**FAQs for Schools and other Professionals Working with Children Known to Social Care**

## **What is the definition of ‘Children Known to Social Care’?**

Children Known to Social Care is defined by the government as ‘all children who have been assessed as needing or previously needing a social worker within the past 6 years due to safeguarding or welfare reasons. It includes all children aged 0 to 18 across all education settings subject to a children in need plan or a child protection plan.’ In Essex, we will also provide anonymised advice for children known to Family Solutions as the needs are often similar.

## **What are the school’s responsibilities for children known to social care?**

Essex Virtual School has prepared a short **document of good practice** for schools in relation to children known to social care. It is available alongside our FAQs.

Beyond the duties that schools have towards every child and their safeguarding duties, there are a number of key areas of responsibility towards children with social workers:

* The Designated Safeguarding Lead is expected to know who the school’s children known to social care are, understand their academic progress and attainment, and maintain a culture of high aspirations for them. The Lead should support teaching staff to provide additional academic support or reasonable adjustments to help children who have or have had a social worker reach their potential, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there is still a lasting impact on children’s educational outcomes. [(KCSIE)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6650a1967b792ffff71a83e8/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf)
* Schools are expected to inform a pupil’s social worker and/or youth offending team worker if there are any unexplained absences and if their name is to be deleted from the register. They should understand how the welfare and safeguarding issues a child has experienced may be affecting attendance, but should also have high aspirations for these children. [Working Together to Improve School Attendance.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)
* They are expected to provide additional academic support and make reasonable adjustments to help them, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there can be a lasting impact on children’s educational outcomes.
* Governing bodies/academy trustees are expected to regularly review attendance data for the cohort and help school leaders focus support on the pupils that need it. They should work with social care and other partners to improve pupils’ attendance.
* Schools should keep social workers fully informed about any [part-time timetables](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f1b048133c22b8eecd38f7/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance__applies_from_19_August_2024_.pdf). These should be only used in exceptional circumstances, should not be used to manage a child’s behaviour, should have the agreement of the parent/carer, have regular reviews and a proposed end date.
* Schools should involve the allocated social worker alongside the pupil’s parents as early as possible if there is a risk of suspension or exclusion, in order to try to avoid it.
* Schools must inform the social worker without delay if a child open on a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan is suspended or permanently excluded. The social worker must be invited to any hearing to make a representation. The focus should be on whether the pupil’s welfare, safeguarding needs and risks were considered in the lead up to the permanent exclusion. If the social worker believes that this was not the case, they should, where possible, advise the panel on the contribution that the pupil’s needs could have made to the circumstances of the pupil’s permanent exclusion. [Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance.](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64ef773513ae1500116e30db/Suspension_and_permanent_exclusion_guidance_september_23.pdf)

Further duties to promote good educational outcomes for children known to social care are non-statutory, but they are now part of the ‘disadvantaged’ group according to [Ofsted.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023) The handbook outlines the high expectations and support that schools should have for disadvantaged pupils both academically and pastorally.

## **What else can schools and other professionals do to support a child known to social care at school?**

The DSL is expected to know about academic attainment of children known to social care, however the school could decide that another staff member will take on responsibility for ensuring the educational outcomes for the cohort. Much of the [statutory guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683561/The_designated_teacher_for_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf) for looked after and previously looked after children aligns with the [non-statutory guidance for children with a social worker](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/virtual-school-head-role-extension-to-children-with-a-social-worker/promoting-the-education-of-children-with-a-social-worker-and-children-in-kinship-care-arrangements-virtual-school-head-role-extension#barriers-to-education-for-children-with-a-social-worker). These are clear that interventions should be evidence-based, that parents and carers should be actively involved, that raising awareness of the cohort’s needs with staff is key, and that mental health, transitions, and multi-agency working are priorities. We would recommend tracking the educational data and attendance of children who have been known to social care as a cohort of vulnerable students who are highly likely to need extra support.

We recommend a proactive approach to assessing, monitoring, evaluating and intervening in the child’s educational journey. A Team Around the Child approach that identifies a key adult and other supportive adults in school is a good starting point.

