

Looked After Children Policy

Date of policy:	March 2017
Date last review adopted by governing body:	21st February 2023
Frequency of review:	3 years (earlier if necessary)

1. Rationale

Schools are key in helping to raise the educational standards and improving the life chances of looked after children, and in tackling the causes of social exclusion through careful planning, monitoring and evaluation. 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.

2. Definition

The term “looked after” was introduced by the Children Act 1989. This refers to a child who is either accommodated (whereby the local authority provides for the child on an agreed basis with the person who has parental responsibility) or is subject to a care order (whereby a court order grants shared parental responsibility to the local authority in order to protect and promote a child’s welfare). Children in both instances could be living with foster carers, in a residential unit, in a residential school, with relatives, or even with parents on a part or full time basis.

3. Legal Framework

Legislation and guidance from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department of Health (DH) requires schools to have effective policies for supporting and promoting the education of looked after children.

Schools must:

- Ensure access to a balanced and broadly based education to all looked after children
- Prioritise recording and improving the academic achievement of all looked after children
- Prioritise a reduction in the number of exclusions and trancies for all looked after children
- Ensure there is a designated teacher to advocate for the rights of looked after children
- Develop systems of communications and protocols
- Promote the attendance of looked after children

4. Objectives

We will:

- Work alongside social workers and other relevant agencies including Foster carers to ensure that each looked after child has a current Personal Education Plan 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, 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 and SENCO is provided with regular training, and that they cascade this training to school staff as appropriate.
- Ensure that a clear protocol for sharing of information will be followed both within school and with outside agencies.
- Endeavour to support all looked after children educated in this school to achieve to their fullest possible academic potential.
- Ensure that a PEP is completed every term for the Virtual Schools and all relevant meetings are attended.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The named Governor will work in co-operation with the Head Teacher and Designated Teacher as the named staff responsible for ensuring that all looked after children have equal access to all learning opportunities in line with their peers. The Head Teacher has specific responsibilities for supporting the rest of the staff in their training and work with looked after children.

The named Governor should be satisfied that:

- the school has a coherent policy for looked after children
- the school's policies and procedures are reviewed in the light of social inclusion guidance and joint DH/DfES guidelines
- the designated teacher has received appropriate training
- looked after children have equal access to all areas of the curriculum
- the Governing body receives an annual report
- the Essex Virtual Learning Tool is used effectively

The Head Teacher will:

- oversee the development of the policy on looked after children
- be responsible for all systems to support looked after children.
- report to the governing body on an annual basis on the following:
 - the number of looked after pupils in the school
 - data as a discrete group, compared to other pupils
 - the attendance of pupils, compared to other pupils
 - the level of any fixed term and permanent suspensions, compared to other pupils
 - the number of complaints
- serve as the contact for social services, virtual schools and the other relevant agencies and will maintain responsibility to support looked after children within the school.
- 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 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
- have an overview and co-ordinating role for gathering and holding all information regarding children who are looked after
- 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 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
- building positive home-school relationships between parents / carers with regular opportunities for dialogue
- being proactive and participating in setting goals for the child's PEP
- 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
- by requesting support from the SENCO and/or outside agencies, including the Education of children Looked After Service, if a looked after child requires additional academic or behavioural support
- by working closely 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
- by having a strategy for key stage or new school transitions

6. Personal Education Plans

Each child will have a Personal Education Plan (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 future steps
- interests, both in and out of school
- developmental and educational and pastoral 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.

7. Admission/Induction Arrangements

Looked after children are a priority for admission and, as such, we will follow the LEA's published admission criteria. Essex County Council has the Virtual School which oversees the support for all Looked After Children and directs schools to report on progress on line. This will need to be set up for the child concerned.

On admission, the carers/parents 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 if appropriate and as soon as practicable after they are received a meeting will be held with the carer / parent, social worker, and 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.)

8. School Trips and Special Activities

Given the delays that 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.

9. Complaints

Please see our complaints policy.

10. Equality statement

The governors and staff are committed to providing the full range of opportunities for all pupils regardless of gender, disability, and ethnicity, social, cultural or religious background. All pupils have access to the curriculum and the right to a learning environment which dispels ignorance, prejudice or stereotyping.