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Looked After Children Policy (Designated Teacher)

Procedure Originator:	B DUFFY
Approved By:	H TURNER
Date Approved:	1 st November 2020
Review Interval:	3yrs
Last Review Date	
Next Review Date	1 st November 2023
Audience:	Designated Teacher / DSL / SLT



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Introduction

Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a specific duty to promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated. The authority must, therefore, give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of those children. Schools are responsible for this educational development so must work with all agencies in ensuring that looked-after children are supported in their educational and personal development whilst at school.

Definition of 'Looked After'

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked after by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following:

- is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours,
- is subject to a care order
- is subject to a placement order

It is possible that a placement order is made without a care order or interim care order being made, or the child not being subject to section 20 of the 1989 Act. For example, the local authority working with a family and believing that the child should be removed and be placed for adoption. The local authority does not have to apply for a care order first (though this would be the usual situation) and then a placement order; it could apply simply for a placement order.

Looked-after children (referred to also as 'children looked-after') may (or may not) have some or all the following issues which may make them an extremely vulnerable group in terms of education and future life-chances.

- low self esteem
- poor education standards due to time out of school
- delayed social/emotional/cognitive development
- be bullied or bully others
- be prone to mental health issues
- be isolated with few friends
- have behaviour issues.
- poor attachments to others.
- have a need to be very private.

In pursuit of addressing these and providing maximum support the school through this policy will ensure that a nominated teacher for looked after children and for those children previously looked-after, who will undertake all the statutory responsibilities of that role. Looked-after children will also come under 'vulnerable' as recognised within the academy's Safeguarding Policy.

Key Documentation and Legislation

This document should be read alongside other key information to enable schools to support its looked-after children, namely:

- [Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children \(DfE\)](#)
- [The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children \(DfE\)](#)
- [Outcomes of children in need, including looked-after children](#)
- [Pupil premium: conditions of grant \(DfE\)](#)
- [Children's Act 1989](#) and subsequent updates

Key People including the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children and the Virtual School Head (VSH)

Looked-after and previously looked-after children start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences and, often, have special educational needs. It is therefore important that they are supported by key professionals in their lives.

As well as the carer(s) they will be living with, the main adult is the Virtual School Headteacher. They have a key role to ensure these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential - an important part of why this role was made statutory. For looked-after children, as part of a local authority's corporate parent role, the VSH needs to be the educational advocate that parents are for others.

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

Within schools the main responsibility for supporting looked-after children lies of course with the Principal/headteacher, but each school must have a 'Designated Teacher', which may commonly be either the school's SENCO or DSL but may be a stand-alone responsibility. However, liaison with DSL and SENCO would be a vital part of that role within a school.

The designated teacher should be a central point of initial contact within the school. This helps to make sure that the school plays its role to the full in making sure arrangements are joined up and minimise any disruption to a child's learning. A full role description is included in appendix 3, which includes expectations from all staff.

Monitoring Progress – the 'Personal Education Plan'

All looked-after children must have a care plan, of which the PEP is an integral part. The PEP (pre-school to age 18) should be initiated as part of the care plan. It is an evolving record of what needs to happen for looked-after children to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the child's identified educational needs, raises aspirations

and builds life chances. The school, other professionals and the child's carers should use the PEP to support achieving those things.

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

For full details of creating, reviewing and monitoring the PEP, read [Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children \(DfE\)](#) pages 14-18.

Supporting the Pupil

Admissions

Looked-after children will be given highest preference in school admissions (see [School Admissions Code \(DfE\)](#) paragraph 1.7). It is important that all relevant documentation accompanies the child when starting at school. A meeting should be convened involving the Virtual School/carer/school to plan transition/enrolment and agree a further meeting to discuss the PEP. All efforts should be made to make any transition as smooth as possible.

External Agencies

As well as the Virtual School, schools may have to liaise with a range of external services dependent on each individual situation, e.g. social workers, foster carers, residential social workers, and other education services. It is important for the benefit of the child that all communications are purposeful and timely to ensure ongoing quality support.

Pupil Voice

All agencies involved, including school should ensure that there are arrangements in place to promote a culture that takes account of the child's views according to age and understanding, identifying and meeting their educational needs; and to ensure all staff understand the importance of listening to and taking account of the child's wishes and feelings about education and the PEP process. The VSH can help schools facilitate this process.

Staff Training

The VSH should ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to meet the training needs of those responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, including the designated teacher, and it is important that strong links exist between the designated teacher and VSH.

