



DEVONPORT HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) AND PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (PLAC) POLICY

Named person: Ruth Morgan

Category: Statutory

Review: Annually or when there are significant changes

Date to be reviewed: Summer 2025

This policy has been reviewed with regard to the work/life balance of staff.

Adopted by the Trustees Committee on: 10/07/2023
(Minor Update 30/01/2024)

(This policy should be read alongside the Addendum to the Safeguarding Policy to reflect additional arrangements for vulnerable students in response to Covid-19).

Looked After Children

Objective

Looked After Children – LAC - are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and it is nationally recognised that there is considerable educational underachievement when compared to their peers. It is our objective to promote the educational achievement and welfare of Looked After Children (LAC) within a supportive and inclusive school culture so that they fulfil their educational potential. This also applies to children who are “post LAC” ie those adopted from care or subject to a special guardianship order (SGO) or child arrangement order.

This policy takes account of the duties laid out in “Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023”, Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance 2018, the designated teacher for looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance 2018, “Equality Act 2010”, “The Children and Young Persons Act 2008”, “Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023” and the “Children and Social Work Act 2017”.

Definition

For the purposes of this policy a child ‘looked after by a local authority’ is one who is looked after within the meaning of section 22 of the Children Act 1989 or Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

A previously looked after child is one who is no longer looked after in England and Wales because s/he is the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order which includes arrangements relating to with whom the child is to live, or when the child is to live with any person, or has been adopted from ‘state care’ outside England and Wales.

A child is in ‘state care’ outside of England and Wales if s/he is in care of or accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation or any other organisation the sole or main purpose of which is to benefit society.

We recognise that ‘Looked After Children’ (LAC) and ‘Previously Looked After Children’ (PLAC) may have very specific needs and may be coping with trauma, abuse or rejection, and are likely to experience personal distress and uncertainty.

When students join the school as part of our administrative process we will ask parents/carers to identify whether their child is PLAC and is therefore eligible for additional support. Where a child is identified as PLAC we will request that parents/carers provide 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/carers are unable to provide clear evidence of their child’s status, the designated teacher will discuss eligibility with the Virtual School Head (VSH) to agree a consistent approach.

Our Commitment

Nationally, LAC and PLAC significantly underachieve and are at greater risk of exclusion compared with their peers. Their academic and social progress is likely to be affected by their experiences, and compounded by instability in their personal circumstances. 75% of LAC and PLAC leave education with no formal qualifications. Only 12% go on to further education compared with 68% of the general population. Helping LAC and PLAC succeed and providing a better future for them is a key priority in our school.

We recognise that LAC and PLAC can experience specific and significant disadvantage within a school setting, and we are committed to ensuring they reach their potential in all areas. We are aware that LAC and PLAC may have specific difficulties in transport and attendance, doing homework, getting parental consent for activities, obtaining funding for extra activities, obtaining correct uniform and equipment, as well as stigma about their circumstances.

We commit to enhancing the achievement and welfare of LAC and PLAC in the following ways:

- by being trauma informed and led in our decision making
- having high expectations for the student and ensuring equal access to a balanced and broadly based education.
- recording, monitoring, and improving the academic achievement of the student in addition to their health and wellbeing.
- listening to their views and wishes.
- achieving stability and continuity.
- promoting inclusion through challenging and changing attitudes and as far as possible avoiding exclusions.
- promoting attendance.
- promoting good communication between all those involved in the student's life.
- maintaining and respecting the student's confidentiality wherever possible.
- ensuring staff awareness of, and sensitivity to, the difficulties and educational disadvantages of LAC and PLAC.
- ensuring an appropriately trained Designated Teacher is appointed, who will be responsible for all LAC and PLAC.
- all LAC will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which will identify the student's individual needs and the support they require.

Looked after children fall into four main groups:

- 1) Children who are accommodated under a voluntary agreement with their parents/carers (section 20);
- 2) Children who are the subject of a care order or interim care order;
- 3) Children who are the subject of emergency orders for the protection of the child;
- 4) Children who are compulsorily accommodated.

The Designated Teacher for Looked After Children/Previously Looked After Children is:

Mrs R Morgan Assistant Head Teacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Our Designated Teacher will liaise with and oversee key staff & external professionals to:

- ensure a welcome and smooth induction for the child and their carer, using the PEP to plan for transition in consultation with the student's social worker
- ensure that a PEP is completed with the student, the social worker, the foster carer and that the relevant Pastoral staff have contributed to the process. If a student becomes looked-after in an emergency, a PEP will be initiated within 20 working days of the start of the first placement. An initial version will be available for the 20 working-day review of the care plan.
- ensure that each LAC and PLAC has an identified member of staff that they may talk to. This need not be the Designated Teacher, but should be based on the student's own wishes. Members of staff who take on this role may need to be supported by the relevant Pastoral Staff. They should also be alert to any child protection issues, any disclosures that students may make, and know what action to take linking closely with the DSL.
- track and monitor academic progress and target support appropriately liaising with the SENCo as necessary. Coordinate any support for LAC and PLAC.
- ensure confidentiality for individual students, sharing personal information on a need to know basis.
- encourage LAC and PLAC to join in extra-curricular activities, where necessary Pupil Premium Plus funding should be made available to allow LAC and PLAC students to access a full range of extra-curricular activities.
- ensure, as far as possible, attendance of key staff at planning for LAC Review meetings.
- act as an advisor to staff and Governors, raising their awareness of the needs of LAC and PLAC.
- communicate/set up timely meetings with relevant parties (carer, social worker, the Virtual School) when the student is experiencing difficulties.
- liaise with all professionals and agencies working with the LAC and PLAC where appropriate.
- ensure the speedy transfer of information between individuals, agencies and, if the student changes to a new school.
- be pro-active in supporting transition and planning when moving to a new phase in education.
- be aware that 60% of Looked After Children say they are bullied, so will actively monitor and prevent bullying by raising awareness in line with our Inclusion aims.
- ensure that attendance & achievement data is returned to the relevant Local Authority LAC Education Service team as requested.
- ensure that all staff have relevant training for LAC/PLAC needs and of this policy, to enable them to positively promote their education.
- ensure that the Pupil Premium Plus allocation is used effectively to support LAC and PLAC as a cohort.
- contribute to the development and review of whole school policies to ensure that they do not unintentionally put LAC and PLAC at a disadvantage.
- produce an annual report for Trustees.

Exclusions

Exclusion is an extremely rare occurrence at DHSG however it is important to acknowledge that, in line with the DfE's statutory guidance on Exclusions from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England. Head Teachers should avoid, as far as possible excluding LAC and PLAC students. If we have concerns about behaviour, the Virtual School's Head (VSH) will be informed at the earliest opportunity. This would allow the VSH and other professionals to:

- consider what additional assessment and support needs to be put into place to address the causes of the child's behaviour and prevent the need for exclusion.
- make any additional arrangements to support the child's ongoing education in the event of exclusion.

Special Educational Needs

The majority of LAC and PLAC have special education needs. Of those, a significant proportion will have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. We will ensure that:

The child's EHC plan will work in harmony with his or her care plan to tell a coherent and comprehensive story of how the student's needs are being met.

Some children may have undiagnosed special needs when they start to be looked after. As part of the PEP process, there are robust arrangements in place to ensure that any undiagnosed special educational needs are addressed through the SEND framework as soon as possible.

Voice of the child

Listening to the voice of looked-after and previously looked-after children is a vital part of successfully understanding and meeting their needs and we will:

- be available and take the time to get to know them
- notice if they are upset or angry and listen to them when they need help
- understand that even though they had a different past than most people, it doesn't mean they need to be treated differently
- understand their experience of being looked-after
- understand that their past will affect their present and their future behaviour even if they don't notice

(Staffordshire virtual school, these tips are based on feedback from the Staffordshire virtual school pupil premium plus awards 2016 and are included in the statutory guidance)

Mental Health

LAC and PLAC are more likely to experience the challenge of social, emotional and mental health issues than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills, forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties, foetal alcohol syndrome and coping with transitions and change. This can impact on their behaviour and education. All our staff have received Mental Health Awareness training as well as training on Trauma and Attachment Disorder, the Designated Teacher for LAC/PLAC is also the Mental Health Lead. There is close monitoring of health and wellbeing of all our students and LAC/PLAC students are given priority access to school based services.

It is important to have a means of regularly measuring the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by LAC and PLAC. Currently, this is done through the Strengths and Difficulties

Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a clinically validated brief behavioural screening questionnaire. SDQ scores from student's carer, teacher and, if they are aged 11 – 17, their self-evaluation, is used to better inform the health assessment and PEP and aid planning for Mental Health support.

The Trustee with special responsibility for Looked After Children is: Mrs Ellen Blakeman

The role of that Trustee

The named Trustee will report to the Trustees on an annual basis providing information on the following: a comparison of progress as a discrete group, compared with those of other students; the attendance of students as a discrete group, compared with other students; the level of suspensions/permanent exclusions and student destinations.

The named Trustee should be satisfied that the school's policies and procedures ensure that LAC/PLAC students have equality of access to all aspects of school life.

Responsibility for Looked After Children/Previously Looked After Children in School

It is important that all teaching staff are aware of which students are LAC/PLAC. The responsibility for the transfer of this information should be that of the Head Teacher and/or the Designated Teacher for LAC/PLAC.

In the absence of the usual class teacher, some information regarding the student's circumstances should be shared with the teacher covering the class. The extent of this sharing should be determined by the Head Teacher or the Designated Teacher for LAC/PLAC.

Admission Arrangements

On admission, records (including the PEP) will be requested from the student's previous school and a meeting will be held with carer/parent/social worker. A date will be agreed upon for a new PEP and an appropriate school induction will take place.

The PEP will be updated at least three times per year, as part of the statutory reviewing process.