



# **Dorset Virtual School**

## **Supporting Children who are Previously Looked After with their Education**

### **Parent Handbook**

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## **Dorset's Vision for Children who are Previously Looked After**

We recognise that our children who are previously looked after continue to need support due to their early childhood experiences and that they may continue to face challenges as they begin their journeys with their new families. Therefore, our aims for these young people are for them to:

- continue to thrive with their new parents/guardians.
- ensure they are happy, healthy and feel safe with their permanent family and able to access the support they need.
- meet their full educational potential and be provided with opportunities to progress and succeed.

We have created this handbook to provide parents and carers with a guide on how to promote children who are previously looked after's education and to identify and support the challenges that they may face.

## **Who are Children who are Previously Looked After?**

Children who are previously looked after are children and young people who, stated in the Children Act 1989, have been looked after by a local authority. These children are those who are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because they are the subject of:

- An Adoption
- Special Guardianship
- Child Arrangement Order; or
- They were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales.



## **Aspire Adoption Services**

Aspire Adoption is a Regional Adoption Agency, established in July 2017, with delegated responsibility for most of the adoption functions for Dorset Council in partnership with Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP).

We know that many children placed through Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders have experienced traumatic and complicated starts to their life, and families benefit from support at times during their child's journey into adulthood.

Aspire Adoption offers a tiered approach to support services, to reflect the needs of the child and family, and delivered in partnership with adopters and special guardians. All our adopters and special guardians are entitled to access our core services. This includes monthly support groups, access to workshops and materials available online, including therapeutic parenting approaches for younger children and teenagers, life story work, grief and loss, quarterly newsletters, access to training courses; and we also provide access to a duty worker who can offer support and guidance.

Families are entitled to a Support Needs Assessment which can help to identify appropriate support. This could include a specific therapeutic provision or a piece of targeted work with a child or young person.

Where an assessment indicates that a therapeutic intervention is required, in consultation with the family a provider can be identified. Aspire are able to make an application for funding through the Adoption Support Fund.

Within Aspire there are a small team of Clinical Psychologists who can advise and support the adoption and special guardianship support team. If deemed appropriate a referral can be made for a consultation with adult family members.

**Aspire recognise that parenting children through adoption and special guardianship arrangements can be complex and we are committed to offering support to families when they need us.**

## **Adopted Children and Young People and their Parents' Voice**

### **Adopted children and Young People**

79% of adopted children and young people agree with the statement: *"I feel confused and worried at school"*.<sup>1</sup>

*"Many of us struggle with issues of self-worth, shame, control and identity."*

*"We want to belong, to connect and to feel connected."*

*"Adoption is hard."*

*"I need to be taught that I have special needs arising from adoption loss, of which I need not be ashamed."*

*"My unresolved grief may surface in anger toward you."*

*"I'm afraid you will abandon me!"*

### **Parents and Guardians**

*"It would be great if we're not the only voice championing our child, we need someone else to help them fly the flag."*

*"Children are not fixed because they are adopted."*

*"Nurture, nurture, nurture. Be that trusting extra adult, to bridge the gap between home and school."*

*"All behaviour is communication. My child does not have the emotional literacy to tell you how they feel."*

*"Friendships and play are vital, but can be fraught with worries. Please support my child with modelling behaviours, involving and including them."*

*"Be curious, imagine what a day in my child's life, full of anxieties must be like for them. Remember, they come from a base of shame. Time in always- not time out."*

*"Transitions are difficult, they can be as small as teeth brushing routine-signalling the end of the day. Plan, prepare, support and scaffold all transitions, no matter how small they may seem to you."*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

*“When school do not see the behaviours my child experiences at home, remember their emotional jug is always full. The stress of containing it in school, is destructive and exhausting for my child and family.”*

*“My child is resilient. They have experienced traumas and loss that would floor an adult. Approach them always with empathy, trust and care.”*

*“Celebrate the everyday-my child may find praise difficult- explore with them what makes them happy and build on it.”*

*“You cannot build on rocky foundations. Develop a trusting and secure relationship with my child first. They will struggle to learn if unhappy and insecure and please be creative in finding ways to support them in class, so they do not feel inadequate in front of their peers.”*

*“My child is amazing- as guardians we do know them best. Please listen when we tell you of our concerns and support us as a family, to help them achieve their maximum potential. Adverse childhood experiences can have a lifetime’s impact on a child’s emotional health. Getting the balance right between home and school early on is vital, to reduce that risk.”*

45% of parents feel that their child’s teachers had a good understanding of the needs of care-experienced children.<sup>2</sup>

75% of parents were experiencing challenges in 2020<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Adoption Barometer 2021 – Adoption UK

