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Owner	CfBT Schools Trust	Next review due	September 2019
Issued	September 2018		

Looked-After, Eligible and Previously Looked-After Children (including those who have been placed for adoption) Policy

Introduction

CfBT Schools Trust and St Mark’s CofE Academy believe that schools play a key role in helping to raise the educational standards and improving the life chances of looked-after and previously looked-after children, and in tackling the causes of social exclusion through careful planning, monitoring and evaluation. We believe that schools can also provide a source of continuity and ‘normality’ for children who may have been subject to emotional distress, abuse, and disruption. School can be the place where children maintain friendships and a place where they feel safe and can be themselves.

Raising levels of achievement has been strongly and clearly highlighted as a major part of improving the life chances of looked-after children and schools play a pivotal role in this.

Definitions

A **child who is looked-after** by the Local Authority (referred to as a looked-after child (**LAC**)) as defined in section 22 of the Children Act 1989, means a child (0-18 years) who is subject to a care order (or an interim care order) or who is accommodated by the Local Authority.

An **eligible child** is a child who is looked-after, after aged 16 or 17, and has been looked after by a Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after they reached age 14 and ended after they reached 16.

For the purposes of this policy, looked-after children include eligible children.

A **previously looked-after child** is a child who is no longer looked after by the Local Authority because they are subject to adoption, special guardianship or a child arrangements order; or were adopted from ‘state care’ (care provided by a public authority, religious organisation or other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society).

A **Virtual School Head (VSH)** is an officer appointed by the Local Authority, under the Children Act 1989 and Section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, to ensure that these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential. For further information on this role refer to Promoting the education of looked-after children February 2018 (to be reviewed 2020).

All maintained schools, academies and free schools are required to appoint a **designated teacher** to champion the educational attainment of looked-after and previously looked-after children, and act as a source of information and advice about their needs.

Going forward, the Government is incentivising every school to train a **Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health** to oversee their approach to mental health and wellbeing.

NB: this is not a statutory requirement.

Personnel

For this school:

The DLAC is: Nina Ahmed/Albertina Magahles

The Designated Lead for Mental Health is: Nicola Van Zyl

The Virtual School Head is: Tracey Lewis and can be contacted via email Tracey.Lewis@merton.gov.uk and phone 0208 545 4713

Legal framework

This policy takes account of:

- The UN CRC Article 25 (review of treatment in care)
- The Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 as amended in 2013
- The Adoption and Care planning regulations 2014
- The Education and Adoption Bill 2016
- The Serious Crime Act 2015
- The Gillick competency
- The Fraser guidelines

And the DfE statutory guidance:

- Working together to safeguard children 2018
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018
- Promoting the education of looked after children February 2018 (to be reviewed 2020)
- DfE Governors' Handbook 2017
- Schools admissions code
- Statutory guidance on school exclusions
- SEND code of practice

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following related policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Attendance and Punctuality
- Anti-bullying
- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Tackling Extremism and Anti-Radicalisation

Schools must:

- Ensure access to a balanced, broadly based and engaging education for all looked-after children that engenders high aspirations and aims to accelerate their progress.
- Prioritise recording and improving the academic achievement of all looked-after children.
- Prioritise a reduction in the number of exclusions and truancies for all looked-after children.

- Ensure there is a designated teacher to advocate for the rights of looked-after children.
- Ensure the designated teacher is a member of the leadership team and there is written cover provision for when they are absent or unavailable.
- Ensure that the designated teacher has appropriate training for the role and recognises that looked-after children and those placed for adoption are not a homogenous group and that their individual needs will be different.
- Promote the attendance of looked-after children.
- Promote a culture that takes account of the child's views according to age and understanding in identifying and meeting their education needs.
- Promote a culture throughout the school and amongst professional partners of understanding the importance of listening to and taking account of the child's wishes and feelings about education and the Personal Educational Plan (PEP) process.
- Ensure the appropriate and educationally impactful use of the LAC Pupil Premium, providing quantifiable results.
- Prioritise the mental health and emotional wellbeing of LAC pupils.
- Ensure that these particularly vulnerable children/students are safeguarded from exploitation, radicalisation and extremism in all its forms. (Refer to CST policies listed earlier).

