



**Policy for
Children with a Social Worker
Looked After Children
Previously Looked After Children**

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Author (Name & Job Title)		Alice Brown - Director of Inclusion With contributions from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann Shaw, Head of Safeguarding • Nicola Ackyrod, Local Governor • Emma Board, Designated Teacher, SMTV Primary School, Dorset • Bethan West, Designated Teacher, The Gryphon School, Dorset • Neela Brooking, Headteacher, Thornford Primary School, Dorset • Matt Barge, Primary Director for SAST • Adele Creed, Designated Safeguarding Lead, King Arthur's School, Somerset • Michael Motteram, Assistant Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead, Shaftesbury Secondary School 	
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SAST POLICY FOR CHILDREN WITH A SOCIAL WORKER, LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

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Introduction

This policy describes the principles, approach and practice that our establishments will adopt and follow in order to promote the educational achievement and welfare of Children with a Social Worker (CWSW), Looked After Children / Children in Care (LAC / CiC) and those who are Previously Looked After Children (pLAC).

The Sherborne Area Schools' Trust (SAST) values are:



SAST recognises that our schools play a vital role in providing a stable base for Children in Care and in promoting their academic, social and emotional development. We promote whole school staff training in their specific needs, so that all adults who work or volunteer in SAST are sensitive to the barriers to learning that Children in Care experience and feel able to support them discretely and confidentially, as needs arise. We are committed to the need to work in a 'relationship-based' way so that children looked after and previously looked after are valued and part of our school communities.

All schools in SAST will ensure that Children in Care, and those who have previously been in care, have access to excellent educational provision and are prioritised for additional support through school-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.*'

Our aim is to champion the needs of these distinct groups to ensure that as individuals, these children are able to make rapid educational and social progress whilst vulnerable or during their period in care / after care, whilst attending a SAST school.

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 Looked After Children who, statistically, experience disadvantage in education. The criteria are clear that the expectation is that all learners receive a high-quality, ambitious education; that SAST establishments are inclusive of all learners; and that all schools must be meeting their statutory duties, including those under the Equality Act 2010 and all protected characteristics therein.

Promoting an inclusive environment is key to the well-being of all pupils, as is a commitment to deepening pupils' understanding of "democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law and mutual respect and tolerance" (OFSTED 2019).

Legislation, statutory guidance and linked SAST policies

This policy is based on statutory guidance from the Department for Education: [The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children \(2018\)](#)

Furthermore, this policy should be read in conjunction with the following statutory and non-statutory guidance, policies and strategy documents:

- [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements \(2024\)](#)
- [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy \(2023\)](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children \(2023\)](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education \(2025\)](#)
- [Equality Act 2010: Advice for Schools DfE \(2018\)](#)
- [Behaviour in Schools - Advice for headteachers and school staff \(2024\)](#)
- [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice 0 – 25 \(2015\)](#)
- SAST SEND Policy
- SAST Inclusion, Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- SAST Attendance Policy
- SAST Admissions Policy
- SAST Equality and Diversity Policy
- SAST Behaviour Principles
- School Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies
- School Pupil Premium Strategy

Where there are discrepancies between this policy and a more recent DfE publication, the most recent legislation will take precedence, until such time as it can be updated.

Definitions

Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

These are children who have been assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker, together with those who have previously had a social worker in the last 6 years due to safeguarding and/or welfare reasons. It includes all children aged 0-18 years of age subject to a Child in Need (CiN) plan or a Child Protection (CP) Plan. This cohort of children have been identified as facing significant barriers to education as a result of experiences of adversity.

Looked After Children (LAC/CiC)

In England and Wales, 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 accommodated under voluntary agreement with their parents (section 20);
- Children who are the subject of a care order (section 31) or interim care order (section 38);

- Children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection (section 44 and 46);
- Children who are accommodated by the local authority. This includes: unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; those children where the LA is acting as the agency for adoption; children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement (section 21); children who are helping the police with enquiries or those subject to police protection.