<sup>3</sup> The Adoption Barometer 2021 – Adoption UK

## Virtual School's Duty to Children who are Previously Looked After

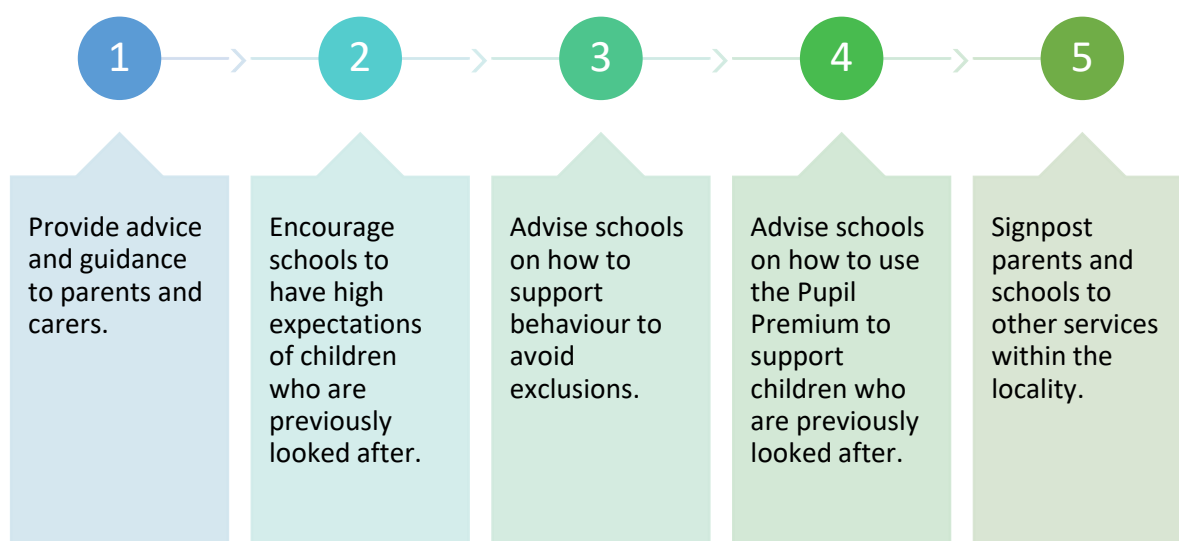
The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places a statutory duty on the local authorities via Virtual Schools:

- To promote the educational achievement of children who are previously looked after through the provision of information and advice to those with parental responsibility, educators (Designated Teachers) and Early Years Providers.
- This duty starts from when children who are previously looked after begin early free education (term after second birthday) until they reach the end of compulsory education (18).
- The duty relates to children who are previously looked after who are educated within the Local Authority regardless of where they were born or live.

## How can Dorset Virtual School help Children who are Previously Looked After?

- Our duty is to respond to requests for advice and support from parents and educational provisions.
- We are no longer the corporate parent for these children and are not expected to monitor their progress or held to account for their educational attainment.

## What support can Virtual School offer?





Advice, information and support offered by Dorset Virtual School will vary depending on parent's/guardian's concerns and will be signposted to the relevant service such as:

- Admissions – will be signposted to the Admissions team.
- Attendance – will be signposted to the Inclusion team.
- Exclusions – will be signposted to the Inclusion team.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – will be signposted to the school SEND team and advice will be given to talk about the concern at the school's termly Joint Planning Meeting. These meetings are attended by the School SEND Team and a Specialist Teacher and Educational Psychologist from Dorset County Council.
- Pupil Premium – we can offer advice on Pupil Premium but this will be referred back to the school as they are responsible for this.
- Concerns about the school – this will be signposted to the Educational Challenge Lead.
- Queries about role of Designated Teachers – we can provide links to statutory guidance.
- Training Needs – we can make suggestions and possibly offer training in certain areas. Dorset Virtual School work in collaboration with Aspire Adoption Services and offer training and workshops. Please contact your Virtual School Lead/Aspire for further information.
- Adoption or Special Guardianship queries – we will signpost you to Aspire adoption service for support
- Family problems – we will signpost you to the Early Help Hub.
- Choosing a school – we will be able to give advice on schools and signpost you to Designated Teachers.

This list is not exhaustive and if you need some help from Virtual School then please contact Dorset Virtual School on [dorsetplac@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:dorsetplac@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

## Designated Teachers

The children and Social Work Act 2017 also places a duty on the governing body of a child's school to promote the educational achievement of children who are previously looked after by:

- Appointing a designated teacher for children who are previously looked after who will have the responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of them.
- Ensuring the designated teacher undertakes appropriate training and has regard to guidance issued by the secretary of state.
- Ensuring the designated teacher shares the knowledge and understanding of children needs to the staff to ensure that they deploy strategies and create an environment which effectively support the child.
- Ensuring the designated teacher plays a key part in decisions about how Pupil Premium is spent.

The full role of designated teachers is published in the following document: [The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612222/the-designated-teacher-for-looked-after-and-previously-looked-after-children.pdf)

Other guidance which is important for all schools is the main safeguarding document Keeping Children Safe in Education which states:

*189. A previously looked after child potentially remains vulnerable and all staff should have the skills, knowledge and understanding to keep previously looked after children safe. When dealing with looked after children and previously looked after children, it is important that all agencies work together and prompt action is taken when necessary to safeguard these children, who are a particularly vulnerable group.<sup>4</sup>*

[Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612222/the-designated-teacher-for-looked-after-and-previously-looked-after-children.pdf)

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<sup>4</sup> Keeping Children Safe in Education – Gov UK

## **Supporting Children who are Previously Looked After who have Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND)**

A number of children who have been previously looked after have special educational needs or a disability.

