

Promoting the Education of Looked-After and Previously Looked After Children

September 2019

The statutory guidance for local authorities 'Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children' was published in February 2018 – please see the link below.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

This guidance sets the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under 22(3A) of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children.

Local authorities are required to appoint an officer employed by the authority to make sure that its duty to promote their educational achievement is properly discharged. For the purpose of this guidance, the officer referred to above is hereby referred to as the Virtual School Head (VSH).

Looked-after and previously looked-after children start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences and, often, have special educational needs. VSHs have a key role to ensure these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential - an important part of why this role was made statutory.

For looked-after children, as part of a local authority's corporate parent role, the VSH needs to be the educational advocate that parents are for others.

For previously looked-after children, the VSH will be a source of advice and information to help their parents to advocate for them as effectively as possible. VSHs are not acting as part of the corporate parent role in these circumstances, but are there to promote the educational achievement of these children through the provision of advice and information to relevant parties.

Main points to note from this guidance are:

- VSHs have a key role to ensure these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential. This includes a specific duty to promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated.
- As part of a local authority's corporate parent role, the VSH needs to be the educational advocate that parents are for others.
- Social workers, VSHs, Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), school admission officers and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) departments should work together to ensure that, except in an emergency, appropriate education provision for a child is arranged at the same time as a care placement.
- Top priority should be given to create a culture of high educational aspirations, striving for accelerated progress and age-related attainment or better for looked-after children.

- Looked after children have access to a suitable range of high quality education placement options
- VSHs should have the resources, time training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively
- Robust procedures should be in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children the authority looks after
- VSHs should ensure the educational attainment and progress of children looked after by the local authority are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school

An up-to-date roll of looked-after children who are in school or college settings should be in place with information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress

2) The Personal Education Plan (PEP)

2.1. The PEP is an integral part of the care plan. The PEP is for young people who are of pre-school age up to 8 years. It is an evolving record of what needs to happen to enable the young people to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. It should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the young person's identified educational needs, realises aspirations and builds life chances. The school, other professionals and the young person's carers should use the PEP to support achieving those things.

The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority that looks after the child and the school. Social workers, carers, VSHs, designated teachers and other relevant professionals will need to work closely together. All of those involved in the PEP process at all stages should involve the child (according to understanding and ability) and, where appropriate, the child's parent and/or relevant family member.

2.2. PEP content

The PEP should cover the full range of education and development needs⁷ including:

- Access to a nursery or other high quality early years provision that is appropriate to the child's age (e.g. pre-school playgroups) and meets their identified developmental needs;
- On-going catch-up support for those who have fallen behind with school work (including use of effective intervention strategies);
- Provision of immediate suitable education where a child is not in school (e.g. because of temporary or permanent exclusion);
- transition support where needed, such as when a child starts attending a new school or returns to school (e.g. moving from pre-school/ early years to primary school, primary to secondary school, from secondary school to further education, or following illness or exclusion) or when a child has a plan for permanence (e.g. placed for adoption) and may change schools as part of that plan;
- school attendance and, where appropriate, behaviour support; and
- Support needed to help the child realise their short and long-term academic achievements and aspirations. This includes:

- support to achieve expected levels of progress for the relevant national curriculum key stage, and to complete an appropriate range of approved qualifications;
- Careers advice and guidance and financial information about further and higher education, training and employment. Discussions about longer term goals should start early and, ideally, well before Year 9 (age 13-14) at school. High aspirations are crucial to successful planning for the future. They should focus on the child or young person's strengths and capabilities and the outcomes they want to achieve; and out-of-school hours learning activities, study support and leisure interests.

7 Schedule 1 Paragraph 2 of the Care planning, placement and case review (England) regulations 2010 sets out the high-level components required in a PEP. This guidance builds on this.

2.3. Initiating, developing and reviewing the PEP

Wherever the child is placed, their social worker, supported by the authority's VSH, should take the lead to:

- initiate a PEP even where a looked-after child is without a school place. This includes meeting with appropriate education providers and the carer;
- ensure that where a child is placed in an emergency, the PEP is initiated within 10 working days of their becoming looked-after, wherever they are placed;
- ensure, with the support of others, including the VSH, that the PEP contains a summary of the child's current attainment and progress (including any additional needs such as SEN and mental health needs);
- ensure the PEP is effective and is available for the first statutory review meeting of the care plan; and
- ensure the PEP gives details of who will take the plan forward and specifies timescales for action and review.

2.4 Once requesting the initiation of a PEP, the Virtual School will need to work with the child's social worker and relevant designated teacher to facilitate its completion and agree how pupil premium plus (PP+) can most effectively be used to facilitate the child's educational attainment and progress.