Looked After Children are sometimes referred to in schools by the legal acronym LAC, however in some local authorities in the South-West, including Dorset, the term **Children in Care (CiC)** is preferred.

“L.A.C” was a term I often saw on all my paperwork, I didn’t know what it meant at first - and I didn’t want to look stupid for asking – so I made an assumption based on what it sounded like. Lack. For a little while I lived under the belief that this was a term created to define kids like me – lacking a family, lacking love, lacking that something that made kids loveable, that brought up maternal instincts and made you want to protect them – I lacked that. I was a lack. Even now that I’m very familiar with this term it’s something that seems alien to me, a label that was stamped on my forehead – and at that a label that couldn’t possibly define even the tiniest bit of my being when it just simply stated that I was a ‘looked after child’ – but wasn’t every child supposed to be that? Looked after? Except that I wasn’t. That’s why I was there.”

Voice of a Young Person in Care, Southwest.

For the remainder of this policy, the term **Children in Care (CiC)** will be used to refer to Looked After Children.

Previously looked-after children (pLAC)

This terminology is used for those children who are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales (as defined by the Children Act 1989) because:

- they are the subject of an adoption order
- they are the subject of a special guardianship order (SGO)
- they are the subject of a child arrangements order (CAO)

It is important to note that children who return to live with their birth parents are not considered to be previously looked after, once the care order is no longer in place. For children accommodated under a voluntary arrangement, the local authority responsibility ends as soon as the child returns to the birth parent. In other cases, an application has to be made to the court to revoke the care order.

Kinship care

This term is used to describe any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term. Kinship carers can be grandparents, uncles, aunts, older brothers and sisters or other adults who have a connection to the child, such as neighbours or family friends. Kinship carers are sometimes called family and friends carers. There are different types of

kinship care arrangements which determine the level of support available to the carer and the child, and who has parental responsibility (see [Kinship care - Family Rights Group \(frg.org.uk\)](http://frg.org.uk) for further information).

School

Within this policy the term *school* or *establishment* relates to any educational setting within SAST. We recognise that some of these places are referred to as Learning Centres or Learning Communities by Local Authorities.

Virtual School

Every local authority in England has a strategic duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care, and to provide educational advice and guidance in relation to those who were previously in care. This duty is discharged through the Virtual School in each LA. Children in Care, who attend SAST schools, are usually under the care of Dorset, Somerset or Wiltshire Local Authority. However, on occasion we do have CiC who are the responsibility of a different authority. In that eventuality, the statutory duties and support are fulfilled via the Virtual School in that authority.

With the agreement and support of the local authority, Virtual School headteachers are also designated as strategic leaders for the cohort of children who have been assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker. The 2023 [kinship strategy](#) further adapted the role of virtual school heads to specifically include championing the attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care.

SAST schools will:

- provide a safe and secure environment where educational progress and stability is always central to planning
- make all endeavours to narrow the gap between the attainment of CiC, pLAC, and their peers, ensuring accelerated and rapid progress
- ensure that that CiC and pLAC benefit from school-based interventions, even if they do not strictly meet the criteria for that intervention as laid out in the *DfE Designated Teacher Statutory guidance*; and to use the allocated Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) effectively
- ensure that all CiC have a minimum of two Personal Education Planning (PEP) 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 intervention as laid out in the *DfE Designated Teacher Statutory guidance*
- for all adults to provide sensitive, child-led support, adopting a relationship-based approach, understanding the specific needs of CWSW, CiC, pLAC and those in kinship care
- ensure that there is at least one key adult with whom the child or young person has a trusted relationship, who will act as an advocate for them and take a special interest in their progress in all school activities
- ensure that school systems facilitate discrete support, which includes a strong relationship between school staff, carers and children

