



# Previously Looked After & Looked After Children Policy

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## **Introduction**

### **Looked After Children**

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked after if s/he is in the care of, or is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by, a local authority. The term 'Looked After Children' refers to:

- (i) Children accommodated by the Local Authority under a voluntary agreement with their parents (section 20)
- (ii) Children subject to a care order (section 31.1) or interim care order (section 38)
- (iii) Children who are subject to emergency orders for the protection of the child (section 44)

It is important not to confuse a young person's legal status with their living arrangements. A child on a care order, for example, could be living:

- with foster carers.
- in a children's home.
- with relatives or friends.
- with one or both parents under supervision by social care.
- with prospective adoptive parents (but still retain Looked After legal status until final adoption order is made by the courts)

### **Previously Looked After Children**

Previously Looked After Children are those who are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales (as defined by the Children Act 1989) because:

- they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement order; or
- were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales. 'State Care' is care provided by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

## **Background**

We recognise that many Previously Looked After and Looked After Children have suffered disrupted learning and may have missed extended periods of school. The gaps in their learning, and in many cases the emotional impact of their experiences, are likely to have become significant barriers to their progress. The complexity of any fragmented educational experience needs careful assessment and planning.

We understand that all Previously Looked After and Looked After Children will have suffered significant loss and trauma and may have experienced abuse and/or neglect. This is likely to have considerable impact on their ability to access the curriculum. Previously Looked After and Looked After Children are prioritised in this school for additional support to manage their learning and behaviour, where needed.

We also recognise that whilst in care, some events can retrigger traumatic experiences (e.g. a court hearing, contact with family or friends, or an aspect of the curriculum that cannot be anticipated). This can affect behaviour and may affect progress, even for pupils who had previously been settled and 'on track'. Staff working with the child will need to use additional strategies, specific to that child's needs and all staff need to be aware of the impact that attachment issues will bring to the young person.

## **Aims**

To support our Previously Looked After and Looked After Children and give them access to every opportunity to continually achieve and enjoy their learning.

To recognise and support the specific challenges faced by Previously Looked After and Looked After Children, while continuing to foster a culture of high expectations of learning, behaviour and progress.

To fulfil our school's role as corporate parents in promoting and supporting the educational achievement of all Previously Looked After and Looked After Children by asking the question 'Would this be good enough for my child?'

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Responsibilities of the School Governing Body**

Section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 ("the 2008 Act") places a duty on the governing body of maintained schools to designate a member of staff (the 'designated teacher') as having responsibility to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children who are registered pupils at the school. This includes those aged between 16 and 18.

Under section 20 (2) the governing body must ensure that the designated teacher (DT) undertakes appropriate training.

The governing body will:

Ensure that there is a qualified and experienced teacher named as the Designated Teacher (DT) for Looked After Children, and that s/he is enabled to carry out his/her responsibilities. Ensure that they have access to appropriate training, and have sufficient time to carry out duties and to receive support.

Support the Headteacher, DT and other members of staff in ensuring the needs of Looked After Children are met.

It is recommended that each school has a named school governor for Looked After Children.

### **The Role of the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children in the School.**

The Role of the Designated Teacher is:

- To promote a culture in which Looked After Children believe they can succeed, and aspire to further training, education and higher education, and/or employment.
- To maintain an up-to-date register of Looked After Children and inform colleagues on a need-to-know basis. Sensitivity and confidentiality are critical.
- To attend relevant training so that they are aware of statutory responsibilities and procedures for Looked After Children.
- Ensure that they keep the school up to date with current legislation and its implications for the school in respect of Looked After Children.
- To understand the impact of trauma, loss and separation and how this can affect behaviour, including how attachment styles can affect their learning.
- To co-ordinate/deliver training to staff, (teaching and non-teaching), and governors so they are aware of the complex issues and educational disadvantage affecting many Looked After Children and young people. To understand the need for positive systems of support to overcome any disadvantages, and the need to promote the involvement of Looked After Children in, for example: school homework clubs, extra curricular activities, home reading schemes, school councils.
- Report to the Governing Body annually on the performance of the Looked After Children who are on the roll of the school.
- To ensure all teachers know when there is a Looked After Child in their class, and what that child's specific needs are. This does not mean that all staff are informed about the child's Looked After status, or that they are given all details.
- To develop and monitor systems for liaising with carers, social care colleagues and other Children's Services professionals who support the child.
- To be the first point of contact for other professionals working with Looked After Children, and ensure the speedy transfer of information between agencies. To ensure in conjunction with the social worker, that all relevant education and care information is available at the point of admission into the school so that appropriate placement can occur. Where a child leaves the school, to pass the child's records to the social worker if possible, so as to avoid admission delays with the new school. Where difficulties arise in obtaining information from a previous school, the Integrated Service for Looked After Children (ISL) can help to obtain this information.
- To monitor the educational progress of all Looked After Children in order to inform the school's development plan. To ensure that all Looked After Children have targets which although realistic are also challenging. The

targets should reflect the high expectations we hold about Looked After Children.

