Cheshire East Virtual School for Cared for Children

Education and Schools

Information for Adoptive Parents and those with children on a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order

Guidance 2018-19
Effective from 1st September 2018
**What is this guidance for?**

Children who were formerly in care and have been placed *straight from care* with Adoptive Parents, on a Special Guardianship Order, or a Child Arrangement Order are known as Previously Looked After and for the purposes of this guide, shortened to Previously LAC, or PLAC for ease.

As part of the Virtual School’s work with Previously Cared for Children, we have put together this booklet for you as a parent/guardian to help you to support and advocate for your child in school. Within it, you should find the answers to frequently asked questions you may have about the education system and processes.

Although some of the information and advice is general, the detail relates to Cheshire East schools only, as the Virtual School in Cheshire East is responsible for providing advice and information for Previously Cared for Children in Cheshire East schools only. If your child attends a school outside of Cheshire East, the Virtual School in that authority will be able to signpost you to services in their area.

You will find information about:

- Cheshire East Virtual School’s Local Offer for Previously Cared for Children
- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Special Educational Needs
- Pupil Premium Plus
- How to raise concerns with school
Supporting previously cared for children in school who are living Cheshire East

Cheshire East has a proven track record of providing post-adoption support to schools and families but from Sept 2018 the statutory duties of Local Authorities and schools have been extended to ensure that children who have previously been in the care have access to information and advice. This article outlines how this will operate within Cheshire East. **The information applies to children who leave care through Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or Child Arrangement/Residence Orders.**

**Information, advice and support**
The Virtual School can provide advice to young people, families or schools on how to support previously cared for children. This can include issues such as school admissions, transfer between schools, and appropriate use of Pupil Premium, challenging exclusions, post-16 options and course availability. Schools are required to identify a staff member to oversee the support for previously looked after children and these staff are able to access all training offered by the Virtual School to Designated Teachers for cared for children.

**Contact**
PostLAC@cheshireeast.gov.uk

**In school support and intervention advice**
In school support and intervention advice for families receiving Post Adoption or ‘Special Guardianship Support’, The Cheshire East Special Guardianship Team and the Regional Adoption Agency ‘Adoption Counts’ have a school advisor who is able to offer practical advice to schools and families on how to ensure that schools understand and respond appropriately to the needs of previously cared for children. In order to access this support the family either adopted or SGO would request a support assessment.

**Our dedicated team is on hand to answer all of your queries and concerns:**
0300 123 2676.

info@adoptioncounts.org.uk
www.adoptioncounts.org.uk
Our Local Offer to meet the statutory duties relating to previously Cared for Children

Cheshire East Virtual School for Cared for Children:

- **will** provide or signpost advice and information to the parents/guardians of previously Cared for Children who attend Cheshire East schools to help them advocate for their children as effectively as possible;

- **will** provide training for schools around issues relating to the education of previously Cared for Children, alongside our training around Cared for Children

- **will** provide training for parents/guardians, in conjunction with Adoption Counts, around issues relating to education

- **will** provide a dedicated email inbox ([PostLAC@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:PostLAC@cheshireeast.gov.uk)) so that parents/guardians have one point of contact for advice. Emails will be responded to within 2 working days of the request being made.

- **will** provide a link within their website to the Adoption Counts website for further queries relating to adopted children.

- **will** signpost any query about a child previously in the care of the local authority, but now living outside its boundary, to the Virtual School in the authority where they now live and go to school;

- **will not** be able to advocate on behalf of an individual previously cared for children as they are not the child’s corporate parent and their local role is not resourced to include this service

- **will not** keep details (including name and contact details) of a previously cared for children or their family as they are not the corporate parent, and to do so would therefore risk a breach of data protection regulations

- **will not** discuss an individual Previously Cared for Child unless the school has expressly gained permission from the parents/guardians, as we are not the Corporate Parent.
Funding support

1. Pupil Premium

Pupil Premium Plus for Previously Cared for Children is a grant given to schools based on the number of Previously Cared for Children they have on their school census. It amounts to £2300 per year, paid directly to the school. It is vital that you ensure that the school knows about your child’s legal status, otherwise they cannot claim the Grant. The Local Authority cannot inform the school, as we do not have parental responsibility.

Schools that have children who are previously cared for, and subject to adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangement order are eligible to claim the pupil premium. To do this, head teachers should invite parents to self-declare that they have a previously cared for child and request sight of the legal paperwork, such as a court order or certificate. This needs to be indicated on the schools management information system before the January census in order for the school census to be accurate. The funding is sent directly to the school. Early Years settings can also claim pupil premium for previously adopted children.

It is important to note that all queries regarding the school's use of the grant must be directed to the school. The Virtual School Headteacher does not receive, manage or allocate this funding, has no role in defining school policy on how it is spent, and has no control over a school’s decisions about the spending of PP+ for previously cared for children. We do, however, provide general advice to schools about their use of PP+ in the same way as we do for Cared for Children.

