

WORCESTERSHIRE  
**CHILDREN FIRST**  
Fostering



Worcestershire Children First Fostering

# **Promoting Educational Achievement for Looked After Children**

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## 1. Introduction and Legal Framework

Although some do well, Looked After Children as a group are at greater risk of poor experiences of education and low educational attainment than their peers. The 1989 Children Act places a duty on Local Authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. The Department of Education in 'Promoting the Education of Looked After Children' (DfE) 2014 has set out the role and requirements of Local Authorities.

The duty placed on Local Authorities is reflected in legislation and guidance concerning fostering, which stresses the importance of promoting education and achievement for all children who are looked after.

Foster carers have a major role in supporting the children with their education within the home as well as being a good advocate for them within the education, employment and training environment.

The **Fostering Regulations 2011 ([Regulation 16](#))**, **National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the Care Planning Regulations** should be read in conjunction with this policy.

### **In summary they require a fostering provider to:**

- Have a written education policy which sets out how foster carers are supported to help ensure that children reach their full educational potential throughout their childhood and the transition to adulthood.
- Provide foster homes which promote a learning environment which supports their development.
- Promote and monitor the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. Promote the regular school attendance and participation in school activities of children of compulsory school age placed with foster parents.
- Provide foster parents with such information and assistance, including equipment, as may be necessary to meet the educational needs of children placed with them.
- Ensure that foster parents promote the leisure interests of children placed with them.
- Where any child placed with a foster parent is above compulsory school age, assist with the making of, and give effect to, the arrangements made for the child's education, training and employment.

WCFF and its foster carers will work with schools and colleges and the Virtual School to promote the educational achievement of children it looks after.

## 2. What is the Virtual School?

The Virtual School is not a building nor does it provide direct teaching or intervention programmes. It has three core functions:

1. To monitor and track the educational progress and achievement for every child in care to Worcestershire Children First.
2. To challenge schools, settings and other professionals where provision is not good enough or where aspirations are not high enough.
3. To promote inclusion and equality of access for all Looked After Children which includes raising attendance and eliminating exclusions.

The Virtual School champions the needs of all Children in Care and is made up of a network of professionals. Their role is to work alongside schools and social care professionals to make sure that the most vulnerable children can access the education they deserve and identify the different areas of support needed for each child to stay on track with their learning.

The child's social worker should inform the Virtual School when a child becomes looked after.

### 2.1 Virtual School Head

The Virtual School is a core statutory function of every local authority and the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) holds overall responsibility for the education outcomes for every looked after child regardless of their age, stage or the setting they attend.

The Virtual School Head must ensure that there are effective systems in place to:

- Maintain an up-to-date roll of its looked after children and monitor their education placement, attendance and educational progress;
- Inform Head Teachers and Designated Teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is looked after by the VSH's local authority;
- Ensure that social workers, Designated Teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP.
- Ensure up-to-date, effective and high-quality PEPs that focus on educational outcomes and that all Looked After Children, wherever they are placed, have such a PEP;
- Ensure the educational achievement of children looked after by the authority is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare;
- VSH reports regularly on the attainment of looked after children through the authority's corporate parenting structures and VS Governing Body.
- Ensure children are in receipt of suitable, full-time education unless there are exceptional circumstances which have been agreed in conjunction with the Virtual school head.

## 2.2 Pupil Premium

There are several components within Pupil Premium that refer to Looked After or Previously Looked After Children:

- Pupil Premium for Looked After Children (LAC) is known as **Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)**. For Worcestershire Looked After Children this is distributed via Worcestershire Virtual School.
- Pupil Premium for 'rising 3-year olds' is referred to as **Early Years Pupil Premium**. For Worcestershire this is distributed via Local Authority Finance Team.
- Pupil Premium for children who have **left Care** via Adoption Order, Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order is known as **Previous Looked After Pupil Premium**. This is paid directly to schools.

The VSH retains the allocation of PP+ for Looked After Children and will allocate up to £700 per term per term directly to schools on receipt of a completed PEP which clearly evidences SMART targets and assessment of impact.

The VSH also has considerable flexibility in the use of PP+ funding in order to maximise its impact for individual Looked After Children as well as the whole looked-after cohort. The PP+ can be used to facilitate a wide range of educational support for looked-after children. VSH should seek the input of the school's designated teacher and carers when deciding on how to use PP+ to support a child. It is important that interventions supported by pupil premium should be evidence-based and in the best interests of the child.

For more information on Pupil Premium please refer to [WCF Virtual School Funding](#)

## 3. Personal Education Plans (PEP)

Every child in care from the end of the first full term after age 3 up to, but not including, age 18 must have a Personal Education Plan. This is part of the Care Plan that is reviewed through the statutory process by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The child's social worker has responsibility for setting up the PEP meeting and this will normally take place at the child's education setting. Foster carers are expected to attend and contribute to the child's educational plan. A PEP should be an accurate reflection of the young person's education plan and identify the support needed to achieve the best outcomes. The plan may have specific actions for the foster carers and their supervising social worker will discuss these with them during supervision. The child's PEP will be reviewed and updated termly.

