



Minerva
Learning Trust

Children Looked After Policy
2020-21

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Version Control

Version 2

- Updated academic year

1. Introduction

Children and young people become 'Looked After' if they have been taken into Care by the Local Authority or if they have been accommodated by the Local Authority (a voluntary care arrangement). Most CLA will be living in foster homes but a smaller number may be in a children's home, living with a relative or even be placed back at home with their natural parent(s). A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. Local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Children in need may be assessed under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Minerva Learning Trust is committed to providing quality education for all our students, based on equality of opportunity, access and outcomes. We recognise that, nationally, there is considerable educational underachievement of Children Looked After, when compared with their peers, and we are committed to ensuring that we provide the best education possible for Look After Children.

This policy takes into account statutory guidance provided by the Department of Education as outlined in the Education Act 2002 section 175 (Duties of LEAs and governing bodies in relation to the welfare of children), the Role and Responsibility of the Designated Teacher – Statutory Guidance for School Governors (2009), DfE Statutory Guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education 2016, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2017 and Promoting the Education of Children Looked After and Previously Children Looked After 2018.

The guidance recognise the collective responsibility of local authorities and sets out six principles:

- prioritising education;
- having high expectations;
- inclusion – changing and challenging attitudes;
- achieving continuity and stability;
- early intervention – priority action;
- listening to children.

The guidance introduced two key measures, in order to improve multi-agency coordination and improve educational life chances for Children Looked After:

- Designated Teachers for every school.
- Personal Education Plans for all Children Looked After.

The Directors of the Trust are committed to ensuring improved educational life chances for Children Looked After through the implementation of this policy, which is enshrined within our practices relating to Every Child Matters. We should also be aware of the needs of students who have previous experience of being Children Looked After, or who are known to be adopted.

We recognise that Children Looked After can be a vulnerable group in school and are committed to narrowing any gap between these students and their peers.

The Directors and staff of the Minerva Learning Trust will ensure that the allocated Pupil Premium funding is used appropriately to the benefit of Children Looked After and that their progress and attainment is carefully tracked, with appropriate interventions and resources directed to ensure best possible outcomes.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Designated Children Looked After Coordinator

Each school within the Trust must have a Designated Children Looked After Coordinator.

The Designated Teacher has a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every Looked After Child within each of the schools. The culture of the trust and its schools ensures that Children Looked After believe they can succeed and aspire to their next step should this be higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After should have the lead responsibility for helping staff in school to understand the things which can affect how looked after children can learn and achieve.

The Designated Teacher has a key role in making sure there is a central point of initial contact within the school who can manage the process of how the school engages with others (e.g. social services, virtual school heads), works in a joined-up way and minimises the disruption to the child's education.

The responsibilities of the Designated Teacher in all Trust include:

- be an advocate for Children Looked After;
- ensure a smooth and welcome induction for the child and carer when new to the school, and note any specific requirements, including care status;
- work with others to ensure that a Personal Education Plan (PEP) is completed, as soon as possible (at least within 20 days of entering care or joining a new school).

This should be prepared with the child and the carer, in liaison with the social worker and other relevant support workers/agencies, and be linked to the Care Plan meetings, where in place. Where appropriate, the PEP should take account of any Individual Educational Plan (IEP), Pastoral Support Plan (PSP), career plan or any other relevant plans. The PEP should inform and be reviewed, concurrently with the Care Plan, i.e.: within 28 days, three months and six months and, at least, every term.

