

Hillingdon Virtual School Handbook 2025 – 2026



[Contents](#)

Overview	3
Introduction	4
The Role of the Virtual School	8
The Role of the Designated Teacher	11
The Personal Education Plan	16
Personal Education Plan Quality Assurance	25
Admissions	26
Attendance	32
Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions	37
Alternative Provision	40
Early Years Provision	43
Special Educational Needs and Disability	51
Pupil Premium Plus	56
Post 16	60
Hillingdon Virtual School Extended Duties – Children with a Social Worker	63
Barriers to Education for Children with a Social Worker	67
Hillingdon Virtual School Support for Children with a Social Worker	68
Support Available for Professionals Working with Children with a Social Worker	72
Pupil Premium	73
Support Available for Children in Kinship Care Arrangements, Previously Cared For Children and Adopted Children	74
Further Reading and Useful Links	78

[Overview](#)

Hillingdon Virtual School plays a vital role in promoting the educational achievement of vulnerable children and young people across the borough. This includes those who are Cared For by the local authority, children with a social worker, children living in kinship care arrangements, adopted children, and Previously Cared For Children. The school does not operate as a physical institution but functions as a central team of education professionals who work across settings to ensure that these children receive the support they need to thrive academically and personally.

The Virtual School Headteacher leads a multidisciplinary team responsible for overseeing Personal Education Plans, monitoring attendance and attainment, and supporting transitions between educational settings. The team works closely with schools, social workers, carers, and other professionals to ensure that education remains a priority in every child's care and support plan. Through training, clinics, and strategic partnerships, the Virtual School also builds capacity across the wider workforce to respond effectively to the needs of children affected by trauma, attachment difficulties, and disrupted education.

In addition to its statutory duties for Cared For Children, Hillingdon Virtual School has an extended remit to champion the education of children with a social worker. This strategic responsibility focuses on improving outcomes by identifying barriers to learning, promoting multi-agency collaboration, and encouraging evidence-based practice across schools and services. The Virtual School also supports schools in accessing and using Pupil Premium Plus funding, and provides guidance on the education of children in kinship care and those who have been adopted.

This handbook outlines the policies, processes, and support available through Hillingdon Virtual School, and serves as a practical guide for professionals working with vulnerable children in education.

Introduction

Cared For Children- Who are they?

The term 'Cared For Children' is how the London Borough of Hillingdon refers to 'Looked After Children', as defined in the *Children Act 1989*. Cared For Children refers to anyone under 18 who is in the care of the local authority. For simplicity, they are often referred to as 'being in care'.

At any one time, around 83,000 children are cared for by local authorities in England. However, this number varies and is by no means static. Over 33,000 children are likely to enter care during a year, with a similar number leaving care for a variety of reasons. The main reason children become cared for is due to abuse or neglect, although other causes include family stress, absent parenting, parental illness or disability, or the child's own disability.

While every Cared For Child must be seen as an individual with their own characteristics, abilities, and needs, as a group they tend to have lower educational outcomes and poorer standards of health and wellbeing than their non-cared-for peers, and are less likely to thrive in adult life.

Local authorities have a legal duty to promote the educational achievement of Cared For Children, ensure regular school attendance, and provide access to the necessary equipment and resources.

The quality of care and education children receive while they are cared for has a major impact on their ability to form secure attachments and realise their full potential. It is vital that those who provide day-to-day care are well supported to make this possible. Placement stability is a key factor in this process, yet for many Cared For Children, frequent moves can severely disrupt their educational progress and achievement.

Hillingdon has a significant number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children due to its proximity to Heathrow Airport. Nationally, only Kent and Croydon local authorities receive higher numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children annually.

For simplicity, the term 'carer' has been used throughout this document to refer collectively to those providing care to Cared For Children, and 'child' to refer to anyone under 18. The term 'young people' has been used where reference is made to that specific group.

Cared For Children- Where do they live?

Nationally, around 75% of Cared For Children are cared for by foster carers; in Hillingdon, this figure usually stands at around 50%. Foster carers can be supported either by the local authority or by a fostering agency.

Although some children have specific needs that can only be met through residential care, fostering should be the first choice of placement for the majority of Cared For Children.

Children's homes are an important part of the provision for Cared For Children whose needs are assessed as best met through residential care. These homes vary in their purpose, focus, and approach, just as foster carers differ from one another. A significant number of children placed in children's homes are teenagers.

Not all Cared For Children are placed with foster carers or in children's homes. About 5% are placed back with their parents while remaining on a Care Order. A small number are placed for adoption, and some young people live in hostels, supported lodgings, or independently.

Local authorities should prioritise keeping Cared For Children near their home community, although this is not always possible or in the child's best interests. In particular, it is important to avoid, if possible, a child having to move education placement when they become Cared For or move placement – especially at Key Stage 4.

Cared For Children- What is a Corporate Parent?

The responsibility of local authorities to actively promote the life chances of the children they look after and improve their outcomes is known as corporate parenting. Local authorities have both a legal and moral duty to provide the kind of care and support that would be expected of any good parent.

The test of good corporate parenting lies in the question: *Would this be good enough for my own child?*

The Team Around the Child

It is important to ensure that the local authorities responsible for a Cared For Child always act as the best possible parent would. No one person can do this alone – everyone who works with Cared For Children has an important role to play.

