

Hillingdon Virtual School Handbook 2023 / 24



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Introduction

Looked After Children- who are they?

The term 'Looked After Child' comes from the Children Act 1989 and refers to anyone under 18 who is in the care of the Local Authority. For simplicity, LAC are often referred to as 'being in care'.

At any one time, around 80 000 children are looked after by local authorities in England, although this varies and is by no means a static group.

Over 30 000 children are likely to become looked after during a year, with a similar number also leaving care for a variety of reasons.

The main reason children become looked after is because they have suffered abuse or neglect, but other causes can be because of families under stress, absent parenting, parental illness or disability or the child's own disability.

While every LAC must be seen as an individual with their own characteristics, abilities and needs, taken as a group they have lower educational outcomes and poorer standards of health and wellbeing than their non-Looked After peers and are less likely to do well in adult life.

Local authorities have a legal duty to promote the educational achievement of LAC, to ensure regular school attendance, and to ensure they have access to the necessary equipment and resources.

The quality of care and education children receive while they are Looked After has a major impact on their ability to form secure attachments and to realise their full potential. It is vital for them that those who provide for them day-to-day are well supported to make this possible.

Placement stability is a key factor in this process, and yet for many LAC, moves can be frequent and often severely disrupt their educational progress and achievement.

Hillingdon has a significant number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) due to its proximity to Heathrow Airport. Nationally, only Kent and Croydon Local Authorities receive higher numbers of UASC annually.

For simplicity, the term 'carer' has been used throughout this document to refer collectively to those providing the care to LAC, and 'child' to refer to anyone under 18. The term 'young people' has been used where reference is made to that specific group.

Looked After Children- where do they live?

Nationally around 70% of LAC are cared for by foster carers; in Hillingdon this figure usually stands at around 65%. Foster carers can either be supported by the local authority or by a fostering agency.

Although some children have specific needs that can only be met through residential care, fostering should be the first choice of placement for the majority of LAC.

Children's homes are an important part of the provision for LAC whose needs are assessed as best met through residential care.

Children's homes vary in their purpose, focus and approach in the same way that foster carers differ from one another.

A significant number of children placed in children's homes are teenagers.

Not all LAC are placed with foster carers or in children's homes. About 5% are placed back with their parents while remaining on a Care Order, a small number are placed for adoption, and some young people live in hostels, supported lodging or independently.

Local authorities should prioritise keeping LAC near to their home community, although this is not always possible and not in the child's best interests. In particular it is important to avoid, if possible, a child having to move education placement when they become LAC or move placement, particularly at Key Stage 4.

Looked After Children- what is a Corporate Parent?

The responsibility of local authorities to actively promote the life chances of children they look after and improve their outcomes is known as 'corporate parenting'. Local authorities have both a legal and a moral duty to try to provide the kind of care and support which would be expected of any good parent.

The test of good corporate parenting lies in the question: *Would this be good enough for my own child?*

The Team around the Child

It is important to ensure the local authorities responsible for a Looked After Child always act as the best possible parent would. No one person can do this on their own: everyone who works with Looked After Children has an important role to play.

All children are unique and have their own specific needs to be met, so the individuals required to provide support will vary, but together they make up what is known as 'the team around the child'.

The child must always be kept at the centre of the thinking and actions of members of the team, because the legal and moral duties are to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and to ensure they realise their maximum potential.

The roles and responsibilities of some of the key team members are described below:

The Foster Carer or the Residential Worker: Foster carers and residential workers from children's homes are always a core part of the team around the child. Through providing day-to-day care and support they will usually know the child better than any other professionals. They are expected to contribute towards planning for the child; including their education.

Regulations require foster carers to agree to care for a fostered child as if they were a child of their own family, and so this sets high expectations.

Foster carers and residential workers should:

- encourage and support children to have a positive attitude towards their education, helping them to do well
- Support a good attendance record
- Maintain regular liaison with the school
- Be an active advocate for their needs
- Provide them with adequate space in the home to complete their homework. This includes computer and internet provision
- Provide them with the equipment they need for the school day
- Attend parents' evenings and other similar events
- Attend PEP meetings and participate in them

The Social Worker: Every Looked After Child has an allocated Social Worker from the local authority. It is the role of the social worker to ensure adequate arrangements are made for the child's care and that a care plan is made and updated based on the most up-to-date assessment of their needs. Children's social workers are responsible for ensuring the care plan is implemented and reviewed.

A key role of the social worker is to coordinate the provision of services and support, and they should ensure the foster carer or children's home:

- Has all the information they need to care for the child
- Is included in meetings about the plan for the child
- Agrees an up-to-date placement plan
- Is aware of arrangements for contact with family and friends
- Is invited to, and attends, meetings and appointments regarding the child's education

The Supervising Social Worker: Every foster carer must have this support and supervision whether they are employed by the local authority or by a fostering agency. The Supervising Social Worker's role is to coordinate the support needed by the foster carer to meet the child's needs in accordance with the placement plan. They will make regular visits to the foster home to see how the placement is progressing and to talk

through any difficulties. Supervision sessions will consider the training and development needs of the foster carer in order to equip them with the necessary skills to respond to the child's needs. The child's educational progress should be discussed, together with any additional support or equipment the foster carer might need to promote this. Supervising Social Workers should also contribute appropriately to care planning, including preparation and review of PEPs.

The Independent Reviewing Officer: Every Child Looked After also has an Independent Reviewing Officer and they are usually known as an IRO. They are independent of those responsible for managing the child's case or allocating resources and it is their responsibility to undertake regular reviews of the child's care plan, to monitor how far outcomes have been achieved and to make any necessary changes to the care plan in light of circumstances. The frequency of reviews can vary, but they should never be less frequent than every 6 months.

The IRO's primary task is to make sure the care plan reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.

The review of the care plan usually involves the IRO chairing a meeting with the key members of the team around the child. All parts of the care plan should be reviewed, including the PEP.

As well as chairing the child's review, the IRO must monitor the implementation of the care plan, ensuring the child's wishes and feelings have been established and taken into account, where appropriate.

The LAC Nurse: Local authorities work in partnership with health services to ensure the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children is effectively promoted. Usual practice is to identify one or more nurses, usually known as LAC Nurses, to play a direct role in overseeing the health of all the authority's LAC. This includes ensuring regular individual health assessments are undertaken as required by regulations, and liaising as necessary with other professionals, including school nurses, GPs and dentists. They are also available to advise carers and young people themselves about health matters, which may in turn impact on educational achievement.

Designated nurses assist with drawing up health plans which form part of a child's care plan and impact on any EHCP.

**** The roles of the Designated Teacher and Virtual School are covered in subsequent sections.****

The Role of the Virtual School

Under the Children and Families Act 2014, every local authority must appoint an officer, employed by them or another authority, to make sure that it properly discharges its duty to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children, no matter where they live or are educated. This officer is called the Virtual School Head (VSH).

Local authorities are charged with ensuring that their VSH has the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge their duties effectively. However, each local authority will do this differently.

In Hillingdon, we are lucky to have a large team who support the work of the VSH, and we are known as the Virtual School.

Our Virtual School team comprises a variety of education professionals, including qualified teachers, teaching assistants, Education Welfare Officers and some who have experience of Virtual Schools in other local authorities. We all support the VSH in a variety of ways.

Hillingdon Virtual School is able to say that all our statutory school age and post-16 young people have an allocated case worker. The Virtual School Officer (VSO) takes responsibility for arranging, chairing and recording all PEP meetings, which may be different to how other local authorities operate.

The concept of the 'single school'

Hillingdon usually has in the region of 330 Looked After Children. Whilst it remains our priority to place each child in a care placement within Hillingdon, there are inevitably times when either it is not in the child's best interests to be kept close to their birth families or there is a shortage of care placements, or there is a shortage of specialist support which can meet the child's needs.

It is therefore sometimes necessary to place a child out of borough.

In order to promote the educational achievement of all Looked After Children, the VSH will keep an up-to-date record of all of them, no matter where they are placed or what kind of setting they are in. The VSH will also maintain up-to-date information about their attendance, attainment and progress; the same as if they were in a single school.

Tracking and Monitoring

VSHs are required to track and monitor the individual achievements of each Looked After Child, keeping an account of how they have achieved in the past, how they are currently achieving, how they are predicted to achieve and the targets set for them by their schools.

They will therefore be aware of which children are not achieving according to national expectations or in accordance with how they have achieved in the past.

In Hillingdon, the VS team uses the child's PEP meeting as the main vehicle through which to negotiate with a child's school the best package of support and intervention to support them to make better progress.

VSHs also track and monitor the attendance of the Looked After Children on their school roll. Hillingdon commissions eGov Solutions to contact individual schools to ascertain that our Looked After Children are attending and, in the case of absence, the reason for this. Where reasons for absences are not acceptable, such as a child being taken out of school for a holiday, VSOs will challenge carers and schools to make changes. All school attendance officers will be given access to the system so that they are able to upload this information.

The suspension and permanent exclusions of Looked After Children is also monitored by the VSH, and support given to carers, social workers and schools via VSOs where there are frequent suspensions or the threat of permanent exclusion.

Carers, Designated Teachers and social workers should always keep the allocated VSO informed where there is a threat of suspension to a child in their care.

The Child's Voice

Every child deserves to be listened to and the VSH has a duty to promote a culture that considers the child's views in relation to their education. This is particularly important at PEP meetings and the child's views should be recorded in the PEP report. The views of the child are particularly important when planning their future education or training and should be recorded in their PEP.

Carers, teachers, VSOs and social workers need to encourage every Looked After Child to have high aspirations for themselves, bearing in mind that some may find it difficult to imagine a future.

Multi-Agency Working

The VS has a duty to work with others to ensure they also consider the educational achievement of Looked After Children to be of prime importance, that they encourage them to be aspirational and that they have high expectations in supporting them to realise their full academic potential.

It is particularly important that those in the team around the child do not work in their individual 'silos'. The VS will often attend additional meetings outside of PEPs, such as

Annual Reviews and LAC Reviews, to ensure the education of the child in question is kept to the fore in discussion and planning.

The VSH must work closely with their local authority schools to ensure:

- their governing bodies understand the role of the local authority as corporate parent,
- they appoint an appropriate designated teacher,
- they understand the needs of Looked After Children
- They understand the need for specific professional development for **at least** their senior leaders and designated teachers.

Training

Virtual Schools have a duty to train other teams and individual professionals in matters relating to the education of Looked After Children.

Hillingdon VS provides and commissions a variety of training for schools, carers and social workers, topics include:

- Attachment and trauma
- Attendance and exclusions
- How to support children at different key stages at home
- Pupil Premium Plus

Commissioning extra support

In order to promote the educational achievement of the children on its role, the VS may commission extra support for them using funds from centrally held Pupil Premium Plus.

