

Designated Teacher Handbook



A guide for schools on how to support children and young people looked after

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Introduction

Children who are in the care of the local authority are described as children looked after. They are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The outlook for these children has improved, but there remains a significant gap between their prospects and those of all children - in academic performance and in being over-represented in a range of vulnerable groups.

Whatever may be happening in their lives, the fact that they are in care usually means something drastic has occurred in their family life.

The best chance children looked after have of overcoming these difficulties is if we, as professionals, take on the role of corporate parent ensuring they get the service we would want ‘as if they were our own’ children.

This handbook is a guide for Designated Teachers to support their role in helping children looked after to achieve their academic potential.

Corporate Parenting

“Once the profound and difficult decision has been made to remove a child, it is the duty of the whole local authority to ‘safeguard and promote their welfare’.”

(Guidance on the Education of Young People in Public Care 2000)

The local authority has a statutory duty to look after the child – this includes ensuring they receive the best education possible. The local authority assumes the role of “corporate parent”. This responsibility is held by every adult employed by the local authority including those who work in schools.

In broad terms, we expect a corporate parent to do at least what a good parent would do. Schools and Designated Teachers, in particular, have an important role to play.

What does 'looked after' mean?

Definition of a Looked After Child - The Children Act 1989

A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she:

- has been provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours;
- is subject to a Care Order;
- Is subject to a Placement Order.

There are two main legal routes by which children become 'looked after':

1a. Care Order (Section 31 of the Children Act 1989)

A care order places the child in the care of the local authority, with parental responsibility being shared between the parents and the local authority. This is a court order and it needs to be satisfied that the care order is in the best interests of the child. A care order will be made when "a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm." A care order can last until the child is 18 or an alternative order is made (for example, adoption) or the court decides the order is no longer necessary.

1b. Interim Care Order

An interim care order places the child into the care of the local authority (for up to eight weeks in the first instance) and allows the court a period of time to decide whether or not a full order should be made.

2. Accommodated (Section 20 of the Children Act 1989)

Parents retain parental responsibility with the local authority acting as 'corporate parent'. This is usually on a short-term basis to cover a family crisis or as part of a package of care, for example to help support a child with disabilities. The person with parental responsibility can remove the child from accommodation at any time.



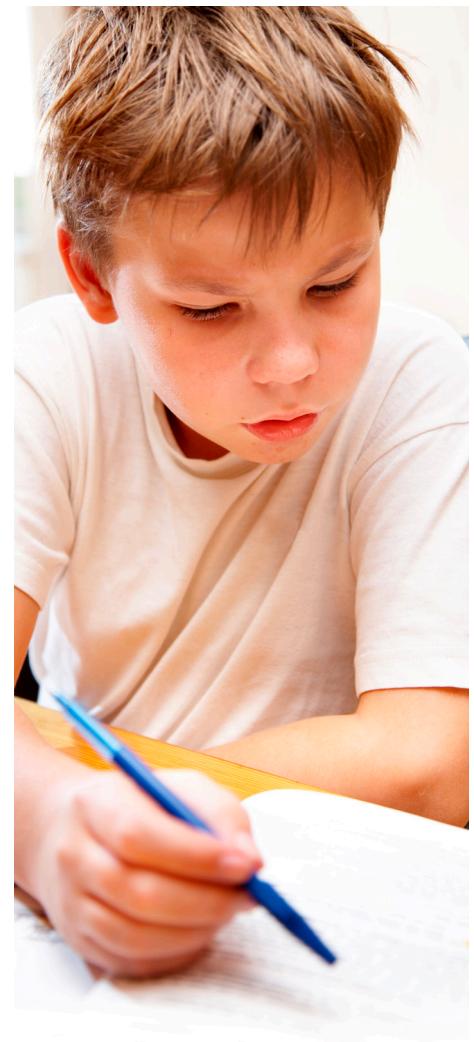
Why do young people become looked after?

The majority of young people in care come from families who experience hardship and are separated from them because their family are unable to provide adequate care. They may have been affected by distressing experiences such as neglect or abuse. Others are looked after as a result of the illness or death of a parent, some may have disabilities or more complex needs. A minority enter the care system as a result of their own behaviour.

Young people become looked after if the court is convinced that “the child concerned is likely to suffer significant harm.”

The main reasons for young people entering the care system are:

- Neglect
- Abuse
- Family breakdown
- Loss or bereavement
- Offence of the young person (less than 2%)



What are the responsibilities of the school for children in care?