All children are unique and have their own specific needs, so the individuals required to provide support will vary. Together, they make up what is known as **'the team around the child'**.

The child must always be kept at the centre of the thinking and actions of the team members, as the legal and moral duties are to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and to ensure they realise their full potential.

The roles and responsibilities of some of the key team members are described below:

The Foster Carer or the Residential Worker

Foster carers and residential workers in children's homes are always a core part of the team around the child. By providing day-to-day care and support, they usually know the child better than any other professionals. They are expected to contribute to planning for the child, including their education.

Regulations require foster carers to agree to care for a fostered child as if they were a child of their own family, which sets high expectations.

Foster carers and residential workers should:

- Encourage and support children to have a positive attitude towards their education, helping them to achieve their potential
- Support good school attendance
- Maintain regular communication with the school
- Actively advocate for the child's needs
- Provide adequate space in the home for homework, including access to a computer and internet
- Ensure the child has the equipment needed for the school day
- Attend parents' evenings and similar events
- Attend and participate in Personal Education Plan meetings

The Social Worker

Every Cared For Child has an allocated social worker from the local authority. It is the role of the social worker to ensure that adequate arrangements are made for the child's care, and that a care plan is created and regularly updated based on the most current assessment of their needs. Children's social workers are responsible for ensuring that the care plan is implemented and reviewed.

A key role of the social worker is to coordinate the provision of services and support. They should ensure that the foster carer or children's home:

- Has all the information needed to care for the child
- Is included in meetings about the child's plan
- Agrees to an up-to-date placement plan
- Is aware of arrangements for contact with family and friends
- Is invited to, and attends, meetings and appointments regarding the child's education

The Supervising Social Worker

Every foster carer must have support and supervision, whether they are employed by the local authority or by a fostering agency.

The role of the Supervising Social Worker is to coordinate the support needed by the foster carer to meet the child's needs in accordance with the placement plan. They make regular visits to the foster home to monitor how the placement is progressing and to discuss any difficulties. Supervision sessions also consider the training and development needs of the foster carer, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills to respond to the child's needs.

The child's educational progress should be discussed during supervision, along with any additional support or equipment the foster carer might need to promote learning.

Supervising Social Workers should also contribute appropriately to care planning, including the preparation and review of Personal Education Plans.

The Independent Reviewing Officer

Every Cared For Child has an Independent Reviewing Officer. This person is independent of those responsible for managing the child's case or allocating resources. Their role is to carry out regular reviews of the child's care plan, monitor progress towards achieving outcomes, and make any necessary changes to the plan in response to changing circumstances. Reviews must take place at least every six months.

The primary responsibility of the Independent Reviewing Officer is to ensure that the care plan reflects the child's current needs and that the actions outlined in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.

The review of the care plan typically involves the Independent Reviewing Officer chairing a meeting with key members of the team around the child. All aspects of the care plan should be reviewed, including the Personal Education Plan.

In addition to chairing the child's review, the Independent Reviewing Officer must monitor the implementation of the care plan and ensure that the child's wishes and feelings have been established and taken into account, where appropriate.

The Cared For Children Nurse

Local authorities work in partnership with health services to ensure the health and wellbeing of Cared For Children is effectively promoted. It is common practice to identify one or more nurses – usually referred to as Cared For Children Nurses – to play a direct role in overseeing the health of all the authority's Cared For Children.

This includes ensuring that regular individual health assessments are carried out as required by regulations, and liaising with other professionals such as school nurses, GPs, and dentists. These nurses are also available to advise carers and young people on health matters, which may in turn impact educational achievement.

Designated nurses assist in drawing up health plans, which form part of a child's overall care plan and may influence any Education, Health and Care Plan.

**** The roles of the Designated Teacher and Virtual School are covered in subsequent sections.****

The Role of the Virtual School

*Under the **Children and Families Act 2014**, every local authority must appoint an officer – employed by them or another authority – to ensure the duty to promote the educational achievement of Cared For Children is properly discharged, regardless of where the children live or are educated. This officer is known as the Virtual School Head.*

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the Virtual School Head has the resources, time, training, and support needed to carry out their duties effectively. However, the way this is implemented varies between authorities.

In Hillingdon, we are fortunate to have a large team supporting the work of the Virtual School Head, collectively known as the Virtual School.

Our Virtual School team includes a range of education professionals, such as qualified teachers, teaching assistants, Education Welfare Officers, and staff with experience in Virtual Schools from other local authorities. Each team member supports the Virtual School Head in different ways.

Hillingdon Virtual School is proud to say that all statutory school-age and post-16 young people have an allocated case worker. The Virtual School Officer is responsible for arranging, chairing, and recording all Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, which may differ from how other local authorities operate.

The Concept of the ‘Single School’

Hillingdon usually has around 330 Cared For Children. While it remains a priority to place each child in a care placement within Hillingdon, there are inevitably times when this is not in the child’s best interests – such as when proximity to birth family is not appropriate, when there is a shortage of care placements, or when specialist support is needed that cannot be provided locally.

As a result, it is sometimes necessary to place a child outside the borough.

