



Haringey Virtual School

**HARINGEY COUNCIL ADMISSIONS,
ATTENDANCE AND INCLUSION POLICY FOR
LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN**

2020 - 2021

Introduction

Local authorities have a statutory duty under Section 22(3A) of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children and must appoint an officer to make sure that this duty is properly discharged. In Haringey, this officer is the Virtual School Head (VSH) and the Virtual School is a multi-disciplinary team consisting of teachers, an Attendance and Inclusion Officer and a part-time Educational Psychologist. Haringey Virtual School believes that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.

Haringey aims to support looked-after children and young people to attend school, college, or alternative educational provision. This policy outlines the way teachers, social workers, and carers will work together to ensure Haringey's looked-after children and young people achieve a high level of attendance. To achieve this target, it is essential that all parties have a clear understanding about current legislation, legal process, and the duties incumbent on them. This policy will set out how this happens in practice.

Relevant guidance

- [School attendance Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818204/School_attendance_July_2019.pdf)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818204/School_attendance_July_2019.pdf
- [The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 \(Amendments of 2013\)](#)
- [The statutory guidance for Promoting education for looked-after and previously looked-after children \(February 2018\)](#)

Background

The term 'looked-after children' is defined in law under the Children Act 1989. A child is looked-after by a local authority if he or she is in their care or is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority.

Looked-after children fall into four main groups:

- Children who are the subject of a care order (section 31) or interim care order (section 38).
- Children who are accommodated under voluntary agreement with their parents (section 20).
- Children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection (section 44 and 46).
- Children who are compulsorily accommodated. This includes children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement (section 21).

School admissions

Looked-after children have been given the highest priority within school admission arrangements. The admission requirements for looked-after children are set out in the School Admissions Code. This Code applies to maintained schools and academies, including free schools.

It is the responsibility of the VSH to ensure that:

- Admission authorities understand that Fair Access Protocols do not apply to looked-after children and that they are 'excepted pupils' in relation to infant class size regulations

- The local authority, as a corporate parent, does not tolerate drift and delay where children the authority looks after are without an education placement that is appropriate to their assessed needs. This includes using their powers of direction in a timely way.

Securing appropriate education

The Virtual School has primary responsibility for ensuring that there is suitable education in place for all children looked after by the local authority.

In arranging a school placement, the child's social worker **must** consult with the Virtual School (and other local authority staff, where appropriate) to secure a school or other education setting that is best suited to the child's needs. That could be a selective, non-selective, maintained, or independent, boarding, day or alternative provision.

In choosing a school place, the guidance outlines the following principles:

- Educational provision should mean a full-time place
- Schools judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' should be prioritised for looked-after children in need of a new school. Unless there are exceptional evidence-based reasons, looked-after children should never be placed in a school judged by Ofsted to be 'inadequate'. Where there are exceptional reasons for placing a child in a school rated less than good, there is a form to be completed (Appendix A) which will need to be signed off by the VSH and Head of LAC services. The Virtual School will then draw up an action plan to monitor the school's progress towards gaining an improved rating, taking appropriate steps where this is not the case, or where there is an impact on the child making progress.
- The choice of the education setting should be based on what any good parent would want for their child. It should be based on evidence that the setting can meet the educational needs of the child and help them make the maximum progress
- The child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit with the child. Where a looked-after child would benefit from attending a boarding school, either in the state or independent sector, VSHs and social workers should be proactive in considering this option. This decision is usually based on the care placement

Children moving school (casual admissions)

The Virtual School should ensure that whenever a child is likely to move schools that there is an informed discussion about the choice of school that will best meet their needs.

Children with special educational needs

The VSH should ensure that social workers, IROs, admission officers for the schools maintained by the local authority and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) departments understand and comply with the requirements in:

- the School Admissions Code about the priority admission arrangements for looked-after children to maintained schools and academies <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code>
- statutory guidance on school exclusion: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion>
- the special educational needs and disability code of practice 0 to 25 years: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

Monitoring attendance

The VSH should be the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked-after children, including those placed out-of-authority. VSHs should have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children their authority looks after as if those children attended a single school.