Objectives

We will:

- Work alongside social workers to ensure that each looked after child has a current Personal Education Plan (PEP or e-PEP) in place.
- Provide a climate of acceptance and challenge negative stereotypes.
- Ensure all children who are looked-after have the same opportunities to participate fully in the National Curriculum, careers guidance, extracurricular activities, work experience, and enjoy the school experience fully in line with corporate parenting principles.
- Ensure discretion when addressing a child's care status and ensure there is sensitivity to the background of children who are looked-after, especially surrounding work on family.
- Ensure the designated teacher is provided with regular training, and that they cascade this training to school staff as appropriate.
- Seek to review all school policies regularly in the light of new legislation and statutory guidance.
- Ensure that a clear protocol for sharing of information will be followed both within school and with outside agencies, including who can have access to information post LAC.
- Embed an emphasis on emotional wellbeing throughout the school and curriculum, which looked-after children will particularly benefit from – **this is everyone's responsibility.**
- Give looked-after children a voice and influence in their school lives and ensure that their views are heard and acted on.
- Ensure that previously LAC and eligible children/young people are supported appropriately and have their needs met.

Responsibilities

Headteacher

- Ensuring the curriculum is such that it promotes high engagement and high aspiration.
- Appointing the Designated Teacher.
- Ensuring that the Designated Teacher has received appropriate training.
- Ensuring the Designated Teacher is a member of the leadership team and there is appropriate cover provision in their absence.
- Overseeing the implementation of the policy on looked-after children.
- All systems to support looked-after children.
- Report to the Local Governing Body/Trust/Virtual School Head on a regular basis on the following:
 - the number of looked after pupils in the school
 - an analysis of test scores as a discrete group, compared to other pupils
 - the attendance of pupils, compared to other pupils
 - the level of fixed term and permanent exclusions, compared to other pupils
 - the number of complaints.
- Supporting the DLAC and the Designated Lead for Mental Health to promote good outcomes for pupils.

Designated Teacher for Looked-after Children (DLAC)

The DLAC will help establish and maintain the ethos regarding looked-after children of the school by:

- Maintaining and respecting confidentiality of all looked-after children and ensuring information is shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.
- Ensuring that all staff, through appropriate training, are aware of the social & emotional difficulties and educational disadvantages faced by looked-after children and understand the need for positive systems to support them, whilst maintaining appropriately high expectations for their educational achievements.
- Acting as an advocate for looked-after children in order to allow them equal access to educational opportunities and support with important decisions affecting future life chances.
- Work to close the attainment and progress gap between looked-after children and their peers and create a culture of high aspirations for them.

The DLAC will set up systems to monitor and record the progress of all looked-after children.

S/he will:

- Gather information (including SEN status, physical and mental health) and maintain records regarding all looked-after children, including legal status and information regarding who should be contacted regarding matters concerning the child.
- Establish a system for contacting and forwarding educational records to new schools to facilitate a smooth and speedy transfer.
- Monitor the educational progress and attainment of all looked-after children and intervene, in co-operation with other agencies if required, if there is evidence of underachievement, absence from school or internal truancy, or other similar concern.

The DLAC will facilitate effective communication by:

- Building positive home-school relationships between parents/designated carers with regular opportunities for dialogue.
- Playing an active role in care planning by ensuring that the attendance of the most appropriate member of staff and/or written reports are provided to all statutory reviews of looked-after children.
- Helping coordinate education and PEP meetings.
- Serving as the named contact for colleagues in social services and education.
- Ensuring effective communication between all relevant parties.
- Inviting the responsible social worker to all meetings and liaising with this social worker regarding the development of Personal Education Plans (PEP).

The DLAC will monitor each child's achievement and ensure that they have the support they require within school by:

- Meeting with the looked-after child to discuss who needs to know they are looked after and to ensure that the young person is informed of their role.
- Ensuring each child has a named member of staff who can provide advice and/or practical help on academic or pastoral issues.
- Ensuring each child has a Personal Education Plan, being proactive and participating in setting goals for the child's PEP.
- Requesting support from the SENCO and/or outside agencies.
- Meeting with the SENCO to ensure all looked-after children with special educational needs are being assessed and are getting appropriate resources to support their learning.
- Ensuring that looked-after children newly admitted into school have their needs assessed quickly. These include their academic needs but also their mental health needs. (See Appendix 1).
- Having a strategy for key stage or new school transitions as well as an induction process.
- Ensuring the involvement of careers advice and guidance services with children in Key Stage 4, including preparation for adulthood.
- Encouraging all children to continue to further or higher education and accessing any additional funding offered.
- Ensuring all looked after-children are made to feel a part of the school environment.
- Listening to the child and giving them every opportunity to express their views and acting according to their age and understanding in identifying and meeting their educational needs.