The designated teacher in turn will ensure that all staff are briefed and aware of expectations around supporting looked-after children in all aspects of their education and well-being while at school.

Appendix 1: Key Personnel Information and contact details

Title	Details
Academy Designated Teacher name:	
Virtual Headteacher name and contact details:	
Virtual School contact details:	
Other 1:	
Other 2:	

Appendix 2: Role of Designated Teacher

The designated teacher should be a central point of initial contact within the school. This helps to make sure that the school plays its role to the full in making sure arrangements are joined up and minimise any disruption to a child's learning.

The most effective designated teachers have a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every looked-after and previously looked-after child on the school's roll. This involves, working with VSHs to promote the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children and promoting a whole school culture where the personalised learning needs of every looked-after and previously looked-after child matters and their personal, emotional and academic needs are prioritised.

Designated teachers should take lead responsibility for ensuring school staff understand the things which can affect how looked-after and previously looked-after children learn and achieve and how the whole school supports the educational achievement of these pupils. This means making sure that **all staff**:

- have high expectations of looked-after and previously looked-after children's learning and set targets to accelerate educational progress;
- are aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) from birth families and that some children may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences, and how this might affect the child's behaviour;
- understand how important it is to see looked-after and previously looked-after children as individuals rather than as a homogeneous group, not publicly treat them differently from their peers, and show sensitivity about who else knows about their looked-after or previously looked-after status;
- appreciate the central importance of the looked-after child's PEP in helping to create a shared understanding between teachers, carers, social workers and, most importantly, the child's own understanding of how they are being supported;
- have the level of understanding they need of the role of social workers, VSHs and carers, and how the function of the PEP fits into the wider care planning duties of the authority which looks after the child; and,
- for previously looked-after children, understand the importance of involving the child's parents or guardians in decisions affecting their child's education, and be a contact for parents or guardians who want advice or have concerns about their child's progress at school.

Designated teachers are also likely to have a more direct and day-to-day role in promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, either directly or through appropriate delegation. This can be achieved by:

- Contributing to the development and review of whole school policies and procedures to ensure that:
 - they do not unintentionally put looked-after and previously looked-after children at a disadvantage;

- there is effective induction for looked-after and previously looked-after children starting school, new to the school and new to care;
 - there are effective procedures in place to support a looked-after child's learning;
 - particular account is taken of the child's needs when joining the school and of the importance of promoting an ethos of high expectations about what s/he can achieve;
 - transitions to the next phase of a child's education are supported effectively to avoid children losing ground – e.g. moving schools from primary to secondary school or because of a change in placement or exclusion;
 - thought is given to the future, careers advice and guidance, and financial information about where appropriate further and higher education, training and employment;
 - when enrolling at the school, parents and guardians of previously looked-after children are reminded that they need to inform the school if their child is eligible to attract PP+; and,
 - there are no barriers to looked-after children accessing the general activities and experiences the school offers to all its pupils (e.g. taking into account possible transport difficulties and the arrangements for looked-after children to attend meetings).
- Promoting a culture in which looked-after and previously looked-after children;
 - are able to discuss their progress and be involved in setting their own targets, have their views taken seriously, and are supported to take responsibility for their own learning;
 - are prioritised in any selection of pupils who would benefit from one-to-one tuition, and that they have access to academic focused study support;
 - are encouraged to participate in school activities and in decision making within the school and the care system;
 - believe they can succeed and aspire to further and higher education or highly skilled jobs; and o can discuss difficult issues (such as SEN, bullying, attendance) in a frank manner with a sympathetic and empathetic adult.
 - Being a source of advice for teachers about:
 - differentiated teaching strategies appropriate for individual pupils who are looked-after or previously looked-after children; and,
 - the use of Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches to improve the short and medium term progress of looked-after and previously looked-after children, and help them and their teachers understand where they are in their learning (including any knowledge gaps), where they need to go, and how to get there.
 - Working directly with looked-after and previously looked-after children and their carers, parents or guardians to:
 - promote good home-school links;
 - support progress by paying particular attention to effective communication with carers, parents or guardians; o ensure carers, parents or guardians understand

- the potential value of one-to-one tuition and are equipped to engage with it at home;
- ensure carers, parents or guardians are aware of how the school teaches key skills such as reading and numeracy; and,
 - encourage high aspirations and working with the child to plan for their future success and fulfilment.
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- Having lead responsibility for the development and implementation of looked-after children's PEP within school in partnership with others as necessary; and,
 - Working closely with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead to ensure that any safeguarding concerns regarding looked-after and previously looked-after children are quickly and effectively responded to.