- CiC will be advantaged within school policies and procedures, with their needs explicitly considered and provided for as laid out in the *DfE Designated Teacher Statutory guidance*
- ensure that Behaviour Policies and procedures maintain clear boundaries and expectations about behaviour, but also explicitly recognise and understand that not all behaviour is a matter of choice. Schools will not enforce sanctions that shame and ostracise CiC from their peers, school, community or family. All SAST schools are expected to create an inclusive and positive school ethos, for every pupil.
- ensure that CiC and pLAC and their families, and kinship carers, will feel part of the school community; they will be actively welcomed, involved and engaged into each school community

Roles and Responsibilities:

The Executive Headteacher/Headteacher and those responsible for governance are committed to promoting improved educational life chances for CWSW, CiC and pLAC. They will ensure that:

- the Designated Safeguarding Lead is clearly identified, suitably trained and given adequate time to fulfil their role
- the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After has qualified teacher status, appropriate seniority in the leadership team, time and experience to fulfil this statutory role, and at least annual training to remain fully informed
- the names of the Designated Safeguarding Lead and Designated Teacher are clearly displayed on the school website
- They will monitor the role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Designated Teacher to ensure that all CWSW, CiC and pLAC make good and rapid progress and that the whole school staff receive appropriate training

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will promote improved educational life chances of CWSW and those in kinship care by:

- acting as a source of support, advice and expertise for all staff
- ensuring that relevant school staff know which children have had/have a social worker and/or are in kinship care
- foster a culture of inclusion and high aspiration
- working with the relevant leaders to monitor attendance, academic progress, and pastoral needs
- working with relevant staff to ensure provision for additional academic support, pastoral intervention and/or reasonable adjustments for CWSW, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there is still a lasting impact on children's educational outcomes
- performing a coordinating role, ensuring effective communication with all school staff, social workers and safeguarding partners
- promote supportive engagement with parents and/or carers in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including where families may be facing challenging circumstances
- providing regular reports to the Headteacher and those responsible for Governance

The Designated Teacher (DT) will promote improved educational life chances for CiC and pLAC by:

- supporting the school leadership team in ensuring that CiC /pLAC have access to quality first teaching
- working with the relevant leaders (such as Assessment Leads) to track the progress of CiC /pLAC across the curriculum using data, teacher reports, book looks and learning walks
- ensuring that the Pupil Premium Plus funding is used effectively and efficiently
- performing a coordinating role with school staff and outside agencies, particularly with regard to leading Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings
- ensuring effective communication with the school's assigned professional workers/advocates from the Virtual School, with Social Care and with foster carers
- developing expertise in the field of CiC, including attachment theory and trauma-informed practice
- providing and attending training and offering advice to the whole school staff
- promoting a school culture which is supportive, relationship-based and has high expectations for CiC/pLAC
- regularly reporting to the Head and those responsible for governance on the attainment of CiC /pLAC; along with school resource and staff training needs for working with this group
- working with those who manage provision planning to prioritise CiC for school-based additional support, even when the young person does not strictly meet the entry criteria
- ensuring that CiC /pLAC are not overlooked for positions of pupil responsibility within the school because of their care status
- organising the collection of any other data requested by professionals e.g., an annual Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to inform their annual CiC health review.
- providing an annual report to the Headteacher and those responsible for governance

All staff will promote improved educational life chances for CWSW, CiC, pLAC and those in kinship care by:

- reading and implementing this SAST policy
- attending relevant training
- providing accurate information and data when asked by the DSL and DT Teacher, in a timely manner
- being pro-active in ensuring regular contact with the carer of any CiC in their class
- referring to the DSL and DT for advice
- playing their part in creating an attachment and trauma-informed 'CiC-friendly' culture and in securing rapid progress for CiC by ensuring that they benefit from any additional school-based support available
- making every effort to develop positive professional relationships with colleagues from other agencies and facilitate their work

SAST Director Of Inclusion, Head of Safeguarding and Trustee for Safeguarding

The role of the Director of Inclusion, Head of Safeguarding and the nominated Trustee is to review the impact of this policy and the effectiveness of its implementation in school; and to

ensure that the specific needs of these cohorts of children are considered and championed at Board Level.