These are set out in three key government documents: which can be downloaded or ordered online at www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for children looked after: statutory guidance for school governing bodies.

Ref: DCSF-01046-2009

Improving the attainment of children looked after in primary schools: Guidance for schools
DCSF-01047-2009

Improving the attainment of children looked after in secondary schools: Guidance for schools
DCSF-01048-2009

The underachievement of children looked after is well documented and has been re-visited in numerous reports and research. The reason for their poor performance is complex but can be summarised as being due to the complexity and volume of barriers which they face.

The previous government consistently published guidance, circulars and regulations relating to the chronic underachievement of children looked after. This culminated in a statutory duty on local authorities (2005) and further strengthened calls for radical change (2006).

From September 2009, governing bodies of all maintained schools were required under the Children and Young Persons Act to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of children looked after on their school roll. This made statutory what had previously been promoted in guidance as good practice. Children looked after remain a priority for the coalition government:

"The government expects schools to take a proactive approach to co-operating with and supporting local authorities in discharging the duty, so that looked-after children receive the support that they need to achieve and succeed."

The Legal Framework: Children Looked After

Section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires the governing body of a maintained school to designate a member of staff (the 'designated teacher') to have responsibility to promote the educational achievement of children looked after who are registered pupils at the school.

Who can be a designated teacher for children looked after?

The designated teacher for children looked after must be:

A qualified teacher working at the school as a teacher OR

A Headteacher or acting Headteacher

Many of the tasks of the role can be delegated to a member of staff e.g. Head of Year but the designated teacher is accountable for children in care at the school.

The Legal Framework: Designated Teacher – Roles and Responsibilities

The governing body must ensure that the designated teacher undertakes appropriate training. Through their funding agreements, designated teacher requirements apply to academies and free schools.

The Role of Designated Teacher

The role of Designated Teacher was made statutory under proposals in 'Care Matters: A time for change'. The designated teacher will 'act as a resource and advocate for children and young people in public care'. They will be key to improving the educational outcomes for children looked after by providing consistency and stability and representing the interests and needs of children looked after within the whole school community.

The Responsibilities of a Designated Teacher include:

Welcoming each looked after child and carer to their school and arranging necessary support to ensure successful integration. Appreciating the importance of showing sensitivity about who else knows about a child's looked after status.

Ensuring that an up-to-date list of children looked after is maintained in school and is available to staff.

Ensuring that the needs of children looked after attending the school are identified. Be aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation from birth families and that some children may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences.

Ensuring that each young person has a Personal Education Plan with appropriate educational targets. To enable each child to contribute to and participate in their Personal Education Plan to help them achieve their potential. Have high expectations of children looked after's involvement in learning and educational progress. Appreciate the importance of the child's Personal Education Plan in helping to create a shared understanding between teachers, carers, social workers.

Monitoring the attendance of children looked after. Applying a 'first day response' approach to all children looked after and contacting the child's carer on each occasion when the child is absent.

Monitoring the progress of children looked after and ensuring that they receive appropriate pastoral support. Understand the reasons which may be behind a child looked after behaviour, and why they may need more support but not allow this to be an excuse for lowering expectations of what a child is capable of achieving.

Ensuring that a member of staff attends all Looked After Reviews. They should be able to update the review on educational issues.

Establishing and ensuring appropriate boundaries of confidentiality.

Making sure that children looked after benefit from the use of the pupil premium+ funding and are prioritised in any selection of pupils who would benefit from one-to-one tuition and access to academic focused study support.

Write an annual report to School Governing Body – template is available on the website.

Establishing an ongoing dialogue for communication with key agencies, such as Children's Services, Health, and Private Fostering Agencies etc., and being the central contact point for other external agencies, ensuring the effective transfer of information.

Success Indicators for the School and the Designated Teacher

Success Indicators

Indicators which demonstrate that the role of the Designated Teacher is being implemented efficiently and is making a real difference include ensuring that:

- the school has a clear overview of the educational needs and progress of all children looked after on roll;
- the school's policies are effective in reflecting the needs of children looked after;
- Resources are allocated to support the designated teacher to carry out this role effectively for the benefit of children looked after.