### **Local offer**

Dorset Council's Local Offer for children and young people from 0 to 25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provides information, advice and support for children and their families. [Dorset's Local Offer - Dorset Council](#)

### **School Offer**

Every school must have a copy of their SEND policy on their website, which will outline the support the school will provide to those children with SEND.

### **How do schools support children with SEND?**

Special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) support is a category of support for pupils with SEND. These children will receive special educational provision.

The school will:

- have identified that they have a SEND
- note this in their records
- tell parents or carers that their child will now receive SEND support
- check that they're putting the right support in place for these children.

To do this the school uses the Dorset graduated approach.

### **The graduated approach**

The graduated approach is a 4 stage cycle that helps the school learn more about:

- the pupil
- what helps them make good progress

The graduated approach has 4 parts:

**Assess** - The school assesses the child's needs. They listen to the views of the child and their parents or carers. They also ask for advice from [other specialist support services](#) if needed.

**Plan** - The teacher and [special educational needs coordinator \(SENCo\)](#) plan how to support the child. They consider what outcomes they want to achieve. They involve the child and their parents or carers and agree a review date.

**Do** - The SENCo helps the class teacher support the child. They think about the child's strengths and weaknesses and how best to help them. The teacher also works with the teaching assistants and specialist staff involved. They assess how helpful the support is.

**Review** - Everyone discusses how effective the support has been. The school adapts the support depending on the child's progress. The child's views and those of their parents or carers are an important part of the review process.

If the child isn't making good progress the school should involve a specialist. Schools involve parents or carers in decisions to involve specialists.

Schools should meet with the parents or carers of children with SEN support at least 3 times a year.

## **Help for your child through SEND support**

SEND support can take many forms; it will be different for each child to suit their needs.

SEND support could include:

- a special learning programme for your child
- extra help from a teacher or teaching assistant
- working with your child in a small group
- helping your child take part in class activities
- encouraging your child to ask for help
- helping other children work or play with your child

The school will tell you as parents or carers what support they're developing for your child.

This might be through:

- a provision map
- an SEN Support Plan
- something similar to these

## **School funding for SEND support**

All mainstream schools have funding to support pupils with SEND. This is called the notional SEN budget.

Schools can decide how to use their notional SEN budget to support pupils with SEND.

## **Progress with SEND support**

Schools should adapt the support given to a pupil depending on how effective it's been. If a pupil doesn't make progress with SEND support, the school and parents may consider making a request for a needs assessment for a [needs assessment for an EHC plan](#).

## **SEND support in early years settings and Further Education (FE)**

SEND support is available for [early years settings](#) and [FE](#) but the amount of support may differ.

## **SEND support for medical conditions or disabilities**

Find information about support for children or young people with:

- [medical conditions](#)
- [disabilities](#)

If you have any concerns about your child please do discuss these with your school SEN team.

## **Pupil Premium**

Pupil premium was introduced in 2014 for children who are previously looked after because it was recognised that they often require extra support due to their early life experiences. This funding is available for children of compulsory school age until year 11 in State Schools and the current amount can be found on [Pupil premium: overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-overview). This Pupil Premium process is different to when your child was a child in care as Virtual School were responsible for the allocation of this money, however Pupil Premium for children who are previously looked after comes directly from the Local Authority. Therefore, it is essential to declare your child's eligibility so that the school can receive the funding. The school does this by recording the information on the school Census in October of each year. It is essential that the school ensures that a new Unique Pupil Number has been allocated to the child to break the link between pre-adoption and post-adoption record. Please see page 13 of the following document for full guidance. [Department for Education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

This money is not ringfenced for the individual child and the school can pool the money together to gain maximum effect, for example by running an intervention to support a group of children. However, schools do have to publish a strategy on how they spend this money and what impact it has had on their children. Parents can speak to the school about how the pp is used to benefit their child.

Parents often believe children must be eligible for free school meals to be eligible for Pupil Premium, however there is no relationship between them.

The Gov UK website clearly outlines how schools should spend Pupil Premium: [Pupil premium: effective use and accountability - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-effective-use-and-accountability)

## **Early Years Pupil Premium**

Your child's early years education provider can claim for early years Pupil Premium to help with your child's education when they are 3 and 4 years old. The current amount can be found on [Get extra funding for your early years provider - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/get-extra-funding-for-your-early-years-provider). This will be paid directly to the provider and should be used to fund additional support, training, or resources to help improve your child's outcomes.

## **Adoption Support Fund**

This fund is available for adoptive parents and eligible special guardians if specific therapeutic interventions are identified following a needs assessment. Please click the link below for further information and to check your eligibility. [Adoption support fund \(ASF\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/adoption-support-fund)

## **School Provisions**

### **Early Years**

#### **Universal Entitlement**

All children aged three and four are eligible for up to 15 hours a week of free early education for up to 38 weeks of the academic year.