To promote the educational achievement of all Cared For Children, the Virtual School Head maintains an up-to-date record of every child, regardless of where they are placed or the type of educational setting they attend. This includes tracking their attendance, attainment, and progress – as if they were all enrolled in a single school.

Tracking and Monitoring

Virtual School Heads are required to track and monitor the individual achievements of each Cared For Child. This includes maintaining records of past performance, current attainment, predicted outcomes, and the targets set by their schools. This enables the Virtual School Head to identify children who are not achieving in line with national expectations or with their previous performance.

In Hillingdon, the Virtual School team uses the child's Personal Education Plan meeting as the main vehicle for negotiating with the child's school to agree the best package of support and intervention to help them make better progress.

Virtual School Heads also track and monitor the attendance of Cared For Children on their school roll. In Hillingdon, the local authority commissions System C who use an Establishment Data Import to communicate with individual schools to confirm attendance and, in cases of absence, to determine the reason. Where reasons for absence are unauthorised – such as a child being taken out of school for a holiday – Virtual School Officers will challenge carers and schools to make changes.

Suspensions and permanent exclusions of Cared For Children are also monitored by the Virtual School Head. Support is provided to carers, social workers, and schools via Virtual School Officers where there are frequent suspensions or the risk of permanent exclusion.

Carers, Designated Teachers, and social workers should always keep the allocated Virtual School Officer informed if there is a risk of suspension for a child in their care.

The Child's Voice

Every child deserves to be listened to, and the Virtual School Head has a duty to promote a culture that values and considers the child's views in relation to their education. This is especially important during Personal Education Plan meetings, where the child's views should be clearly recorded in the report.

The child's perspective is particularly important when planning their future education or training and should be reflected in their Personal Education Plan.

Carers, teachers, Virtual School Officers, and social workers all have a responsibility to encourage every Cared For Child to have high aspirations for themselves – recognising that some children may find it difficult to imagine a future.

Multi-Agency Working

The Virtual School has a duty to work with others to ensure that the educational achievement of Cared For Children is treated as a priority. This includes encouraging children to be aspirational and ensuring that those supporting them have high expectations and are committed to helping them realise their full academic potential.

It is particularly important that members of the team around the child do not work in isolation. The Virtual School will often attend additional meetings outside of Personal Education Plan meetings – such as Annual Reviews and Looked After Children Reviews – to ensure that education remains central to discussion and planning.

The Virtual School Head must work closely with local authority schools to ensure:

- Their governing bodies understand the role of the local authority as corporate parent
- They appoint an appropriate designated teacher
- They understand the specific needs of Cared For Children

- They recognise the importance of professional development for senior leaders and designated teachers **at least**

Training

Virtual Schools have a duty to train other teams and individual professionals on matters relating to the education of Cared For Children.

Hillingdon's Virtual School provides and commissions a variety of training for schools, carers, and social workers. Topics include:

- Attachment and trauma
- Attendance and exclusions
- How to support children at different key stages at home
- Pupil Premium Plus

Commissioning Additional Support

To promote the educational achievement of the children on its roll, the Virtual School may commission additional support using funds from the centrally held Pupil Premium Plus.

Examples of the types of support Hillingdon's Virtual School may provide include:

- Residential visits
- One-to-one tuition
- Mentoring
- Careers Advice
- Literacy schemes, such as Letterbox
- Numeracy schemes, such as Doodle Maths
- English language schemes, such as Flash Academy

Extended Duties

The Virtual School Headteacher has extended duties to promote the education of children with a social worker, children living in kinship care arrangements, adopted children, and Previously Cared for Children. These responsibilities go beyond the traditional remit of supporting Cared for Children and reflect a strategic commitment to improving educational outcomes for a broader cohort of vulnerable learners. For further details, please refer to the [Extended Duties](#) section of this handbook.

The Role of the Designated Teacher

In carrying out their role, Designated Teachers should act as advocates and champions for Cared For Children within the school setting. Their role is to make a positive difference by promoting a whole-school culture where the personalised learning needs of every Cared For Child are recognised, and their personal, emotional, and academic needs are prioritised.

The Designated Teacher plays a key role in promoting the education of Cared For Children and is central to achieving successful educational outcomes. This is a statutory role, and every governing body has a duty to ensure that their school has a Designated Teacher who is a qualified teacher with appropriate seniority, professional experience, and status to lead in this vital area. If the Designated Teacher is not a member of the Senior Leadership Team, a senior leader must be appointed to champion Cared For Children at that level and work closely with the Designated Teacher.

In schools with a high number of Cared For Children, the Designated Teacher may delegate some responsibilities but must retain overall accountability.

The Designated Teacher is expected to work with the school's governor responsible for Cared For Children, reporting regularly on their progress across all areas of school life and supporting the governor in conducting an annual review of policy and practice.

Training and Resources

In addition to ensuring that a Designated Teacher is in place, the governing body must also ensure that the teacher has sufficient support, training, and resources to carry out their role effectively.

Designated Teachers should be given time to attend training provided by the Virtual School, professional organisations, and external providers. This training helps them understand and address the barriers to learning that Cared For Children may face. They also need to attend some local authority forums and training sessions to stay informed and up to date.