Effective Schools and Children looked After

Effective schools support children looked after by:

- Doing the things they do for all children but more so.
- Balancing high levels of support with real challenge.
- Skilfully linking each child to a key person they relate well to.
- Making it a priority to know the children well and to build strong relationships.
- Developing strong partnerships with carers, local authorities and specialist agencies.
- Making things happen and seeing things through.
- Ensuring consistency as well as discrete flexibility.
- Actively extending the horizons of each child.
- Planning for future transitions.

Our aim is that all children in our care make the same or better progress in their learning compared with their peers.



Admissions

When a young person becomes looked after, it is imperative that their school place is maintained. School offers stability and familiarity, which is vital during a time of change.

There will be exceptional circumstances when a change of school is necessary. When this happens, everything should be done to assist in the smooth transition to a new school. This is essential to avoid the young person becoming disengaged from education. Schools need to consider how they can best support the admission of children looked after and their admissions policy should reflect this.

To summarise recent admission legislation:

- An education placement for a looked after child must be secured within 20 school days;
- Schools must give children looked after the highest priority in their admission arrangements;
- Class size regulations allow for the admission of a looked after child as an ‘excepted child’ in primary schools;
- The local authority can direct schools to admit children looked after.

Attendance

Life can present challenges, for some young people, which can distract from learning. Barriers entirely beyond their control may prevent them from fully engaging with education. Non-attendance at school maybe an indicator of particular difficulties a child is experiencing.

While the majority of children looked after regularly attend school, a significant minority find going to school problematic. The reasons behind this are complex and can overlap, but include:

- The emotional trauma of being separated from family and friends.
- The young person’s pre-care experience which can be characterised by neglect, a lack of routine and low aspirations.
- Delays in the admissions process especially for students who transfer mid –term.
- The distance a young person lives from school which can make transport problematic.
- Transfers to a new school which may lead to a child struggling to settle in academically and socially.
- The increased likelihood that they suffer health problems when compared to their peers.
- A lack of confidence, lower resilient and emotional insecurity due to significant turbulence.

The attendance of children looked after should be closely monitored, analysed and understood. Any issues or concerns should be raised through care team meetings or highlighted in the child’s Personal Education Plan. The Virtual School Attendance Officer should also be kept informed

Exclusions

Schools should be especially sensitive to exclusion issues where children looked after are concerned.

Children looked after are particularly vulnerable to exclusions and the effect on them can be catastrophic. It can lead to an added pressure at home and the breakdown of a foster placement.

Schools need to be proactive, providing support and perhaps alternative educational packages to prevent this from happening.

Early dialogue with all involved with the young person is essential and can be supported through the Personal Education Plan process.

Schools should try every practicable means to keep the child in school and should seek local authority and other professional advice as appropriate.

The Designated Teacher in school may be best placed to do this. The child's social worker, foster carer and the Virtual School should be involved in working with school to avoid the need to exclude.

OFSTED

Ofsted Inspectors will ask:

- How many children looked after do you have in your school?
- Do you have an up-to-date Personal Education Plan for each child?
- How is the pupil premium used to support each looked after child?
- How do children looked after compare academically and socially to their peers and other groups?
- How does the school support national and local targets for children looked after?
- Does the school admission policy actively support children looked after?
- Are Governors aware of the progress of children looked after and how is this achieved?



Targets and Indicators for children looked after

There are numerous national and local targets and performance indicators used to measure the success of children looked after.

The overall national target is:

To narrow the gap in educational achievement between children looked after and their peers.

Indicators of success include:-

- Attaining Level four or higher in Reading, Writing and Maths at the end of Key Stage two.
- Achieving five or more GCSEs (including English and Maths) at grades A*-C in Year 11.
- Making at least expected progress for their Key Stage.
- Closing the gap in their attainment (from age related expectation).
- Are not excluded from school.
- Attendance is over 95%.



Personal Education Plans

The Personal Education Plan should be completed within 20 days of a child coming into care or within 20 days of changing school.

The Social Worker should:-

- Contact the Designated Teacher at the child's school to arrange a meeting to complete the Personal Education Plan.
- Generate the electronic Personal Education Plan so the school can complete appropriate sections before the meeting. The social worker should complete 'Part A' prior to the meeting.
- Ensure that the young person and their carer are invited.
- Others that may be invited could be the class teacher or learning support, relevant health professionals and the Virtual School.

