



Dacorum Education
Support Centre

Children Looked After (CLA) Policy

DESC values the mental health and wellbeing of every member of its community.

Our policies reflect the core values of respect and support for each other in every aspect of life. Our aim is that all in our community, through working together, to feel safe and secure in an environment, which enables and equips every individual to thrive and be respectful of each other's strengths and differences.

Respect, Aspiration, Resilience

January 2025

Policy Objective:

To promote the educational achievement and welfare of Children Looked After (CLA) and Children Previously Looked After (PLA) on the roll of this Centre.

Name of the Designated Teachers for CLA and PLA

Naomi Walker (Deputy Headteacher)

Alice Neve (Dacorum Primary Behaviour Service Lead) (Maternity Leave)

Faye Ewan (Maternity Cover for Primary CLA & PLA)

Name of the Designated Management Committee Member for CLA and PLA

Mrs. Sara Johnson

At **Dacorum Education Support Centre** we will ensure that children looked after (CLA) and children previously looked after (PLA) have access to excellent educational provision and are prioritised for additional support through Centre-based interventions to achieve as well as possible, in accordance with the '*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018.*

We recognise that our Centre plays a vital role in providing a stable base for CLA and in promoting their academic, social and emotional development. We promote whole Centre staff training in their specific needs, so that all adults at this Centre are sensitive to the barriers to learning that CLA experience and feel able to support the children discretely and confidentially, as needs arise. We understand the need to work in a 'relationship-based' way so that children looked after and previously looked after feel valued and a part of our Centre community.

Our aim is to champion the needs of CLA to ensure they make rapid educational and social progress during their period in care on the roll of this Centre.

As a school, we acknowledge and understand the intention of the [revised guidance issued in June 2022](#), by the DfE to local authorities, that **extends** the role of the Virtual School Head to use strategic influence with **schools and social care** to improve the educational outcomes for all children known to a social worker. We will extend the priority for additional support to this group as part of our implementation of the New Duty.

Equality and Diversity statement

This policy is intended to be helpful for improvement in the education available for all learners but has a focus on children looked after who, statistically, experience disadvantage in education. The criteria are clear that the expectation is that all learners receive a high-quality, ambitious education; that providers are inclusive of all learners; and that all providers must be meeting their statutory duties, including those under the Equality Act 2010 and all protected characteristics therein.

The implementation of this Policy requires a reflection on those learners who have many overlapping experiences: discrimination because of a protective characteristic, SEND, poverty,

Respect, Aspiration, Resilience

other adverse childhood experiences. Supporting these learners to achieve will raise achievement for all. The expectation is that all learners receive a high-quality, ambitious education; that is inclusive of all learners.

An inclusive learning environment in which everybody is respected is conducive to a happy and healthy learning environment. We will use our Centre policies and practice to create a *'calm, safe and supportive environment where children and young people want to attend and where they can learn and thrive'*.

We know that it is likely that children have experienced loss and educational damage as a result of the pandemic and as a Centre, we see each academic year as an opportunity to develop our Centre staff to engage in positive relational practice to enable all to achieve the best possible outcomes and standards.

The Virtual School Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed [Toolkit](#) training will support a greater understanding of diversity and equality and will enable staff to better understand the behaviours of all children.

Our Aims for CLA:

- provide a safe and secure environment where educational progress and stability is always central to the planning and all adults understand the specific needs of CLA and PLA
- narrow the gap between the attainment of CLA and PLA and their peers, ensuring **accelerated** and **rapid** progress
- they benefit from Centre-based interventions, even if they do not meet the criteria for that intervention (*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*) and to use the allocated Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) to ensure effective impact
- for all CLA to have at least termly Personal Education Planning (ePEP) meetings each academic year and for the joint planning and quality first teaching to have measurable impact on each child's learning on a daily basis (*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*)
- for all adults to provide sensitive, child-led support, adopting a relationship-based approach and with at least one key adult with whom the child or young person has a trusted relationship and who will act as an advocate for them and take a special interest in their progress in all Centre activities
- that Centre systems facilitate discrete support, that includes a strong relationship between Centre staff, carers and children looked after on roll
- CLA will be advantaged within Centre policies and procedures, with their needs explicitly considered and provided for (*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*)
- our Behaviour Guide maintains clear boundaries and expectations about behaviour but we understand that not all behaviour is a matter of choice. We will not enforce sanctions that shame and ostracise children looked after from their peers, Centre, community or family. In this Centre we seek to create an inclusive and positive Centre ethos for every learner