- Ensure the child, carer(s), social worker and other relevant parties receive early notification of school-based meetings, parents evenings and other events and that communication, both written and verbal, remains regular and positive.
- To intervene if there is evidence of individual underachievement, repeated or sustained absence, internal truancy or risk of exclusion.
- To identify with teachers the student's strengths and gaps in learning, and any barriers to learning. This should form the basis of the PEP, or the refinement of it.
- To ensure the young person has an up-to-date personal education plan (PEP). If not, then to arrange the meeting in partnership with the child's social worker. The DT will ensure that the school has updated information on the child's attainment, progress and educational needs, irregardless of whether a PEP meeting has been arranged.
- To ensure that the actions identified in the plan are implemented and reviewed at least annually, but preferably termly.
- To facilitate the completion of the student section of the PEP.
- Ensure that someone is available to attend LAC Reviews on each child/young person and/or always prepares a written report which promotes the continuity and stability of their education.
- To supervise admission of new Looked After Children and ensure appropriate induction and transition support into school.
- Ensure that each pupil in care has an identified member of staff they can talk to. This need not be the Designated Teacher, but should be based on the child's own wishes. **Members of staff who take on this role may themselves need some emotional support at times, by an appropriate member of staff. They should also be alert to any child protection issues, any disclosures that pupils may make, and know what action to take. They should link closely therefore with the school's Designated Senior Member of Staff for Child Protection.**
- Ensure that Looked After Children play a full and active part in the life of the school and have access to extended school provision where required.
- Ensure that if/when the child transfers to another school, all relevant information is forwarded to the receiving school as with minimal delay.

- If a Looked After Child on roll moves educational setting, the DT will advise the social worker about the likely impact of a move on the child's education and what should be done to minimise this.
- To contact/liaise with the virtual school if a Looked After Child requires extra support.
- If a Looked After Child transfers out of care, their educational needs are unlikely to have changed. The Designated Teacher will liaise with/hand-over monitoring and support to other staff members, in order to ensure that the child's needs continue to be met.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL STAFF**

The school staff will:

- Ensure any child in care is sensitively supported and that confidentiality is maintained.
- Have high aspirations for the educational and personal achievements of Previously Looked After and Looked After Children.
- Respond appropriately to requests for information to support the completion of Personal Education Plans and other documentation needed as part of review meetings.
- Contribute to the designated teacher's requests for information on educational attainment and needs, as appropriate.
- Attend LAC Reviews as a professional with direct understanding of the child/young person's educational needs, where appropriate, and as indicated by the Designated Teacher.
- Be aware of challenging behaviours that can result from trauma. Adapt behaviour management strategies in response to any challenging behaviour resulting from re-triggering of trauma, and seek advice from the designated teacher, as needed.
- Provide a supportive climate in school, enabling children in care to achieve stability.
- As a corporate parent, make additional efforts to communicate to Looked After students your belief in their ability to achieve.

**All Governors and Staff will:**

- Support the local authority in its statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER AND LOOKED AFTER CHILD**

### **Confidentiality**

The designated teacher will decide, in conjunction with relevant local authority staff, their approach to sharing sensitive information about an individual child. This is not just about keeping records but also about a child's identity in school. Many Looked After Children are reluctant for information to be known, as they may feel stigmatised or different because they do not live with their families. For other children there will be official requirements that their status is not identified.

The DT will decide, with LA staff, the extent to which information will be shared, and with which staff, including Teaching Assistants, on a case-by-case basis. It may not be necessary to share details of the child's traumatic past, where an understanding can be reached about the child's current needs and strategies to support these. Some cases may require selected staff to understand how specific previous experiences are impacting on current behaviour.

Where information is shared by selected staff, the young person is made aware of this, although how this is shared with them will depend on their age and understanding.

### **Looked After Children Placed by Other Authorities**

Looked After Children placed in care placements outside their originating authority, and especially those who are a long way from home, are especially vulnerable. It is the responsibility of the originating authority to ensure that the identified educational needs of any child placed in another authority area will be effectively met in the proposed placement before it is agreed.

School and the social worker should ensure that the Personal Education Plan is completed within 20 school days of the young person starting school, and that this is completed with the child and their carer. Where additional support is identified by the school, record this on the personal education plan.

However, where there are delays, school will endeavour to gain information from the previous school. Good practice would be to assess educational needs promptly and to plan for additional support where needed. This can occur before a PEP meeting and in readiness for the PEP.

In Worcestershire the Virtual School are able to contact other LAs on behalf of the school to request support from them for their Looked After Children.

### **Private Fostering**

A child is in private fostering if they live with friends/neighbours or relatives who are one step removed, (e.g. second cousin). The arrangement must exist for longer than 28 days.