When supporting previously looked-after children, designated teachers should be aware of the following: the VSH must provide information and advice to parents and designated teachers on meeting the needs of these children - this may be general information, including training opportunities, or information and advice on individual children at the request of their parents or designated teacher. The designated teacher should fully involve parents and guardians in decisions affecting their child's education, including any requests to the VSH for advice on meeting their individual needs.

Appendix 3: Role of Academy Council

The way in which the role of the designated teacher is carried out varies from school to school. It will depend on the number of looked-after and previously looked-after children on roll, and their individual needs as well as, for example, whether the school caters for primary or secondary age children. Some schools may never have had a looked-after or previously looked-after child on roll, and the designated teacher may not, therefore, be familiar with some of the issues and processes they need to know about.

Not all aspects of the role of the designated teacher need necessarily be carried out by a single individual or by a qualified teacher. While lead responsibility for raising attainment of looked-after and previously looked-after children on roll must rest with the designated teacher, schools will need to decide how functions within it, including pastoral and administrative tasks, are most appropriately delegated to suit their own circumstances. If, for example, a secondary school had a significant number of looked-after and previously looked-after children on roll, the academy council may decide to designate more than one teacher, perhaps with one responsible for pre-16 and a second for post-16 pupils.

The academy council, head teacher and school leadership team will want to consider the following in supporting the designated teacher role:

- Does the designated teacher have appropriate seniority and professional experience to provide leadership, training, information, challenge and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children?
- Does the designated teacher have appropriate seniority and skills to work with the school's senior leadership and academy council to help ensure school policies and approaches appropriately reflect the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children and act as a champion for them?
- Does the designated teacher have training opportunities, including time away from timetable commitments, to acquire and keep up-to-date the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children, including a good knowledge of SEN?
- How does the designated teacher role contribute to the deeper understanding of everyone in the school who is likely to be involved in supporting looked-after and previously looked-after children to achieve?
- What resource implications might there be in supporting the designated teacher to carry out their role?
- What expertise can designated teachers call on within and outside the school such as SENCOs, health and mental health support?
- What monitoring arrangements might be appropriate to ensure that the role of the designated teacher is providing appropriate support for looked-after and previously looked-after children on the school roll?

The needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children may have implications for almost every school policy and consideration may want to be given to ensure that policies are

effective in reflecting their needs. How schools monitor this is up to them, but some of the issues that may be considered are:

- that there are no unintended barriers to the admission of looked-after and previously looked-after children either at normal transition or any other point of the school year;
- whether there are any issues arising as a result of the number of looked-after and previously looked-after children on roll at the school and the number of local authorities which are involved;
- whether looked-after and previously looked-after children have made the expected or better levels of progress over the past twelve months in line with their peers (i.e. educational, social and emotional progress);
- whether the pattern of attendance and exclusions for looked-after and previously looked-after children is different to that of other children at the school;
- for looked-after children, whether the school's policies are sensitive to their needs, e.g. in accessing out of school hours learning, respecting the children's wishes and feelings about their care status or generally meeting their needs as identified in their personal education plans (PEPs);
- whether any looked-after and previously looked-after children are identified as gifted and talented and how those needs are being met;
- whether any looked-after or previously looked-after children face additional safeguarding challenges of which the school's designated safeguarding lead should be aware;
- whether any looked-after and previously looked-after children have special educational needs (SEN) and whether those needs are being identified and met at the appropriate level;
- whether any looked-after and previously looked-after children have mental health needs and whether those needs are being identified and met;
- whether the school's behaviour management policy is sufficiently flexible to respond to looked-after and previously looked-after children's challenging behaviour in the most effective way for those children;
- how the teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children are reflected in school policies, in particular in relation to interventions and resources;
- what the impact is of any of the school's policies, e.g. on charging for educational visits and extended school activities, on looked-after children; and,
- what impact Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) has in supporting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

Academy council should, through the designated teacher, hold the school to account on how it supports its looked-after and previously looked-after children (including how the PP+ is used) and their level of progress. In some schools, designated teachers do this by providing the academy council with a regular report. The patchy nature in the numbers of looked-after and previously looked-after children in any one school means it would be best to have a flexible approach to providing such a report.



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