

Policy for Previously Looked After Children – April 2025

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children' 2018 sets out the framework under which Virtual Schools discharge their duty for previously looked after children.

Looked-after and previously looked-after children start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences and, often, have special educational needs. Virtual School Heads (VSH) 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 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 listed in *Previously looked after children*.

The definition of a previously looked after child is:

- Children who are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order.
- Children who were adopted outside England and Wales from 'state care' (care that is provided by a public authority, religious or other organisation).

Discharging the duty for previously looked-after children

Local authorities have a duty under section 23ZZA of the Children Act 1989 (inserted by section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017) to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children in their area by providing information and advice to:

- any person that has parental responsibility for the child;
- providers of funded early years education, designated teachers for previously looked-after children in maintained schools and academies; and
- any person who is no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales (as defined by the Children Act 1989 or Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014) because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order; or
- any person who was adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales. 'State care' is care provided by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

The duty applies to children who are in early years provision (secured by the local authority under section 7(1) of the Childcare Act 2006) and continues throughout the compulsory years of education where the child is in provision funded in part or in full by the state.

VSHs are integral to ensuring that local authorities discharge their duty to provide suitable advice and information for the purpose of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked-after children. They can also undertake any activity they consider appropriate where that activity will promote the educational achievement of such children in their area.

Role of the Virtual School Head for previously looked-after children

The role of the VSH for previously looked-after children is to promote their educational achievement through the provision of information and advice to their parents, educators and others who the VSH considers necessary.

VSHs must discharge their duty from the point at which the child becomes eligible for free early education and conclude when they have completed the compulsory years of education.

The duty relates to previously looked after children who are in education in the area served by the VSH irrespective of where the child lives. This avoids the need for education settings to work with more than one VSH and prevents cross-border complications.

VSHs, in conjunction with the Director of Children's Services, should decide the extent of their offer to parents, early education providers and schools but as a minimum, the VSH must:

- respond to parental requests for advice and information – e.g. advice on school admissions in their area. Where appropriate, the VSH should sign-post parents to other services that can offer advice and support;
- respond to requests for advice and information from providers of early education, designated teachers in maintained schools and academies, and providers of alternative provision in their area in respect of individual children supported by the local authority. In particular, the VSH should develop/ build on existing good working relationship with designated teachers for previously looked-after children in their area; and
- make general advice and information available to early years settings and schools to improve awareness of the vulnerability and needs of previously looked-after children. This should include promoting good practice on identifying and meeting their needs, and guidance on effective use of the PP+.

However, it is important to note that the local authority and VSH are no longer the corporate parent for previously looked-after children and the VSH role in relation to these children reflects this. VSHs are **not** expected to monitor the educational progress of individual children or be held to account for their educational attainment. Any intervention in the education of a previously looked-after child must be with the agreement of the person(s) who have parental responsibility for the child. They, like all parents, are responsible for overseeing their child's progress in education.

VSHs will want to satisfy themselves that the child is eligible for support by asking the child's parents for evidence of their previously looked-after status. For children adopted outside England and Wales, the child must have been looked after by a public authority, a religious organisation or other provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society. Where parents are unable to provide clear evidence of their child's status, VSHs will need to use their discretion. In such circumstance, VSHs should discuss eligibility with the designated teacher at the child's school to agree a consistent approach.

School admissions

Admissions authorities of all mainstream schools must give the highest priority in their oversubscription criteria to looked-after and previously looked-after children, as defined in the School Admission Code. The admission requirements for looked-after and previously looked-after children are set out in the School Admissions Code. This Code applies to maintained schools and academies, including free schools.

For the purpose of the School Admission Code any child previously in the care of the Local Authority has the same priority in the School Admissions Code as children currently in the Care of the Local Authority.

Where a previously Looked After Child is without a school place it is expected that the Child Missing Education Officer coordinates the application process with the parent in line with the principles set out for Looked After Children.

Where a child previously in the care of the Local Authority has difficulty securing an educational placement within seven days of making an application the case must be referred to the Senior Education Adviser for Vulnerable Learners.

Information sharing

Appropriate and specific arrangements for sharing reliable data are in place to ensure that the educational needs of Looked After and Previously Looked After children are understood and met.

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)

In 2013 the DfE introduced Pupil Premium Plus for Looked After and Previously Looked After children.

In doing this, the DfE acknowledged the enduring impact of trauma and loss in children's lives and the key role of schools in supporting children who have had a difficult start in life.

Pupil Premium Plus funding for Previously Looked After children is allocated directly to and managed by their school and is allocated to pupils recorded in the October school census and alternative provision census.

Schools will only be allocated the funding if carers inform the school that their child(ren) was previously looked after by an English or Welsh local authority immediately before being adopted, or who left local authority care on a special guardianship order or child arrangements order (previously known as a residence order). These are collectively referred to as post-LAC in these conditions of grant.

Both VSH and schools manage their 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, both VSHs and schools may choose to allocate an amount of funding to an individual to support their needs.

Pupil premium plus is currently provided at a rate of £2,630 (2025 rate) per child per year.

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) was introduced in April 2015 as additional funding for early years settings, children will be funded at a rate of £1.00 an hour which equates to £570 per annum.

Who is eligible for Pupil Premium Plus?

Pupil Premium Plus is available to pupils from reception age to Year 11 in state-funded education in England who:

- Have been adopted from care in England or Wales.
- Left care under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).
- Left care under a Child Arrangements Order.

In respect of children adopted from care, the Pupil Premium Plus was initially restricted to children adopted on or after 30 December 2005 but in the summer of 2014 was extended to all children adopted from care. Pupils must be attending either:

- An early years provider. This includes any organisation offering education for children aged under 5, including nurseries, school nurseries and childminders.
- A local authority maintained school or maintained special school. An academy or free school.
- A non-maintained special school, an independent school and other alternative provision (e.g. home education) where the place or provision is funded by the local authority.

Children who are educated at home or attend private schools are not currently eligible unless these placements are funded by the local authority.

Uses of Pupil Premium Plus

The Virtual School cannot direct schools to use their Pupil Premium Plus in a given way for previously looked after children however, the Education Endowment Fund offers a range of strategies that support the development of care experienced children.

[Teaching and Learning Toolkit | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/teaching-and-learning-toolkit)

Useful organisations

ACE

ACE Education Advice & Training provides independent advice and information for parents on education issues in England. <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/>

Adoption UK

Adoption UK provides support, awareness and understanding for those parenting or supporting children who cannot live with their birth parents. <http://www.adoptionuk.org/>

Contact a family

Contact a Family is a national charity for families with disabled children. They provide information, advice and support. <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/>

Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances. <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/>

IPSEA (Independent Parental Special Education Advice)

IPSEA provides independent legally based advice and support for the families of children with SEN and/or a disability <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/>

SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)

SENDIASS (formerly Parent Partnership) provides Information, Advice and Support to children and young people with SEN or disabilities, and their families. Each local authority provides SENDIASS and you can find your local service on your LA website.

SOS!SEN

SOS!SEN offer an independent and confidential telephone helpline for parents and others looking for information and advice on Special Educational Needs (SEN).

<http://www.sossen.org.uk/>