#### **Extended Entitlement**

Children who have working parents who earn the equivalent of the National Minimum wage for 16 hours per week may be eligible for 30 hours a week of free early education for up to 38 weeks of the academic year. Please see the following link to check eligibility: [30 hours free childcare - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/free-childcare)

#### **Free education and childcare for 2-year olds**

A two-year-old is eligible for 15 hours a week of childcare for up to 38 weeks of the academic year if they have left care under an Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order, or a Child Arrangements Order. Please click the following link for further information and to apply for this funding: [15 hours funded childcare for 2 year olds - Dorset Council](#)

### **Admissions**

The School Admissions Code in England gives the highest priority for school places to specific children which includes Previously Looked After Children. Therefore, in a normal admission round they will be allocated places before other children at their chosen school. If you are applying for a place outside the normal admissions round, then your child will be offered a place if spaces are available. If the classes are full then your child will be placed at the top of the waiting list. Schools who are full are allowed to exceed their class number for children who are previously looked after, however they are not required to do this. If refusing a place they will have to prove to the Local Authority that accepting an additional child would prejudice the efficient education or use of resources in the school.

[School admissions: Admission criteria - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/school-admissions-admission-criteria)

### **How do I choose the right school for my child?**

It is important to choose a school that will be able to support your child's needs.

The Gov UK website allows you to compare schools in your local area and it is advisable to read the latest Ofsted report to gain some understanding on how the school can support your child. Virtual School staff are also available to offer advice.

It is also advisable to meet with the school's designated teacher and ask the following questions:

- Does the school have a good record of support children who are previously looked after?
- Have staff received training on trauma, loss, and attachment? What impact has this training had?
- Is a key person provided to those children with attachment needs?
- Is there a safe place my child can go to if they need to regulate their emotions?
- What is the behaviour and exclusion policy? How is disruptive behaviour managed and supported?
- What support is in place for those children who find unstructured activities difficult? Are changes to timetable communicated with child?
- Will my child's background information be shared with all staff?
- How does the school communicate with parents?
- How is the Pupil Premium used?
- What support is in place for SEMH?
- How are transitions supported?

## Exclusions

Schools should make every effort to avoid excluding children in care and children are previously looked after. Dorset Virtual School are available to offer support and guidance to avoid exclusions. An exclusion will either be Fixed Term or Permanent. You will be informed of any exclusion with the reason and the length of time. If the exclusion is fixed-term you will be required to attend a Reintegration Meeting when your child returns to school to ensure all support is put in place to prevent any further exclusions. **For more information please click the following link: [School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/school-suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions)** *"The decision to exclude a pupil must be lawful, reasonable and fair. Schools have a statutory duty not to discriminate against pupils on the basis of protected characteristics, such as disability or race. Schools should give particular consideration to the fair treatment of pupils from groups who are vulnerable to exclusion."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/consultations/exclusion-from-maintained-schools-academies-and-pupil-referral-units-in-england)



## Attachment<sup>6</sup>

To understand some of the behaviours displayed by children who have experienced loss and trauma, it is essential to develop a knowledge of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1951).<sup>7</sup>

Bowlby's theory of attachment suggests that babies come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachment with others. He maintained that babies are predisposed to seek closeness to their parents in times of need, for shelter, warmth, and protection and that this attachment had a survival value. Where children develop this attuned relationship with their parent, this then acts as a "secure base" from which the child can explore the world, safe in the knowledge that their needs will be met and that they are loved and wanted. The attachment figure is attuned to the child and helps the growing infant to make sense of their emotions and of the world around them. In turn, this secure attachment allows children to respond positively to other children, have good social skills, a positive sense of self and resilience to cope with life's setback and disappointments.

Children who have not experienced the consistent care of an attuned parent in their early years may experience difficulties later in life. For these children, the everyday interaction with school and home can be difficult, and they may act out these difficulties in a variety of ways.

Everyday, children with attachment needs may be dealing with thoughts and feelings of:

- Loss
- Control
- Rage
- Identity
- Pleasing others
- Rejection or abandonment
- Helplessness

We now have a greater understanding of how the pre birth experiences can impact on brain development and how alcohol, drugs, tobacco and domestic violence can be risk factors for the health of the developing child.

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<sup>6</sup> Aspire – supporting adopted and permanently placed children in schools

<sup>7</sup> Bowlby, J (1951). *Maternal Care and Mental Health*. Geneva: World Health Organisation

## **How a child might feel and behave**

### **Remember Every behaviour is a communication**

A child who has experienced inconsistency, neglect or loss of their main caregiver may suffer acute physical and emotional distress that is sometimes termed “traumatic injury”. This distress may cause a child to behave differently to other children.

Developmental trauma or attachment difficulties can impact on all aspects of development; physical, physiological, emotional, social, and cognitive.

Research suggests that around three quarters of all adopted children suffered neglect or abuse before living with their permanent families. This means that adopted children will often have a brain that is wired for “survival” and their survival strategies will be much more highly developed, in preference to normal development.

Therefore, children who are adopted often have disrupted development, and/or areas of poor development. For example, adopted children may struggle with peer relations and social situations, as they have had to learn to fight to survive; good social skills are not just an adaptive priority in times of threat.