## **INCLUDING PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

### **Attendance**

It is vital that Looked After Children have good attendance, as a means to improve their educational outcomes. School closely monitors the attendance of all Looked After Children on roll. Where attendance of a Looked After Child is a cause for concern, the form tutor will raise with the Phase Leader and DT any concerns with attendance. Typically, the Phase Leader and DT will problem-solve barriers to attendance with the carer and student in a face to face meeting at the earliest opportunity. If concerns continue, these will be raised with the Education Welfare Service and a multi-agency approach to improving attendance and engagement in learning will be planned and recorded as part of the PEP. Holistic needs and barriers to learning should be addressed by identified professionals within a specified time frame on a case-by-case basis

### **Exclusions**

*Improving Behaviour and Attendance: Guidance on exclusions from schools and pupil referral units* (2008) draws particular attention to Looked After Children as a group particularly at risk of exclusion. The school will try every practicable means to maintain the child in school and will involve the child's social worker and seek advice and support from Children's Services professionals and ISL as soon as possible.

*Improving Behaviour and Attendance Guidance* (2008) states:

*77. Looked-after children are no less able than other children. Many looked-after children have unmet social and emotional needs and, as a group, are more likely to be at risk of exclusion. Schools are expected to proactively support and cooperate with foster carers and the local authority as a corporate parent in doing everything possible to avoid excluding a looked-after child. Exclusion from school/PRUs, and permanent exclusion in particular, can place great strain on care placements and lead to even more disruption in a child's life if the care placement breaks down as a result. Local authorities, schools/PRUs, social workers and carers all share the responsibility for reducing exclusions of looked-after children. Schools/PRUs, supported by their local authority, should put in place strategies to reduce the need for exclusion for looked-after children. Virtual school head teachers, who are senior figures within an LA, are being introduced to help support schools and local authorities to raise the attainment and ensure progression of all looked-after children and young people within their authority.*

*78. Exclusion of looked-after children should be an absolute last resort. It is vital that schools/PRUs and social workers work together in partnership with other professionals and try every practicable means to maintain them in school /PRUs (if that is where they are placed) and to exclude them only in the most exceptional circumstances. Before excluding, schools/PRUs, in conjunction with the local authority, should first consider alternative options for supporting the looked-after child or young person. No looked-after child should be excluded from a school/PRU without discussion with the local authority to ensure that there is suitable alternative provision available elsewhere.*



Where a managed move is sought for a Looked After Child, steps will need to be taken to minimise the impact of previous multiple rejections that Looked After Children have typically received, and also to ensure that transitions are managed and planned supportively. The aim of such move is usually to encourage behavioural change, provide a fresh start, whilst understanding that a move is likely to have a deeper emotional impact on a Looked After Child than other students. The impact of trauma, separation and loss on all Looked After Children should be considered as part of an assessment of needs, when planning significant interventions such as managed moves. We recognise that any move is often seen as another rejection by a Looked After Child and the consequences of this can be considerable and long term. These measures are only considered when all other options and strategies have been exhausted.

### **The Personal Education Plan (PEPs)**

Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children are statutory planning meetings which should occur within 20 school days of a child becoming looked after and reviewed at least annually. Our practice is to update PEPs termly with latest tracking information. A current PEP is in evidence at every statutory review of the child's care plan, and updated if significant changes occur (e.g. change in school place, care placement, school programme disruption). PEPs are significant vehicles for celebrating the achievements of young people and effecting change. They should address the 5 key outcomes of Every Child Matters agenda, and ensure appropriate resources and responsibilities are allocated in order that these are achieved. Education targets and strategies set through the PEP should be known by teaching staff. This is especially important if issues have arisen regarding classroom, homework or behaviour in certain lessons.

The young person should be involved in the PEP. Where a young person does not wish to attend, the meeting should nevertheless take place, and they should be encouraged to comment on their education and progress through the relevant section of the PEP. Issues around confidentiality for the Looked After Child should be respected, and information shared on a need-to-know basis. Teaching staff who are in contact with the child should be aware that he/she is looked after, in order to promote an understanding of the child's / young person's needs, and to ensure positive systems of support are in place.

The PEP would encompass all the additional educational plans, such as those described under part time and alternative provision. Worcestershire Virtual Schools team will support the PEP writing process.

### **Communication**

The importance of communication for Previously Looked After pupils and Looked After pupils cannot be underestimated. WFS staff must prioritise communication with carers and other agencies relevant to Previously Looked After and Looked After Children. This communication will focus on ensuring that this cohort of pupils receive consistent messages from all adults involved in their care and reduce the increase in anxiety that inconsistent and poorly planned approaches bring.

## **Ensuring the Progress of Previously Looked After and Looked After Children at WFS**

Wyre Forest School are proud of the achievements and progress of all our pupils but recognise the importance of rigorous monitoring of Previously Looked After and Looked After Children to ensure progress is in line with peers. Our school Individual Provision Plan supports the focus on progress additional to the traditional school curriculum model, e.g. emotional, physical, communication and we use the following strategies to ensure previously looked after and looked after pupils are monitored;

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Statutory or school based</b>	<b>How often?</b>
LAC review	Statutory	Every 6 months
PEP review	Statutory	Termly
Progress / behaviour / attendance reports to governors	School based	Termly
Parent / carer evenings	School based	Three times per year
Mid-term PEP updates	School based	Half termly (to coincide with PEP dates)
Progress data and pupil progress meetings	School based	Termly
DT regular update (check in with teachers of Previously LAC and LAC pupils)	School based	Fortnightly

### **REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed as to its effective implementation on a bi-annual basis and updated as appropriate.