Before the meeting

- The Designated Teacher should meet with the young person to ensure they are aware of the purpose of the meeting, discuss their views/concerns and anything they wish to raise at the meeting and to complete the young person's section on electronic Personal Education Plan.
- Collect the views of the teachers and staff involved with the young person, including targets to be included on the plan.
- Complete the designated Teacher section of the plan so attendance, targets, attainment etc. can be addressed in the meeting if pertinent.

The Personal Education Plan meeting

- Check all the details and contacts are correct.
- All parties should discuss the Plan and contribute to it.
- SMART targets should be formulated that will contribute to the young person's educational attainment.
- All parties should be clear how additional resources (e.g. Pupil Premium+) are to be utilised to meet targets. Specific interventions, resources, one to one tuition etc. needs to be included in a detailed plan e.g. six x one hour one to one intervention at £25 an hour. This is then used to access Pupil Premium +
- A time and date for the Personal Education Plan review meeting should be set.
- Complete the electronic Personal Education Plan within five working days

Personal Education Plan Review

Personal Education Plans should be reviewed termly to inform the statutory review on educational progress and to review the SMART targets. Electronic Personal Education Plan will send reminders of the date and a similar format as detailed above is followed.

The Virtual School monitors the quality of Personal Education Plans to ensure they are strongly focussed on learning outcomes.

KS5 Personal Education Plan's

- KS5 Personal Education Plan reviews should be held yearly, in the Autumn Term. These can then be reviewed during the year at professional's discretion, to record changes and access appropriate resources.
- More detailed information on completing the Personal Education Plan process can be found in the electronic Personal Education Plan handbook.

Using Pupil Premium +

Examples of some of the types of activities that the Pupil Premium might be used to support children in care include:

- One to one tuition
- Small group teaching
- Alternative education provision
- Intensive support in the basics
- Targeted catch up
- Personalised learning resources
- Support to build a child's confidence
- Supporting gifted and talented activities



Additional Notes regarding carer responsibilities

Extract from Torbay Foster Carer's handbook

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1.1 Unless otherwise expressly stated in the IPA relating to the Child you shall be expected to provide at least the following for the Child out of the weekly fee specified in the IPA:-

- (i) All reasonable costs arising from academic assignments and extra-curricular activities that the Child undertakes, including after school clubs, music lessons and activity clubs outside of school that the Child may attend.
- (ii) All general day to day transport needs (including all transportation to and from school, college, training courses, apprenticeships and work up to 200 miles per week (averaged out over the 4 week claim period).

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'In respect of additional holiday opportunities for the Child, such as school activity holidays you are expected to fund up to £250. We may be able to provide funds over this amount if detailed on the Personal Education Plan.

Laptops are not usually purchased using Pupil Premium +. However, in specific circumstances, exceptions may be made e.g. a young person that is experiencing a number of placement changes and needs the support to achieve academically.

Monitoring Progress

The Virtual School will collect current assessment data on each child on a termly basis in order to monitor the progress that each child in care is making and to ensure that appropriate interventions are put into place if good progress is not being made.

Reasons for collecting data:

To improve outcomes for children looked after, reliable, accurate, up to date and readily accessible data is the basis for informed strategies, actions and interventions:

We collect data to:

- Enable effective tracking and early intervention.
- Improve attendance.
- Raise attainment and standards.
- Accelerate progress.
- Raise aspirations.
- Reduce NEET at 16.
- Challenge and support schools – providing data for School Improvement Advisers.
- Support the completion of Personal Education Plans and review meetings.

Help and Support.

This may be accessed via the Virtual School.

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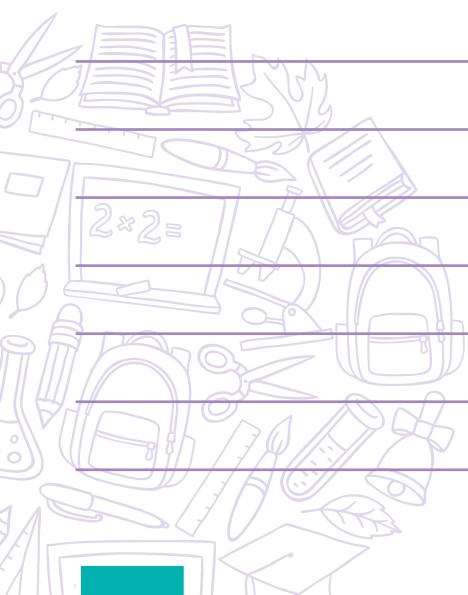
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Notes





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