Educational Planning

Provision for Children with a Social Worker and those in kinship care

Each SAST school will ensure CWSW and those in kinship care have access to quality first teaching which is complemented, where required, with provision for additional academic support, pastoral intervention and/or reasonable adjustments. Such provision may be recorded through learning passports, individual support plans or pastoral support plans if appropriate.

Provision for Children who were Previously Looked After

This is managed through the Pupil Premium Plus and details of how each school supports children who were previously looked after can be found in the strategy published by each individual establishment.

Provision for Children in Care

Each SAST school will ensure that every CiC on roll has a Personal Education Planning (PEP) meeting, 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* two PEP meetings for each CiC (some Local Authorities, such as Dorset, expect there to be three meetings per year). If a CiC is transitioning to a new setting, an additional meeting will be held with the receiving DT, social worker and virtual school representative.

If a child already in a SAST school becomes designated as “looked after”, or if a CiC joins a new setting, the first PEP meeting must be held within 20 days. For new CiC, the second PEP will be held within three months before moving to the six-monthly cycle.

The local authority processes and procedures for completing PEPs are laid out by each Virtual School in their relevant handbooks which are updated annually. Designated Teachers must ensure that they follow the advice from the correct Virtual School. PEPs are monitored by each Virtual School for quality assurance and compliance.

Admissions and Transitions

School procedures to support children during admission and transition include:

- prioritising CiC /pLAC at the point of admission
- ensuring the swift transfer of information between schools that may include school visits and/or telephone conversations with the class teachers / DT / DSL Lead at the previous/receiving school.
- an introductory meeting between carers, social workers and the DT
- identification and introduction of the class teacher /form tutor as the key adult
- early introduction to a peer buddy
- additional support and planning for CiC /pLAC at times of transition away from school

- additional support for admission and progression through Post 16/18 education and the preparation for adulthood e.g. supporting Open Day visits, high quality Careers Information Advice and Guidance, 16-19 bursary and assistance for university and loan applications
- structured activities to 'say goodbye', in recognition of the impact of broken attachments and loss

SAST schools will endeavour to complete any professional liaison and introductory meetings **before** admission or transition for CiC, however it is recognised that this is not always possible. In that eventuality, Designated Teachers will endeavour to hold the meeting within five working days of the change in placement.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Teachers will prioritise the early identification of any Special Educational Needs by:

- having high expectations and ambition for all children
- consistently providing high quality teaching
- reviewing prior attainment information
- holding discussions with other school staff who work / have worked with the child
- undertaking qualitative observations of learning and play as relevant
- assessing gaps in learning
- implementing a graduated approach, ensuring progress is regularly monitored and reviewed
- ensuring that planning to address gaps 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 they are prioritised for additional school-based support, even if they do not meet the criteria
- accurately and swiftly completing any screening checklists or questionnaires requested by the SENCO
- undertaking frequent and close liaison with carers, the Designated Teacher and SENCO

All staff will work creatively to secure rapid progress for Children in Care who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by:

- having high expectation of progress each academic year (in line with the expectation set out in the PEP)
- completing one-page profiles/learning passports and Individual Provision Plans that are complementary to the targets set in PEP meetings
- ensuring that they are accessing school-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

- ensuring, with the SENCO, that any EHCP review is held in a timely manner with all relevant professionals invited and their views obtained.

Safeguarding

School staff will be vigilant for any safeguarding issues which can impact particularly on CWSC and CiC by familiarising themselves with this policy and by following the procedures laid out in the SAST/School safeguarding and child protection policy and the most recent 'DfE: *Keeping Children Safe in Education*' guidance.