Examples of extra support Hillingdon VS may use:

- Residential visits
- One-to-one tuition
- Mentoring
- Literacy schemes, such as Letterbox
- Numeracy schemes, such as MyMaths
- English Language schemes, such as Flash Academy

The Role of the Designated Teacher

In carrying out their role, Designated Teachers should be advocates for and champions of Looked After Children within the school setting. The role should make a positive difference by promoting a whole-school culture where the personalised learning needs of every Looked After Child matters and their personal, emotional and academic needs are prioritised.

The role of the Designated Teacher (DT) in promoting the education of Looked After Children in their school is key to successful educational outcomes for them. The role is statutory and every governing body has a duty to ensure they have a DT who is a qualified teacher and has 'appropriate seniority, professional experience and status' to lead in this vital task. If this person is not a member of the Senior Leadership Team, a member of the SLT is expected to champion Looked After Children at senior leadership level and work closely with the DT.

Where schools have many LAC, the DT may delegate some of their responsibilities whilst remaining in overall control.

The DT is expected to work with the governor for Looked After Children; reporting to them on a regular basis on the progress in all areas of school life for their LAC and support them in undertaking an annual review of policy and practice in this respect.

Training and Resources

As well as ensuring there is a DT in place, the governing body must also ensure that the DT has sufficient support, training and resources to be able to carry out their role. Designated Teachers will need to be given time to attend training provided by the Virtual School, professional organisations and private enterprises to learn about possible solutions to some of the barriers to learning that LAC are subject to. They will need to attend local authority designated teacher forums and training to keep themselves informed.

In turn, DTs will need to train others in the school so they are enabled to respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of their LAC. They have lead responsibility for ensuring staff dealing with LAC are aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and broken attachment and how that is likely to impact on the child. They should be allocated INSET time and resources for this purpose.

School Policies

The DT will also have a role in promoting a whole school policy for LAC. Such a policy would:

- Reflect the school's ethos and set out clearly its commitment to LAC
- Be linked to the statutory framework

- Be linked to other school policies such as admissions, safeguarding, equality and diversity (in which LAC should be specifically mentioned)
- Be specific and detailed in the ways a school is going to carry out its duty to support LAC
- Include what the school will do to support staff who are working with LAC
- Spell out the roles and reporting duties of key personnel in school, including governors, SLT, the DT and classroom teachers
- Specify how school will link with external agencies, such as social care, VS, foster carers, CAMHs etc
- Show how progress of LAC in all aspects of school life (academic, pastoral and extracurricular) will be tracked and monitored
- Show what interventions and supports will be used when LAC are not progressing in line with their peers, academically and personally

The DT also has a role in ensuring that regular school policy specifically and overtly considers the specific needs of LAC. This is especially important in policies for safeguarding and inclusion and behaviour management for example. Furthermore, DTs need to ensure that school policies do not have any adverse impact on LAC, such as a policy on admissions interviews.

The Child's Voice

In promoting the educational achievement of the school's LAC, it is essential the DT (or someone to whom they have delegated this task) knows each child individually and builds a relationship with each one.

Many Looked After Children find trust in adults difficult so it is important a trusting, affirmative relationship is modelled to them, both at home and in school.

In doing so, the DT should listen to the child and their views concerning their education, achievements and progress, guide them where necessary, and represent those views in meetings when required.

Tracking and Monitoring

DTs are required to track and monitor the achievement and progress of each individual LAC putting in interventions and strategies for improvement where needed.

When a LAC is new to the school, the DT should liaise with the previous educational setting to request that their school file and any previous PEPs are transferred without delay. This ensures they have all the prior information and data needed to form a view of the child's educational needs. They should also ensure that assessments are made by the child's new teachers to identify the young person's strengths and weaknesses and any barriers to learning, so that any support needed may be put in place as soon as possible.

All children are tracked and monitored routinely in schools. At such times, the DT should analyse the achievements and progress of their LAC as a group, comparing their outcomes to those of the year group as a whole and to other similar cohorts, which could be Children in Need.

Hillingdon Virtual School also requests up to date attainment and progress data in each subject to be presented at each PEP meeting. This is done via a range of student feedback forms which are emailed by the VSO prior to the PEP meeting.

Role in the PEP

Whilst in Hillingdon it is the responsibility of the VSO to initiate the PEP, the DT has a key role in preparation for it. Besides ascertaining the child's views and reviewing the targets and actions planned at the last PEP, the DT will need to obtain a very clear picture of how the child is achieving and progressing in each individual curriculum area.

They will therefore need to ascertain from each of the child's teachers key information and data regarding their academic performance and progress. This can be gathered through the student feedback forms, mentioned above.

Teacher feedback to their students plays a very important role in improvement and progress, and this feedback also needs to be shared at the PEP meeting, so the carer and other key professionals can assist the child in implementing such feedback.

It is also important that the DT brings to the meeting positive feedback, even when difficulties are being experienced by the child.

An essential checklist for DTs when preparing for a PEP meeting should include:

- Meeting with the child before the meeting to ascertain their views and ensure they understand the PEP process if they are to attend
- Circulating student feedback forms to all teachers and ensure adequate completion. It is also important that the DT is familiar with this feedback before the PEP.
- Ensuring an appropriate location for the PEP meeting has been booked if the meeting is to take place in school
- Ensuring any additional school staff who need to attend the meeting are made aware and cover provided as appropriate
- Compiling any data requested by the VSO for the meeting. This may include attendance and academic data, reports from 1-1 tutors/mentors, financial information regarding PPP spend etc.
- Preparing to feedback on progress towards PEP targets and considering any new targets which are needed
- Ensuring Section B of the ePEP document has been completed

Implementing support in school

Since the prime purpose of the PEP is to support the educational attainment of LAC, effective intervention strategies will need to be planned to support the child's targets. Statutory guidance is very clear that these targets need to be SMART (as explained in the PEP section of this handbook). The DT, being the person at the meeting with the most in-depth knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, will need to take a lead in promoting the most effective intervention strategies, in proposing how they will be monitored and specifying what the success criteria will be. Where such strategies require funding, the DT will need to discuss the use of the devolved PPP funds from Hillingdon VS with the VSO at the PEP meeting.

The DT will also need to have a clear knowledge of other aspects of the child's school development, such as their involvement in the wider life of their school, how they have been rewarded, or otherwise, and any positions of responsibility they are undertaking. They may need to encourage the child to talk about their successes and achievements at the PEP meeting.

Recording and distribution of the PEP document should take place without delay and is the responsibility of the VSO. However, they can only complete this task in a timely fashion if all the information required has been provided.

In Hillingdon, PEPs are recorded online via an ePEP system with eGov Solutions; all DTs have their own access to this system and can view and contribute to PEP documents at any time.

The VSO will email all professionals concerned when the draft PEP document has been completed and is ready for review.

If a DT has not received the PEP document within the appropriate timescale, they will need to follow this up so there is no drift in implementing strategies.

The DT will need to give careful consideration to the implementation of intervention strategies in school and work closely with the child's teachers and other staff in ensuring they are effective. This could include working with the child's teachers on teaching and learning styles; for example, is the work adequately differentiated for the child, is there enough scaffolding, are transitions between tasks causing difficulty?

In implementing strategies decided upon at the PEP, the DT may also need to employ the services of other professionals, such as behaviour support workers and educational psychologists.

Communication and support of others in the team around the child

Securing school stability for LAC is an integral part of what needs to happen in order to narrow the gap between what they achieve compared to other children. The stronger the working links and co-operation between the school and local authorities, as well as the child's carers and whoever else is involved in providing support, the greater the chances of keeping the child's education on track.

Designated Teachers should understand that some foster carers and social workers will not have the knowledge and understanding of the English education system that they have, especially in regards to the strategies which could be implemented to accelerate progress. DTs should therefore support others in the team around the child with strategies and interventions they may use outside of school. For example, a DT may advise a carer on the best to support their child in homework completion.

Where carers themselves may have had a negative experience of school, the DT is able to make them especially welcome at parents' evenings, school information sessions, school concerts and sports days and other school occasions.

Social workers, carers and the VSOs also have a duty to communicate regularly and directly with the DT, to keep them up-to-date with any events which may have an impact on educational outcomes of the child, such as family contact or a move in care placement. A DT should also always be consulted about any aspects of the child's care plan which may disrupt their education.

Where a child is in danger of exclusion, the DT will need to ensure that every possible intervention has been put in place to support the child. They will need to be involved in discussions with the headteacher and communicate with the carer, VSO and social worker to ensure that any exclusion is an 'absolute last resort'.

Where a child is to access alternative provision, the DT will need to liaise closely with the provider so that every safeguard is in place and ensuring the provider has all the necessary information on the child.

The Personal Education Plan

As a group, Looked After Children (LAC) typically lag behind their non-Looked After peers at the end of every Key Stage. In order to narrow this gap a personalised learning plan is essential for each LAC, which identifies their individual learning needs and puts a plan in place to meet those needs so that their own expectations, and those of others, are raised and their life chances enhanced. This is known as the Personal Education Plan (PEP).

It is a legal requirement that every LAC has a care plan of which the PEP is an integral part. An up-to-date copy of the PEP should be available for each LAC Review and Pathway Planning meeting from when the child is pre-school until they are 18.

The PEP also forms part of the child's official school record. If a child moves school, all previous PEPs should be securely forwarded along with the child's file, to the receiving school by the Designated Teacher (DT). As a document, it provides a 'collective memory' about the child's education.

The first PEP is usually referred to as the 'initial' PEP. Subsequent PEPs should build upon previous ones, to become an evolving record and review document.

It is expected that a PEP will be agreed at a meeting which is usually held at a child's school. Where a child does not have an education placement, the Virtual School Officer (VSO) will liaise with other professionals to agree a suitable alternative location.

Whilst attendees at the PEP meeting can be varied depending on the needs of the child, it is expected in Hillingdon that as a minimum the PEP meeting will be attended by the child, Virtual School Officer, the Designated Teacher, the Social Worker and the Foster Carer / Key Worker.

Some LAC do not wish for their PEP meeting to be held at school or to attend. Where this is the case, their wishes and feelings should be gathered beforehand and shared at the meeting on their behalf.

While it may not always be possible, efforts should be made to not remove a child from their lessons in order for them to attend their PEP meeting.

PEPs should not be disciplinary meetings. They should identify, promote and build upon the child's strengths. PEPs should be solution focused; finding ways to support the child's educational progress.

PEP Timescales

Before the PEP:

When a child first becomes Looked After an 'initial' PEP meeting must be held within 20 working days or within 10 working days in the case of an emergency. The PEP should feed into the first LAC Review.

Thereafter, statutory guidance requires a minimum of one PEP meeting to be held per school term so that there are at least three per year. Additional PEP meetings may take place at any time if there is a need.

It is good practice for PEPs for children in transitional year groups (eg. 6 and 11) to be held close to the start of a term to ensure the child has every support and intervention needed to reach their targets.