Education Director

The Trust, through the Education Director will ensure that:

- The school has a coherent policy for looked-after children and works closely with the VSH.
- Policies and procedures are reviewed alongside social inclusion guidance and DfE guidelines.
- The Designated Teacher has received appropriate training.
- Looked-after children have equal access to all areas of the curriculum.

Personal Education Plans

Each child will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP or e-PEP), which their social worker will take the lead in developing. However, the school's role in this plan is crucial and at least one member of staff who knows the child well will attend the meeting to establish and subsequently review this. Other staff will contribute in writing as appropriate.

The PEP will consider:

- The child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Interests, both in and out of school.
- Developmental and educational and pastoral needs, including any specific Physical, Mental Health and/or Special Educational Needs.
- Future plans, and how these can be supported.
- Issues arising for the child.
- It will also identify targets that will be reviewed during the next PEP meeting.
- The child's emotional wellbeing and intervention and therapeutic care to develop resilience and emotional wellbeing.
- The child's wishes and feelings.

Admission/induction arrangements

Looked-after children are a priority for admission and, as such, we will follow our Admissions Policy.

On admission, the child will meet with the Designated Teacher and their named member of staff. They will discuss any relevant issues, academic or pastoral, and ensure the child is made to feel comfortable in our school.

Records will be requested from the child's previous school and as soon as practicable after they are received a meeting will be held with the carer/parent, social worker, other relevant professionals, and child as appropriate. This will provide information to inform the child's new Personal Education Plan and ensure that communication systems are established early.

In the first PEP meeting, we will seek clarification from the social worker as to who requires school reports and who may give permission for school trips or other such activities. At this meeting any means of communication to aid the fluid exchange of information between statutory meetings will be discussed and agreed (such as a home/school book to detail any sudden significant changes in a child's circumstances).

School trips and special activities

Given the delays that some looked-after children experience in getting parental consent for school trips and activities, we will aim to ensure that looked-after children enjoy the same extracurricular opportunities as other children by reserving placements for them on trips or on activities.

It may be necessary to add any additional needs a LAC child might have to a Visits Risk Assessment in order that they might have their specific needs accommodated.

Complaints

If a child, young person, parent, designated carer or social worker wishes to complain about the provision or policy, they should in the first instance raise it with the Designated Teacher, who will try to resolve the situation.

If the issue cannot be resolved within 10 days, the child, young person, parent, designated carer or social worker can submit a formal complaint in writing to the Headteacher. The Headteacher will investigate the complaint and respond within 10 working days.

Any issue that remains unresolved at this stage should be addressed through a meeting in order to assess the impact of any such complaint upon the young person’s education. This meeting may include the named Local Governor and any other outside agency that both parties deem necessary to attend. This meeting should be held within 10 working days of the Headteacher’s response.

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) for looked-after children

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.

All VSHs should publish a clear policy on their use of PP+, including how they decide the level and use of top-sliced funding.

The PP+ can be used to facilitate a wide range of educational support for looked-after children. It is important that interventions supported by pupil premium should be evidence-based and in the best interests of the child.

PP+ funding for previously looked-after children is allocated directly to and managed by their school. This school manages the PP+ allocation for the benefit of their cohort of looked-after or previously looked-after children and according to children’s needs. It is not a personal budget for individual children; however, the school may choose to allocate an amount of funding to an individual to support their needs.¹