For these children, their survival instinct is so strong that this mode will often override other emotions. Thus, staying calm or thinking clearly is not easily achieved by adopted children without adult support. Children in survival mode are unlikely to have a conscious understanding of their behaviour in these situations. However, attuned adults can spot when they are in survival mode as they will not be functioning in line with their chronological age. For example, the adopted child may act as if they are much younger (e.g. throwing a tantrum or wanting an adult to do something for them they are able to do) or act as if they are more mature than their age e.g. rejecting adult assistance. Being in survival mode can last for long periods of time or may be ever present for some adopted children.

Children who have suffered these early traumas will need adults around them to support and teach them how to manage their overwhelming feelings, grounding skills is a way to help the child return to the present moment, rather than being stuck in perpetual survival mode.

Grounding skills can support a child to be more in the moment rather than being caught up in the memories of traumatic experiences.

## Challenges for Children who are Previously Looked After<sup>8</sup>

Every child is shaped by their experiences and children who have been previously looked after may have suffered considerable trauma. Even when a placement is secure, these young people are still likely to struggle with the challenges below:

- They have the disadvantage of their pre-life experiences. These can have a significant and lasting impact on their development which can sometimes make a school struggle.
- They often have Special Educational Needs and find processing sensory information difficult.
- They may experience grief, separation, and loss for their birth family, foster family, previous friends, school and even neighbourhood.
- They have significant self-esteem and identity issues.
- They experience attachment and mental health issues.
- Post Adoption issues such as managing difficult feelings and establishing relationships with their new family.
- Difficulty with contact with their birth family.
- Feelings of abandonment leading to detachment, clinginess, separation anxiety, fear of illness and difficulties with transitions.
- There can be significant barriers to learning. Statistics show that children who are previously looked after are achieving lower attainment levels than their peers.
- They find it difficult to form trusting relationships and to build positive friendships.
- They find coping with transitions and change difficult.

These challenges can lead to the following behaviours:

- Poor concentration
- Disruptive behaviour including lying, stealing, fighting, or hurting other children
- Perfectionism
- Ignoring instructions

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<sup>8</sup> <https://consideringadoption.com/>

- Refusing to accept help
- Explosions around certain work due to fear of failure
- Disrespect to teachers
- Running away or hiding
- Being the class comedian
- Emotional dysregulation
- Sudden rages like tantrums
- Defiance
- Being overly compliant or complicit
- Terrified of rejection so desperate to please
- Anxiety
- Controlling behaviour

## Children who are Previously Looked After Educational Statistics<sup>9</sup>

### Adopted children are:-

- ❖ 5 times more likely to be temporarily excluded from school.
- ❖ 16 times more likely to be temporarily excluded during the first three years of primary school.
- ❖ 20 times more likely to be permanent excluded from school.
- ❖ 26% of children who are previously looked after achieve 5 GCSE grades including maths and English in 2016 compared to 53% of all children and 14% of children in care. The Adoption UK report From Both Sides (February 2022) shared *that only 19% of adopted students felt their final examination results were a fair reflection of their abilities.*
- ❖ 4 out of 5 need support which is mainly SEMH rather than academic. The Adoption UK report From Both Sides (February 2022) reported that *almost 80% of adopted children have shared that they routinely feel confused and worried at school and two thirds of those at secondary school report being teased or bullied because of being adopted.*
- ❖ 61% of parents are worried that their child will leave school with few or no qualifications. The Adoption UK report From Both Sides (February 2022) reported *that young people leaving school are twice as likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to their peers.*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

- ❖ 32% of adopted children need a little more support than their peers and 50% need much more support than their peers.

Adoption UK's Adoption Barometer 2022 Report states that 58% of adoptive parents in England are parenting one or more adopted children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 60% are parenting one or more children with SEN support in school.

## **How can schools support Children who are Previously Looked After?**

The challenges that children who are previously looked after face can affect all elements of a child's school life, academically, socially and emotionally. Therefore, it is vital that schools are proactive in providing support for these vulnerable children to ensure they reach their full potential and have a positive experience at school.

It is important to remember that all behaviour is communication and most adopted and permanently placed children are acting in a certain way because of their early life experiences.

For children who are previously looked after to thrive and succeed they need:

### **To feel safe at school**

Structure and routine are vital for children who have experienced trauma to help them feel safe. A visual timetable will help support this.

Unstructured times such as playtimes can cause negative behaviours, therefore organising an activity at playtimes and ensuring they are supervised will help. It is also important to provide a safe space for them if they start to feel overwhelmed.

A key person must be identified who is able to establish a positive and trusting relationship with the child. Ideally this person should be the first and last person they see during their school day to help them feel safe and wanted. Building relationships can be very difficult so this needs to be supported and encouraged with all members of staff as there may be an occasion when their key person is not available.

Support them to cope with change and transitions by providing them with notice of any changes and full support. Please see transition section for further support.

Many children who have experienced trauma like to be able to sit in a place where they can see their exit, therefore this should be considered when organising seating plans.

### **Ensure that the school culture and curriculum is adoption friendly**

This will also allow the child to feel safe, supported and wanted. It is also important that staff members feel supported by the school as it can be challenging at times supporting children who have suffered trauma.