2.5 VSHs should have a quality assurance role in relation to PEPs. To be effective and high quality, a PEP should:

- be a 'living', evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's experience, progress and achievement (academic and otherwise), and inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child's wider care plan;
- be linked to, but not duplicate or conflict with, information in any other plans held by the child's education setting or responsible authority – e.g. their care plan or Education, Health and Care Plan; identify developmental (including any related to attachment and past trauma) and educational needs (short and longer term) in relation to skills, knowledge, subject areas and experiences; say what will happen or is already happening to identify and support any mental health needs, including detailing any support that is required or ongoing from mental health specialist support services;
- include SMART8 short-term targets, including progress monitoring of each of the areas identified against development and educational needs;

- include SMART longer-term plans for educational targets and aspirations. These should, according to age and understanding, typically focus on: public examinations, further and higher education, managing money and savings, work experience and career plans and aspirations;
- identify actions, with time scales, for specific individuals intended to support the achievement of agreed targets and use of any additional resources (e.g. the pupil premium plus) specifically designated to support the attainment of looked-after children;
- include behaviour management strategies agreed between the VSH and school to help ensure challenging behaviour is managed in the most effective way for that child; and
- Highlight access to effective intervention strategies and how this will make/has made a difference to achievement levels.

2.6 Arrangements for the flow of information to develop, review and update the PEP should be in place to ensure the VSH, designated teacher, carer and, where appropriate, child and parent have a copy of the latest version of the document.

2.7 The VSH and social worker should work together to ensure that monitoring arrangements are in place so that actions and activities recorded in the PEP are implemented without delay. This involves working in a joined-up way with the child's school (usually through the designated teacher) and other relevant people and agencies (e.g. educational psychologists or the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service) where necessary.

2.8 VSHs should make arrangements for PEPs to be reviewed each school term. This should include mapping how the pupil premium and any other additional funding has been used to support the targets set in the PEP. This is to ensure that the story of the child's educational progress is current and continues to meet the child's educational needs. It is also to ensure that information from the PEP is available to feed into the next statutory review of the wider care plan. The nature of these arrangements and who to involve are for the VSH to decide in partnership with others.

8 SMART means **specific**, significant, stretching, **measurable**, meaningful, motivational, agreed, **achievable**, action-orientated, realistic, **relevant**, result-orientated, **time bound**.

2.9 The designated teacher role in the PEP

The designated teacher leads on how the PEP is developed and used in school to make sure the child's progress towards education targets is monitored.

2.10 The social worker's role in supporting the PEP

The social worker with responsibility for the child should:

- not take significant decisions about a looked-after child's education without reviewing the PEP in consultation with the child, the child's school, carer, VSH, IRO and, where appropriate, their parent(s);
- alert the IRO to any significant changes to the child's PEP such as the breakdown or change of an education placement so that the IRO can decide whether a review of the care plan is required;
- work with the child's school or other education setting between the statutory reviews of their care plan (involving the VSH if necessary) to ensure that up-to-date PEP information is fed into those reviews, which are chaired by the child's IRO;

- ensure that all relevant information about the child's educational progress and support needs is up-to-date and evidenced before the statutory review meeting; and
- Act on any changes required to meet the child's education needs identified by the IRO.

2.11 The PEP for 16-18 year olds

- The PEP for 16-18 years olds is still a statutory duty to be carried out by the social worker care leavers attending educational provisions. This form of the PEP is in electronic or paper format and completed copies must be returned to the Virtual School where they will be monitored and quality assured.

2.11 The IRO's role in supporting the PEP

IROs should ensure that the PEP's effectiveness is scrutinised in sufficient detail in order to feed in to the statutory review and at other times if necessary. If a child also has an Education and Health Care (EHC) plan, where possible, the IRO should ensure review of the care plan, including the PEP, is appropriately linked with the statutory review of the EHC plan. The VSH should work with the IRO and child's social worker to help enable this.

2.12 The IRO should raise any unresolved concerns about a child's PEP or education provision with social workers and the VSH.

4.2 Pupil premium plus (PP+) for looked-after children

4.21 Looked-after children are one of the groups of pupils that attract PP+ funding. This is additional funding provided to help improve the attainment of looked-after children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers. Local authorities receive a PP+ grant allocation based on the number of children looked after for at least one day and aged 4 to 15 at 31 August, as recorded in the latest looked-after children data return.

4.22 SHs, working with education settings, should implement PP+ arrangements for all looked-after children, in need of support for whom the authority is responsible, in accordance with the latest conditions of grant published by the department and any supplementary departmental advice it issues. VSHs have considerable flexibility in the use of PP+ funding in order to maximise its impact for individual looked-after children as well as the whole looked-after cohort. All VSHs should publish a clear policy on their use of PP+, including how they decide the level and use of top-sliced funding¹⁰.