Getting the most from PP+

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<tr>
<th>Approaches that are:</th>
<th>Which emphasise:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Individually tailored to the needs and strengths of each pupil</td>
<td>• Relationship-building, both with appropriate adults and with peers</td>
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<td>• Consistent: based on agreed core principles and components, but also flexible and responsive</td>
<td>• An emotionally intelligent approach to the setting of clear behaviour boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Based on evidence of what works</td>
<td>• Increasing pupil’s understanding of their own emotions and identity</td>
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<td>• Focussed on clear short-term goals which give opportunities for pupils to experience success</td>
<td>• Positive reinforcement</td>
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<td>• Include regular, high quality feedback from teaching staff</td>
<td>• Building self-esteem</td>
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<td>• Engage parents/guardians in the agreement and evaluation of arrangements for education support (e.g. via the PEP)</td>
<td>• Relevance to the learner: relate to pupil’s interests where possible - make it matter to them</td>
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<td>• Supporting pupil transition (e.g. primary-secondary/KS3-4)</td>
<td>• A joined-up approach involving social worker/guardian/VSH and other relevant professionals</td>
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<td>• Strong and visionary leadership on the part of both of the pupil’s head teachers</td>
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• Raising aspirations through access to high-quality educational experiences

• Promote the young person’s awareness and understanding of their own thought process (metacognition) and help to develop problem-solving strategies

• A child centred approach to assessment for learning

2. Post Adoption Support Fund

To provide essential therapeutic support for adopted/SGO children and families in a plan agreed with the post-adoption support team.

This new statutory DfE guidance extends the role of the Designated Teacher (DT) to now include previously cared for children i.e. those ‘no longer Looked After by the LA and are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order.’ This applies to children from the early years ‘throughout the compulsory years of education.

It is recommended that schools read the full statutory guidance document as it is a valuable source of information about supporting looked after and previously looked after children. However, this document provides a summary of its contents regarding support for previously cared for children.

Which children are included?
For the purposes of the statutory guidance, previously cared for children are those who have:
• Ceased to be looked after through Adoption
• Ceased to be looked after through a Special Guardianship Order
• Ceased to be looked after through a Child Arrangement Order (previously, Residency Order)

It does not include children who return to their birth families following a period of being looked after where none of the above categories apply. It does not include children who belong to one of these categories but have never been looked after.

Schools will want to satisfy themselves that the child falls into one of these categories by asking parents or guardians for evidence of their previously cared for status. Where parents are unable to provide clear evidence, schools will need to use their discretion. In such circumstances, schools could discuss a child’s status with the Virtual School (VS) to agree a consistent approach.

Consent to hold information about previously cared for status or to discuss a child’s previously cared for status, including with the VS, must be granted by parents or guardians.
**Designated Teacher for Previously Cared for Children**

Schools must have a Designated Teacher (DT) with responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously Cared for Children. The DT must receive appropriate training to help them fulfil this role. The DT for previously Cared for Children may also be the DT for Cared for Children. However, the work of the DT will need to reflect that their role for previously Cared for Children is different to that for Cared for Children, as the local authority is no longer their corporate parent.

For previously Cared for Children, the role of the DT includes:

- Ensuring that there are no barriers to school admission
- Tracking progress in relation to the pupil's starting point and in relation to their peers
- Monitoring exclusions to ensure this group is not over represented in this regard
- Ensuring that school policies are sensitive to the needs of these pupils, particularly behaviour and exclusions policies
- Monitor the impact of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) in supporting educational achievement

The DT should ensure that other staff members have an understanding of the specific needs of previously Cared for Children. For example, by disseminating knowledge gained during training.
The Role of the Governing Body (Maintained) or Proprietors (Academies)

Governing bodies or proprietors must ensure that their school has a DT for previously Cared for Children and this person is suitably qualified for this role. Governing bodies must ensure that DTs have adequate time to carry out these duties and that they receive appropriate training to support them with this role.

Governing bodies or proprietors should hold schools to account on how they support previously Cared for Children, including how PP+ is used. Therefore, DTs should routinely report to the Governors on this group of pupils in a way which is agreed by individual establishments.

School admissions

For Cheshire East schools, applications are usually made online but can be made by telephone on 0300 123 5012 if it is not possible to apply online. Full details of all the admission processes can be found on Cheshire East website.

For schools outside of Cheshire East, each LA has their own Admissions Teams and they will be found on their LA websites.

For children starting Nursery, Reception or Year 7, priority is given to previously Cared for Children (where adopted straight from care or on SGO/Child arrangement order immediately from care). Some faith schools may prioritise children of the faith over Cared for Children who are not baptised in the faith of that school, but they must give priority to Cared for Children and previously Cared for Children of the faith before other children of the faith.

For children moving school during the year (in-year admissions), there are priority arrangements for CFC and previously CFC (where Adopted straight from care or on an SGO/CAO straight from care).

Applications for children moving into an adoptive placement will be accepted ahead of the usual timescales given above and places will be held in order to aid the transition process into the new placement. Adoptive parents can make the school application but contact details for the child’s social worker must be provided so that approval can be sought.

