher and Governing Body must ensure that 'the DT has the 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.' *Statutory Guidance 2018*

Children and young people's **Carers** play a vital role in making sure that children and young people attend school regularly, make progress in their education and enjoy their learning. This includes supporting their ambitions and their learning, attending education meetings (e.g. PEPs and parents' evenings) and supporting the child/young person with their homework and school-based learning and extra-curricular activities.

All children in care need high quality **Personal Education Plans (PEP)** detailing their education, aspirations, support, and progress. PEPs help to close the attainment gap and enable them to achieve their full potential, educational provision needs careful planning and monitoring. A PEP is

part of a young person's care plan. It's a record of the child's views and a plan of how everyone is supporting their education to ensure they achieve the best outcomes. A PEP includes information the young person's educational progress and how the young person thinks and feels about education. All looked after children from the age of 2-18 must have a PEP as part of their care plan. PEPs must be arranged within 10 days of the child coming into care. This will ensure the PEP is available for the first looked after review.

PEPS must be arranged by a SW within 10 days of the child coming into care.

All PEPS must be reviewed termly and are attended by social worker and designated teacher.

DT's chair and implement the PEP, ensuring pupil voice and data are recorded.

The ePEP form recording all agreed actions is completed within 10 working days of the meeting.

IROs should ensure that the PEP's effectiveness is scrutinised in sufficient detail in order to feed in to the statutory review and at other times if necessary.

The social worker has a duty to initiate and organise all PEPs as they are part of the child's care plan. The Virtual School will endeavour to attend the termly PEP meeting for **all** children aged 2-18. PEPs **must** be reviewed termly, at an appropriate point in the term. Good practice would suggest that where there are concerns regarding learning or progress PEPs should be reviewed more regularly. A new PEP should take place following any major change, such as when a child moves school or placement.

The **social worker and designated teacher must attend all PEPs** taking place in schools, early years settings, or colleges. It is good practice for the carer, as well as the child/young person (where appropriate). Others can be invited, if necessary, i.e. the SENCo if the child has any SEN needs or a relevant health professional if there are any identified health needs. In Calderdale, the Virtual School case lead will also attend the PEP meeting. At the meeting, the date for the following term's PEP review **must** be set.

APPENDIX A

What is Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)?

‘Both VSH and schools manage their PP+ allocation for the benefit of their cohort of looked after or previously looked after children and according to children’s needs. It is not a personal budget for individual children; however, both VSHs and schools may choose to allocate an amount of funding to an individual to support their needs’. (**Statutory Guidance 2018**) The Pupil Premium Plus provides an opportunity to address the learning needs of children in care through the provision of **additional** interventions and learning resources tailored to the individual child’s need. Further information on PEPs and use of pupil premium plus can be found at: [Pupil Premium Plus \(PP+\) Policy for 2024/25 \(calderdale.gov.uk\)](https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/pupil-premium-plus-policy-2024-25)

Admissions

Statutory Guidance places a clear expectation that our children **are placed in schools with a ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating**. Admissions authorities must give **the highest priority** in their oversubscription criteria to our children, as defined in the School Admission Code. Schools **cannot refuse to admit** a child based on challenging behaviour or refer a child looked after for action under the Fair Access Protocol based on challenging behaviour. The SEN team are legally required to take the lead in consulting and securing a school place for a child looked after with an Education, Health Care plan. When making an application to school, please ensure advice is sought from the Virtual School.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

Separated migrant children are entitled to the same local authority support as any other child in our care. Some of these children may never have had access to education before or their education has been interrupted. Social Workers, Virtual School, Independent Reviewing Officers, School Admission and Special Educational Needs services should work together to ensure that appropriate education provision for the child is arranged at the same time as a placement. Virtual School will provide guidance regarding the most appropriate settings. This includes seeking out the best EAL and/or ESOL provision in the area. Only Post 16 students should be placed in a Post 16 setting as these do not have the appropriate safeguarding arrangements for statutory school age students. A Post 16 setting for Year 11 students in term 3 of Year 11 may be considered, but social workers **must** consult with the Virtual School prior to making any such arrangement.

Attendance

We are ambitious for our children in care to secure the best education they can, and this means maximising their attendance in school. Therefore, requests for absence during term time **will not be supported**. The parent/carer may seek absence authorisation from the Head teacher at the school the child attends as the Headteacher will only give permission to take leave in term time if there are exceptional circumstances.