Respect, Aspiration, Resilience

- CLA and PLA and their families will feel part of the Centre community; they will be actively welcomed, involved and engaged into this Centre community (*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*)

Educational Planning for Children Looked After

Personal Education Plans (ePEP) and CLA Self Evaluation Forms (CLASEF):

The Centre will ensure that every CLA on roll has a Personal Education Planning (ePEP) meeting that is reviewed termly, within the statutory care planning framework, and in collaboration with the social worker, carer and other relevant professionals. In any one school year there will be at least 3 PEP meetings for each CLA. The Centre will complete all sections of the CLASEF to share our plan for improvement and development in Centre for disadvantaged children and also to inform the Hertfordshire Virtual School of the Centre's policy and practice, to account for the efficient and effective spend of the PP+ funding and to inform the Centre Management Committee as the annual report.

Roles and Responsibilities: Education planning for all children with a Social Worker

The Headteacher and Management Committee are committed to promoting improved educational life chances for all children. They will ensure that the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After has qualified teacher status, appropriate seniority in the leadership team and time and experience to fulfil this statutory role and have at least 2 days per year training to remain fully informed. They will monitor the role of the Designated Teacher to ensure that all CLA and PLA make accelerated and rapid progress and that the whole Centre staff receive appropriate training.

Children known to a social worker, as shown in the Government's [Children in Need review \(2019\)](#) evidenced for the first time, achieve significantly less well than others at all stages of education and that poor educational outcomes persist even after social work involvement ends.

The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After and Children Previously Looked After in 2024-2025 (academic year) is Naomi Walker. She is a qualified teacher, and will promote improved educational life chances for CLA and PLA by:

- ensuring that the CLA or PLA has access to quality first teaching
- tracking the progress of CLA and PLA across the curriculum using data, teacher reports and book looks
- ensuring that the PP+ is used effectively and efficiently
- performing a coordinating role with Centre staff and outside agencies
- ensuring effective communication with the Centre's assigned Education Adviser from the Virtual School
- developing expertise in the field of CLA, including attachment theory and trauma- informed practice

Respect, Aspiration, Resilience

- delivering the Virtual School training: 'An introduction to Attachment Aware and Trauma-Informed Practice' to the whole Centre
- providing and attending training and offering advice to the whole Centre staff
- promoting a Centre culture which is supportive, relationship-based and has high expectations for CLA and PLA
- regularly reporting to the Head and Management Committee on the attainment of CLA and PLA and Centre resource and staff training needs for working with this group
- prioritising CLA for Centre-based additional support, even when the young person does not meet the criteria (*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*)
- ensuring that CLA and PLA are not overlooked for positions of learner responsibility within the Centre because of their care status
- completing the annual Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) of each CLA as requested, to inform their annual CLA health review

All staff will promote improved educational life chances for CLA and PLA by:

- reading this 'Centre policy' for CLA
- attending relevant training, including the Virtual School toolkit training on 'Attachment Aware and Trauma-Informed Practice' (to be found on the Virtual School website: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/virtualschool)
- providing accurate information and data when asked by the Designated Teacher
- referring to the Designated Teacher for advice
- playing their part in creating an attachment and trauma-informed 'CLA-friendly' culture and securing rapid progress for CLA by ensuring that they benefit from any additional Centre-based support available

Attendance:

Centre attendance procedures reflect the specific needs of CLA and PLA to ensure good Centre attendance. Where there is a concern about attendance or punctuality the Centre will contact the carer, social worker and other professionals including the Virtual School, as an early intervention, as outlined in our attendance policy.

Admissions/ Transitions:

Centre procedures to support CLA during admission and transition include:

- prioritising CLA and PLA at the point of admission
- the swift transfer of information between schools that may include school visits and at times of transition, teaching at the previous school
- early identification of staff mentor and peer buddy
- additional support and planning for CLA and PLA at times of transition
- structured activities to 'say goodbye', in recognition of the impact of broken attachments and loss

Additional Educational Needs:

All staff will work creatively to secure accelerated and rapid progress for CLA and PLA with additional educational needs by:

- having high expectations
- ensuring that they are prioritised for additional Centre-based support, even if they do not meet the criteria (*in line with the DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*)
- ensuring that planning is coordinated, appropriate interventions identified and teaching to the plan is systematic; ensuring that any work undertaken by non-teaching staff has teacher over-sight (*in line with the Lamb Report, Dec '09*)
- ensuring that progress is regularly monitored and reviewed, against the targets set as agreed in the termly Virtual School visit, ePEP and CLASEF

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities:

All staff will work creatively to secure accelerated and rapid progress for CLA who have special educational needs & disabilities by:

- having high expectation of progress each academic year (*in line with the expectation set out in the ePEP and CLA-SEF*)
- ensuring that they are accessing Centre-based targeted support which is 'additional to and different from' the universal and additional needs provision (*in line with the SEND Code of Practice*)
- ensuring that all plans are coordinated, appropriate interventions identified, and teaching to the plan is systematic
- ensuring that progress is regularly monitored and reviewed, in line with the SEND Code of Practice
- ensuring that any work undertaken by non-teaching staff has teacher over-sight
- that with the Centre SENCO the EHCP review is held in a timely way with all relevant professionals invited and their views obtained

Safeguarding:

Centre staff will be vigilant for any safeguarding issues which can impact particularly on any child with a Social Worker by: familiarising themselves with the Centre's child protection policy and the current KCSIE [guidance](#) 'DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education' (All staff) September 2024, if there are any safeguarding concerns.

Alternative Provision:

We will make every effort to ensure that any arrangements for provision alternative to daily attendance at school will be:

- a plan that will retain the CLA on the roll of the school or clarify in writing which educational establishment will be responsible for essential reporting and accountable for the PP+
- an agreed part of the overall ePEP for the learner

Respect, Aspiration, Resilience

- full time (25 hours) or contribute to full time attendance and be of high quality
- meet the educational needs of the CLA or PLA
- will provide the opportunity to make rapid progress in the course of study provided by the setting
- will be monitored regularly and that ePEPs will include the school and the alternative provider

Suspension:

- We have reviewed the Centre behaviour guide in line with the statutory guidance published in February 2018 (*DfE Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children Statutory guidance for local-authority-maintained schools carrying out duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children. 28th February 2018*).
- We will make every effort to avoid suspending a CLA, in recognition of the increased risk this poses in terms of them quickly disengaging from the Centre, due to their early experience of broken attachments and loss. Before acting, we will discuss the rationale for suspension with the assigned Education Adviser from the Virtual School.
- If there is no option other than suspension, then we will make every attempt to reduce the number of days of the suspension.
- We will use the following methods to avoid suspending a child looked after or previously looked after;
 - Form positive relationships with the learner
 - Form positive relationship with parents/carers
 - Provide a meaningful and purposeful curriculum offer including alternative provision when appropriate
 - To support the Centre workforce to have the knowledge and skills they need to manage behaviour and meet learner needs
 - To ensure designated senior leads for mental health and Special Educational Needs Coordinators are effective
 - Provide effective nurture groups and programmes bespoke to the needs of the learner
- Centre procedures are in place to reduce the risk of suspension of CLA and PLA. CLA and PLA with special educational needs should have suspension as a behaviour management action as a last possible resort (*Regulation 4(1)(c) of the Equalities Act 2010 which means that a head teacher could only lawfully suspend a child for a reason relating to their disability, even a disability that results in the child having a tendency to physical abuse, if reasonable adjustments have been made*)

Multi-Agency Working:

- **Centre staff will make every effort to** develop positive professional relationships with colleagues from other agencies and facilitate their work. This will enable colleagues to successfully perform their roles and positively impact on the education and wider needs of CLA and PLA

The Headteacher, Designated Teacher and Management Committee will ensure that all staff are briefed on the Statutory Guidance and practice outlined in this policy.

Date: 21/01/2025

Review date: 21/01/2026

The Hertfordshire Virtual School for Children Looked After

- Website: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/virtualschool
- Twitter: @VS_HCC
- Email: virtualschool@hertfordshire.gov.uk
- Phone: 01992 556915

Appendix 1 – the Revised New Duty June 2022

The New Duty Update 2022/23

[Promoting the education of children with a social worker \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

The Government's [Children in Need review \(2019\)](#) evidenced for the first time that at least 1.6 million children have needed a social worker between 2012/13 and 2017/18 – equivalent to 1 in 10 of all children. The review showed that these children do significantly worse than others at all stages of education and that poor educational outcomes persist even after social work involvement ends.