It is important to share information with all staff members who support the child so that communication is consistent. This is especially important with regards to managing behaviour as this should always be dealt with consistently and positively.

Ensure the curriculum is adoption friendly, and recognises the needs of children living with guardians, and that difficult tasks are dealt with sensitively.

Different aspects of the curriculum can be a trigger for many adopted children and any concerns should be discussed with their parents/guardians.

Possible triggers:

- Personal information, biographies – it is important to be mindful that adopted children may not be able to talk about their history or family situation and may not have baby photos.
- Children living with a guardian may find it difficult to talk about their family.
- Sex/PHSE Education – A child may have suffered sexual abuse and may have inappropriate awareness of knowledge due to this. It may also trigger painful memories.
- Discussions about alcohol, drugs or nutrition could also act as painful reminders for them if these are the reasons why they were removed from their families.
- PE – some children may find it difficult to remove clothing or change in front of others.
- Celebration dates – Christmas, birthdays, Mother's Day and Father's Day may be difficult.
- R.E – discussions about religion, race and culture can be difficult.
- English – some books will contain difficult topics such as loss, death, abandonment.

## **Support them to manage their strong feelings**

Children who are previously looked after may need support to identify their feelings and working with an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant can really help in this area and provide them with strategies to use when feeling certain behaviours.

Using a curiosity approach such as 'PACE' can be beneficial e.g. asking curious questions like I wonder if you are feeling cross because ..... This allows the child to understand how they feel and start to recognise triggers. Please see below for further information.

If a child does have an outburst it is important to listen to them to validate their feelings.

Resources such as social stories and role play can also be very helpful.

A behaviour plan should be in place if the child is displaying difficult behaviour. This plan should promote positive behaviour and be consistently used by all members of staff. Threats of exclusion or time out should be avoided to prevent negative feelings, instead a child could be given 'calm time' or 'time in' to self-regulate. Zones of regulation are very useful to manage this behaviour. Please see below for further information.

Provide them with a safe space to calm down. They may want to be alone or they may wish to be with a safe person. Grounding techniques and physical activity can be very beneficial.

Some children find it very difficult to explain and voice their feelings; therefore they could be encouraged to draw how they feel or even write it down.

Think toddler – some of these children are emotionally much younger than their age. If this is the case, then provide them with opportunities to engage in childhood activities perhaps by helping younger children.

## **Support Special Educational Needs and Learning**

A high level of children who are previously looked after also have special educational needs and many will have an EHC Plan, which will outline the support they require.

Support children who are previously looked after to learn and make progress by ensuring learning tasks are personalised and that activities are differentiated or broken down into smaller tasks so that they are more manageable and achievable. This will lead to achievement and success boosting confidence and self-esteem which so many of these children lack.

Encourage children who are previously looked after to develop their thinking brains and encourage them to work in a pair or small groups. This will also help them to establish friendships with their peers.

Be aware of their sensory needs, are loud noises a trigger? If so ear defenders or a quiet space can make a huge difference.

### **Boost confidence and Self-Esteem**

Use praise. It is important that this matches the child's needs as some young people cannot deal with praise and it can lead to negative feelings or unworthiness causing a response such as ripping up work. A thumbs up or smile may be all they can cope with.

A praise book is sometimes easier to accept for children who have low self-worth and low self-esteem. This would involve a teacher writing positive comment with evidence of why they are making the comment within the book. This is something the child can keep and is a constant reminder of all of their achievements, which is especially useful if they are experiencing self-doubt.

### **Relationship Building**

Support and encourage children who are previously looked after to develop peer relationships and to develop their social skills. This can be achieved in a nurture or friendship group, a buddy system or putting children with partners during tasks.

Show the child you care and that they are in mind. This will lead to trust.

### **School and home partnership**

Form good relationships and communication with children's parents or guardians. A positive home/school relationship will provide consistency of practice and allows information to be shared.

This also prevents the child from feeling any confusion or trying to play one off against the other.

It is important that the management of school and home behaviours are kept separate as not doing so could lead to negative feelings of low self-worth and low self-esteem.

A home/school diary can be useful to show children that you school are working in collaboration with home to support them. All communication to be positive.

### **Education Meetings**

While a child is in care, they have termly Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings to review their progress and to ensure they are meeting their full potential. These meetings will stop once a child is adopted, however Virtual School would recommend that the school



continues to hold regular educational meetings without Virtual School presence to promote the educational achievement of their children who are previously looked after. At these meetings SMART targets should be set to help them progress. These should then be reviewed at each meeting. This is especially important at points of transition to ensure all support is in place to ensure it is successful.

Dorset Virtual School have created a template that can be used for these meetings. See Appendix 1

## **Transitions**

Most children find change difficult and this is especially apparent for children who are previously looked after. Therefore, it is essential that support and scaffolding is put in place during all changes to support the child's emotional well-being especially during transition periods.

Transitions are not just the move to a new school, year group or class but can also be moving from one topic to another, having to leave school for an appointment or moving from unstructured time to learning. One of the main reasons children who are previously looked after find transitions so difficult is because they do not feel safe leaving what they are doing or safe to start something new. Therefore, it is essential to make all transitions positive by showing them that they are cared for, being thought of and by giving them permission to make the transition and that it is safe to do so. Transitions can also mean that the child is losing someone they trust and feel safe with, so it is imperative that a transition plan is put in place to identify and solve this need.