The VSH should ensure that there are effective systems in place to:

- maintain an up-to-date roll of its looked-after children who are in school or college settings and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress.
- monitor attendance, and in Haringey, attendance data is collected on a daily basis by Welfare Call Ltd on behalf of the Virtual School. Social workers must ensure that when a child moves school for whatever reason that the previous school is 'ended' on Mosaic and the new school 'started' otherwise the information provided to Welfare Call will be incorrect and will not allow for tracking of attendance. This enables swift action to be taken where a child is not attending.
- inform headteachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is looked-after by the VSH's local authority

Ensuring good attendance

If a child starts missing school, there may be a problem that foster carers are not aware of. It is important that they speak to the child first, then approach their teacher or form tutor. Once the full facts are known it will be important to involve the social worker and possibly the Virtual School, which has a designated Attendance and Inclusion officer (AIO) with a focus on this area. There are many different issues which can affect school attendance. For example, problems with:

- Bullying
- Care arrangements.
- Travel to and from school.
- Workload and feeling out of their depth.

The child's school is the first place to go to, to discuss any attendance problems. If there are still concerns these must be addressed with the child's social worker and with the supervising social worker. By working with the school, it should be possible to agree a plan of action to improve the child's attendance.

Ten Day's Absence

For any pupil who is absent for 10 consecutive days during term time without a satisfactory reason or explanation most schools will notify the Local Authority, by submitting a referral to the Education Welfare officer. The school will include details of the action that they have taken, and the Local Authority may choose to issue a Fixed Penalty Warning Letter.

Continuing Absence

It is the responsibility of the individual School's Attendance Officer to be aware of and bring attention to, any emerging attendance concerns. In cases where a pupil begins to develop a pattern of absences, the school will try to resolve the problem with the foster carer/s, involving the Virtual School AIO if appropriate. If this is unsuccessful the school will refer to the Education Welfare Service.

The Virtual School monitors attendance on a weekly basis from the data that it receives from Welfare Call and, if it appears that there is a pattern of continuous absence developing, the AIO will send the foster carer and the school an Absence Enquiry letter. Additionally, the child's social worker will be informed.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA):

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for whatever reason. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any child's educational prospects and we need foster carers' fullest support and co-operation to tackle this. PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully by Welfare Call and this is followed up with particular regard as to how this is affecting academic achievement, this will be monitored at the Personal Education Plan meeting, where strategies will be put in place to improve attendance and educational attainment.

The Virtual School monitors all absence thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA mark, or is at risk of moving towards that mark, will be followed up by sending foster carers a first letter requesting a valid reason for the non-attendance. Any reasons that are not acceptable will be followed up. If there is no improvement in attendance following the first letter, a second letter will be sent. If attendance continues to be a problem, this matter will be escalated to the Education Welfare Department in the borough that the child resides in.

Exclusions

Local authorities and schools must have regard to the Department's statutory guidance *Exclusions from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England*⁷. In line with that, headteachers should, as far as possible, avoid excluding any looked-after child. VSHs should ensure that carers and social workers know where to seek advice about their role and responsibilities.

Where a school has concerns about a looked-after child's behaviour, the VSH should be informed and, where necessary, involved at the earliest opportunity. This is to enable the VSH, working with others, to:

- consider what additional assessment and support (such as additional help for the classroom teacher, one-to-one therapeutic work or a suitable alternative placement) needs to be put in 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 on-going education in the event of an exclusion.

Working with other VSH

Ensuring there is timely communication and effective co-operation with the VSH from other local authorities, particularly in relation to possible education placement changes, school admissions, achievement and exclusions.

Conclusion

Good attendance is key to educational achievement, and it is important that foster carers and social workers understand and are supported by the Virtual School to ensure that looked-after children receive their full entitlement to education without any prolonged gaps. Given the nature of being placed in care, children sometimes experience a number of foster placement moves and consequent school moves, and this inevitably has a profound effect on their stability, their learning ability, and their ability to make and keep friendship groups. It is vitally important that all professionals work together to ensure smooth transitions to new education provision when children move home.