If a child also has an EHCP and has a school named in the EHCP, then you should also liaise with the Cheshire East SEND Team (SEN contact details below), as the SEND Team must be involved in any decisions about a move of school, and the EHCP may need to be updated.

If your child is refused a place at a school you will be offered the right of appeal. Schools are required under the School Admissions Code to give priority to Cared for Children and previously cared for children. In Cheshire East, where pupils are moving we would strongly encourage schools to admit a Cared for Child or previously Cared for Child. We would only expect that it would be in exceptional circumstances that a cared for child would be refused a place and we would work with the family / social worker to find a suitable alternative place.

Cheshire East admissions team can provide further information on admissions, schools moves and appeals.

Contact:
Admissions Team: 0300 123 5012
AdmissionsCE@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Exclusions

‘Informal’ or ‘unofficial’ exclusions, such as sending a pupil home ‘to cool off’, are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents. Any exclusion of a pupil, even for short periods of time (eg half a day), must be formally recorded.

There are two types of exclusion: Fixed Term and Permanent. Both types have to be formally notified by the school to the parent and the Local Authority Exclusions Team. The notification can be by letter or email and must include the length of exclusion, the reason for exclusion and the parent’s right to make representations/appeal and details of how to do this. The notification must be in the form of a letter, and usually preceded by a phone call to parents.

Fixed Term Exclusions are for a set number of days

A Headteacher could lawfully fixed term exclude for:

- Repeated failure to follow academic instruction
- Failure to complete a behavioural sanction/follow school behaviour policy
- Repeated and persistent breaches of the behaviour policy. Even if the incident that has led to the exclusion would not have normally constituted a serious enough breach on its own a child can still be excluded if it is part of a wider pattern of behaviour.

Schools should take reasonable steps to set and mark work for pupils during the first five school days of exclusion; full time alternative provision must be arranged from the sixth day of exclusion.

There should always be a re-admission meeting on the first day back after exclusion, and the parent should be invited. A school cannot refuse to re-admit a pupil on the grounds that a re-admission meeting has not happened.

Permanent Exclusions are where a pupil cannot return to a school due to the seriousness of an incident, or for repeated breaches of the school’s behaviour policy.

For both Fixed Term and Permanent Exclusions, there is a right of appeal and this must be clearly laid out in the exclusions notification letter.

Preventative Action/Support

Where your child is experiencing difficulties with behaviour in school there are various options:

- For Primary aged children, the class teacher is usually your first port of call for any issues. School should let you know the details of how to make arrangements to see the class teacher.

- For secondary aged children, the Head of Year, or similar would usually be your contact in school for issues around behaviour.

- Ask for a meeting in school with the Designated Teacher for Previously Cared for Children. Every school has to have one by law. Discuss any triggers and how these can be avoided and ask about adjustments that can be put in place by the school, to support
the young person. Explore with them whether any Pupil Premium Plus can be used to purchase additional support or assessments.

- Ask the school to explore the possibility of starting Statutory Assessment for an EHCP if the issues are longstanding (see section on SEND)
- If your child already has an EHCP, ask to speak to the SENCO at school.
- The school could ask for an Educational Psychology assessment to provide some strategies for the child or the school. This should be via the school EP. If they have no EP time left, enquire as to whether the PPP could be used to spot purchase additional time.
- If a child has had some specialist assessments already and school has been given advice, check whether school are following that advice.
- If the child has an EHCP in place, ask for an emergency review to be convened if you feel that the placement is no longer able to meet the child’s needs and they are vulnerable to permanent exclusion.

Contact:

Exclusion team

Education Access Support Officer is responsible for working with schools and parents around the prevention of permanent exclusions.

Anne Vaughan-Griffith - Education Access Support Officer

anne.vaughan-griffith@cheshireeast.gov.uk

01625 374771
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

As with cared for children, previously cared for children are significantly more likely to have SEN than their peers. It is vital that DTs are aware of the SEN needs of previously cared for children. If the DT is not also the SENCo they should liaise regularly to ensure clear communication between all parties.

For initial advice and information about provision for children with special educational needs, you should contact the child's school directly. This would usually be the school SENCO – Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator. Their details should be on the school website.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health
Like cared for children, previously cared for children are more likely to experience the challenge of social, emotional and mental health issues than their peers. DTs are not expected to be mental health experts; however, they have an important role in ensuring they and other school staff can identify signs of potential issues and understand where the school can draw on specialist services.
Where the child’s parents or guardians give consent to its use, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a clinically validated brief behavioural screening questionnaire which can help to provide an indication of whether a pupil's emotional wellbeing is likely to impact on learning.

Contact:
SENteameast@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Complaints about a school
If you have a complaint about your child’s school, every school should have a complaints policy available on their website. This will explain what you need to do and who to contact in order to submit a complaint.

Generally, if the complaint is about a member of staff, the person to write to about the complaint is the Headteacher. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, then you should write to the Chair of Governors.