Attendance

School attendance procedures will reflect the specific needs of CWSW, CiC and pLAC to ensure good school attendance. Where there is a concern about attendance or punctuality the DSL and DT, will work together with the relevant pastoral staff and senior leaders, to ensure that contact is made with the carer, social worker and other professionals including the Virtual School, as an early intervention.

Alternative Provision

If it is deemed necessary to make any arrangements for provision alternative to daily attendance at school, schools will make every effort to ensure that it is:

- arranged in discussion with the carer, all professionals, and the relevant LA Alternative Provision Commissioning / Locality Inclusion Officer
- a plan that retains the CiC on the roll of the school or notify in writing which educational establishment will be responsible for essential reporting and accountable for the PP+
- a plan that is shared with the SAST Directors of Education, Inclusion and Safeguarding
- an agreed part of the overall PEP for the student
- full-time (25 hours) or contribute to full-time attendance and be of high quality
- meet the educational needs of the CiC /pLAC
- will provide the opportunity to make rapid progress in the course of study provided by the setting
- will be monitored regularly and that PEPs will include the school and the alternative provider

Suspension and Exclusion

Schools will make every effort to avoid excluding a CiC, whether for a fixed term or permanently, in recognition of the increased risk this poses in terms of them quickly disengaging from the school, due to their early experience of broken attachments and loss. Executive Headteachers, Headteachers and Heads of School will follow the guidance laid out in the SAST Inclusion, Suspension and Exclusion Policy. In giving particular regard for the vulnerability of CiC or pLAC **before making a decision to exclude**, they **must** discuss the rationale for suspending or excluding with the Director of Education and the LA Virtual School.

If there is no option other than suspension, schools will make every attempt to minimise the number of days of the suspension.

CiC /pLAC with special educational needs should only ever have suspension/exclusion used as a behaviour management action as an absolute last resort. (*Regulation 4(1)(c) of the Equalities Act 2010 which means that a head teacher could only lawfully exclude 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*).

APPENDIX A: Checklist for a Child New to Care and Joining a SAST School

If a child or young person is expected to join your school soon you should:

- Have had contact with their social worker, know their name and have their contact details
- Have been provided with details and contact information about the child's current carers (whether this a temporary or long-term placement)
- Have been given details of any specific safeguarding information e.g., adults who should not have contact with the child.
- Have been requested to set a date for an initial PEP meeting – this is essential where a child is new to care and needs to be completed within 20 days of a child entering care.
- Have been supplied with a copy of the child's latest PEP (if they are already in the care of a local authority)

You should request:

- A date for a PEP meeting with the social worker, if this has not been requested of you.
- Where relevant, the child's Health and Care plan (EHCP)
- The legal care status of the child – ICO (interim care order), FCO (full care order) or Accommodated (Section 20). This may need updating within a short period of time, dependent on the individual circumstances as an interim care order may be replaced with a full care order as a case proceeds through the courts.

You should ensure:

- The School Information Management System holds the correct data
 - Identifying the child as In care, with the correct Caring Authority
 - Recording accurately carer details, including any mobile numbers for school text messaging
 - That FSM eligibility is recorded correctly. For the vast majority of children in care – those fostered or resident in children's homes - are not eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). This status is not affected by the individual circumstances of the carer – they receive funding to supply all meals for children in their care therefore the child's record should not identify them as currently eligible for FSM.
- The Designated Teacher arranges an introductory meeting with the child's foster carer(s) at the earliest opportunity.

APPENDIX B: Useful Contacts

Dorset Virtual School

Service Manager and VSH: Jo Smark-Richards
Email: jo.smark-richards@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Tel: [01305 221632](tel:01305221632)

VS Northern Locality Lead: Olivia Curtis and Tracey Sutterby
Email: olivia.curtis@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Tel: [01305 228345](tel:01305228345)

Somerset Virtual School

VS Headteacher: Julia Ridge
Email: julia.ridge@somerset.gov.uk
General enquires: thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk

Wiltshire Virtual school

Email: virtualschool@wiltshire.gov.uk