In turn, Designated Teachers are expected to train other staff within the school so they are equipped to respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of Cared For Children. They hold lead responsibility for ensuring that staff working with these children understand the emotional, psychological, and social effects of loss and broken attachment – and how these experiences may impact learning and behaviour.

Designated Teachers should be allocated appropriate INSET time and resources to fulfil this responsibility.

School Policies

The Designated Teacher also plays a key role in promoting a whole-school policy for Cared For Children. Such a policy should:

- Reflect the school's ethos and clearly state its commitment to supporting Cared For Children
- Be linked to the statutory framework
- Be connected to other school policies, such as admissions, safeguarding, equality and diversity (in which there should be specific reference to Cared For Children)
- Be specific and detailed in outlining how the school will fulfil its duty to support Cared For Children
- Include provisions for supporting staff who work directly with Cared For Children
- Define the roles and reporting responsibilities of key personnel, including governors, senior leaders, the Designated Teacher, and classroom teachers
- Specify how the school will work with external agencies such as social care, the Virtual School, foster carers, and mental health services
- Show how the progress of Cared For Children will be tracked and monitored across academic, pastoral, and extracurricular areas
- Outline the interventions and support that will be used when Cared For Children are not progressing in line with their peers, either academically or personally

The Designated Teacher also has a responsibility to ensure that regular school policies explicitly consider the specific needs of Cared For Children. This is especially important in policies related to safeguarding, inclusion, and behaviour management. Furthermore, Designated Teachers must ensure that school policies do not inadvertently disadvantage Cared For Children – for example, through admissions interview procedures.

The Child's Voice

In promoting the educational achievement of the school's Cared For Children, it is essential that the Designated Teacher – or a delegated colleague – knows each child individually and builds a meaningful relationship with them.

Many Cared For Children find it difficult to trust adults, so it is important that a trusting, affirming relationship is modelled both at home and in school. As part of this, the Designated Teacher should listen to the child and take account of their views regarding their education, achievements, and progress. They should offer guidance where needed and represent the child's views in meetings when appropriate.

Tracking and Monitoring

Designated Teachers are required to track and monitor the achievement and progress of each individual Cared For Child, implementing interventions and strategies for improvement where needed.

When a Cared For Child is new to the school, the Designated Teacher should liaise with the previous educational setting to request the transfer of the child's school file and any previous Personal Education Plans without delay. This ensures that all prior information and data are available to help form a clear understanding of the child's educational needs. The Designated Teacher should also ensure that assessments are carried out by the child's new teachers to

identify strengths, weaknesses, and any barriers to learning, so that appropriate support can be put in place as early as possible.

All children are routinely tracked and monitored in schools. During these times, the Designated Teacher should analyse the achievements and progress of Cared For Children as a group, comparing their outcomes to those of the wider year group and to other similar cohorts, such as Children in Need.

Hillingdon's Virtual School also requests up-to-date attainment and progress data in each subject to be presented at every Personal Education Plan meeting. This is collected via a range of student feedback forms, which are emailed by the Virtual School Officer prior to the meeting.

Role in the Personal Education Plan

While in Hillingdon it is the responsibility of the Virtual School Officer to initiate the Personal Education Plan, the Designated Teacher plays a key role in preparing for it. In addition to gathering the child's views and reviewing the targets and actions from the previous meeting, the Designated Teacher must develop a clear understanding of how the child is achieving and progressing in each curriculum area.

To do this, the Designated Teacher should collect key information and data from each of the child's teachers regarding academic performance and progress. This can be gathered through the student feedback forms mentioned earlier.

Teacher feedback is essential for improvement and progress, and this feedback should be shared during the Personal Education Plan meeting so that carers and other professionals can support the child in implementing it.

It is also important that the DT brings to the meeting positive feedback, even when difficulties are being experienced by the child.

An essential checklist for DTs when preparing for a PEP meeting should include:

- ➔ Meeting with the child beforehand to gather their views and ensure they understand the process if they are attending
- ➔ Circulating student feedback forms to all teachers and ensuring they are completed adequately; the Designated Teacher should be familiar with this feedback before the meeting
- ➔ Booking an appropriate location for the meeting if it is to take place in school
- ➔ Informing any additional school staff who need to attend and arranging cover if necessary
- ➔ Compiling any data requested by the Virtual School Officer, such as attendance and academic data, reports from one-to-one tutors or mentors, and financial information regarding Pupil Premium Plus spending
- ➔ Preparing to report on progress toward previous targets and identifying any new targets

Implementing Support in School

Since the primary purpose of the Personal Education Plan is to support the educational attainment of Cared For Children, effective intervention strategies must be planned to help the child meet their targets. Statutory guidance clearly states that these targets should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound), as outlined in the relevant section of this handbook.

As the person at the meeting with the most in-depth knowledge of teaching and learning, the Designated Teacher should take the lead in proposing effective intervention strategies, outlining how they will be monitored, and specifying the success criteria. Where strategies require funding, the Designated Teacher should discuss the use of devolved Pupil Premium Plus funds from Hillingdon's Virtual School with the Virtual School Officer during the meeting.

The Designated Teacher should also have a clear understanding of other aspects of the child's school experience, such as their involvement in wider school life, any rewards or recognition received, and any positions of responsibility they hold. They may need to encourage the child to share their successes and achievements during the meeting.