Further consideration should also be given to key points in the academic year eg. when the child chooses their GCSE options or takes their mock exams when scheduling PEP meetings.

After the PEP:

The recording and dissemination of the PEP should take place without delay and this is the responsibility of the VSO in Hillingdon.

The expectation is that the PEP will be written up on the eGov Solutions ePEP system within 10 working days of the meeting date.

Once a PEP has been audited for quality assurance (QA) by managers or the VSO has been informed it has not been selected for QA, the PEP should be shared in draft form with all professionals via secure email. Professionals should be given 7 calendar days to provide the VSO with any amendments or additions.

Once the draft period has ended, the VSO should complete the final sign off process for the PEP and share the final document with all professionals. It remains the responsibility of Social Care to ensure the document is uploaded to LCS.

Once a PEP has been finally signed off, it should not be altered as it stands as a record of the child's progress and achievements at that moment in time.

Any subsequent updates should be added to the new PEP document for the following term.

Initiating a PEP

In Hillingdon it is the responsibility of the VSO to initiate the PEP, and this should be done in consultation with the Designated Teacher, the Social Worker and the carer. The PEP should be seen as a priority in the calendar of meetings for LAC. Even if the child does not have an educational placement, a PEP must still be produced within the statutory timeframe.

In initiating the PEP, the VSO should produce an agenda in advance of the meeting so those attending have a chance to prepare.

The VSO should request the views of the child are ascertained, whether the child is attending the meeting, and request the DT gathers the additional required information for the meeting.

Whilst it is expected that a DT will attend all PEP meetings, some choose to delegate this responsibility to another member of staff. This is acceptable provided this member of staff knows the child well and has enough seniority to affect change on behalf of the child, where necessary.

It may also be appropriate to invite: (list is not exhaustive)

- SENDCO
- Form tutor / Class Teacher / Head of Year
- MAPs
- LAC Nurse
- Birth parent(s)
- Supervising Social Worker
- Learning mentor / LSA / teaching assistant

However, in order to encourage the involvement of the child, it is recommended that the size of membership for the meeting is considered carefully so the child is not made to feel intimidated or uncomfortable. Some professionals may be invited for part of the meeting, or it may be appropriate for the VSO to meet with them before or after the meeting to gain their views.

The Initial PEP

Initial PEPs will vary according to a number of factors.

If a child is remaining in the education placement they were on roll with prior to becoming LAC, the school/college will already have a good knowledge of their needs and prior achievements. They should also be in a good position to agree targets and an action plan for going forward.

It is imperative at this PEP meeting that the DT is updated with the key points of the child's care plan by the Social Worker and how this may impact their education.

At this meeting, the key professionals should establish an effective system of communication between them so that any concerns about the child can be communicated and dealt with without delay.

In the case that the child is attending a new school, the VSO should seek to contact the child's previous school to obtain all necessary data and reports and ensure these have been shared with the new school. Communication between the new DT and the previous school should also be encouraged.

Again, it is imperative at this PEP meeting that the DT is updated with the key points of the child's care plan by the Social Worker and how this may impact their education. An effective system of communication between professionals should again be established so that any concerns about the child can be communicated and dealt with without delay.

When a child is without an education placement, the VSO (assisted by the SW and carer) will need to bring to the meeting all relevant information and data concerning the child's previous education, as well as any reports from other professionals and their EHCP, if they have one. Based on this information, decisions should be made on the educational placement best suited to meet the child's needs, and an action plan put in place to secure such a placement, naming those who will lead in this and putting in timescales for completion.

It may be that the child has newly arrived in the country as an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC). If they speak little or no English, it is the expectation that an interpreter will be employed by the Social Worker so that as much information as possible may be gathered concerning the child's previous education.

It must be remembered that a lack of English does not equate to a lack of education.

Some UASC may arrive in this country with very little prior education while others will have been educated to a high standard.

However, all will have been without education for the time they have been travelling to the UK, which for some can be years. It is therefore vital that the VSO gets as much information as possible about the child's previous experiences of education and gets them assessed as accurately as possible, considering language barriers.

Where a child has had an initial PEP and has then begun a new school/college, the first PEP review should be held within six weeks of the child starting.

PEP Reviews

After the initial PEP, subsequent PEP meetings will review the previous PEP(s), especially the targets. A PEP review should take place once per academic term.

In preparation for the meeting, all professionals should consider what they have done to support the child's education since the previous PEP, particularly in relation to target achievement.

The Child's Voice

The PEP meeting is something which is done *with* the child, rather than *to* the child. The child's views, comments and preferences should be recorded by the VSO as an explicit part of the PEP document, as well as comments being woven throughout the summary where appropriate. The young person's long term and short term aspirations regarding their education and future should also be explicitly recorded.

It is understandable that some children, particularly younger ones, do not wish to attend their PEP meetings and this can be for a variety of reasons. Whilst they should be encouraged to do so where possible, it may be more appropriate for other professionals to seek their views outside of the PEP meeting so they can be shared and discussed. HVS has a variety of proformas which can be used by DTs to gather the views of our children.

Academic Review

Each PEP should contain a summary of the child's current attainment and progress. In order to do this, the DT should present the most current data for the child, including attainment, progress and targets.

Where requested to do so, the DT should bring to the meeting feedback from each of the child's teachers using the round robin proforma provided by the VSO beforehand. This feedback focuses on the child's attitude to learning, motivation, effort and class and homework quality and completion.

Any other plans, such as ECHPs, behaviour support plans, will also be considered during the meeting.

Solution focused discussion on how the child is attaining and progressing in each area of the curriculum is central to the PEP meeting.

Other areas for discussion at a PEP (list is not exhaustive)

Attendance & punctuality to school and to lessons will be an area of focus at the PEP meeting as they are key to good educational outcomes. Many LAC have excellent attendance and punctuality and so this is an opportunity for praise. Where this is not good enough, or there are signs of slippage, discussion will need to be had on both the reasons why and the strategies which might be employed in order to make improvements, including by whom and by when.

Transitions between Key Stages should form ongoing discussion at PEP meetings. Major changes, such as those between primary and secondary schools, should prompt discussion and preparation at the PEP meeting from about 18 months prior to the transition itself. Plans will need to be made and recorded in the PEP as to how the outgoing school will liaise with the receiving school in transferring information and how endings will be managed for the child.

Involvement in extracurricular activities is also an area of discussion for the PEP and should take into consideration their involvement both in and outside of school. Where LAC are reluctant to participate, discussion will need to focus on understanding why and what strategies may be employed to encourage participation in the best interests of the child and their wider development. This discussion should also encompass any upcoming trips or visits the child will attend either through their school or through HVS.

A care plan update should be provided at every PEP meeting to ensure all professionals are aware of any changes or issues which may impact on the child's learning or education. This should include their contact plan, legal status and any upcoming planned moves, as appropriate.

In the event that consideration for a child moving into semi-independent accommodation or a residential unit is being given, there should be open discussion on the likely impact of this on academic achievement. It is also important that in the case of the former, schools/colleges consider the child now having to shop, cook, clean and manage a meagre budget alone, as well as their studies.

The usage of Pupil Premium Plus should be linked to the target setting section of the PEP (see below). PPP is available to pay for interventions that will enhance the educational outcomes of the child and may be used in a variety of ways. Use of PPP should be discussed at the PEP meeting and requests for its usage recorded in the PEP document.

Target setting and review

This is a key part of the PEP meeting. Where appropriate, LAC should be part of the target setting as they are more likely to succeed if they have a say in devising them. Targets need to be action planned so that it is absolutely clear what the targets are, why they are needed, how they will make a difference, who will take responsibility for implementing them and how their impact will be measured within a given timescale.

Targets should be **SMART** as defined in statutory guidance:

S	specific, significant, stretching
M	measurable, meaningful, motivational
A	achievable, agreed, action-oriented
R	realistic, relevant, results-oriented
T	time-bound, tangible, trackable

The targets should be reviewed at the next PEP meeting and each person tasked with an action will be accountable for their part in it. VSOs should also agree a mid-way review date between PEP meetings where they will be responsible for contacting professionals linked to the targets to check on progress and to ensure agreed actions have been taken.

A minimum of three targets are expected to be set at each PEP meeting (unless in exceptional circumstances) and their setting should be needs led.

Targets may be taken from a child's EHCP, behaviour plan or similar where it is considered appropriate.

PEPs in EYFS

Early Years PEPs will look very different to those of older children but will share a focus on the child's individual learning and development needs and should highlight the child's current stage of development, together with the actions required to meet appropriate goals.

The PEP should cover:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

The PEP should also comment on access to early years provision which is appropriate to the child's identified developmental needs and address how they can make a successful transition to Key Stage 1.

There is also an Early Years Pupil Premium. Use of this should be discussed at the PEP meeting and decisions made for its use.

PEPs for those who are NEET

For all children who will be 16 by 31st August, statutory school age ends on the last Friday of June of the same year. However, young people are required to stay in some form of education, employment (with training) or full-time training (EET) until they are 18. A young person between 16 and 18 who is not involved in any of these is classed as NEET.

A PEP for a young person who is NEET will look different to those of their EET peers. A NEET PEP should focus on the current barriers to the young person engaging in education or training, as well as a realistic plan for re-engaging them with it. This plan should include SMART targets which make it explicit who is going to do what, why and by when.

A NEET PEP needs to maintain a positive and aspirational focus, just like any other PEP. Efforts should be made to highlight the young person's strengths and build on their interests in order to re-engage them with education or training.

PEPs for children with significant SEND

PEPs for those children with significant SEND may be slightly different to those without. Based on their level of need it may not be possible for the child to be able to express their views or contribute directly to the meeting. If this is the case, the child's views should be captured via the views and opinions of others.

The curriculum content may also vary as the schools often have a curriculum which is specific to the needs of their students. A VSO should be prepared for this, and adapt the round robins as required.

For the majority of young people with significant SEND they will be attaining below age related expectations, but this does not mean they are not making progress from their starting point. This will need to be judged on a case by case basis.

When setting targets, where possible link these to the targets from the young person's IEP or EHCP. Many schools will have termly targets for their young people to support the EHCP target. If they have a large number of targets for the young person then the DT should be able to identify the main ones which should be included in the PEP.

Those with significant SEND will have an EHCP. This section of the PEP document must be fully completed and maintained. Any additional support should also be clearly

documented along with the impact it is making on the young person's development. Where possible, one PEP per year should be carried out alongside the annual review.

Depending on the school provision, PPP may be awarded to the school. This needs to be discussed where appropriate and clearly shown within the targets on the PEP.

PEPs for children who are missing

Sadly it is not an unusual occurrence for LAC to go missing whilst they are in the care of the Local Authority.

Missing periods can vary in length from case to case and this influences the PEP completion process. However, regardless of their missing status, a PEP is required every term.