Getting the most from Pupil Premium Plus

Approaches that are:	Which emphasise:
Individually tailored to the needs and strengths of each pupil	Relationship-building, both with appropriate adults and with peers
Consistent (based on agreed core principles and components) but also flexible and responsive	An emotionally intelligent approach to the setting of clear behaviour boundaries
Based on evidence of what works	Increasing pupil’s understanding of their own emotions and identity
Focused on clear short-term goals which give opportunities for pupils to experience success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive reinforcement • Building self-esteem
Include regular, high-quality feedback from teaching staff	Relevance to the learner: relate to pupil’s interests where possible; make it matter to them
Engage parents/carers in the agreement and evaluation of arrangements for education support (e.g. via the PEP)	A joined-up approach involving social worker/carer/VSH and other relevant professionals
Supporting pupil transition (e.g. primary-secondary/KS3-4)	Strong and visionary leadership on the part of both of the pupil’s headteachers
Raising aspirations through access to high-quality educational experiences	A child centred approach to assessment for learning
Promote the young person’s awareness and understanding of their own thought process	

¹ Designated teachers may also find it helpful to refer to the Education Endowment Fund Tool Kit.

(metacognition) and help to develop problem-solving strategies	
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Appendix 1: Mental health

Looked-after children and previously looked-after children are more likely to experience the challenge of social, emotional and mental health issues than their peers. For example, they may struggle with:

- executive functioning skills - the mental processes enabling us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. (Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>)
- forming trusting relationships,
- social skills,
- managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger),
- sensory processing difficulties,
- foetal alcohol syndrome
- coping with transitions and change.

This can impact on their behaviour and education. It is key that 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, in the December 2017

In *Transforming children's and young people's mental health provision* the government outlines plans to encourage schools to appoint a Designated Senior Lead (DSL) for mental health.

Whilst the DSL is not expected to be a mental health expert, they are responsible for:

- ensuring the school is able to identify signs of potential mental health issues and know how to access further assessment and support where necessary; and
- ensuring the school understands 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'².

Measuring emotional and behavioural difficulties

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 to 17-year-olds or 2 to 4-year-olds. The SDQ can help 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 to 17.

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.

The school 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.

² 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) [Mental-health-services-and-schools-link-pilot-evaluation](#).

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2>

Promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2>

Improving mental health support for our children and young people

<https://www.scie.org.uk/children/care/mental-health/report#downloads>

Children's attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26/resources/childrens-attachment-attachment-in-children-and-young-people-who-are-adopted-from-care-in-care-or-at-high-risk-of-going-into-care-1837335256261>

Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health: A Green Paper

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664855/Transforming_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_provision.pdf

Appendix 2: Further information

Useful resources and external organisations

A good practice guide for schools: understanding and meeting the needs of children who are looked-after, fostered, adopted or otherwise permanently placed (PAC, 2013)

<https://www.pac-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/A-Good-Practice-Guide-for-Schools.pdf>

Become (formerly The Who Cares Trust) <http://www.becomecharity.org.uk/>

The National Children's Bureau <https://www.ncb.org.uk/>

Research

Education Matters in Care: A report by the independent cross-party inquiry into the educational attainment of looked-after children in England.

http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15782/1/Education_Matters_in_Care_September_2012.pdf

Information on attachment awareness for schools – Bath Spa University

<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/education/research/attachment-aware-schools/>

The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data
– Rees Centre

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/educational-progress-of-looked-after-children/>

Looked after children: good practice in schools (Ofsted report 2008)

<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8180/1/Looked-1.pdf>

Practice tools

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) teaching and learning toolkit

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit>

This provides useful information and evidence on effectiveness of types of support which can be facilitated by pupil premium funding.

Mental health

Children's attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care (NICE guideline, 2015)

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26/resources/childrens-attachment-attachment-in-children-and-young-people-who-are-adopted-from-care-in-care-or-at-high-risk-of-going-into-care-1837335256261>

This guideline covers the identification, assessment and treatment of attachment difficulties in children and young people up to age 18 who are adopted from care, in special guardianship, looked after by local authorities in foster homes (including kinship foster care), residential settings and other accommodation, or on the edge of care.

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire <http://www.sdqinfo.com/>

Information for researchers and professionals about SDQs

MindEd <https://www.minded.org.uk/>

Other relevant departmental advice and statutory guidance

Improving looked-after children's attainment in primary schools (guidance)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-attainment-of-looked-after-children-in-primary-schools-guidance-for-schools>

Improving looked-after children's attainment in secondary schools (guidance)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-attainment-of-looked-after-children-in-secondary-schools-guidance-for-schools>

Pupil premium: funding and accountability for schools (guidance)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings>

SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years (statutory guidance)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>