4.23 Arrangements for PP+ should be as un-bureaucratic as possible, whilst providing for strong transparency and accountability. Ofsted's framework for Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services requires inspectors to ask for the Virtual School Annual Report. The Virtual School Annual Report should include:

- Details of how the VSH has managed the PP+ and Early Years Pupil Premium for looked-after children; and
- evidence of how the VSH's spending of the premium has supported the achievement of the children looked-after by their local authority, including clearly setting out how top sliced funding has supported this.

4.24 Further information is available on virtual-school-heads-responsibilities on pupil premium.

4.25 The PP+ can be used to facilitate a wide range of educational support for looked-after children. VSH should seek the input of the school's designated teacher and carers when deciding on how to use PP+ to support a child. It is important that interventions supported by pupil premium should be evidence-based and in the best interests of the child.

4.26 PP+ funding for previously looked after children is allocated directly to and managed by their school.

4.27 Both VSH and schools manage their PP+ allocation for the benefit of their cohort of looked after or previously looked after children and according to children's needs. It is **is not a personal budget for individual children; however, both VSHs and schools may choose to allocate an amount of funding to an individual to support their needs.**

4.28 Below is a summary of positive characteristics of interventions which can be helpful when considering whether an intervention might be an effective use of PP+ to support a looked-after child. VSH and designated teachers may also find it helpful to refer to the *Education Endowment Fund Tool Kit*.

4.29 Getting the most from Pupil Premium Plus

Approaches that are:

- Individually tailored to the needs and strengths of each pupil
- Consistent (based on agreed core principles and components) but also flexible and responsive
- Based on evidence of what works
- Focussed on clear short-term goals which give opportunities for pupils to experience success
- Include regular, high quality feedback from teaching staff
- Engage parents/carers in the agreement and evaluation of arrangements for education support (e.g. via the PEP)
- Supporting pupil transition (e.g. primary-secondary/KS3-4)
- Raising aspirations through access to high-quality educational experiences
- Promote the young person's awareness and understanding of their own thought process (metacognition) and help to develop problem-solving strategies

Which emphasise:

- Relationship-building, both with appropriate adults and with peers
- An emotionally-intelligent approach to the setting of clear behaviour boundaries
- Increasing pupil's understanding of their own emotions and identity
- Positive reinforcement
- Building self-esteem
- Relevance to the learner: relate to pupil's interests where possible; make it matter to them
- A joined-up approach involving social worker/carer/VSH and other relevant professionals
- Strong and visionary leadership on the part of both of the pupil's head teachers
- A child centred approach to assessment for learning

This table was produced by Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head for City of Wolverhampton Council

4.30 Case Study12

A boy in Year 1 who had lots of potential but his behaviours were stopping him from learning. This was his third school in one year due to placement moves. He had only been in school part-time and needed constant supervision due to absconding and dangerous behaviour. His primary school was concerned that they could not meet his needs, especially as there seemed to be no triggers for his behaviour and he was very erratic.

The solution: –

Partnership working – school, social worker, foster carers, Virtual School Co-ordinator and Virtual School Mentor, behaviour support, district inclusion officer, educational psychologist. The team had regular high quality personal education planning meetings where advice and guidance was thoroughly explored and robustly implemented. This team gave a strong sense that everyone was committed to the young person and was prepared to always go the extra mile to support him.

Voice of the child – the young person was involved in designing his own safe space and was able to use it when he felt overwhelmed and anxious. Over time he used it less and less and eventually he volunteered for it to be used as the space for a new school mascot instead.

How was the pupil premium used – 1 to 1 teaching assistant support; individual and whole school attachment and trauma training and letterbox in the home.

Aspiration - To support the pupil to regulate his behaviour so that he could increase his time in school and make the progress in attainment that he was capable of achieving.

Outcome - He is now in school full-time and permanent exclusion has been avoided. He is a popular member of the class and is making good relationships. He is starting to fill in the gaps in his education and is engaging in learning at home, something that he would not have done previously. He is now very much a part of his new foster family and they have confidence to go out and experience new things together.

With thanks to Staffordshire virtual school, this case study is based on a nomination to the Staffordshire virtual school pupil premium plus awards 2017.

