



**ESSEX VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

Circular to Headteachers Designated Teachers regarding Behaviour, Exclusion, Part Time Timetables, and Alternative Provision.

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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

**Nelson Mandela**

**Dear Headteachers and Designated Teachers for LAC & PLAC,**

Essex Virtual School sits within ‘Essex Specialist Education Services’ and is therefore ideally placed to be able to work with social workers, carers, and the many teams and services who all contribute in different ways to ensuring that children enjoy and achieve in their education and beyond.

We are fully committed to being ‘educational advocates’ for our children and young people. We aim to deliver this not only with determination and energy, but also with care and compassion.

The Virtual School’s statutory responsibilities extend to every looked after child, whatever their age.

***Our mission is to place our children and young people at the very heart of everything we do. Championing their interests, celebrating their successes, and constantly striving to ensure that all those working around them share the highest aspirations for their achievements. We want our children and young people to feel happy, safe, and secure in settings where they receive an outstanding educational experience that enable them to grow into confident, resilient citizens.***

Integral to achieving this goal is our partnership with Headteachers, Designated Teachers, and school staff. It is your determination, skill, and hard work that makes such a positive difference to our children and young peoples experiences on a day-to-day basis.

We fully appreciate the impact the last few years has had on schools and in particular our children and young people. It is becoming clear that many care experienced young people have been particularly affected by school closures and the wider impact of the Covid pandemic.

It is therefore important that we work together to support our children and young people both academically and emotionally.

We have already devolved additional financial support to schools, almost doubling the Covid recovery grant provided by the DfE. Next term we will be providing additional funds for 1 to 1 catchup and continue to offer a wide range of free training for school staff. Last term we introduced a high-quality online numeracy platform for KS1/2 students (we are piloting this and will aim to extend it to KS3 next year), and this term will be introducing a literacy platform for KS2-4 students. We are ensuring that all our children and young people have a laptop or equivalent device to support their academic studies at school and at home.

Our conference this year is focusing on mental health and wellbeing, and of course you are all cordially invited to join us.

As we emerge from the pandemic, I am particularly concerned that we work closely to ensure good attendance and provide support for schools and young people where behaviour may present a barrier to learning.

I urge you to contact us if young people are encountering problems at school so that we can work together to adapt their Personal Education Plan to meet their needs.

I have outlined below our expectation for partnership working in regard to behaviour, exclusion, part time timetables, and Alternative Provision.

Kind regards.

John Edgar

**Headteacher Essex Virtual School**

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**Working together to support good behaviour**

**Introduction**

The past experiences of looked after and previously looked after children can have an impact on their behaviour in school. It is important to remember this when considering how best to support the child or young person with their learning and the design and application of school’s behaviour policies.

Care experienced children and young people are more likely to experience the challenge of social, emotional, and mental health issues than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills, forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties, foetal alcohol syndrome and coping with transitions and change. This can impact on their behaviour and education.

We know that exposure to childhood trauma impacts on working memory performance and attentional processes. These are key elements that underpin learning and impact on the ability to engage in the classroom. We also know that some children with unresolved trauma and/or unmet attachment needs may show behaviours in school that include disengagement, self-harm, depression risk-taking and oppositional behaviour. They may also struggle with focussing on and taking pleasure in learning.

It is therefore crucial at a time where Covid has placed greater pressure on children and schools that we work in partnership to overcome the potential barriers that many care experienced young people may encounter.

**Designated teachers** should take lead responsibility for ensuring school staff understand the things which can affect how care experienced children learn and achieve and how the whole school supports the educational achievement of these pupils.

This means making sure that all staff:

* have high expectations for learning and set targets to accelerate educational progress as part of the PEP.
* are aware of the emotional, psychological, and social effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) from birth families and that some children may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences, and how this might affect the child’s behaviour.
* understand how important it is to see looked-after and previously looked-after children as individuals rather than as a homogeneous group, not publicly treat them differently from their peers, and show sensitivity about who else knows about their looked-after or previously looked-after status.
* appreciate the central importance of the looked-after child’s PEP in helping to create a shared understanding between teachers, carers, social workers and, most importantly, the child’s own understanding of how they are being supported.
* have the level of understanding they need of the role of social workers, the Virtual School and carers, and how the function of the PEP fits into the wider care planning duties of the authority which looks after the child.
* for previously looked-after children, understand the importance of involving the child’s parents or guardians in decisions affecting their child’s education, and be a contact for parents or guardians who want advice or have concerns about their child’s progress at school.