In Essex, the Local Authority advocates [Trauma Perceptive Practice](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupil-support-and-wellbeing/social-emotional-and-mental-health-semh/semh-training/trauma-perceptive) and [Attachment Awareness](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex_Virtual_School/Pages/Virtual-School-Training.aspx) as ways to ensure the needs of all children are met. We strongly recommend the regular use of a wellbeing assessment such as 6 Core Strengths or the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to identify areas of strength and need. We also recommend that schools and partners use [Let’s Talk: We Miss You](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupil-support-and-wellbeing/social-emotional-and-mental-health-semh/essex-lets-talk-resources) to support attendance and intervene as soon as attendance starts to slip

We would suggest considering the use of multi-agency [One Planning](https://send.essex.gov.uk/help-learning/make-plan-action-support-your-child-0/one-planning-process) and a One Page Profile, with an emphasis on understanding triggers and stressors for the child and ways that staff can help the child to learn most effectively, and to co-regulate and support them when distressed. This could be shared with home and social care to provide a consistent approach. The meetings can be combined with CiN or Core Group meetings when the child is open to social care and should continue when they close.

We recommend that academic progress, attainment, attendance, wellbeing, belonging and future aspirations are discussed in multiagency meetings, and where appropriate, incorporated into plans with a shared multiagency response. For example, social workers could support completion of the attendance difficulties questionnaire, complete work with parents about values and experiences of education, or do anxiety work with a young person. In the Virtual School, we often refer to the [Academic Resilience Framework](https://www.boingboing.org.uk/academic-resilience-approach/) as a way of thinking about the network around the child, not just looking at the child. This is part of our multi-agency approach to improving educational outcomes.

We would also recommend careful planning for any transitions, in-year and within school as well as between schools. Social workers could be utilised to do work around these areas and in the holidays. Finally, we suggest investing in developing the relationship with the parent/carer and having a main point of contact and a schedule of contact (outside of emergencies) to minimise anxiety for the family.

## **What is the Virtual School’s duty towards children known to social care?**

The Virtual School has a non-statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of children known to social care through the provision of information and advice to professionals and through strategic work with schools, social care and other services. There are further duties towards previously looked after children or those under SGOs or CAOs – please see those FAQs.

The Virtual School is not the corporate parent for children known to social care, so it does not monitor nor is held to account for individual children’s attainment and progress. Any intervention must be by the consent of the parent/carer.

Our role is to:

* Make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships 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.

We will do this by:

* Enhancing partnerships between education settings, the local authority and other organisations so agencies can work together.
* Identifying the needs of children with a social worker and those in kinship arrangements and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes, including attendance, and ensure pupils make educational progress.
* Offering advice and support to key professionals to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using evidence-based interventions.

We do not work directly with parents and carers for children known to social care. Please contact the Essex Virtual School by emailing [christina.addenbrooke@essex.gov.uk](mailto:christina.addenbrooke@essex.gov.uk) if you would like to talk about a child’s education, or fill in a [Student Profile](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupil-support-and-wellbeing/essex-virtual-school/complete-student-profile).

The Virtual School is not the corporate parent for children known to social care, so it does not monitor nor is held to account for individual children’s attainment and progress. We do not replace any statutory duties, such as SEND, for children known to social care.

## **What other support can the Essex Virtual School offer?**

Please see our [‘Interventions, Opportunities and Projects’](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupil-support-and-wellbeing/essex-virtual-school/interventions-opportunities-and-projects/projects) page for full details of support for you and your cohort. Our projects, such as individual music lessons, mental health workshops and access to Britannica among others, are all open to children known to social care.

We work in partnership with Multi-Academy Trusts and with individual schools and settings providing education from 0-18 years. Many schools have an allocated Virtual School Advisor because they have children in care. We are able to provide support for schools that do not have children in care too. Please contact us by emailing [virtual.school@essex.gov.uk](mailto:virtual.school@essex.gov.uk).

We work alongside families and professionals, offering advice, reflections and signposting to services. We are able to liaise and consult with key services on a parent/carer’s behalf, for example SEND partners. We can, where appropriate, attend meetings to help create an educational plan for a child and can offer schools and social care colleagues bespoke support and training.