- help to keep PEPs and other records up to date, particularly in time to inform review meetings;
- ensure that PEPs are detailed in the recording system as defined by the authority with parental responsibility and education development and attainment is clearly recorded.
- ensure that each Looked After Child has an identified member of staff that they can talk to (this should be based on the child's wishes and may not necessarily be the Designated CLA coordinator);

- co-ordinate support for the child in the school and liaise with other professionals and carers as necessary, including Virtual School for Children Looked After, Sheffield CLAES team, MAST teams and Social Care;
- ensure staff receive relevant information and training and act as an advisor to staff and governors;
- ensure that interventions are implemented to highly reduce the number of possible fixed term exclusions for CLA
- ensure confidentiality for individual children and only share personal information on a need to know basis;
- provide written information to assist planning/review meetings and ensure attendance as far as possible;
- ensure that the child and carer(s) receive early notification of meetings, parents' evenings and other events and that communication remains regular and positive. Issues about transport arrangements and consent signatures for example must be planned well in advance;
- encourage Children Looked After to participate in extra-curricular activities and out of hours learning;
- ensure speedy transfer of information between individuals and other relevant agencies and to a new school if and when the child transfers;
- seek urgent meetings with relevant parties where the child is experiencing difficulties and/or is at risk of being excluded;
- ensure appropriate 1:1 tuition and/or personalised support is being provided for each Looked After Child so that all thrive in school and achieve their educational potential. 1:1 tuition can take many forms including: Subject coaching to address gaps in learning or accelerate learning, mentoring to build positive attitudes to learning, building self-worth and self-esteem.
- to attend CLA Network meetings.

2.2 Role and Responsibility of All Staff

Everyone involved in helping looked after children achieve should be supported by the Designated Teacher to;

- have high expectations of looked after children's' involvement in learning and educational progress;
- be aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation from birth families, the reasons for the separation and that some children may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences;
- understand the reasons which may be behind a looked after child's behaviour, and why they may need more support than other children, however this should not be an excuse for lowering expectations of what the child is capable of achieving;

- understand how important it is to see looked after children as individuals rather than as a homogenous group and to not publicly treat them different to their peers;
- appreciate the importance of showing sensitivity about who else knows about a child's looked after status;
- appreciate the central importance of the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) in helping to create a shared understanding between teachers, carers, social workers and most importantly, the child and what everyone needs to do to help in order for them to achieve their potential;
- have the level of understanding they need of the role of the social workers, virtual school in local authorities and how education and the function of the PEP fits into the wider care planning duties of the authority which looks after the child.

All staff within the Trust will therefore:

- ensure that any Looked After Child is supported sensitively and that confidentiality is maintained;
- be familiar with the Guidance on Children Looked After and respond appropriately to requests for information to support the completion of PEPs and other documentation needed as part of review meetings;
- respond positively to a Looked After Child's request to be the named person that they can talk to when they feel it is necessary;
- contribute to the Designated Teacher's requests for information on educational attainment and needs, as appropriate;
- ensure that the Looked After Child has the opportunity to achieve targets set out in the PEP;
- as with all children, ensure that no Looked After Child is stigmatised in any way;
- provide a supportive climate to enable a Looked After Child to achieve stability within the school setting;
- as with all children, have high aspirations for the educational and personal achievement of Children Looked After as with all children, ensure that attendance and punctuality is carefully monitored and put appropriate measures in place if any concerns arise;
- positively promote the self-esteem of Children Looked After.

2.3 Role and Responsibility of Local Governing Body

The Local Governing Body will:

- ensure all Trustees, Members and Governors are fully aware of the legal requirements and Guidance for Children Looked After;
- be aware of whether have Children Looked After and how many;
- ensure that there is a named Designated Teacher for Children Looked After;

- liaise with the Head Teacher to ensure that the Designated Teacher is enabled to carry out her/his responsibilities in relation to Children Looked After;
- support the Head Teacher, Designated Teacher and other staff in ensuring the needs of Children Looked After are met;
- ensure the Designated Teacher has the appropriate level of support in place to fulfil their role effectively and the opportunity to acquire and keep up to date the necessary skills, knowledge and training to understand and respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of Children Looked After;
- ensure there is a governor who links with the Designated Teacher in every school, receive regular progress reports and providing feedback to the governing body. These reports should not include any names of individual children for child protection and confidentiality reasons.