Behaviour, Exclusion, Part Time Timetables and Alternative Provision

The past experiences of looked after and previously looked after children can have an impact on their behaviour in school. We know that exposure to childhood trauma impacts on working memory performance and attentional processes. These are key elements that underpin learning and impact on the ability to engage in the classroom. We also know that some children with unresolved trauma and/or unmet attachment needs may show behaviours in school that include disengagement, self-harm, depression, risk-taking, and oppositional behaviour. The DT and Headteacher should always ensure the school fulfil its statutory duty to consult with the Virtual School at the earliest opportunity where there is a concern about a child's behaviour so they can help the school decide how to support the child to improve their behaviour and avoid exclusion.

Headteachers have a statutory duty 'as far as possible, to avoid permanently excluding any pupil with an EHC plan or a looked after child' and cooperate proactively with the Virtual School'. The [Suspension and permanent exclusion guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) August 2024 clearly outlines (p 8) that when headteachers suspend or permanently exclude a pupil they must, without delay, notify parents. Legislative changes mean that if a pupil has a social worker, or if a pupil is looked-after, the headteacher must now, also without delay after their decision, notify the social worker and/or VSH, as applicable. Likewise, prior to arranging any part time timetables or alternative provision, Virtual School and the SW must be consulted and provide approval.

Supporting Post 16 and transitions from care

Those above statutory school age (above Year 11) remain part of the Virtual School as a Post-16 student. This is in line with government requirements that all young people in England must continue in education or employment with training until the age of 18, and/or the end of Year 13.

Post-16 students require a PEP meeting still on a termly basis through Year 12 and Year 13. The PEP/Pathway Plan is required for all young people regardless of whether they are in education, employment, or training, as well as for those who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training)

APPENDIX B

Support from the Virtual School

Support for Social Workers?

- Acting as a first point of contact for social workers for all education related queries.
- Maintaining regular dialogue with Calderdale's SEND team as well as the Youth Justice Service, and others to ensure that there is joint work around barriers to attendance, progress, and attainment.
- Providing an annual programme of training for social workers to support them with the education related statutory elements of their role and ensure that there is high aspiration around care experienced children.
- Virtual School website provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of social workers around PEPs, admissions, SEND, Post 16, attainment and progress measures, transition, and other aspects of education.
- Where it is not possible to maintain the child/ young person's existing education placement, the Virtual School will support the social worker to identify a new placement which will best support their needs. Social workers need to proactively consult with the Virtual School team so that education and care placements can be planned at the same time, and advice provided to avoid choosing a school that is unlikely to meet the child's needs.

Support for Designated Teachers?

- Providing specialist training and ongoing professional development that supports their statutory role.
- Supporting school governors in their specific role around care experienced children, in line with DfE statutory guidance.
- Advocating for, supporting, and challenging around the progress and outcomes of care experienced children.
- Providing specific feedback following termly quality assurance of PEPs so that we work as partners in improving the quality of personal education planning around each child.
- Providing direct support where needed around school admissions, attendance, and inclusion. Supporting access to Post 16 education and providing specialist advice in relation to separated migrant children or unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
- Providing information, advice, and guidance to support the education of children previously looked after and in kinship care. Supporting access to key services including those in other local authorities including Virtual Schools.
- Supporting and professionally challenging provision for CLA to close any attainment gaps and SMART target setting to accelerate progress. This is linked to administering Pupil Premium Plus (PP+).

Support for parents and carers?

- Delivering an annual programme of training based on feedback from carers around their needs and how they can make a difference.
- Contributing to training for carers provided by other services.
- Attending carer groups and meetings at different points through the year.
- Sharing and developing resources.
- Supporting carers and social workers with school applications particularly where a child has additional needs, or where several agencies are involved.
- Attending key meetings to advocate for the child/young person. (Please note that it is not possible for the Virtual School to attend every PEP/CLA review, however please contact the VS for further help and support).
- Through the Virtual School case lead as a first point of contact (please see team information) for queries around any aspect of children's education and learning.
- By seeking carer views and feedback, ensuring this informs the ongoing development and improvement of the services and support we (and other services) offer.

APPENDIX C

The PEP Process Flowchart