Recording and distribution of the Personal Education Plan document should take place without delay and is the responsibility of the Virtual School Officer. However, timely completion depends on all required information being provided. In Hillingdon, the Personal Education Plan is considered an integral part of a Cared For Child's care plan and is recorded within the Liquidlogic Children's System.

The Virtual School Officer will email all relevant professionals once the draft Personal Education Plan is completed and ready for review. If the Designated Teacher has not received the document within the expected timeframe, they should follow up to prevent delays in implementing agreed strategies.

The Designated Teacher must give careful consideration to how intervention strategies are implemented in school and work closely with the child's teachers and other staff to ensure their effectiveness. This may include collaborating with teachers on teaching and learning approaches – for example, ensuring work is appropriately differentiated, that scaffolding is in place, and that transitions between tasks are manageable for the child.

In implementing strategies agreed at the Personal Education Plan meeting, the Designated Teacher may also need to involve other professionals, such as behaviour support workers or educational psychologists.

Communication and Support of Others in the Team Around the Child

Securing school stability for Cared For Children is an integral part of narrowing the gap between their educational outcomes and those of their peers. Strong working relationships and cooperation between the school, local authority, carers, and other

professionals involved in the child's support significantly increase the chances of keeping the child's education on track.

Designated Teachers should recognise that some foster carers and social workers may not have the same level of understanding of the English education system, particularly regarding strategies that can accelerate progress. Therefore, Designated Teachers should support others in the team around the child by sharing strategies and interventions that can be used outside of school. For example, they might advise a carer on how best to support homework completion.

Where carers may have had negative experiences of school themselves, the Designated Teacher can play a key role in making them feel welcome at parents' evenings, school information sessions, concerts, sports days, and other school events.

Social workers, carers, and Virtual School Officers also have a duty to communicate regularly and directly with the Designated Teacher, keeping them informed of any events that may impact the child's educational outcomes – such as family contact or changes in care placement. The Designated Teacher should always be consulted about any aspects of the child's care plan that could disrupt their education.

If a child is at risk of exclusion, the Designated Teacher must ensure that every possible intervention has been explored to support the child. They should be involved in discussions with the headteacher and communicate with the carer, Virtual School Officer, and social worker to ensure that exclusion is considered only as an absolute last resort.

Where a child is accessing alternative provision, the Designated Teacher must liaise closely with the provider to ensure all necessary safeguards are in place and that the provider has all relevant information about the child.

The Personal Education Plan

As a group, Cared For Children typically lag behind their non-looked-after peers at the end of every Key Stage. To help close this gap, each child must have a personalised learning plan that identifies their individual educational needs and outlines a strategy to meet those needs. This plan aims to raise expectations – both the child’s and those of the adults around them – and improve their life chances. This is known as the Personal Education Plan.

It is a legal requirement that every Cared For Child has a care plan, of which the Personal Education Plan is an integral part. An up-to-date copy of the plan should be available for each Cared For Child Review and Pathway Planning meeting, from pre-school age through to 18.

The Personal Education Plan also forms part of the child’s official school record. If a child moves school, all previous plans should be securely transferred along with the child’s file by the Designated Teacher. The document serves as a ‘collective memory’ of the child’s educational journey.

The first plan is usually referred to as the ‘initial’ Personal Education Plan. Subsequent plans should build upon the previous ones, forming an evolving record and review document. It is expected that the plan will be agreed at a meeting, usually held at the child’s school. Where the child does not have an education placement, the Virtual School Officer will liaise with other professionals to agree on a suitable alternative location.

While attendees at the meeting may vary depending on the child’s needs, in Hillingdon it is expected that, **at a minimum**, the meeting will include the child, the Virtual School Officer, the Designated Teacher, the Social Worker, and the Foster Carer or Key Worker.

Some Cared For Children may not wish to attend the meeting or have it held at school. In such cases, their wishes and feelings should be gathered beforehand and shared at the meeting on their behalf.

Where possible, efforts should be made to avoid removing the child from lessons to attend the meeting.

Personal Education Plan meetings should not be disciplinary in nature. They should focus on identifying, promoting, and building upon the child’s strengths and be solution-focused, aiming to support the child’s educational progress.

Personal Education Plan Timescales

Before the Personal Education Plan:

When a child first becomes looked after, an initial Personal Education Plan meeting must be held within 20 working days – or within 10 working days in the case of an emergency. This initial plan should feed into the first Cared For Child Review.

Thereafter, statutory guidance requires that a minimum of one Personal Education Plan meeting is held per school term, resulting in at least three meetings per academic year. Additional meetings may be arranged at any time if needed.

It is considered good practice for Personal Education Plan meetings for children in transitional year groups (e.g. Years 6 and 11) to be scheduled near the start of a term. This ensures that the child receives timely support and intervention to help them meet their targets.

Further consideration should also be given to key points in the academic year – such as when the child is choosing GCSE options or taking mock exams – when planning the timing of Personal Education Plan meetings.

After the Personal Education Plan:

The recording and dissemination of the Personal Education Plan should take place without delay, and this is the responsibility of the Virtual School Officer in Hillingdon.