#### 4. Designated Teachers for Looked after Children

Each school must nominate a senior member of staff as the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children. It should be someone with enough authority to get things done and may be the Head Teacher or Deputy Head, particularly in Primary Schools. These teachers are offered training and information to help them to understand the situation of Looked After Children, the hurt and trauma that they have often suffered, the feelings that such children may have and the behaviour that can result. Designated teachers should also understand the role of foster carers, social workers and the systems of planning meetings, reviews, Court etc that surround Looked After Children. The Designated Teacher may often be a foster carer's first port of call if the carer has information to pass on about the child.

For example, it can help the school to know straight away if there has been a significant event, such as a contact visit that has distressed the child, as this could affect the child's behaviour in school.

The Designated Teacher can also be the person to contact if there are any difficulties, either with the child in school, or with communication between home and school or indeed any school related issue.

#### 5. Expectations of Foster Carers

WCFF expects its foster carers to participate fully in the educational experience of children in care by:

- Following the placement of a child, introducing themselves to the Designated Teacher\ classroom teacher or form tutor for the child and establishing lines of communication.
- Making sure children attend school regularly and providing reasons for absence promptly to the school, when necessary. If carers are experiencing difficulties, they should speak to the education provider or contact the Virtual School for Children in Care.
- Attending parent consultation meetings and celebration events.
- Supporting the child or young person to attend appropriate after school activities and other leisure activities which contribute towards the child's learning and social skills.
- Ensuring that the home includes a space where the child or young person can sit quietly and study.

- Providing the time and opportunity for younger children to read to an adult carer each day.
- Supporting children's learning by helping to ensure that homework is completed, and homework diaries are checked and signed each week, as required by the school. If foster carers are unsure how best to support homework, they should speak to the school or contact the Virtual School.
- Providing appropriate books and resources around the home, in liaison with school if necessary.
- Ensuring that children have the right equipment and resources for learning e.g. access to a computer, stationery, calculator.
- In most circumstances, foster carers are expected to transport children to and from school, unless the child or young person is able to go independently. Where children are attending school more than 3 miles from the foster carers home foster carers can claim mileage. This 3-mile rule applies to outward and return journeys.
- WCCF also provides a discretionary school uniform allowance for those children who become looked after without sufficient uniform or change schools. For further information on this and mileage please refer to **Financial Support to Foster Carers found in the [Foster Carer Handbook](#)**
- Foster Carers are expected to pay for school dinners or provide a packed lunch from the child's Foster Care Allowance.
- Foster carer should prioritise and celebrating educational achievements
- Being aspirational about children's education and the importance of education in enhancing life choices and opportunities.

## 6. Placement Meetings\Delegated Authority

During the placement meeting when the child's Placement Plan is being drawn up and decisions are being made on what authority is being delegated to foster carers, consideration should be given to the tasks that foster carers will undertake to promote the child's education. This should include discussion on areas such as attendance at school events, signing of Home-School Agreements and permission to go on school trips.

## 7. Attendance

Foster carers should ensure that they have the school term dates and any school closure dates for the schools attended by children in their care, in order to avoid arranging holidays in term time and to maximise school attendance.

Children and young people should not be taken out of school during school time unless there are exceptional circumstances. If this is required, foster carers would be expected to discuss this with the social worker of the child or young person and their supervising social worker.

This permission to remove a child during term time should be agreed by WCF managers before any holiday is booked and authorisation sought from the Headteacher.

If a child or young person is excluded from school, foster carers should inform their supervising social worker and the child's social worker immediately. Informal exclusions do not exist and if carers are told that this is the plan by the school, they must contact the social worker or the Virtual School immediately as this is not a legal process.

## 8. SEND School Provision and Education Health Care Plans (EHCP)

Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support is available at every stage of education. This can be identified in the early years setting and follows the young person through every stage of their education.

If a child's school or setting cannot meet a child's needs using the support they usually offer to children who need extra help, the County Council may carry out a needs assessment for the child. This is called an Education Health and Care Assessment or EHC assessment. When the child's needs have been assessed a plan for meeting them may be drawn up. This plan is called an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The EHCP is put together by professionals in education, health and social care to make sure children with SEND have a package of support to help them through to adulthood (until they are 25). Foster carers will be expected to contribute to the assessment for the plan, the plan itself and reviews of the plan.

If a child is placed who already has a plan, a copy of this should be given to the foster carers.

More Information can be found at [SEND School Provision and Education Health Care Plans](#)

## 9. Avoidance of Disruption in Education

Changes of school should be minimized to avoid disruption to the child's education and should not normally take place in years 10 and 11.

Finding a school place is the overall responsibility of the child or young person's social worker and Virtual School. Foster carers should not change a child's school or enroll them in a new school without discussion with the child and all other professionals involved.

Where a child has an Education Health and Care Plan the Local Authority's SEND Services, who maintains the Statement/EHCP is responsible for securing appropriate provision. This needs to be planned as soon as possible if a child is moving placement and will need a new school place, as it can be difficult to find the right provision at short notice.

In circumstances where a child's educational placement needs to change the child or young person's social worker must consider:

- Ascertaining the child's wishes and feelings
- Ascertaining the views of the foster carers
- Ascertaining the views of the parents
- Notifying and consulting with the Independent Reviewing Officer
- Notifying and consulting with the Designated Teacher at the child's current school

## 10. Training for Foster Carers

The Virtual School offer foster carers regular workshops on different aspect of a child's education and information on these are sent to all foster carers.