

Stone Church of England Combined School



Looked after Children Policy

This policy was reviewed: Spring 2019

To be reviewed: Spring 2020

The policy is to be reviewed by Inclusion Manager

1. Introduction

The Governing Body of Stone C of E School is committed to promote the inclusion, well-being and achievement of all its Looked After Children (LAC).

The Governing Body will ensure that the school has a Designated Teacher for LAC and that the Designated Teacher is able to carry out his/her responsibilities effectively.

Designated Teacher for LAC: Mrs S Hale (Deputy Headteacher)
Governor responsible for LAC: Mrs A Foy

2. Policy Statement

2.2 National and Local Context

At any one time there are around 39,000 children of statutory school age in the care system nationally and about 500 of those are looked after by Buckinghamshire. For most children, care is intended to be time limited with the aim of returning home as soon as possible. Although there are many reasons why children are looked after by local authorities, they are all likely to have undergone distressing experiences. It is important that schools, the Local Authority, carers and parents (where appropriate) work together and intervene early to support these particularly vulnerable children to achieve their educational potential, thus improving their life chances.

Nationally and locally there has been a drive to improve educational outcomes for this group of children and this has brought some success locally. The Virtual School is a joint agency team whose purpose is to work with schools, social workers, foster carers and other agencies, in supporting the children to achieve well. Working together has greatly improved outcomes but there remain challenges, including encouraging higher aspirations.

2.3 Definition of LAC

Children and young people in public care or looked after may either be:

- On **care orders** made by a court. This means that the Local Authority has gone to court to assume parental responsibility because the child has suffered or is likely to suffer 'significant harm'. Children on care orders may be cared for by foster carers, in residential homes, in residential schools, by relatives or occasionally still living at home. Whatever the arrangement, they are likely to have ongoing contact with their parents;
- Or **accommodated** by councils with the agreement of their parents e.g. if the parents are ill or otherwise unable to care for their child. In such cases,

parents retain full parental responsibility. These children may live in any of the settings listed above, except at home.

- **All children in care will have a Care Plan** which details how roles and tasks concerning their education and other aspects of a child's life will be shared between carers, parents, social workers and school.

2.4 Potential Barriers to Success

The Social Exclusion Unit's report 'A Better Education for Children in Care' (SEU 2004) identified five key reasons why children in care underachieve:-

- Their lives are characterised by instability;
- They spend too much time out of school;
- They do not have sufficient help with their education if they fall behind;
- Primary carers are not expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development;
- They have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education.

2.5 Key Elements of the Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities and Schools (*Promoting the education of looked after children - Statutory guidance for local authorities July 2014*)

- Every school must have a Designated Teacher to act as an advocate for children in care;
- Each looked after child or young person must have a Personal Education Plan;
- All looked after children are entitled to a Pupil Premium Grant. The Virtual school has its own procedure for administering this grant and early contact with the Virtual School is recommended to understand PPG schedules and guidelines.
- Local Authorities must have a protocol for sharing information;
- Care placements are only to be made when education is secured – except in emergency situations;
- All children in public care must have educational arrangements in place within 20 days of entering care;
- Each admission authority must give children in care priority in their admission arrangements;
- Local Authorities must include children in care as a priority within their Fair Access Protocol.
- LAC should be placed in Good or Outstanding schools.
- Exclusion should only be used as a very last resort.

2.6 Aims of the Guidance

'Corporate Parenting' emphasises the collective responsibility of the whole Local Authority to achieve good parenting. We recognise that we are an essential partner in this process and as such, we aim to:

- Act as an effective advocate for any child in care attending our School;
- Implement the relevant statutory elements of the Guidance;
- Have high expectations;
- Develop and implement effective inclusive strategies;
- Intervene early and appropriately to support any child in public care who is experiencing difficulties, liaising promptly with other professionals;
- Work in partnership with parents, carers and social workers to gather and share information to plan and monitor achievement; and
- Listen to the child or young person, respecting their rights of confidentiality.

2.7 Equal Opportunities and Valuing Diversity

We believe that children in public care are individuals, with distinct identities and needs shaped by their racial origins, religious beliefs, their gender and sexuality and whether or not they are in any way disabled. They all have the potential and equal right to succeed.

3. School Responsibilities

3.1 Designated Teacher (DT)

It is a statutory requirement that all schools designate a teacher for children in care. This teacher must understand about care and its impact on education; they should preferably be a senior member of staff who will act as an advocate for children in care, and who will be critical to tackling underachievement (See: The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for looked after children)

3.2 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

It is a statutory requirement that every child in care who is of statutory school age has a Personal Education Plan; this forms part of their statutory Care Plan. The child's social worker in conjunction with the Virtual School should initiate the PEP working with relevant teachers/education professionals. It is usually held in the school. It is a record of what needs to happen for the child to enable him/her to fulfil their potential and it reflects any existing education plans, such as an EHCP. The child should be involved in this process and the PEP should be reviewed termly.

3.3 Pupil Premium Grant for Looked After Children (PPG+)

The Pupil Premium Grant is additional funding to help schools close the attainment gap between our looked after children and their peers (nationally).

Schools need to decide how to spend these extra funds in conjunction with the Virtual School and the benefits *must be* quantifiable. Schools need to be aware that, in assessing their performance, OFSTED will be looking forensically at how well their PPG pupils do. This will be reflected and recorded in the PEP.

Schools must ensure:

- That relevant pupils are clearly identified on the schools tracking system so that evidence of performance is clear;
- They document how whole-school initiatives to close the attainment gaps have impacted on these pupils;
- They evidence curriculum enrichment activities not directly linked to literacy and numeracy from which these pupils have benefitted thanks to the PPG;
- Show they have used the funding to raise these pupils aspirations e.g. through mentoring schemes or visits to university;
- And where applicable, demonstrate that relevant pupils are performing well above age related expectations or identified as gifted and talented.
- Complete the school section of the ePEP every term.