VSH leadership is vital now more than ever given the impact the pandemic has had on the learning of all children, but none more so than the most vulnerable. For example, in the 2020/21 academic year Children in Need (CiN) lost an average of 4.1 months of learning in secondary school reading compared with 2.4 months for all children. Children with a social worker (CWSW) are around 3 times more likely to be persistently absent from school and between 2 to 4 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers.

Who are CWSW?

Includes all children who have been assessed as needing or previously needing a social worker **within the past 6 years due to safeguarding and/or welfare reasons**. It includes all children aged 0 to 18 across all education settings subject to a CiN plan or a Child Protection plan.

The new strategic role of the VSH

- Make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities, including with children's social care.
- Promote practice that supports children's engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting can be an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm.
- Level up children's outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential. This will include helping to ensure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover educationally from the impact of the pandemic.

Identify needs and address barriers

- Use data and analysis to understand and monitor the cohort's needs, including making links to local strategic priorities e.g., attendance, suspension, and permanent exclusion rates.
- Share knowledge and expertise to strengthen how education settings and social care understand the impact of adversity on learning and educational outcomes of children.
- Promote professional practice for education settings and local authorities.

Attendance

- For children with a social worker, attending school is also a protective factor, offering a safe space when home is not, away from the threat of gangs, crime, or exploitation.
- During the pandemic in 2020/21 persistent absence figures were 12.3% for all pupils and 41.2% for CiN.
- VSHs may wish to strengthen engagement with DTs through established local networks to share advice, best practice or training to support attendance and raise awareness of the barriers these children can face.

Elective home education

- When a family notifies the local authority of their intention to home educate, we recommend that local authorities, schools, and other key professionals (such as social workers) work together to coordinate a meeting with parents/carers where possible.
- This is particularly pertinent if a child has SEN or has a social worker.
- VSHs should refer to the Government guidance on [elective home education](#).
- Introduced in the [Schools Bill in May 2022](#), the Government will require each local authority to establish a registration system for children not in school. The measures will make each authority responsible for maintaining a register of children not in school, including electively home-educating children, and have a duty to provide support to those families where they request it.

Mental health and well-being

- VSHs should work with their local authority lead for mental health, responsible for linking with education settings.
- The VSH should ensure that mental health training includes:
 - the value of a graduated approach to assessing, understanding, and meeting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of children and young people with a social worker
 - how to identify signs of potential mental health issues for children with a social worker and how to access further assessment and support where necessary
 - understanding the impact of issues that children with a social worker can experience and that settings are able to offer targeted support to meet the needs of these children
 - how to recognise the value of engaging the child's voice in the process of identification and support.
- VSHs may also want to work with individual school senior mental health leads (SMHL), where the role exists, to ensure children with a social worker are factored into the school's strategy on mental health and well-being.

Recovery programmes

- VSHs should be aware of the following initiatives, given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on CWSW, and work with education settings to ensure these children are able to access the following support:
 - [The National Tutoring Programme](#)
 - [The Summer School Programme](#)
 - [Recovery Premium](#)

SEN

- A significant proportion of children with a social worker may also be identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) or may be disabled.
- VSHs should work strategically with the local authority Head of SEND and, where appropriate, with school leaders and SENCOs, to ensure that education settings adopt a graduated approach.

Advice and guidance

- VSHs are not being asked to work with individual children with a social worker as replicating existing professional relationships and support would be counterproductive and burdensome to children and their families.
- VSHs will be best placed to offer advice and information to professionals who are providing direct support to these children.
- Identify and establish links with key professionals e.g., DSLs, social workers, headteachers, governors, SENCOs, SMHLs, other local authority officers, including Designated Social Care Officers (DSCOs) for SEND.
- Provide advice on evidence-based interventions that can address barriers to learning, such as those highlighted by [What Works for Children's Social Care](#).
- Engage with research organisations to help develop good practice and build a strong evidence base for what works to improve outcomes of children with social workers.
- Support education settings and social care to be creative and thoughtful in building relationships with children and families.

Research

- VSHs will be invited to participate in research commissioned by the Department to capture emerging practice and contribute to the development of a strong evidence base for how they can effectively promote the educational outcomes of children with social workers.
- The Department will ask all local authorities to share data and information about how their VSH has been supporting children with a social worker and what funding has been used for that support.
- Some local authorities, including VSHs, their teams, and partner agencies, will be invited to take part in focused interviews to build detailed case studies.