Strategies that can help:

### **Going to appointments**

If a child needs to leave class for an appointment this can lead to anxiety and them being concerned that they will receive negative attention. To support this, ensure that it is dealt with sensitively and perhaps a pre-arranged hand signal could be used to indicate they need to leave or they could be sent to do a job.

Think about who is collecting the child if they need to leave – don't always use a person who is known to help those with special needs as this can lead to them feeling uncomfortable and different to others.

When they return from an appointment, if needed, allow them some space to regulate before they return to class as most children will ask them where they have been.

Try and encourage parents to arrange appointment outside of the school day.

### **Moving to a new school/year group**

- Organise a transition meeting to the new school so that the child is familiar with the new setting.
- Set up meetings with a key person so that a trusted relationship can be established.
- Postcards could be sent by new teacher and staff who are working with child to say how much they are looking forward to meeting them.
- Arrange additional transition meetings to the school.
- Provide photos of the staff and school.
- Ensure they are aware of new routines – a visual timetable is beneficial for this.

The ending at their current school is very important and we would recommend the following:

- A goodbye book containing photos, memories, evidence of successes, comments written by staff.
- Postcards from old member of staff to remind them they are being thought about and to wish them well in new school.

## Trip Trauma

School trips can sometimes cause children who are previously looked after to feel dysregulated. To support this:

- Prepare the child for the trip by providing a plan of the day with a visual timetable if possible.
- Show the child pictures on the internet.
- Give them a chance to discuss any worries with their key person
- If particularly anxious have a pre-visit with their parent/guardian.
- Provide calming strategies and encourage the child to use these
- Plan for success
- Allow the child to take an item from home so they feel connected
- If the trip is likely to be too long for the child, reduce the length from them. It would be more beneficial for them to join later so that they end the trip with their peers.
- Allow the child to contact home during the trip if necessary. Sometimes just knowing they can do this is enough for them to feel secure and many children won't need to do this.
- Ensure the child does not feel pressured to go on the trip.
- Each child's needs are different, so it is important to create a personalised plan for all transitions around their individual needs.

## Additional Support, Guidance and Advice

### PACE

Dan Hughes' PACE family treatment has been used successfully by many schools and families to help children feel safe and create trusting and communicative relationships. PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving in a way that aims to make the child feel safe by playfulness, showing Acceptance, showing Curiosity and displaying Empathy.

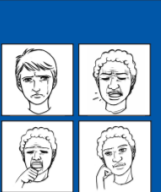
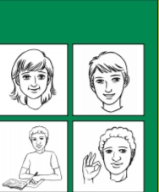
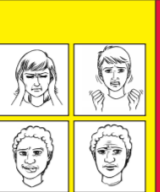
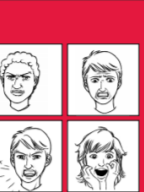
Please see the following link for more information: [P.A.C.E. \(danielhughes.org\)](http://P.A.C.E.(danielhughes.org))

### Zones of Regulation

Zones of Regulation which is rooted in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, teaches children to learn to identify their feelings and levels of alertness by using four different colour zones. The goal is to help them learn how to regulate their emotions, to discover their triggers and to learn strategies to help them regulate when their emotions are heightened. Please see link below for further information.

The ZONES of Regulation® Reproducible E The Zones of Regulation Visual

### The ZONES of Regulation®

			
<b>BLUE ZONE</b> Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	<b>GREEN ZONE</b> Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	<b>YELLOW ZONE</b> Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	<b>RED ZONE</b> Mad/Angry Terrified Yelling/Hitting Elated Out of Control

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From The Zones of Regulation® by Leah M. Kuypers • Available at [www.socialthinking.com](http://www.socialthinking.com)

[THE ZONES OF REGULATION: A CONCEPT TO FOSTER SELF-REGULATION & EMOTIONAL CONTROL - Welcome](#)

## Grounding Techniques

There are numerous different grounding exercises that can help calm and regulate a child:

- The 5-1 Senses

*Using the senses close your eyes and tell me*

*5 things you can see*

*4 things you can feel*

*3 things you can hear*

*2 things you can smell*

*1 thing you can touch*

- Breathing exercises
- Moving the body
- Self soothing.

There are many more suggestions on the following links:

[Resources \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://www.beaconhouse.org.uk)

[Six Different Types of Grounding Exercises for Anxiety & Intense Emotions — The Growlery \(tothegrowlery.com\)](https://www.tothegrowlery.com)

[Home - Relax Kids - Official Website](https://www.relaxkids.com)

## Drawing and Talking

This is a therapeutic technique that helps children understand their emotions and has been highly effective in resolving conflict and trauma. Through drawing the child is able to create a story and can come to a symbolic resolution.