- Where a child has been missing for a short period(s): PEP Review meetings should be postponed until their return to ensure they can be part of proceedings.
- Where a child has been missing for a long period(s): PEP Review meetings should be postponed until their return. If a child has not returned within a few weeks of term end, efforts should be made by the VSO to meet with the other professionals in the team around the child or gather their views via other means. These should be recorded in the PEP document, as well as a review of any recent academic data and any other relevant sections which would be included in a usual PEP review.
- Where a child has been missing since becoming LAC: PEP Review meetings should be postponed until their return. If a child has not returned within a few weeks of term end, efforts should be made by the VSO to find out any relevant background information which can be recorded in the PEP document. This could be taken from the IRO's LAC Review notes, or from speaking to other professionals in the team around the child.

Where a PEP has been completed whilst a child is missing, this should be noted clearly in the PEP summary.

PEP Quality Assurance

Hillingdon Virtual School has a PEP Quality Assurance process which enables all managers to RAG rate (Red, Amber, Green) the quality of PEPs for the staff for whom they have line management responsibility.

The PEP quality assurance policy is reviewed annually by the VS management team and was last reviewed in August 2021 to ensure the document continues to be fit for purpose.

A summary of the policy is outlined below:

- VS managers will review a minimum of 25% of the caseload of each VSO they manage, including any previously rated amber PEPs over the termly PEP cycle.
- Where VS staff are not meeting expected standards, managers will use one to one meetings to discuss the document, using the QA template as the basis for conversation. Actions will then be agreed to bring about the required improvements and followed up in subsequent meetings. If necessary, further training/shadowing of VS staff may be offered to model PEP meeting delivery and ensure the correct questions are being asked to generate the required information and plan appropriately. Where progress is not made following additional support, standard council capability processes will be followed.
- At the end of each term, managers will moderate a sample of each other's PEPs in order to cross check quality and ensure the QA criteria is consistently interpreted.

It is important to remember that although the allocated VSO leads on the organisation of the meeting and completion of the PEP, as outlined in previous sections there is still a responsibility on social workers to complete the personal and care details in section A of the PEP for the young people on their caseload and for designated teachers to complete the education fields in section B for young people within their school.

Admissions

Whose Responsibility?

The Looked After Child's placement plan should make explicit who has the delegated authority on the choice of a school. Depending on the child's legal status and permanence plan this responsibility is often shared between the carer and the social worker. When a child is accommodated under Section 20, the birth parents will usually be at least a part of the decision. However, all school placement choices should be made in consultation with the child's Virtual School Officer and applications should be made by the social worker and carer working together.

For children and young people looked after with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), please refer to the [SEND](#) section of the handbook.

Changes to educational provision

When a child or young person becomes looked after, every possible effort should be made to avoid disrupting their education. This means doing everything possible to find a care placement from which the young person can continue to attend their present school, providing this is meeting their needs.

This may mean the local authority providing transport to enable the child to continue at their school.

The same duty to ensure, as far as possible, that education is not disrupted applies when a young person must move to a new placement.

When the care placement of a Looked After Child necessitates the sourcing of a new school, this must be secured **before** the child is moved so there is no break in educational provision.

An exception to this is when a child must move to a new care placement in an emergency. In this instance, a new school must be secured **within 20 school days**. The child's home local authority has a duty to **avoid drift and delay**.

If the child is in Key Stage 4 (Years 10 or 11), a change in educational provision may only be made in **exceptional circumstances**.

If such a move is contemplated, the designated teachers of both the old and new schools should be consulted, as must the IRO. The child's wishes and feelings should also be ascertained, and those of their parents if the child is accommodated. Even if the child is on a care order, the parents' views should be sought, unless this is not appropriate or possible.

The local authority must be satisfied the new placement will promote the child's educational achievement and is consistent with the PEP, which will need to be amended to set out the arrangements for minimising disruption to the child's education and what will happen in cases of syllabus/course changes.

Appropriate education provision

All education provision should be appropriate to a child's assessed needs. It should be judged as the one which will best support and maximise the child's academic progress and enable them to achieve in line with their peers.

For the majority of Looked After Children, this will mean a mainstream school, including local authority maintained schools, academies and free schools. However, for some this may mean a specialist school for children with special educational needs or alternative provision.

When securing a new school place, the child's wishes and feelings should be considered, according to their age and maturity. Every effort should be made to enable the child to visit the school informally beforehand.

The school chosen should be at a reasonable distance from the care placement; the child should not have to travel for more than one hour each way.

The school chosen may not be a school from which the child has previously been permanently excluded.

It is expected that a range of schools in the area will be researched by the carer and social worker, in consultation with the child's Virtual School Officer. All schools now have easily accessible websites with a range of information, including their curriculum and pastoral offer, exam results and extra-curricular activities.

Most websites will also have the school's most recent OFSTED reports, but if not, these reports can be easily found by using a search engine. One website link that is useful for researching schools is [Find and compare schools in England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/publications/find-and-compare-schools-in-england) (www.gov.uk)

Carers may also use local knowledge of schools to assist their choice.

The educational provision for Looked After Children of statutory school age must be full-time, which means 23 or 25 hours of education per week depending on their Key Stage.

The school chosen should have an OFSTED rating of 'outstanding' or 'good'. Schools 'requiring improvement' should be avoided and, unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, no Looked After Child should be placed in a school rated 'inadequate'.

Securing a place

Looked After Children have been given the highest priority within school admission arrangements. In practice this means they are given first choice, even above siblings. The only exception is for faith schools, where Looked After Children of that faith, get higher priority.

Application for a school place may usually be made either by the carer or the social worker in consultation with the child's VSO.

Most applications for mainstream school places are now done online, either directly to the school or to the admission department of the local authority in which the school is situated.

If the application is made directly to the school, it is good practice to send a copy of the application form to the child's VSO.

When an 'in year' (during the school year) application is being made, mainstream schools are required to give Looked After Children priority in their oversubscription criteria. In practice, this means that a school **must** admit a Looked After Child, even if they are full.

Schools must not 'interview' a child. They can have an informal meeting with a young person and their Carer and Social Worker but under no circumstances must they formally interview a child.

The VSH should be kept informed of the progress of all school admissions applications so they can take appropriate action if there is any undue delay, avoiding protracted negotiations.

School refusal to admit a Looked After Child

If a Looked After Child is refused admittance by a school, the social worker, carer and VSO should seek the support of the VSH without delay in order to discuss whether the school may be directed to admit by the local authority.

If a school maintained by a local authority refuses to admit a Looked After Child, the home local authority has the power to direct the school to do so, even if the school is full. This does not apply if the child has been previously permanently excluded from that school.

Any such direction will be done in accordance with the [School's Admissions Code](#).

If an academy or free school refuses to admit a Looked After Child, the home authority may request them to admit, but it may not direct them.

If there are strong grounds in favour of that school being the most suited to meet the child's needs, then the local authority may ask the Secretary of State to intervene.

School admissions during normal transition times

Looked After Children frequently find transitions from one school to another very difficult because of past circumstances. Normal transition times are:

Nursery to Key Stage 1 (infant): Even when a nursery is attached to a primary school, you will be required to apply for a place in the primary school. Carers and social workers are responsible for knowing when this is a requirement and making an application in keeping with the appropriate timescales.

Key Stage 1 (infant) to Key Stage 2 (junior): In some schools, the infant and junior school are separate and have different headteachers. Carers and social workers are responsible for knowing if there are any transition requirements so they can meet them.

Key Stage 2 (junior) to Key Stage 3 (secondary): This is a major transition for any child and can be particularly traumatic for a Looked After Child. Children must adapt from being the oldest in a small school to the smallest in an often much larger school. They have to adapt from having one teacher for all subjects to around a dozen teachers for different subjects, from doing the majority of their lessons in one classroom to having multiple classrooms to travel to around a much larger, crowded building.

In supporting the transition of a Looked After Child from primary to secondary school, carers, supported by the social worker and VSO, should:

- Begin to search for an appropriate secondary school in the autumn term of Year 5
- Ensure transition is a subject discussed at each review of the child's PEP from the autumn term of Year 5
- Attend all transition advice meetings arranged by the child's primary school
- With the child, attend open sessions offered by at least three secondary schools, so they can question teachers directly about the academic and pastoral support, enquire about the wider life of the school, view first-hand the physical aspects of the school and then make comparisons between schools
- Speak with the designated teacher in all the schools being considered and discuss with them what support they offer Looked After Children
- Listen to the child's views about which school they would like to attend
- If the child has an EHC Plan, discuss with the primary school SENCO and the SEN department of the local authority which maintains the plan the schools which are best suited to meet the needs of the child outlined in their plan. It is also good practice to consult the VSO for the child.

- For Looked After Children who do not have an EHC Plan, an application for a secondary school place should be made by the required date in October of Year 6, ensuring their looked after status is made clear.
- Throughout Year 6, prepare the child for transition through motivational and aspirational conversations at home.
- Request the designated teacher from the new secondary school (and SENCO if the child has an EHC Plan) attend the last PEP in Year 6 in the summer term so the meeting can be focused on ensuring a smooth transition.

In the summer of Year 6, receiving secondary schools will usually invite those children in Year 6 who will be joining them in Year 7 to visit the school for a day in order to get to know the school layout and some of their new teachers and classmates. The carer and the social worker should ensure the child attends any such transition days. Where a child is particularly anxious about the move, the carer and social worker can request additional transitional activities from the secondary school. The child's VSO would be best placed to advise on what types of activities may be appropriate.

Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 : The vast majority of children will remain in their current education provider when they transition from Year 9 to Year 10. However, some children may wish to consider applying to a UTC or studio school at this age. Schools that admit pupils in Year 10 are called University Technical Colleges (UTCs) or Studio Schools.

When a child is a pupil in Year 9, they have the right to apply for their admission to a University Technical College (UTCs) or Studio School to complete their studies at Key Stage 4.

This alternative school provision allows a child to study for their core subject GCSEs, but also gain qualifications in areas not normally taught in mainstream school.

UTCs are set up by universities and business and specialise in one or two technical subjects. In Years 10 and 11 they offer a similar GCSE curriculum to a typical secondary school, including English and Maths, as well as their specialist subject. You can find out more [here](#).

Studio schools are similar to UTCs in that they have employer involvement in the curriculum and focus on developing skills needed for employment, involving personal coaching and work experience. They have a similar curriculum to a typical secondary school.

You can find out more information about this offer in Hillingdon [here](#).

Key Stage 4 (secondary) to Key Stage 5 (6th form/further education/college): All young people are expected to be in education, training or employment up to the age of 18. This may be in a variety of education or training provisions and may include apprenticeships, traineeships, work experience, internships and voluntary work, as well as courses of study in schools and colleges. Preparation for this transition should begin

during the PEP of the spring term in Year 10 and should subsequently be a standing item on the PEP meeting agenda for the rest of Year 10 and 11.