3. The Voice of a Looked After Child

The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After should act as an advocate for Children Looked After. The views of Children Looked After should be heard and opportunities should be provided for these to be voiced privately, via 1:1 meetings as well as informally. Children Looked After need to be clear that all staff will support them and act on any concerns as their advocate and be the link with outside agencies including their social worker and carer.

Looked after Children should always contribute to the PEP process and should attend review meetings wherever possible.

4. Exclusions and Children Looked After

Every school within the Trust does its best to avoid excluding children and in the case of Children Looked After it is even more important. Designated Teachers in partnership with school staff and the Local Governing Body, as necessary should:

- be involved in any discussions related to decisions about potential exclusions of Children Looked After
- make sure the authority which looks after the child and the child's carer are involved in such a decision
- ensure all formal interventions have been implemented prior to an exclusion.

Data for exclusion rates within the schools as a whole will be reviewed by the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After to identify any trends in respect of Children Looked After.

5. Additional Support

The Designated Teacher and SENCO should make sure that Children Looked After are prioritised in any selection of students who would benefit from interventions and that they will have access to academic focused study support.

Referrals to other agencies e.g. counselling services will be made with the child, carer and social worker.

Children, carers, social workers and the Virtual School will be involved in all SEND reviews, which if possible will be combined with PEP reviews.

6. Communication Around Children Looked After

It is important that all teaching staff within the school who are in contact with the child are aware that they are being looked after by the local authority. This will be identified on SIMS and, where appropriate, staff will receive a formal notification through email. This will be the responsibility of either the Designated Teacher or Safeguarding Lead.

Good communication is essential between professionals. It is important to exchange information in-between formal reviews if there are significant changes in a young person's circumstances e.g. if there is a change of course, there is a change of care placement or there are significant issues such as behaviour and attendance. The Designated Teacher and/or the pastoral link will be the central point of contact.

Schools, and social workers within Local Authority Children's Services should endeavour to co-ordinate their review meetings e.g. to have an Annual Statement or Education Health Care Plan Review and a Personal Education Plan or PEP meeting or review. This is necessary to ensure the child does not feel overwhelmed by the number of meetings and the same information is not having to be repeatedly shared.

The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After will be responsible for providing reports on the progress and attendance of all children in care to the Local Governing Body, Virtual School and Board of Directors as requested.

7. Transition and Admission

All Children Looked After who apply to Trust schools will be offered transitional visits in addition to being able to attend open day/evenings. The Designated Teacher will lead and arrange all visits as necessary.

Children Looked After will have dedicated and named person to provide on-going support and to act as their first point of contact throughout their time at school.

Once enrolled, records will be requested from the student's previous school. This will provide information to inform the PEP. Contact arrangements will be clarified at this meeting including who to call first in an emergency.

When Children Looked After leave the school, either due to progression into Higher Education or transfer to another educational provider, contact will be made with the new educational establishment.

8. Careers Advice and Progression Planning

All students are able to receive careers guidance within their school and 1:1 appointments can be made throughout the year for further support. Children Looked After, as all other students, will have a dedicated member of staff who will support them with their progression planning, HE applications and also employability skills.

Destinations will be monitored and reported at the end of every academic year.

9. Record Keeping and Information Sharing

The Designated Teacher will co-ordinate record keeping for all Looked after Children in School. Children Looked After status will be appropriately "flagged" on SIMS.

Sensitivity is a priority in sharing information with members of the school staff. We are guided by best practice and on the "need to know". Wherever possible students' wishes are taken into account in sharing information within the staff team.

10. Partnership Working

The Minerva Learning Trust and its schools values the views of parents/carers. We firmly believe in developing strong partnerships with carers, parents and residential care workers to enable students to achieve their full potential.

We recognise the essential contributions that external support services make in assisting Looked after Children and we are committed to developing positive partnerships with all involved.