3.4 Attendance

School ensures that all pupils attend regularly; continuity and stability are known to promote educational success for children in public care. Often school can be a lifeline when care placements are changing. However, where non-attendance is identified, early intervention is essential. It signals to the young person the importance of their education and that because they are in care of the Local Authority they are a priority. Working in partnership with the Social Workers, Foster Carers, Education Welfare Officers, and/or The Virtual School, school will take positive action quickly to avoid unauthorised absences.

3.5 Narrowing the Gap

The school sets challenging targets for children in care and has high expectations of them, both with regard to attainment and also participation in broader school activities. It recognises, however, that there are often additional hurdles for them to surmount because of their early life experiences; support will be offered where appropriate to help them achieve their potential and 'narrow the gap' between their attainment and that of their peers.

Teachers also recognise that sensitivity is needed in dealing with aspects of the curriculum which deal with family values and experiences which are likely to either rekindle distressing memories or put the spotlight on the child.

3.6 Data on Children in Care

It is the responsibility of the school to inform The Virtual School about any new children in care joining the school, or any leaving the school. Through PEP meetings, training courses and the annual conference, Virtual School staff will ensure that systems are in place to support the young people, to discuss their progress and to confirm their willingness to help the school resolve any issues which may arise. Other LA teams, including advisers, The Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and School Improvement Partners will also be aware of the names of children in care and may also enquire about their progress.

3.7 Admissions

School understands the importance of ensuring continuity of education for children in care. It works in partnership with the Local Authority to try to achieve suitable outcomes in terms of admission for these children, including those who are hard to place and / or who move into the area on an emergency placement. When the school is over-subscribed top priority is given to children in care, and consideration is given to going over numbers in line with the Council's Fair Access Protocol which can be viewed at: <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/education/schools/admissions-and-moving-school/in-year-admissions/fair-access-protocol/>

3.8 Exclusions

Continuity is vital for children already suffering disruption in their family life; exclusion from school can place great strain on care placements, sometimes resulting in more disruption in the children's lives if these break down. School will always aim to tackle the underlying causes of poor behaviour e.g. through pastoral support programmes, working with support services and giving purposeful help through the SEN framework. Exclusion will be used only as a last resort; wherever possible school will work creatively (with support teams where appropriate) to find other strategies to implement behavioural boundaries.

3.9 Children and Young People who have Special Educational Needs

- Like other children, children in care may at some time have special educational needs. It should not, however, be assumed that all children in public care will have such needs. If they do have learning needs or difficulties accessing learning opportunities they need support and advocacy. The needs of most pupils with special educational needs are expected to be met in mainstream schools through their EHCP and/or Individual Provision Map.
- The needs of the child in care should be known to the SENCO, the Designated Teacher and their Carer and Social Worker. The PEP should detail their needs and the support already provided. It should be used in conjunction with the statement or Individual Provision Map to monitor and record progress and to indicate any barriers with plans to overcome these.
- Children who are separated from their families will have behavioural and emotional responses to that separation and the often traumatic events which led to it. Schools have an important role to play in helping to ensure that unmet emotional needs do not lead to disaffection, difficult behaviour or exclusion wherever possible.

Glossary of Terms

Accommodation –
(Section 20
Children Act 1989)

Some children are looked after by the Local Authority by agreement with, or at the request of, their parents, perhaps because of problems within the family which are making it hard for them to cope. Under Section 20 of the Children Act, it is the duty of all local authorities to make accommodation available for such children in need. Children may be accommodated (in residential or foster care) for a short or longer period. No court proceedings are involved, and the parents retain full parental responsibility. Their continued involvement with their children's education should be encouraged wherever possible.

CAMHS

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

**Children in Public Care /
Children in care**

The two terms mean the same and are used interchangeably in this document.

Care Order
(Section 31
Children Act 1989)

A Care Order is made by the court (under Section 31(1)(a) of the Children Act), placing the child in the care of a designated Local Authority, with parental responsibility being shared between the parents and the Local Authority. It can only be made if the court is satisfied that:

- the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm; and
- the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to either:
 - the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect of parent to give him;
 - or
 - the child being beyond parental control.

Children's Guardian

On receiving the application for the Care Order, the court will appoint a Children's Guardian. This is an independent Social Worker working as a Court Officer, to safeguard and promote the interests of the child and young person during court proceedings. This replaces the Guardian Ad Litem.

Corporate Parent

The primary duty of the Local Authority is to act as 'corporate parent' to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or young person in public care, and to make use of services available for children and young people cared for by their own parents as appears to the authority to be reasonable in the case of the particular young person (Children Act, 1989, 23(3)(b)). In order to act as a 'good corporate parent' we need to base our expectations and aspirations for these children and young people as if they were our own children.

Interim Care Order

The court may make an Interim Care Order (for up to eight weeks in the first instance) where, in an application for a Care Order, the proceedings are adjourned or where a court in any proceedings gives a direction for the investigation of a child's home circumstances.

Special Guardianship Order

A Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order is a legal way for someone with whom the child has a relationship, other than a birth parent, to provide that child or young person with a secure, loving family when their own parent cannot.

If a child needs to live permanently away from their parents and the carer would like to make major decisions on behalf of the child, similar to those with an adoption order, but everyone agrees that links with their birth parents should continue, then a Special Guardianship Order can be applied for. This will restrict the birth parents rights but will not permanently end the relationship.