The expectation is that the Personal Education Plan will be written up within the child's care plan on the Liquidlogic Children's System within 10 working days of the meeting date.

Once a Personal Education Plan has been audited for quality assurance by managers, or the Virtual School Officer has been informed that it has not been selected for quality assurance, the Personal Education Plan should be shared in draft form with all professionals via secure email. Professionals should be given 7 calendar days to provide the Virtual School Officer with any amendments or additions.

Once the draft period has ended, the Virtual School Officer should complete the final sign-off process for the Personal Education Plan and share the final document with all professionals.

Once a Personal Education Plan has been finally signed off, it should not be altered, as it stands as a record of the child's progress and achievements at that moment in time.

Any subsequent updates should be added to the new Personal Education Plan document for the following term.

Initiating a PEP

In Hillingdon, it is the responsibility of the Virtual School Officer to initiate the Personal Education Plan, and this should be done in consultation with the Designated Teacher, the Social Worker, and the carer.

The Personal Education Plan should be seen as a priority in the calendar of meetings for children who are cared for. Even if the child does not currently have an educational placement, a Personal Education Plan must still be produced within the statutory timeframe.

When initiating the Personal Education Plan, the Virtual School Officer should produce an agenda in advance of the meeting so that those attending have a chance to prepare. The Virtual School Officer should ensure that the child's views are gathered, whether or not the child is attending the meeting, and request that the Designated Teacher collects the additional required information for the meeting.

While it is expected that the Designated Teacher will attend all Personal Education Plan meetings, some choose to delegate this responsibility to another member of staff. This is acceptable, provided the staff member knows the child well and has sufficient seniority to influence decisions on behalf of the child, where necessary.

It may also be appropriate to invite the following individuals (this list is not exhaustive):

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
- Form Tutor, Class Teacher, or Head of Year
- Multi-Agency Professionals
- Nurse for Children Who Are Cared For
- Birth Parent(s)
- Supervising Social Worker
- Learning Mentor, Learning Support Assistant, or Teaching Assistant

However, to encourage the child's involvement, it is recommended that the number of attendees is considered carefully so that the child does not feel intimidated or uncomfortable. Some professionals may be invited to attend part of the meeting, or it may be appropriate for the Virtual School Officer to meet with them before or after the meeting to gather their views.

The Initial PEP

Initial Personal Education Plans will vary according to a number of factors.

If a child is remaining in the educational placement they were enrolled in prior to becoming a child who is cared for, the school or college will already have a good understanding of their needs and prior achievements. They should also be well placed to agree on targets and an action plan for moving forward.

It is essential at this Personal Education Plan meeting that the Designated Teacher is updated by the Social Worker with the key points of the child's care plan and how these may impact their education.

At this meeting, key professionals should establish an effective system of communication between them so that any concerns about the child can be raised and addressed without delay.

If the child is attending a new school, the Virtual School Officer should contact the child's previous school to obtain all necessary data and reports, and ensure these are shared with

the new school. Communication between the new Designated Teacher and the previous school should also be encouraged.

Again, it is essential at this Personal Education Plan meeting that the Designated Teacher is updated by the Social Worker with the key points of the child's care plan and how these may impact their education. An effective system of communication between professionals should again be established to ensure concerns are addressed promptly.

When a child is without an educational placement, the Virtual School Officer – supported by the Social Worker and carer – will need to bring to the meeting all relevant information and data concerning the child's previous education, as well as any reports from other professionals and their Education, Health and Care Plan, if they have one. Based on this information, decisions should be made about the educational placement best suited to meet the child's needs, and an action plan should be put in place to secure such a placement. This plan should name those responsible for each action and include timescales for completion.

If the child has newly arrived in the country as an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child, and speaks little or no English, it is expected that the Social Worker will employ an interpreter so that as much information as possible can be gathered about the child's previous education.

It must be remembered that a lack of English does not equate to a lack of education.

Some Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children may arrive with very little prior education, while others may have been educated to a high standard. However, all will have been without education during their journey to the United Kingdom, which for some may have lasted years. It is therefore vital that the Virtual School Officer gathers as much information as possible about the child's previous educational experiences and ensures they are assessed as accurately as possible, taking language barriers into account.

Where a child has had an initial Personal Education Plan and has subsequently started a new school or college, the first Personal Education Plan review should be held within six weeks of the child starting.

Personal Education Plan Reviews

Following the initial Personal Education Plan, subsequent meetings should include a review of previous plans, with particular focus on the targets set. A review should take place once per academic term.

In preparation for the meeting, all professionals should reflect on the support they have provided for the child's education since the last plan, especially in relation to progress towards the agreed targets.

The Child's Voice

The Personal Education Plan meeting is something that should be done *with* the child, rather than *to* the child. The child's views, comments, and preferences should be

recorded by the Virtual School Officer as a clear and explicit part of the Personal Education Plan document. These views should also be reflected throughout the summary where appropriate. The child's short-term and long-term aspirations regarding their education and future should be clearly documented.

It is understandable that some children – particularly younger ones – may not wish to attend their Personal Education Plan meetings, and this can be for a variety of reasons. While attendance should be encouraged where possible, it may be more appropriate for other professionals to gather the child's views outside of the meeting so they can be shared and discussed during it. Hillingdon Virtual School provides a range of templates that Designated Teachers can use to collect the views of our children.

