

The HOPE Virtual School for Children in Care: Frequently asked questions for schools

1. How do I know if a child in my school is looked after?

- When a child on your school roll comes into care you should be contacted by the child's social worker. If a child has been placed through a care order, interim care order or accommodated (section 20 order) the child is "looked after".
- It can be complicated sometimes as when a child lives with their relatives they may, or may not be, looked after. If this is a private arrangement they are not classed as "looked after" by the Local Authority. If the carer has been approved (by the Fostering Panel) as a Kinship Carer they are "looked after".
- For schools outside of Bristol, The HOPE notifies the relevant virtual school headteacher (VSH) if a Bristol child in care is being educated in a school in their authority.

Children with Care Orders

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. A Care Order may 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/her if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give, or;
 - the child being beyond parental control.

Interim care orders

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. A court may also make an Interim Care Order when, during any proceedings, it directs that there is an investigation into a child's home circumstances.

Accommodation: Section 20 Order

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. 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. Parents' continued involvement with their children's education should be encouraged wherever reasonable.

Short breaks

A child is placed in respite care if the family needs short-term support for any reason. This is often used for families whose children have complex needs. If a

child is placed in respite care for more than 120 days in one year they are deemed “looked after” by the Local Authority.

2. What should we do differently in our school for children who are looked after?

There are many systems in school which may need to be more flexible to better meet the needs of these children. Your designated teacher for children looked after should have attended training run by The HOPE and be aware of what needs to be done in your school. Your designated teacher will need to know about the DfE’s February 2018 statutory guidance for schools: [Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children](#) and for local authorities: [Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children](#).

You will need to monitor and track individual children who are looked after in your school. As part of this, you will need to enter data onto the secure, online CLA Tracker database. The CLA Tracker is a useful tool that allows you and the virtual school staff to review all the children in care at your school. A login can be obtained from Jackie Scarman at The HOPE (0117 35 76108 or via jackie.scarman@bristol.gov.uk).

Attainment/progress data need to be entered on the CLA Tracker by the end of terms 2, 4 and 6. Attendance data for confidential CiC need to be entered at the end of each of the six terms. Completed PEP forms need to be uploaded to the Tracker (unless the child’s care status is confidential).

If you have children in your school looked after by other Local Authorities you should have similar systems in place as for Bristol looked after children.

3. What is a PEP and who should attend PEP meetings?

A PEP is a Personal Education Plan and every looked after child in your school should have one. A PEP is a record of what needs to happen for children looked after to enable them to fulfil their potential and reflects any existing education plans, such as a Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and an Individual Education Plan (IEP). A group of key people involved in the child’s life should agree what is recorded on the PEP.

The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning which secures good basic skills, stretches aspirations and builds life chances. PEPs are reviewed termly and in line with the care planning for a child.

Below are some specific frequently asked questions regarding PEPs.

a) Who is responsible for initiating the PEP and how often should they be done?

The social worker should initiate the first PEP within 28 days of the young person becoming looked after. PEPs should then be reviewed termly and further meetings coordinated with the Looked After Children (LAC) reviews. The first review takes place after three months then on a six monthly basis.

When The HOPE is notified that a child has come into care, our Business Support Assistant sends an email to the social worker, copying in the designated teacher, reminding the social worker to organise the first PEP meeting.

b) What should I do if I think PEP is overdue?

You should contact the social worker and ask them to arrange the meeting. If the delay continues email the social worker. If this does not elicit a response, contact the team manager.

c) Who should attend PEP meetings?

PEP meetings must be attended by the social worker and the young person, the carer, and the teacher who knows the child best and who can agree targets and actions regarding learning outcomes should also attend. If designated teachers are not attending they should know when the meeting is and receive a copy of the completed PEP.

The HOPE staff monitor a selection of PEPs as they are uploaded on to the CLA Tracker using a PEP descriptors document. Where PEP paperwork is judged to be less than good, The HOPE lead for the year group/s concerned contacts the designated teacher directly.

The PEP descriptors document for primary and secondary PEP forms is available online at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/resources-professionals/personal-education-plans>.

The PEP descriptors document for the EYFS PEP form is available online at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/resources-professionals/pre-school-and-foundation-stage-pep>.

DTs can use the format to monitor their own PEPs and if they would like further support with this, please contact The HOPE.

d) Does someone from the school need to attend the LAC review?

If the PEP has been completed at the right time and is of good quality there should be no need to attend the review unless the child has specifically asked for a member of staff to be invited.

For copies of guidance notes and documentation for PEP including the early years PEP please see: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/resources-professionals/personal-education-plans>

4. A looked after child in my school has gaps in their learning. How can they get help?

There are individual children in care who do very well at school, but, when children in care are looked at as a cohort, there is an achievement gap in comparison with their peers. Nationally, just 1% go to university.

The HOPE supports schools to help identify ways for children to catch up by working to improve joint planning between schools, foster carers and social care staff. The staff team oversees several year groups or a key stage:

Early Years Foundation Stage

Anne Mortimore

Primary Pupils

Anne Mortimore:	Year R
Shelina Jerram:	Years 1 and 2
Leanne Bishop:	Years 3 to 6

Secondary Pupils

Hattie Billsberry*/Heather Beach:	Years 7 to 9
Craig Barnett:	Years 10 and 11

* on maternity leave September 2018 to end of May 2019

Post 16

Penny Russell:	Year 12
Angela Ryan:	Year 13 and above

When the PEP identifies the need and the school are doing all they can; e.g. after school/homework clubs, support may be accessed through The HOPE. In KS4, this could be specific catch up lessons from a teacher in the form of academic coaching.