Please see the following link for further information:

[Drawing & Talking Home - Drawing & Talking \(drawingandtalking.com\)](https://www.drawingandtalking.com)

## Emotion Coaching

“Helping children and young people to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur and how to handle them” (Gottman, 1996)



**EmotionCoaching**<sup>UK</sup>  
*Practitioner Trainer*

Emotions are universal, normal responses to everyday experiences; as human beings we need relationships with people who help us to understand our emotions, feel safe and teach us how to handle them in prosocial ways. Emotion Coaching is an evidence-based approach to responding to children’s emotions. It is an approach that draws on neuropsychology and attachment theory and focuses on maintaining relationships with children and young people to support their social skills, emotional and mental health and their learning and attainment. Emotion Coaching is an integral relational approach used in attachment and trauma aware practice as well as a teaching tool for use with all children and young people to develop their emotional management skills.

Research carried out by Bath Spa University found that using Emotion Coaching as a whole-school approach helped to reduce the number of negative behaviour incidents and exclusions. Research indicates that Emotion Coaching:

- Promotes positive relationships – with children and parents / other adults
- Helps children and young people to regulate, improve and take ownership of their behaviours
- Helps create more consistent responses to children and young people’s behaviours
- Helps practitioners feel more ‘in control’ during incidents

Further information can be requested from your school link Educational Psychologist or email Clare Anderson, Educational Psychologist Practitioner Trainer for Emotion Coaching UK [clare.anderson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clare.anderson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk).

## Adoption Barometer 2023<sup>10</sup>

Adoption UK has published their Adoption Barometer 2023 ([Download.ashx \(adoptionuk.org\)](https://www.adoptionuk.org/download.ashx)) and the report is calling for free, accessible, high-quality support for adoptees of all ages, whenever they need it. This means:

1. **Quality Standards** for preparation, approvals and matching to ensure prospective adopters are well equipped to meet the needs of the children who are placed with them, wherever they live in the UK.
2. **Ringfenced, multi-year government funding for adoptions support** in all nations of the UK.
3. **Free, expert support to establish and maintain relationships with birth relatives** for adoptees of all ages.
4. **Standalone multi-disciplinary support plans for every child to be placed for adoption** with a duty to deliver the support required.
5. **Education and health professionals trained in early childhood trauma.**
6. **Free, professional, adoption-informed therapeutic support for adult adoptees.**

## Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

*Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is a term used to describe the permanent impacts on the brain and body of individuals prenatally exposed to alcohol during pregnancy resulting in a spectrum of physical, emotional, behavioural and neurological characteristics. Individuals with FASD have their own unique areas that create challenges in their daily lives. They may need support with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, emotional regulation, and social skills. They also have a unique set of strengths and many are showing talents, that when nurtured and supported, demonstrates their unlimited potential in those areas.<sup>11</sup>*

It has become apparent in recent years that many children have been misdiagnosed with ADHD, ASC or Attachment Disorder when in fact they have FASD. Please click the following link for further information.

[FASD Network UK - Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](https://www.fasdnetwork.org/what-is-fasd.html)

## Training and Support

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.adoptionuk.org/the-adoption-barometer>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.fasdnetwork.org/what-is-fasd.html>

There are various different training courses that are suitable for schools to help them work successfully and positively with children who are previously looked after:

- Adoption UK [Workshops & Training | Adoption UK Charity](#)
- PAC UK [PAC-UK | Workshops for Professionals](#)
- Trauma Informed School [Trauma Informed Schools UK](#)
- PACE Dan Hughes [Trainings \(danielhughes.org\)](#)
- Attachment – Louise Bomber [Louise Bomber webinars - YouTube](#)

Please also contact Dorset Virtual School if you require any training.



## Useful websites/Resources

### Adoption Support

Adoption UK [Adoption UK Charity](#)

Anna Freud Centre [Adoptive Parents, Special Guardians, Kinship Careers and Foster Carers | Anna Freud Centre](#)

Beacon House <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

PAC UK [PAC-UK | Adoption & Permanency: Advice, Support, Counselling & Training](#)

Adoption Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-strategy-achieving-excellence-everywhere>

Kinship <https://kinship.org.uk/>

Special guardianship support [www.Specialguardianssupport.org.uk](http://www.Specialguardianssupport.org.uk)

### Education support

Attachment difficulties in schools -

<https://healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk/media/1052/attachment-difficulties.pdf>

First 4 Adoption [Education Support - First4Adoption](#)

Gov UK [Search for schools and colleges to compare - GOV.UK - Find and compare schools in England \(compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Ofsted [Find an Ofsted inspection report](#)

### Social, Emotional and Mental Health Support

Camhs [HOME | CAMHS Resources \(camhs-resources.co.uk\)](#)

Kooth [Home - Kooth](#)

Mind [For children and young people | Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems](#)

Minded <https://www.minded.org.uk/> -

Mentally Healthy Schools [Anxiety : Mentally Healthy Schools](#)

Samaritans [Samaritans | Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy | Here to listen](#)

Shout Text Hotline: 85258

UK Trauma Council [UKTC \(uktraumacouncil.org\)](http://UKTC (uktraumacouncil.org))

Young Minds [YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | YoungMinds](#)

### Useful Books

[Booklist-for-Schools.pdf \(pac-uk.org\)](#)

## **Appendix 1**

Education Plan to be attached