15) Mental health

15.1 Looked-after children and previously looked-after children are more likely than their peers to experience the challenge of social, emotional and mental health issues. *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health: a Green Paper*, we outline plans to encourage schools to appoint a Designated Senior Lead (DSL) for mental health. Neither DSL nor VSH are expected to be mental health experts; however, they have an important role in sign-posting designated teachers to appropriate training and specialist services. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills, forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties, foetal alcohol syndrome and coping with transitions and change. This can impact on their behaviour and education. It is key that VSHs and designated teachers have awareness, training and skills regarding these children's needs and how to support them, particularly in relation to behaviour management and mental health. Many schools will have an officer responsible for making links with mental health services, and schools have been encouraged to appoint a Designated Senior Lead (DSL) for mental health.

Social, emotional and mental health is one of the four broad areas of children's SEN identified in Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0 – 25 years (see Paragraph 5.32).

The mental processes enabling us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. (Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child)

As part of this the VSH where possible/applicable in conjunction with an officer responsible for making links with mental health services, should work with designated teachers to:

- ensure that schools are able to identify signs of potential mental health issues and know how to access further assessment and support where necessary; and
- ensure that schools understand the impact that issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties and other mental health issues can have on looked-after and previously looked-after children, and are "attachment aware"

15.2 VSHs, where possible/applicable with the support of an officer responsible for making links with mental health services, should also consider how to work effectively in partnership with health agencies to support wellbeing and, in turn, educational attainment. This could be through use of an educational psychologist, or by exploiting any single points of contact that have been established within the local children and young people's mental health service.

15.3 In Luton there is a Specialist Clinician for Mental Health who is part of the Virtual School team. They work in partnership with all education and health agencies to ensure that looked after children receive support for their emotional health and well-being and are able to attend school and achieve.

15.4 It is important to have a means of regularly measuring the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by looked-after and previously looked-after children. For looked-after children, currently, this is often done through the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a clinically validated brief behavioural screening questionnaire for use with 4-17 year-olds or 2-4 year-olds. The SDQ can help social workers and other professionals form a view about a looked-after child's emotional wellbeing. It exists in three versions: for parents or carers, teachers and a self-evaluation for children aged 11-17.

15.5 The SDQ can help social workers and other professionals form a view about the emotional wellbeing of a looked-after child. Looked-after children may benefit from the triangulation of the scores from the carer's SDQ with those of their teacher and, if s/he is aged 11 to 17, the self-evaluation to better inform the child's health assessment *and* PEP. To help enable this, where an SDQ for a child gives cause for concern or is "border line", VSHs should work with schools to encourage them to complete their element of the SDQ.

15.5 VSH and schools may also wish to use other screening tools. Pages 16 to 18 of the "*Improving mental health support for our children and young people*" document linked below include examples of this.

15.6 For previously looked-after children, VSHs should signpost schools to appropriate tools to help them measure this group's emotional and behavioural difficulties.

15.7 VSH and designated teachers may find it helpful to refer to the following documents with respect to supporting looked after and previously looked after children's mental health:

- *Mental health and behaviour in schools*
- *Promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children*
- *Improving mental health support for our children and young people*
- *Children's attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care*
- *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health: a Green Paper*

i.e. ensuring that the school understands attachment theory and the impact of attachment disorders on a child's emotional development and learning, and adopts a whole school approach to identifying and supporting pupils with attachment difficulties. This includes upskilling of staff and use of appropriate support resources, such as those developed by Bath Spa University (see Useful resources and external organisations) and Mental-health-services-and-schools-link-pilot-evaluation

What might supporting looked-after children's mental health look like?

15.8 Case study 1

The therapeutic offer for children in care in North Tyneside has been enhanced using the PP+. This includes:-

- training staff in the virtual school to deliver Drawing and Talking therapies;
- educational Psychologists offering Theraplay and Video Interaction Guidance to both schools and for carers / adopters; and
- funding a counsellor through PP+ who addresses needs identified through triangulation of the SDQs, which are completed by carers, teachers and young people.

Case study 2

The Virtual School providing attachment and trauma training, either commissioned from external providers or delivered in house by staff from the virtual school or educational psychology service.

This is available on a termly basis from the Luton Virtual School and is delivered at the Leagrave Centre. Please contact:

theschoolsupportservices@luton.gov.uk, or Matthew Sims matthew.sims@luton.gov.uk

9. Celebrating a Child's Achievements

Children's educational (and other) achievements should be acknowledged at one or more of the following times; at Looked After Reviews; in the PEP, at school-based reports; and after exams.

Recording a Child's Achievements

A Looked After Child's educational attainments at Key Stages 1-3, GCSE, A level and GNVQ should be recorded, including on the electronic record and in the PEP.

The Luton Virtual School, supported by the Social Care teams, organise the annual Barney Wild Awards for Looked After Children (Key Stages 1-3) which is held in November. The Bright Star Awards for young people and care leavers from 14 years and older are held in June.