The views and aspirations of the young person should be paramount in any discussion about Key Stage 5 plans. All Key Stage 5 courses will have specific entry criteria. Enquiries regarding this should be made in Year 10 and the likelihood of the young person meeting them discussed at each PEP meeting, with targets set and any extra support needed to meet these being provided.

Carers are expected to attend any transition advice sessions provided by the young person's secondary school. The carer should accompany the young person to any open evenings in the schools and colleges of their choice, supporting them in their preparation, in asking relevant questions of the staff and in undertaking research into what courses are on offer, entry qualifications needed and past results. The young person's VSO is also available to provide information, advice and guidance to the carer and young person during this time if they are unsure of what to do.

Carers are expected to support the young person in making applications by checking that application forms are completed well and submitted on time. They should also encourage the young person to reveal their looked after status on application forms (this is not a requirement and a young person can choose not to do so if they wish) so that they can be made aware of any additional support available and access funding, such as the 16-19 Bursary.

Carers should accompany the young person to college enrolment and ensure they have all the necessary papers with them, such as identity documents and qualification certificates.

PEPs are continued up to the age of 18 in Hillingdon and the young person will continue to have a named VSO assigned to them.

Attendance

Children must be educated in school while they are of statutory school age (SSA); that is, between the school term after their fifth birthday and the last Friday in June in the school year they turn 16. From age 16 - 18, they must be in some form of education, training or employment; this can include voluntary work, internships and work experience.

For children to realise their academic potential, it is highly recommended they have attendance of at least 95%.

When children miss school other than when they are ill, not only are they missing out on teaching and learning, they are also missing out on learning essential life skills such as how to interact and communicate with others in a positive social way.

Good school attendance is a safeguarding factor in the lives of Looked After Children.

Carers, social workers and schools have a joint responsibility to ensure the children in their care attend school every day. They are expected to work together supportively if attendance rates dip.

As part of our duty as corporate parent, Hillingdon commissions Welfare Call to contact the school for each of our Looked After Children every day to check that they are attending and, if not, to ascertain the reason why.

Unacceptable reasons for absence

- Medical, dental and therapy appointments should be made for out-of-school hours. Carers and social workers should negotiate with medical practitioners to ensure Looked After Children are a priority for such appointments
- Holidays may not be taken during term-time and those with parental authority may be fined for taking their children on holiday when they should be in school

Punctuality

Looked After Children should be supported to have 100% punctuality to school as missing the start of the school day can cause confusion and anxiety. For example, schools will often use morning assemblies and registration time to give out important notices, to check home-school diaries and to check that pupils have all the necessary equipment and uniform. Pupils who start late are disadvantaged.

When a child is late before the register closes, they will be marked in the school register as being late. If a child arrives after the register closes (with each school this time maybe different), the child will be marked as absent. The register is taken in the morning and afternoon, each mark counts as half a day. Lateness can impact an overall attendance figure, as each absence will count.

Advice on attendance and punctuality

- Clear lines of communication between school and home are essential in supporting good attendance and punctuality. To this end, from the first day a Looked After Child joins a school, there should be agreement between the school and the carer as to who to notify (attendance officer, designated teacher, head of year, tutor, office) and by what means (phone, text, email, note) when a child is to be absent or late
- When a child is too ill to attend school or is going to be late, the carer is expected to let the school know before the start of the school day
- When a Looked After Child does not turn up for school and there has been no notification from the carer, the school should, **without delay**, contact the carer, social worker and VSO to let them know so that a decision on appropriate next steps can be collectively made
- When a child is in school but is truanting from lessons, the school should contact the carer, social worker and VSO on the same day and agree strategies for avoiding such behaviour in the future
- If such absences are persistent, or there is a truancy from the school, a meeting should be called **without delay** between the school, the carer, the social worker and the VSO to discuss possible causes and future prevention of such truancy
- Encourage good attendance and punctuality at every opportunity at home
- Ensure that the child's social worker and VSO are notified where there are concerns about a child's attendance
- Encourage and facilitate engagement in Out of School Hours Learning
- Ensure that a child is prepared and organised for school (including having appropriate uniform and equipment).

Missing out

Attendance	Missing out on	Which means.....	Over 13yrs of schooling is.....
90%	1 day per fortnight	4 weeks per year	Nearly 1.5 years missed
80%	1 day per week	8 weeks per year	Over 2.5 years missed
60%	2 days per week	16 weeks per year (over 1 term)	Over 5 years missed
40%	3 days per week	24 weeks per year	Nearly 8 years missed

Of the pupils who miss more than 50% of school, only three per cent manage to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades 5 - 9 including Maths and English.

73% of pupils who have over 95% attendance achieve five or more GCSEs at grades 5-9.

Responsibilities of other professionals:

Social Workers:

- Ensure the school is being held to account, explore what support they can offer to address any attendance or punctuality issues.
- Encourage good attendance and punctuality at every opportunity (LAC Reviews, statutory visits etc).
- Ensure the Virtual School is informed about any rising concerns regarding attendance and punctuality.

Designated Teachers:

- Be sensitive in sharing information about children who are looked after. Most children do not want to be identified to their peers as looked after
- Maintain regular contact with carers, encouraging high expectations of looked after and previously looked after children and what they can achieve
- Keep the child's social worker and VSO informed if there are concerns about attendance
- Raise aspirations of looked after and previously looked after children by offering lots of opportunities for them to develop their strengths and talents. This has been identified as one of the key factors that lead to looked after and previously looked after children succeeding educationally
- Encourage involvement in school activities outside school hours such as visits, outdoor activities, sports, drama, art or any other club that might interest the young person
- Encourage carers and young people to attend informal activities at the school such as plays, concerts, social events and sporting activities.
- Use positive rewards such as vouchers, day trips or token rewards such as stars or virtual points for improved attendance and punctuality. In the short term, these may not be the usual targets that other pupils are expected to achieve. Set realistic targets for the looked after or previously looked after child to achieve the rewards, avoid sanctions and punishment in the traditional sense.
- Consider reduced hours or phased returns especially after a traumatic event. However, the expectation must be that the child will return to full attendance over time.
- Provide a consistent adult in school for the child to have regular, easy contact with. This needs to be someone that the child likes, trusts and respects. Ideally the child will choose who this key person should be. The relationship should be a long term one: try to choose an adult who is likely to remain in the school for a long time. This key person does not have to be the Designated Teacher. The aim is to develop a relationship with an adult who focuses on the child's personal, emotional and academic needs.

- Consider peer mentoring. This provides a supportive social relationship for the child with a person of their own age
- Counselling is offered by many schools. Working through some of the complex factors that affect school attendance can be helpful.
- Ensure the needs of looked after and previously looked after children are specifically addressed in school development planning and clear in school policies and procedures. Whilst generic support may be appropriate for some children, others will have complex needs and require tailored support and a flexible approach to school systems and procedures. Planning needs to be proactive, rather than reactive.
- Offer training on the needs of looked after and previously looked after children to school staff.

Strategies for improving attendance

Attendance Reports: Provides a way of monitoring attendance daily and for every lesson.

Pastoral Support Plans: PSP is a school based and co-ordinated intervention to help individual pupils to improve their social, emotional and behavioural skills. As a result of a PSP, pupils should be more able to regulate their behaviour and /or improve their attendance

Transport: Transporting a child/young person to school, can be a good way of getting back into a regular routine. Carers will need to ensure that there is a designated member of staff to receive the child/young person, once they are dropped off.

Incentives: A long term reward agreed by School and Carer to encourage good attendance (eg. tickets to a football match).

Patterns: When looking at a young person's attendance, are there any patterns to the lessons/days they are missing? If a pattern seems to be occurring, the school will need to look at what support can be put in place to address this.

Refusal to attend school: Anxiety around attending school can easily build up. Carers will need to be sensitive in exploring the reason for this (e.g. bullying, learning difficulty etc) and seek to put in the right support to address this (e.g. therapeutic support/ peer mentor/ SEN support etc).

Collaboration: Schools should be keeping professionals in the loop. If possible regular review meetings should be arranged to ensure there is a robust plan in place and that attendance is improving.

Peer mentor/Mentor: Having allocated time with someone who is invested and interested in a young person's well-being will help them to feel valued and encourage them to attend.

Breakfast Club: Most schools offer a morning breakfast club, and sometimes a free breakfast. This may work as an incentive for a young person and will avoid any issues with lateness associated with transport.

Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

The lives of many Looked After Children are characterised by change and instability and these are major factors in underachievement. Where suspension and permanent exclusion from school is used as a sanction for a Looked After Child, instability is increased and the sense of rejection reinforced.

Suspension and permanent exclusion should be used only as an absolute last resort.

Preventing suspensions and permanent exclusion

Looked After Children are suspended from school at a much higher rate than other children; they are more than twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school than all children.

Negative behaviour from Looked After Children often has its roots in the experience that led to them becoming looked after. For instance, attention-needing behaviour may sometimes reflect neglect in earlier childhood.

Traumatised children may need significant help to learn personal skills, such as self-control, which their peers acquired much earlier in life.

While Looked After Children must have consistency, schools are asked to also provide discrete flexibility for them in a subtle way.

When the behaviour of a looked after child is giving cause for concern, this should be discussed with the child's VSO at the PEP meeting and strategies for improvement put in place and monitored frequently.

If such behaviour escalates between PEPs, then additional meetings should be called by the school to discuss causes and interventions to which the VSO, the carer and the social worker should be invited.

If the child has an EHC Plan, consideration should be given by the school to calling an early annual review.

Schools, social workers, carers and VSOs need to be proactive in obtaining support for Looked After Children to avoid exclusion.

Amongst other interventions they might:

- Put in place a behaviour support plan or pastoral support plan
- Commission an educational psychologist to assess the child and make recommendations
- Provide a teaching assistant or learning mentor support
- Make changes within the classroom in terms of seating plans, examining the content of what is being taught to ensure it is not the cause of the child's behaviour, and reappraise the teaching and learning strategies being used

- Involve the SENCO if the child has an EHC Plan
- Refer the child to a counsellor, MAPs or CAMHs
- Consider an alternative timetable

Suspensions

Suspensions can only be issued by a Head teacher.

Head teachers must, without delay, provide reasons for the suspensions and length of the suspension. This letter should be sent to the child and /or the carer and copies sent to the Social Worker and VSO.

Suspensions can be anything from half a day to 45 days in any one school year.

'Informal' or 'unofficial' suspensions, such as sending pupils home 'to cool off', are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents or carers. Any suspension of a pupil, even for short periods of time, must be formally recorded and the local authority notified.

Work must be sent home by the school on the first day of the suspension by email or handed to the child.

The work provided by school must cover the duration of the suspension (up to 5 days). This work needs to be returned and marked by school.