Pupil Premium funding for children in care should be used to narrow any gaps with peers or to boost a pupil's attainment even further. The PEP form needs to identify the areas in which the young person needs help in order for the VSH to release the funding and evidence needs to be provided as to how the funding has benefited the pupil. Each pupil's data also needs to be up to date on the CLA Tracker.

5. The behaviour of a child who is looked after in my school is causing me concern. What help is available?

Schools should seek advice from their Educational Psychologist. The HOPE is also available to provide initial advice and support. Bristol City Council has an exclusions process for children in care in place which is available to view at: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/resources-professionals/attendance-and-exclusions>

6. Attendance may be an issue for a child looked after at my school. What should I do and what help is available?

Attendance can be a contributory factor to low attainment so we must ensure that all our children in care attend 100% of the time if possible. Bristol has to report on any CiC missing 19 days or more of schooling for any reason in one academic year.

What can schools do?

- Contact the carer before any issues arise.
- Ensure the designated teacher is aware of the child and makes an appointment with the carer to discuss what support is available.
- Inform the carer of who the most important people in school are for the child so they know who to communicate with i.e. class teacher, tutor, Head, designated CLA teacher.
- Make sure the key people (including the school secretary/admin staff) have the carer's details for contact should anything need to be communicated to them.
- Give positive messages to the young person and carer about the importance of attending school and the value of achieving their best. Link it in with positive outcomes for the future such as the car, holiday, flat the young person will be able to have if they are able to engage in employment when they leave education.
- Encourage the young person to have ambitions about their future and what they want to achieve.
- Don't let an issue seem like the end of the world for the young person's education – always look for the next step to making things better for them. Talk to support services and the carer about how to use a Solution Focused Approach to solving the issue.
- Communicate openly with the carer so that help is available at the earliest stage, problems addressed before they become too large and the young person is aware that there is regular communication between you and their carer.
- Build on the positives rather than focussing on the negatives.
- If sanctions are building up at school which discourage the young person from attending e.g. detentions for lateness, talk to the carer about alternative ways for the young person to meet the schools requirements.
- Make sure the carer is aware of the need to ring the school first thing in the morning if the young person isn't going to be in and ensure that the school makes contact if the young person hasn't turned up and the carer hasn't rung in.
- If the young person has truanted or is refusing to attend, be proactive in informing other agencies to get support at the earliest opportunity.
- Listen to what the young person is saying and try to understand the issue from their perspective and seek ways to address it which will improve their view of school.

7. A looked after child in my school has special educational needs and disabilities. What do I need to do to ensure best practice?

A good personalised plan is essential to support the PEP process for children looked after with special educational needs. The class teacher and teaching assistants, along with SENCO may have an important role in attending and contributing to the PEP meeting.

An important element of the new SEND code of practice is more active involvement with parents/carers. Their voice is now paramount to writing and planning of children's needs.

All parties - social care, health and education have one document to follow.

The new SEND code of practice can be found at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND Code of Practice January 2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf)

8. How can I best support a looked after child when they transfer from primary to secondary school?

Change is never easy for any child and for children looked after, lack of stability and attachment issues may make change a particularly difficult and stressful time.

One of the changes that is predictable and therefore can be planned and well managed is the transfer from primary to secondary school. For secondary transfer to work best for children looked after, all the key adults need to be clear about their responsibility and know how each individual's role supports and builds on the work of colleagues. The key responsibilities for supporting the transfer are set out below.

The Social Worker should:

- arrange a PEP meeting in Year 6 in May or June at the primary school and invite the designated teacher and the designated teacher from the secondary school, also the young person, carer and any key worker already allocated (learning mentor, The HOPE etc).
- talk to the young person before the meeting about how they are feeling about moving schools and what support they would like
- ensure that all of the young person's concerns are addressed at the meeting and be clear what support will be in place and that the young person knows who the key person will be at the new school.
- set a date at the meeting in May/June for a PEP meeting early on in Year 7 at the secondary school and invite the designated teacher or year head, also the young person, carer, key worker.

The Carer should:

- attend the PEP meeting in Year 6, and be clear which actions are planned and the timescales decided. Know the name of the secondary designated teacher and their phone number.
- attend the PEP meeting in Year 7 and be clear which actions are planned and the timescales decided.
- ensure all the uniform and school bag etc is ready to start during the summer holidays
- discuss with the young person how they will get to school and practice the route if needed
- be extra vigilant during the early days at secondary school, notice any concerns and discuss with the social worker and/or the designated teacher
- ensure excellent attendance
- ensure a good pattern with homework is set early
- encourage and support Out of School Hours Learning, clubs and new interests.

The Designated Teacher (Primary) should:

- attend the PEP meeting in Year 6 and outline any additional support necessary to achieve a successful transition

The Designated Teacher (Secondary) should:

- attend the PEP meeting in Year 6 and set up learning mentor/home-school worker support
- use Year 6 SATs results to inform Year 7 classes and booster support where needed
- manage support in new school including Out of School Hours Learning
- attend the PEP meeting in Year 7
- ensure the young person knows you have a particular responsibility for children looked after and are there to 'look out' for them in their new school and ensure they do well academically. Have a conversation with the young person about who will know they are looked after and why.

The HOPE will:

- attend the Year 6 and Year 7 PEP meetings where possible
- liaise with the social worker to ensure effective communication.

Information about Bristol's admissions procedures, including in-year admissions, is set out in the document called 'Admissions Protocol and Operational Process' which is available from <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/resources-professionals/information-for-social-care-staff>.

Further information about the education of children in care can be found in the Care Matters document available on our Useful links and websites page: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/resources-professionals/useful-links-and-websites>.