**FAQs for Schools and other Professionals Working with Children with a Social Worker**

## **What is the definition of children with a social worker?**

The Department for Education (DfE) has defined ‘children with a social worker’ as those children who have been assessed as needing support under s17 or s47 of the Children Act. This means that a child has been placed on a Child in Need (CiN) or Child Protection (CP) plan. The DfE has also said that any child who has previously been known to social care on a CiN or CP plan in the last six years is part of this group. That is because children who have been known to social care often face some barriers to learning and need extra support over their education, even once social care has stepped away.

If a child was in Local Authority care and then came to live with you immediately as a result of a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order, they are likely to qualify as Previously Looked After. This means they are entitled to extra support and the school can claim Pupil Premium Plus funding for them. Please see our ‘Previously Looked After Children’ section.

## **What are the statutory duties for schools around the education of children with a social worker?**

Currently, the statutory duties for children with a social worker relate to exclusions and suspensions. When a child with a social worker is excluded or suspended, the school must inform the social worker without delay, and the social worker must be invited to the hearing. Their role is to explain the possible context for any behaviour and to identify any safeguarding risks if the exclusion or suspension goes ahead. Please see the [guidance here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion) The Virtual School provides training and support to social workers so that they understand how to perform this role. Of course, there are also the statutory duties around safeguarding.

There is no current statutory duty around improving outcomes for children known to social care. Ofsted has, however, named children who need a social worker as part of the ‘disadvantaged pupils’ group. In addition, the DfE has identified pupils who have a social worker a as cohort that [governors should consider in terms of attendance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-your-data-a-guide-for-school-governors-and-academy-trustees/understanding-your-data-a-guide-for-school-governors-and-academy-trustees). Finally, the new attendance guidance, [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance), outlines clear expectations of a multi-agency approach for children with a social worker. In Essex, we have a multi-agency guide to attendance called Let’s Talk… We Miss You.

## **What is the duty of the Virtual School for children with a social worker?**

Please see the [duty outline here.](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1086931/Promoting_the_education_of_children_with_a_social_worker_-_virtual_school_head_role_extension_2022.pdf) Please note that it not currently a statutory duty.

The role of the Virtual School for children with a social worker is strategic: we do not do individual direct work with families or young people, and we do not track individual children’s academic progress. Our role is to champion the attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker. This means we will help to:

* Make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children.
* promote practice that supports children’s engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting can be an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm.
* level up children’s outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential. This will include helping to make sure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

It is important to note that we also do not replace any statutory duty owed to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Our priorities for 2022 -23:

* development and dissemination of a data dashboard and school-friendly data packs for children with a social worker to improve insight into trends for the cohort
* Improve working together between social workers, education, other professionals and parents so that the right intervention is in place as early as possible. We aim to raise awareness in schools of the barriers to learning children with a social worker can face. We also aim to increase understanding of the education system for social workers so that they are able to prioritise education as part of CiN/CP planning and champion their children’s needs.
* Work strategically within the local authority and the Eastern region to provide a direction for common barriers such as attendance, behaviour and post-16 outcomes
* Support schools and social care to identify and trial interventions and good practice in order to build the evidence base of what is effective in improving educational outcomes
* Promote the [Education Endowment Fund](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/) and [What Works for Children’s Social Care](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/) research as evidence-based resources
* Use our own research with the University of Sussex to feed into our 2022-23 priorities

## **What does the Essex Virtual School offer children with a social worker, their schools and other professionals?**

It is important to note that we are always looking to hear from schools, settings or social care who would like to work more closely with he Virtual School around our children with a social worker cohort.

Our offer includes:

* we provide advice and guidance around education through individual case or cohort consultations to social workers, schools and other professionals
* we provide training to schools and social workers and promote evidence-based interventions. This includes training on trauma, exclusions, educational conversations, and understanding the education system and training for Learning Support Assistants
* we support small-scale projects in schools and larger local authority projects aimed at improving educational outcomes for the cohort. We are looking to build the evidence base of what works for these children. This can include mental health interventions, transition support, parent workshops and attendance projects.
* we offer direct support through a number of Virtual School projects. Currently, these include mentoring for some children who go missing; access to Britannica Online and Maths Whizz, Pupil Perceptions Surveys for all schools, multi-sports in schools, trauma-based training for schools, music and mental health workshops and a targeted post-16 offer of training for those not in employment, education or training. **Please look at the ‘**[**Projects and Interventions**](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex_Virtual_School/Pages/Interventions.aspx)**’ section of our website.**

## **Are children with a social worker entitled to Free School Meals (Ever 6) Pupil Premium?**

Children are only entitled to one source of Pupil Premium. Needing a social worker is not currently a category of need that makes a child eligible for Pupil Premium, however more than 50% of children needing a social worker are eligible for Free School Meals Pupil Premium.

## **What is good practice for the cohort of children known to social care?**

The DfE recognises that many young people known to social care will have suffered grief and loss and will have had traumatic early-life experiences. They may face additional barriers to attending school, accessing learning and fulfilling their potential. They often do not do as well as other pupils. The funding is not ring-fenced as a personal budget for each pupil and schools are not required to spend all of the allocated grant on eligible pupils. Schools can decide how best to use the finding, whilst meeting the requirements of the grant, which states that it must be spent to support the educational attainment of the PLAC cohort.

The government’s recommendation is that pupil premium spending is most effective when used across 3 areas:

1. High-quality teaching, such as staff professional development.
2. Targeted academic support, such as tutoring.
3. Wider strategies to address non-academic barriers to success in schools, such as attendance, behaviour and social and emotional support.

Please click[**here**](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/using-pupil-premium) to access the advice and guidance by the Education Endowment Fund on using Pupil Premium.

Please click [**here**](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/pupil-premium/Documents/Toolkit.pdf) to access Essex’s toolkit for use of Pupil Premium.

At the Virtual School, we strongly support the whole-school [Trauma Perceptive Practice](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/social_emotional_mental_health_portal_for_schools/Documents/TPP%20Leafletv5-Accessible.pdf) approach, as well as [Attachment Awareness.](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex_Virtual_School/Pages/Virtual-School-Training.aspx)

Currently, the evidence base for what works in improving outcomes for children known to social care is not robust. Some recent publications from the [DfE’s Review of Children in Need](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-children-in-need/review-of-children-in-need) outline the early evidence.

For social care, some of the key messages are working together with partners to improve school attendance and reduce suspensions/exclusions; supporting routines and boundaries at home; building stronger family attachments; having and articulating high aspirations for children; advocacy for children, and incorporating educational targets into social care planning where appropriate.