Schools need to agree a date for re-integration, Carers/Social Workers and VSOs should be notified of this date. School should not extend a suspension to facilitate a reintegration meeting.

If the young person is suspended for 6 days or longer, the school and the local authority will need to work together to arrange alternative provision from Day 1 following the suspension.

A child who is suspended must remain at home during school hours (i.e. 9am- 3:30pm). Within this time the carer should try to complete the set work with the young person.

It may also be useful to consider:

- Whether the child is aware of the suspension and reasons behind this.
- Consider if the child will be missing an exam/national curriculum test. If so, can the school make arrangements for the child to sit the exam. If not, School Governors can be notified and a request made to overturn the suspension .
- Collect a statement from the child, if necessary.
- Consider an appeal if it appears the exclusion is unlawful.

Permanent Exclusions

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Head teachers should, as far as possible, avoid permanently excluding any Looked After Child. However, if this does occur:

- Schools will need to clarify reasons surrounding the permanent exclusion.
- School will need to inform the local authority.
- The social worker needs to consider the impact of the permanent exclusion upon the care placement. Does additional support need to be considered to support the placement?

In order to minimise disruption to the education of a Looked After Child, statutory guidance states that the local authority should work with the school to arrange suitable full-time education for the pupil from the first day of the exclusion, where this is not possible alternative provisions should be in place by day 6 of the exclusion.

It may be useful to:

- Consider the right to appeal
- Consider contacting the Exclusions Officer in the LA to find out what alternative provisions/options may exist locally.
- Visit the Exclusion section on [LEAP](#) to explore what other support is available to avoid an exclusion.
- Consider a managed move to another school

A decision to exclude a pupil permanently should only be taken:

- In response to a serious breach, or persistent breaches, of the school's behaviour policy;
- Where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school.

If a Looked After Child is permanently excluded, the school may have to inform more people than usual about the permanent exclusion and their right to make representations and appeal. The definition of a parent for the purposes of the Education Acts includes a person who has parental responsibility (which includes the Local Authority where they have a care order in respect of the child) and any person (for example, a foster parent) with whom the pupil lives. These are in addition to the child's birth parents. Even where the Local Authority does not have parental responsibility, the child's social worker should be informed about any permanent exclusion.

Alternative Provision

Alternative provision (AP) is an educational provision used for children who, because of illness, exclusion or other reasons, need an alternative to their mainstream school. It is very often used by schools for children on fixed term exclusion and by local authorities for children on permanent exclusion.

There are various types of alternative provision, catering for different needs. Some provide for children who are waiting for a school place, some for school refusers, while pupil referral units often provide for children either temporarily or permanently excluded from school. Some may miss school due to health reasons. This may be illness (physical or mental health), injury or a planned admission to hospital. The health problem may be time-limited or a child may have a long-term condition. Hillingdon's policy for the alternative education arrangements of these children is available [online](#).

Looked After Children are overrepresented in alternative provision. Research suggests the percentage of Looked After Children attending a pupil referral unit (PRU) is around 11 times that of children with non-looked after status.

What constitutes a good alternative provision?

Carers, social workers, VSOs and IROs should expect the following from any alternative provision provided for their Looked After Children:

- The AP provider will have worked with the school prior to the child transferring to the AP in order to assess their specific needs and ensure they can provide for them
- It will have high aspirations for the outcomes of the child, aiming to improve their attendance, motivation, self-confidence and engagement with education, as appropriate.
- It will provide the child with an education that is on par with that of their peers in mainstream schools, particularly in English, Maths and Science, and will ensure there are appropriate accreditations and qualifications available
- It will have very clearly defined objectives. For children up to the age of Key Stage 3, this should be reintegration to mainstream school; for older children it may be progression to further education, an apprenticeship, training or employment
- For all key professionals linked to the child or young person to be involved with any education planning arrangements to ensure that there is a holistic approach to supporting the child/young person's progress.

When is it appropriate?

Since January 2013, governing bodies of maintained schools have had the power to direct a pupil off-site for education to improve their behaviour. This makes it more

difficult for carers, social workers, VSOs and IROs to challenge the commissioning of AP for Looked After Children.

However, statutory guidance requires the governing body to ensure the corporate parent is given clear information about the placement: why, where, when and how it will be reviewed.

In considering the use of AP for a Looked After Child, governing bodies and headteachers **should** consider whether this is in fact in their best interests.

Where negative behaviour in a child springs from past trauma leading to becoming looked after, and where children have lives characterised by instability and change, disruption to their education is more likely to increase such behaviour rather than to lessen it, and only further decrease their life chances.

While the behaviour of a child is the most common reason for its use, alternative provision may be used for a variety of other reasons such as illness, or very short term while waiting for a school place for a child newly arrived in the authority.

Governing bodies of schools are responsible for arranging suitable alternative full-time education from the sixth day of a fixed term exclusion. However, in the case of Looked After Children, a school is expected to make this provision from day one. Full-time means the same total amount of education as the child would receive in a maintained school.

Commissioning alternative provision

There is specific guidance on alternative provision to which the governing bodies of maintained schools and local authorities must adhere.

When commissioning AP in order to support the improved behaviour of a Looked After Child, schools will need to ensure the following:

- They have clearly identified the needs of the child and used all possible strategies and interventions to support the Looked After Children in school
- They construct a personalised plan for intervention in writing, which has clear objectives for improvement and attainment according to the ability of the child
- The plan for intervention contains arrangements for assessment and monitoring progress, timeframes for achievement and a baseline of the current position against which to measure progress
- Where the objective is school integration, the plan should specify how the AP will complement and keep up with the child's current curriculum, schemes of work and qualification routes
- The plan for intervention is linked to any other plan the child may have, such as an EHC Plan

- The plan has a clear timeframe for regular reviews of progress and the criteria for such reviews are set out
- The plan lays out the objectives for the next steps in the child's education. This may be reintegration to school or progression to further education, training or employment for a child in Key Stage 4
- The plan specifies what criteria will be used to judge when the child is ready to be reintegrated into their school, when appropriate
- Records are kept of the child's progress in the AP
- There is appropriate staff liaison between the school and the AP
- Where a child looked after is referred to an AP on a part-time basis, the intervention plan will need to include the child's attendance at school on the other days

The end of a placement at an Alternative Provision

At the end of a placement at an Alternative Provision, the school should have a plan and processes with clear strategies in place to reintegrate the child.

- The AP provider should give a full written report to the governing body on the child's attendance, academic achievements and improvements to their personal, social and emotional wellbeing. This report should also be shared with the carer, social worker and VSO
- The governing body should also seek the child's views on the success of the placement and give due regard to the child's feedback
- If the objective was for the child to progress to further education, training or employment, the AP provider and the school should work together to ensure that appropriate provision is in place
 - ◆ The child's views about the AP should be ascertained for future planning purposes
 - ◆ The destination of the child should be recorded by the school

Early Years Provision

The Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) stage runs from birth through to age 5 and is taught up until the end of Year 0.

This stage prepares children for school as well as future learning and successes.

Early years education can be of benefit to children's social, physical and mental development, helping to prepare them for school.

The EYFS is based on the principles that:

- Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents/carers
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

While this is important for all children, it is even more important for children who have experienced early trauma. EYFS is essential for such children because it works alongside carers to help LAC to develop fundamental skills required to thrive in primary and secondary settings as they grow older. These skills are:

- Trusting adults
- Building self-esteem
- Developing empathy
- Learning cooperation skills
- Learning self-control
- Building positive relationships
- Developing language and communication skills

These are the skills most children develop naturally through living in families that provide secure, nurturing and stable relationships. For many LAC, they need to be taught discretely by carers and EY settings.

Entitlement

Local authorities have a duty to encourage take-up of early years education places.

Two-year-old LAC are included in the group of children who are eligible for an early education place providing 570 hours per year over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year from the relevant date below:

- **For children born in the period 1 January to 31 March:** the start of term beginning on or following 1 April after the child's second birthday

- **For children born in the period 1 April to 31 August:** the start of term beginning on or following 1 September after the child's second birthday
- **For children born in the period 1 September to 31 December:** the start of term beginning on or following 1 January after the child's second birthday

Once a place has been taken up the child remains eligible even if they cease to be a LAC.

For three and four-year-olds local authorities are required to secure early education places offering 570 hours per year over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year from the relevant date below until they reach compulsory school age:

- **For children born in the period 1 January to 31 March:** the start of term beginning on or following 1 April after the child's third birthday
- **For children born in the period 1 April to 31 August:** the start of term beginning on or following 1 September after the child's third birthday
- **For children born in the period 1 September to 31 December:** the start of term beginning on or following 1 January after the child's third birthday

Early Years PEPs

Early Years PEPs will look very different to those of older children but will share a focus on the child's individual learning and development needs and should highlight the child's current stage of development, together with action required to meet appropriate goals.

There are seven areas to the EYFS Framework:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts

Children should mostly develop the prime areas first:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development

As they grow these areas will help them to develop in the remaining four areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World

→ Expressive Arts and Design

PEPs should include information about access to EY provision which is appropriate to the child's developmental needs and address the requirements for a successful transition to Key Stage 1.

In addition, there is EY Pupil Premium funding. Use of this should be discussed at each PEP meeting and agreed upon in collaboration with the VSO. The EY Pupil Premium Funding is released directly to the education provider from the local authority where the child resides.

After a child turns two, a Progress Check at Age 2 should be completed. This will be a written report completed by professionals of how the child is progressing in the three prime areas of the framework and anywhere they may need extra help and support.

In the summer term of the child's Reception year in school the EYFS profile will be completed by teachers focusing on the seven areas of the framework.

The EYFS profile will help inform their learning when they move into Year 1 as well as provide a clear overview as to where they are achieving at the end of this year.

Statutory Framework Information

Educational programmes must involve activities and experiences for children, as follows:

- Personal, social and emotional development involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities. Children will learn to manage their own basic needs including hygiene and the importance of healthy food choices.
- Communication and language development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations. Reading a range of texts frequently allows them to embed new words in a range of contexts.
- Physical development involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive; and to develop their coordination, control, and movement. During this time they will develop their gross and fine motor skills starting with sensory experiences and moving on to develop their strength, co-ordination and positional awareness.
- Literacy development involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write. Children must be given access to a wide range of

reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest. Within Literacy children will develop their language comprehension, word reading and writing skills.

- Mathematics involves providing children with opportunities to develop and improve their skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and to describe shapes, spaces, and measure.
- Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.
- Expressive arts and design enables children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology.

Learning goals for the different areas:

The prime areas:

→ **Personal, social and emotional development:**

◆ Self-Regulation:

- Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
- Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
- Give focused attention to what adults are saying, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

◆ Managing Self:

- Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.
- Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.

◆ Building relationships:

- Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others.
- Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers.
- Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

→ **Communication and language:**

◆ Listening Attention and Understanding:

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
- Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

◆ **Speaking:**

- Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate.
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from adults around them.