[Academic Review](#)

Each Personal Education Plan should include a summary of the child's current attainment and progress. To support this, the Designated Teacher should present the most up-to-date data for the child, including attainment levels, progress, and educational targets.

Where requested, the Designated Teacher should bring feedback from each of the child's subject teachers, using the round robin template provided in advance by the Virtual School Officer. This feedback should focus on the child's attitude to learning, motivation, effort, and the quality and completion of both classwork and homework.

Any other relevant plans – such as Education, Health and Care Plans or behaviour support plans – should also be considered during the meeting.

A solution-focused discussion on how the child is attaining and progressing in each area of the curriculum is central to the Personal Education Plan meeting.

[Other areas for discussion at a Personal Education Plan Meeting](#) (list is not exhaustive)

Attendance and Punctuality

Attendance and punctuality – both to school and individual lessons – are key indicators of educational outcomes and should be a focus of the Personal Education Plan meeting. Many children in care have excellent attendance and punctuality, and this presents an opportunity for praise. Where attendance is a concern or there are signs of decline, the meeting should explore the underlying reasons and identify strategies for improvement, including who will take action and by when.

Transitions between Key Stages

Transitions, particularly major ones such as moving from primary to secondary school, should be discussed regularly in Personal Education Plan meetings. Planning should begin approximately 18 months before the transition. The plan should include how the current school will liaise with the receiving school to transfer information and how the child's experience of leaving will be managed sensitively.

Extracurricular Involvement

The child's participation in extracurricular activities – both within and outside of school – should be discussed. If a child is reluctant to participate, the meeting should explore possible reasons and consider strategies to encourage participation in ways that support the child's development. This discussion should also include any upcoming trips or visits the child may attend, either through school or through Hillingdon Virtual School.

Care Plan Update

A care plan update should be provided at every Personal Education Plan meeting to ensure all professionals are aware of any changes or issues that may affect the child's education. This should include details such as the child's contact plan, legal status, and any planned moves, where relevant.

If a move to semi-independent accommodation or a residential unit is being considered, the meeting should include open discussion about the potential impact on the child's academic progress. In cases of semi-independence, schools and colleges should be mindful that the child may now be responsible for tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, and managing a limited budget alongside their studies.

Use of Pupil Premium Plus

The use of Pupil Premium Plus funding should be directly linked to the target-setting section of the Personal Education Plan. This funding is available to support interventions that enhance the child's educational outcomes and may be used in various ways. Its proposed use should be discussed during the meeting and clearly recorded in the Personal Education Plan document.

Target setting and review

Target setting and review is a key component of the Personal Education Plan meeting. Wherever appropriate, children in care should be actively involved in setting their own targets, as they are more likely to succeed when they have a voice in shaping their goals. Targets must be clearly action-planned to ensure it is understood what the target is, why it is needed, how it will make a difference, who is responsible for implementing it, and how its impact will be measured within a defined timeframe.

Targets should follow the SMART framework as defined in statutory guidance:

S	specific, significant, stretching
M	measurable, meaningful, motivational
A	achievable, agreed, action-oriented
R	realistic, relevant, results-oriented
T	time-bound, tangible, trackable

Each target should be reviewed at the next Personal Education Plan meeting, and individuals assigned actions will be accountable for their contributions. In addition, the Virtual School Officer should agree a mid-point review date between meetings, during which they will

contact professionals linked to the targets to check on progress and ensure that agreed actions are being followed through.

A minimum of three targets should be set at each meeting, unless exceptional circumstances apply, and these should be based on the child's individual needs. Core areas for target setting include:

- Attendance
- Literacy / English
- Numeracy / Maths

Targets may also be drawn from existing plans such as an Education, Health and Care Plan or a behaviour support plan, where appropriate.

Personal Education Plans in Early Years Foundation Stage

Personal Education Plans for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage will look different from those for older children, but they should still focus on the child's individual learning and development needs. The plan should highlight the child's current stage of development and outline the actions required to support progress toward appropriate goals.

The Personal Education Plan should cover the following areas of learning:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

The plan should also include comments on the child's access to early years provision that is appropriate to their identified developmental needs. It should address how the child will be supported to make a successful transition to Key Stage 1.

Additionally, there is an Early Years Pupil Premium available. The use of this funding should be discussed during the Personal Education Plan meeting, and decisions regarding its use should be clearly recorded in the plan.

Personal Education Plans for those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training

For all children who turn 16 by 31st August, statutory school age ends on the last Friday of June in that year. However, young people are required to remain in some form of education, employment with training, or full-time training until the age of 18. A young person aged 16 to 18 who is not participating in any of these is considered to be not in education, employment or training.

A Personal Education Plan for a young person in this situation will differ from those of their peers who are engaged in education or training. The plan should focus on identifying the current barriers preventing the young person from engaging, and outline a realistic and

personalised strategy for re-engagement. This strategy should include clearly defined targets that specify what needs to be done, by whom, why, and within what timeframe.

The Personal Education Plan must maintain a positive and aspirational tone. The meeting should aim to highlight the young person's strengths and interests, using these as a foundation to encourage re-engagement with education or training.