As the central point of contact in school the Designated Teacher should:

* Lead PEP meetings in school (currently this is the PEP 2 in Essex, from September PEP1 and PEP 2 will be combined). The PEP should be the plan for meeting all need including attendance, behaviour, social emotional and mental health, progress, attainment, provision. The DT monitors and reviews the PEP process.
* Be the educational advocate for care experienced children, listening and taking account of their views.
* Ensure the specific needs of care experienced children inform whole school policies and practices.
* Ensure that all policy and practice is personalised to meet the needs of care experienced children, that adjustments to policy and practice are made to meet those specific needs.
* Consult with the Headteacher Virtual School prior to decisions regarding provision and exclusion.
* Ensure that Part Time Timetables and Alternative Provision are carefully planned to meet the specific needs of care experienced children and recorded and reviewed as part of the PEP every half term

The Virtual School will support Designated Teachers by providing:

* Whole school training around attachment, mental health, and trauma and attachment.
* Support and training to support them in their role.
* Support and training around the Personal Education Plan.
* Network meetings to share good practice.
* One on one support from members of the Virtual School Advisor and Inclusion teams.

**Headteachers**

The governing body of a maintained school and the proprietor of an academy must ensure that an appropriately qualified and experienced member of staff is appointed as the Designated Teacher for LAC and PLAC (DT). They have responsibility within the school to promote the educational achievement of care experienced children on the school’s roll.

Not all aspects of the role of the designated teacher need necessarily be carried out by a single individual or by a qualified teacher. While lead responsibility lies with the DT, schools will need to decide how functions within it, including pastoral and administrative tasks, are most appropriately delegated to suit their own circumstances.

The Headteacher and governing body should ensure that the DT has appropriate seniority and professional experience to provide leadership, training, information, challenge, and advice to others. That they have time away from timetable commitments to conduct their duties and engage with appropriate training.

The needs of care experienced children have implications for almost every school policy and consideration may want to be given to ensure that policies are effective in reflecting their needs.

Headteachers should:

* Consult with the DT when making decisions that affect the education of care experienced children. This includes decisions about provision and the use of exclusion.
* Ensure that the DT consults with the Virtual School at the earliest opportunity *where there is a concern about a child’s behaviour* so they can help the school decide how to support the child to improve their behaviour and avoid exclusion.
* Ensure that the DT carefully plans the use of Part Time Timetables and Alternative Provision to meet the specific needs of care experienced children and that these plans are recorded and reviewed as part of the PEP every half term.
* Ensure appropriate monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that the role of the DT is providing appropriate support for care experienced children on the school roll?

The Virtual School has a duty to:

* Ensure schools have regard to the statutory guidance ‘Exclusions from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England’.
* Ensure head teachers, as far as possible, avoid excluding any looked-after child.
* Build relationships with Governing bodies, head teachers and designated teachers to ensure exclusion is avoided.
* Be proactive in building relationships with head teachers, designated teachers, school’s pastoral, and behaviour leads, the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENDCO) and carers to ensure information is shared.
* Where a child is at risk of or has been given a fixed-term or permanent exclusion, work with others to consider what additional assessment and support is needed to help the school address the causes of the child’s behaviour and prevent the need for exclusion.
* Work to secure new educational provision in line with the child’s needs and PEP.
* Provide advice about how to avoid exclusion where a school/parent has concerns about the behaviour of a previously looked-after child which could result in the child being excluded from school.
* Ensure Part Time Timetables and Alternative Provision are used carefully and in a planned and coordinated way, as an integral part of the PEP, to meet specific identified need. This must include the recording and monitoring of provision and safeguarding.