→ **Physical development:**

◆ **Gross Motor Skills:**

- Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
- Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing.

◆ **Fine Motor Skills:**

- Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing - using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paint brushes and cutlery.
- Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.

The specific areas:

→ **Literacy:**

◆ **Comprehension:**

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- Anticipate - where appropriate - key events in stories.
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems and during role-play.

◆ Word Reading:

- Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs.
- Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending.
- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.

◆ Writing:

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others

→ **Mathematics:**

◆ Numbers:

- Have a deep understanding of number to 10, including the composition of each number.
- Subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5.
- Automatically recall (without reference to rhymes, counting or other aids) number bonds up to 5 (including subtraction facts) and some number bonds to 10, including double facts.

◆ Numerical Patterns:

- Verbally count beyond 20, recognising the pattern of the counting system.
- Compare quantities up to 10 in different contexts, recognising when one quantity is greater than, less than or the same as the other quantity.
- - Explore and represent patterns within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds, double facts and how quantities can be distributed equally.

→ **Understanding the world:**

◆ Past and Present:

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society.
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

◆ People, Culture and Communities:

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps.

- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and - when appropriate - maps.

◆ The Natural World:

- Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants.
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

→ **Expressive arts and design:**

◆ Creating with Materials:

- Safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.
- Share their creations, explaining the process they have used.
- Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.

◆ Being Imaginative and Expressive:

- Invent, adapt and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher.
- Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs.
- Perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and - when appropriate - try to move in time with music.

Assessment

Children who are following the EYFS curriculum are assessed as to whether they are attaining at Age Related Expectations or are working Below Age Related Expectations in the different Early Learning Goals (ELG)

EYFS practitioners should be able to inform the VSO of the level the young person is working.

We are now monitoring their progress in the different ELG.

- Green - they are making above expected progress from their starting point
- Amber - they are making expected progress from their starting point
- Red - they are making below expected progress from their starting point.

When looking at data to make predictions for KS1 SATS the key early learning goals to look at are:

- Word Reading
- Writing
- Comprehension
- Number
- Numerical patterns

Reception Baseline Assessment

The RBA will be completed within the child's first 6 weeks of Reception by their Class teacher. The assessment is a short activity-based assessment of the pupil's starting points in Language, Communication and Literacy as well as Mathematics. Pupils will use practical resources to complete tasks and teachers will record the results on a laptop, computer or PC. The assessment is roughly 50/50 focused on Maths and Literacy.

No numerical score will be shared and the data will only be used at the end of year 6 to form the school-level progress measure. Teachers will instead receive a series of short, narrative statements that tell them how their pupils performed in the assessment which can be used to inform teaching within the first term.

If possible, HVS would like school to share these statements with us during the Autumn Term PEP.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

The [SEND Code of Practice](#) puts a focus on supporting both children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (and their carers) by raising their aspirations, listening to their views, wishes and feelings, helping them to participate more fully in decisions on provision and reviews and preparing the children and young people for adulthood.

The local offer

Each local authority now must publish in one place clear, comprehensive information on the provision they expect to make for those children in their authority who have SEND, whether they have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). They are also required to publish how such support may be accessed. One of the aims of this is to make local provision fit local need by involving children, young people and those with parental responsibility in developing and reviewing the local offer.

The local offer can most usually be found on the website of the local authority. Hillingdon's local offer can be found [here](#).

Outcomes for Looked After Children with SEND

The most common reasons for Looked After Children having a special educational need are:

- Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- Moderate learning difficulties (MLD)
- Speech, language and communication difficulties (SPLD)

Looked After Children with SEND generally achieve considerably less well in terms of meeting national expectations at the end of Key Stages Two and Four. However, there have been improvements, especially for Looked After Children in primary school.

Identifying special educational needs

Robust arrangements should be in place to ensure any undiagnosed SEN are recognised and addressed when children first become looked after. In view of the existing gap in attainment between Looked After Children and all other children, carers, designated teachers and social workers should give this a very high priority. In doing so, they should consider the potential impact of insecure attachment on the child's learning.

Not all children with SEND will need an EHC Plan. For many, extra support in school for a period of time will be sufficient to enable them to attain on a par with their peers. However, some children need funding for support over and above that which schools are normally able to provide and will need such support to continue beyond statutory school

age, and so an EHCP needs to be considered. An EHCP may cover the period up to age 25.

Some types of SEND

There is a wide variety of SEND that may impact to a greater or lesser degree on learning of the child. A few of these are:

- **Moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties:** this covers a wide range of learning difficulties. For example, it includes global developmental delay where a child is having difficulties with a number of facets of learning, such as understanding language and communication. It also includes dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.
- **Socialisation and communication difficulties:** for example, a child may have difficulties in interacting with their peers, teachers, carers or other adults in their world. They may have difficulties in expressing themselves and their needs verbally and coherently or in interpreting social situations and other people's intentions. Children whose needs are more extreme may be described as being on the 'autistic spectrum'. However, it must be remembered that Looked After Children with some forms of insecure attachment may also display such characteristics.
- **Physical disabilities:** children with physical disabilities will need to be assessed to ascertain whether their disability impacts negatively on their education and what strategies can be used to lessen such an impact. It must be remembered that all learning does not take place seated in the classroom and children with even mild physical disabilities may need specialist support to access the wider life of school.
- **Social Emotional and Mental Health:** the majority of Looked After Children have suffered trauma from neglect or abuse prior to coming into care. Children who have insecure attachment are likely to behave in ways that are different from those who have experienced secure attachments. Difficulties in meta-cognition - that is, in understanding their strengths and weaknesses as a learner and controlling their thinking or difficulties in expressing themselves - may lead to children expressing their emotions and their needs through their behaviour which may, in turn, be interpreted as anti-social.

Identifying the need for an EHC Plan

While carers and teachers are often the first to identify that a child has a SEND, anyone in the life of a Looked After Child who suspects they have unmet needs should raise this at the PEP meeting.

Information on the child, such as prior and current attainment data and feedback from their teachers, will form part of the PEP and this information will show whether the child is attaining and progressing in line with their peers. A plan should be devised to assess the child's needs further and to ensure there is support available to meet them.

Such a plan is likely to include a discussion with the school's SENCO about the needs of the child and how they can best be met within the school.

Based on the SENCO's assessment of the child's needs, interventions and strategies will be put in place to support the child and monitor their impact. The SENCO may also employ specialists to assess and support the child, such as educational psychologists, occupational therapists, specialist teachers or CAMHs. The SENCO may also ask the carer to implement certain strategies and interventions outside of school.

The SENCO will keep a record of strategies and interventions employed and their impact on the learning of the child. They will have a timeframe for review and refinement of strategies and interventions that will be shared with carers and social workers.

If despite such interventions and strategies, the child does not make progress in line with their peers over the agreed timeframe, and it is agreed that the child's needs exceed those normally addressed in mainstream education provision, a request for assessment for an EHC Plan can be made, taking into account the statutory guidance contained in the SEND Code of Practice.

This request will be made to the local authority in which the child lives.

The request can be made by:

- The child's parent or person with parental responsibility, which could be the social worker
- A young person over 16 and under 25 years of age
- A person acting on behalf of the child or young person's educational institution, such as the SENCO. It is expected that this will be made with the agreement of those with parental responsibility or the young person.

The drafting of the EHC Plan

Once the request for an assessment for an EHC Plan has been made, the maximum time that may be taken to complete the process is **20 weeks** (unless there are exceptional circumstances). The code of practice specifically states that for children looked after there should be no delay.

Once the request for an assessment has been made, the local authority has **six weeks** in which to decide as to whether or not to make the assessment and to communicate that decision to those with parental responsibility or the young person. If the decision is not to undertake an assessment, the local authority will let those with parental responsibility or the young person know how to appeal and they will have a maximum of **six weeks** in which to do so.

If the local authority has decided in favour of the assessment, then it has a further **six weeks** in which to gather the information it needs.

Once the local authority has considered all reports, strategies and interventions used, it will then make the decision as to whether the child or young person needs an EHC Plan.

If it is decided the child is not in need of an EHC Plan, it will notify those with parental responsibility of their right to appeal and that they must do so within **16 weeks** of the initial request for assessment.

If it is decided the child does need an EHC Plan the authority will make a draft plan and send it to those with parental responsibility before the end of the **twelfth week** from the initial request.

Those with parental responsibility or the young person then have **15 calendar days** to provide their views on the plan, should they wish to do so. Within this time, they may also request for a particular school or educational institution to be named on it.

The local authority will then consult with that school as to whether they are in a position to meet the needs of the child as written in the draft EHC Plan. They must respond within **15 calendar days**. If they decline, other schools will be consulted and must also respond within **15 calendar days**.

It is good practice that before a school is named on an EHC Plan, it should be visited by the social worker, the carer and birth parents and, if appropriate, supported by the VSO. Once it is named, the child or young person should be taken to visit it and all support offered as per any other school transition.

Once a school has been named on the draft EHC Plan, it can be finalised.

Once the child or young person has an EHC Plan

The EHC Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis. The review meeting, which will normally be chaired by the school's SENCO, will measure the impact of the strategies and interventions used on the child's progress and may suggest amendments to the EHC Plan. It is usual practice for the SENCO to write an individual education plan for the child that sets out the strategies and interventions to be used by teachers and other professionals to meet the child's needs, as outlined in the plan.

The SENCO and the DT are required to work closely together in promoting the achievement of the Looked After Children with SEND. They will need to ensure that the implications of a child having SEND and being looked after are fully understood by

all of the child's teachers and support staff, and that appropriate teaching strategies are in place and their effectiveness monitored.

It is important to not duplicate plans for Looked After Children. It is therefore advisable for the annual review of the EHCP to be held at the same time as the PEP meeting as the latter is part of the care plan and the information it contains will feed into the Looked After Children review.

When a Looked After Child does not live in the area of the authority which is looking after them (the responsible authority), the local authority in which they live (the area authority) maintains and funds their EHCP. In maintaining the EHCP, the area authority will review it at least once per year and amend it where necessary.

When a Looked After Child with an EHCP moves from one authority to another, the authority that maintains the plan must send it to the new area authority.

Post 16

The SEND Code of Practice makes it clear that sixth form and further education schools and colleges should promote high aspirations in their students with SEND, provide careers guidance and make every effort to support them in achieving their ambitions.

Transitions can be very difficult for Looked After Children. When a Looked After Child with SEND aged 14 - 16 is considering a college course as part of their Key Stage Four offer, or a Looked After Child with SEND is considering a transition to college post-Key Stage Four, such transition should be undertaken in consultation between the child or young person's current school and the college. It is good practice for the young person to be given a tour of the college facilities, to meet prospective tutors and for their views and aspirations to be considered. The college has a duty to ensure the young person always knows who to go to for support if needed.

All annual reviews from age 13 upwards must have a focus on preparation for adulthood.

Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) is a sum of money allocated to local authorities to be used for the benefit of the educational needs of the authority's Looked After Children as described in their PEP.

The amount of PPP each local authority receives is based on an allocation of £2,530 per child for the number of statutory school age Looked After Children for at least one day, as recorded in specific data returns.

The amount of £2,530 is confirmed for financial year 2023/24 but is subject to review and change. The DfE guidance on PPP can be viewed [here](#).

This funding is allocated according to the financial year, and if unspent may not be carried forward by the VS to the next financial year. Any unspent funds are returned to the DfE.

PPP is managed by the VSH. This is based on the premise that the VSH is best placed to know how to use the funding to maximise educational outcomes for Looked After Children in their local authority.

VSH's responsibilities

In deciding on the use of PPP, the VSH will consider the following:

- Use of PPP is intended to contribute towards meeting the needs identified and recorded in the child's PEP.
- There is no requirement for the VSH to give the PPP funding to schools. They may decide to do so in part or not at all depending on the needs of the child and the school's ability to demonstrate appropriate use and impact of the funding.
- Where the funding is being passed on to schools, this may be done in one payment or in instalments.
- The funding should be used according to the child's needs; some children will be allocated more or less than others as their needs vary. **It is important to remember that although the funding is allocated on a 'per head' basis, this is not an entitlement.**
- Allocation of PPP should be linked to the content of the child's PEP, and in particular the PEP targets.
- PPP may be pooled to provide activities to benefit the local authority's Looked After Children more holistically.
- In agreement with the VS, schools who have more than one Looked After Child may choose to pool the funds they receive to provide extra support, such as employing a teaching assistant.
- There is no requirement to pass on PPP funding to non-maintained schools.
- VSHs will need to be able to demonstrate how their PPP funding is linked to raising achievement for Looked After Children by their authority.

- VSHs will need to keep an account of all PPP spending so they can report as required on its use and effectiveness. The VSH is required to report annually on the use of PPP at the very least.

While PPP cannot be used to fund posts that are the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parent, it may be used to support *'the work of a person where it can be very clearly demonstrated that their role has a significant contribution to promoting the educational achievement of Looked After Children by the authority.'*

PPP is also paid in respect of children who have ceased to be looked after by reason of adoption, special guardianship, residence or child arrangements order so long as they were looked after for one day in the preceding financial year. This funding is paid directly to schools and is not monitored by the VSH.

Hillingdon Virtual School's approach to PPP

- HVS will allocate PPP to schools on a monthly basis. Where possible, this will be the month following the PEP meeting, but this is dependent on when in the month the meeting is held. For example, if a PEP is held in early October, monies will be released in November. If the meeting was held from the mid-point of October, monies will be released in December. The VSO will be able to confirm the date of release of funds at the PEP meeting.
- Schools can request up to £2000 per academic year.
- The VSH will allocate based on the targets set at the PEP meeting.

Working with Schools

The VSH has had control over the Pupil Premium Plus Grant since April 2014. DfE Guidance states that: *"The grant allocation for Looked After Children must be managed by the Virtual School Head to be used for the benefit of the Looked After Child's educational needs as described in their Personal Education Plan (PEP)".*

The VSH has the discretion not to authorise payment if the above condition is not met, however we expect to be able to work together to build on good practices already established in Hillingdon schools.

Staff in the Virtual School can provide advice and guidance on how the Pupil Premium Plus can be spent and monitor its usage via the PEP and PPP termly evaluation.

All schools and settings are advised to have a Pupil Premium Plus policy approved by their Governing Body. This should include the role of school staff in ensuring the most effective spend of the funding, the monitoring of the expenditure and the process for evaluating the impact on progress. The Governing Body should be fully aware regarding the publication of information about Pupil Premium Plus on the school's website.

Since September 2012, schools have been required to publish information online about how they have used Pupil Premium Plus to improve the attainment and outcomes of Looked After Children. It would also be good practice to include this information in the Designated Teachers Annual Report to the Governing Body.

PPP for LAC should not pay for things which are expected and included within foster carers allowances or provided through the corporate parent pledge, eg. standard school trips, regular out of school activities and access to a laptop.

OfSTED & Pupil Premium Plus

OfSTED now has a sharper focus on the performance and progress of Pupil Premium Plus pupils in their inspections.

It is unlikely that a school will be judged 'outstanding' if its disadvantaged pupils are not making good progress. Schools that are judged not to be using their Pupil Premium Plus effectively will be expected to commission an external Pupil Premium Plus review, led by a system leader, in order to improve provision for their disadvantaged pupils.

Inspectors may ask the following questions during an inspection:

- Is the school making effective and efficient use of the pupil premium for its Looked After Children?
- Does the PEP identify the needs of the child/young person and show the interventions and support the school will provide to secure accelerated progress?
- Are the targets in the PEP sufficiently challenging and do they reflect high expectations?
- Is impact evaluated?

Inspectors may expect the following:

- A list of all Looked After Children on the school roll with an indication of the PPP spend for each.
- To be able to triangulate this by examining a random sample of personal education plans to determine if the assertion in the list can be evidenced at the level of the individual pupil?
- Data on the destination of the secondary looked after cohort post-16 as evidence of the degree to which the PPP spend has supported progression.

Post 16

This section explains some of the local authority's responsibilities towards young people who are looked after as they make the transition to adulthood, and the routes open to them beyond 16 in education, training and employment.

Pathway Plans

For all children who will be 16 by 31 August, statutory school age ends on the last Friday of the June of that year. However, young people are required to stay in some form of education, training or employment at least until they are 18.

In order to support their transition to adulthood, young people who are looked after will have a pathway plan. Assessment for this plan must be completed within **six weeks** of the young person's 16th birthday and will identify their needs as they move into adulthood and the advice, assistance and support they will need to meet these. The PEP continues until the young person is 18 and forms part of the pathway plan.

In respect of their education, the PEP and pathway plan should include:

- The young person's aspirations and career ambitions and actions and support to achieve this
- Access to careers advice
- Education objectives and support
- Arrangements to support the young person in further or higher education
- Support to enable suitably qualified young people to enter apprenticeships, make applications to university or gain necessary qualifications
- Arrangements for work experience, career mentoring or pathways into employment.

Pathway plans are kept under review and maintained until the young person reaches 21, or 25 if they are still engaged in education or training.

When they reach 18, a personal adviser (PA) is responsible for keeping in touch with the young person, providing them with advice and support, co-ordinating the provision of services, and participating in reviews of this plan. The PA should make sure the young person is being properly supported in education, training or employment in accordance with their wishes and needs. Sometimes the child's social worker will fulfil the PA role in addition to their other duties.

Educational pathways beyond 16

Educational pathways Post 16 cater for a large range of abilities and previous attainment. Some examples are:

- **A Levels:** subject-based qualifications which can lead to university, other study, training or work. Usually at least 3 subjects are studied over the course of two years.
- **BTECs:** these are designed for young people interested in a particular sector or industry but who are not yet sure what they would like to do. Students may take up to Level 3 post 16 and will be awarded with a pass, merit, distinction or distinction*. A Level 3 BTEC qualification is equivalent to one or two A Levels.
- **T Levels:** these are a two-year course which are broadly equivalent to three A-Levels. The content of the courses prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or related technical study through further or higher education. T Levels provide both practical and knowledge-based learning at either school or college and on the job experience through an industry placement of at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days)
- **NVQs:** help young people move into employment by developing abilities in the workplace. They are available at five levels and in more than 1000 subjects and are assessed by portfolio and observation. There are no specific timescales, but NVQs at levels 1-3 generally take a year to complete.
- **Access courses:** a qualification that prepares people without traditional qualifications for study at university. They are designed for young people who are 18 and over who did not achieve well in their GCSEs and do not have A Levels but wish to return to education and progress to university. They usually take a year to complete.
- **Apprenticeships and traineeships:** apprenticeships combine practical training in a job with study whilst earning a wage. Apprenticeships can take 1 - 4 years to complete depending on their level which can be
 - ◆ Intermediate- equivalent to 5 GCSEs
 - ◆ Advanced- equivalent to 2 A Levels
 - ◆ Higher- can lead to an NVQ level 4 and above, or a foundation degree
 A traineeship is a course with work experience, lasting for up to 6 months, that prepares the young person for work or an apprenticeship. Traineeships can provide help with English and Maths, if required.

16 - 19 Bursary

Young people aged 16 - 19 who are looked after by the local authority are eligible to apply to the 16 - 19 Bursary Fund for help with education-related costs. This applies if they are studying at a school or college (not university or apprenticeship) in England or are on a training course, including unpaid work experience.

The bursary can be used by the young person or their education or training provider to pay for things like clothing, books and other equipment for their course or transport and lunch on days of study or training.

The maximum payment is £1200 per year.

Accommodation

Many young people are expected to live semi-independently once they turn 16. When considering this type of accommodation, the social worker should give due consideration to the education needs of the young person. For example, consideration needs to be given to the fact that young people in semi-independent accommodation will need to live on a reduced budget and shop, cook and house clean for themselves at a time when their peers still have their parents doing this for them. This can place them at a considerable disadvantage, and it is essential that if a young person is being moved to semi-independent accommodation their school or college be made aware of this.

Young people should never be moved in the run up to or during public examinations.

Post LAC

The role of Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers in schools has extended to include promoting the educational achievement of Previously Looked After Children (PLAC), as well as Looked After Children.

Definition: the term refers to a child who has left care via one of the following routes:

- **An Adoption Order:** this is the legal order which gives adoptive parents full, permanent parental rights for their children.
- **A Special Guardianship Order:** introduced in 2005 as a way of providing children with a permanent family without severing legal ties with their birth families. Special guardians may be family members, family friends, or foster carers. The child's special guardian does have parental responsibility, however.
- **A Child Arrangements Order:** a court order regulating arrangements relating to who a child lives with or has contact with. The individual/s named on the order has parental responsibility.

The guidance acknowledges that previously Looked After Children are highly likely to have had similar experiences to Looked After Children, such as having missed extended periods of school, disrupted learning and/or special educational needs.

Emotional or trauma related experiences, as well as gaps in learning may pose significant barriers to their progress.

The role of the Designated Teacher

Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, every school governing body must designate a member of staff to have responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of "previously looked after" children. The main difference is that Previously Looked After Children are not required to have a Personal Education Plan (PEP).

Entitlement

- If a child was previously looked after in England prior to being permanently placed, they have the right to priority in school admission.
- Children who have been adopted from care are entitled to a free early education and will qualify for the Early Years Pupil Premium (£353).
- Schools are also entitled to receive the Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) for Previously Looked After Children, at a rate of £2,530 per-pupil, per-annum. The funding goes directly to schools, based on census data, to support educational progress and this can include training in key areas such as supporting children with difficulties related to attachment, trauma and emotional wellbeing.