Personal Education Plans for Children with Significant Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Personal Education Plans for children with significant special educational needs and disabilities may differ from those for children without such needs. Depending on the child's level of need, they may not be able to express their views or contribute directly to the meeting. In such cases, their views should be captured through the observations and input of trusted adults who know the child well.

Curriculum content may also vary, as many schools catering to children with significant needs follow a bespoke curriculum tailored to their students. Virtual School Officers should be prepared for this and adapt the round robin feedback forms accordingly.

While many children with significant needs may be working below age-related expectations, this does not mean they are not making progress. Progress should be assessed based on the child's individual starting point and judged on a case-by-case basis.

When setting targets, these should, where possible, link to the child's Individual Education Plan or Education, Health and Care Plan. Many schools set termly targets to support the broader goals outlined in the Education, Health and Care Plan. If a child has a large number of targets, the Designated Teacher should identify the most relevant ones to include in the Personal Education Plan.

Children with significant needs will have an Education, Health and Care Plan, and the relevant section of the Personal Education Plan document must be fully completed and regularly updated. Any additional support provided should be clearly documented, along with evidence of its impact on the child's development. Where possible, one Personal Education Plan meeting per year should be aligned with the child's annual review.

Depending on the school's provision, Pupil Premium Plus funding may be allocated to support the child. This should be discussed during the meeting and clearly reflected in the targets section of the Personal Education Plan where appropriate.

Sadly, it is not uncommon for children in the care of the local authority to go missing. The length of time a child is missing can vary significantly from case to case, and this will influence how the Personal Education Plan is completed. However, a Personal Education Plan is still required every academic term, regardless of the child's missing status.

If a child has been missing for a short period:

The Personal Education Plan review meeting should be postponed until the child returns, to ensure they can participate in the process.

If a child has been missing for a longer period:

The review meeting should still be postponed until the child returns. If the child has not returned within a few weeks of the end of term, the Virtual School Officer should make efforts to meet with other professionals involved in the child's care or gather their views through other means. These views should be recorded in the Personal Education Plan document, along with any recent academic data and other relevant sections that would normally be included in a review.

If a child has been missing since becoming looked after:

The review meeting should be postponed until the child returns. If the child has not returned within a few weeks of term end, the Virtual School Officer should seek out any relevant background information to include in the Personal Education Plan. This may come from the Independent Reviewing Officer's notes or from conversations with other professionals in the child's support network.

If a Personal Education Plan is completed while the child is missing, this should be clearly noted in the summary section of the document.

Personal Education Plan Quality Assurance

Hillingdon Virtual School operates a Personal Education Plan quality assurance process that enables managers to assess the quality of plans completed by staff under their line management. Each plan is rated using a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) system to indicate its overall quality.

The Personal Education Plan quality assurance policy is reviewed annually by the Virtual School management team to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The most recent review took place in May 2025. A summary of the policy is outlined below:

- Managers will review a minimum of 25% of the caseload for each Virtual School Officer they manage during each termly cycle. This includes any Personal Education Plans previously rated as amber.
- Where staff are not meeting expected standards, managers will use one-to-one meetings to discuss the plan using the quality assurance template as a guide. Actions will be agreed to support improvement and followed up in subsequent meetings. If needed, further training or shadowing may be offered to model effective meeting delivery and ensure the right questions are being asked to gather the necessary information and plan appropriately. If progress is not made following additional support, standard council capability procedures will be followed.
- At the end of each term, managers will moderate a sample of each other's Personal Education Plans to cross-check quality and ensure consistent interpretation of the quality assurance criteria.

It is important to note that while the allocated Virtual School Officer leads the organisation of the meeting and completion of the Personal Education Plan, there are shared responsibilities. Social workers are responsible for maintaining up to date personal and care details on Liquidlogic Children's System for the children on their caseload, and Designated Teachers are responsible for providing all key data including progress, attainment and attendance.

[Admissions](#)

[Whose Responsibility?](#)

The Cared For Child's placement plan should clearly state who holds delegated authority for choosing a school. This responsibility is often shared between the carer and the social worker, depending on the child's legal status and permanence plan. For children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, birth parents will usually be involved in the decision-making process.

Regardless of legal status, all school placement decisions must be made in consultation with the child's allocated Virtual School Officer. Applications should be submitted jointly by the social worker and the carer to ensure a coordinated approach.

For children and young people who are looked after and have an Education, Health and Care Plan, please refer to the [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities](#) section of the handbook for further guidance.

[Changes to Educational Provision](#)

When a child or young person becomes Cared For, every effort should be made to avoid disrupting their education. This includes prioritising care placements that allow the child to continue attending their current school, provided the school is meeting their needs. In some cases, this may require the local authority to provide transport to support continued attendance.

The same duty to minimise disruption applies when a child moves to a new care placement. If the move necessitates a change in school, a new school placement must be secured **before** the child moves, to prevent any break in educational provision. The only exception to this is in emergency situations, where a child must move urgently. In such cases, a new school must be identified and secured **within 20 school days**. The child's home local authority has a duty to **avoid drift and delay** in this process.

For children in Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11), changes to educational provision should only occur in **exceptional circumstances**. If a move is being considered, the designated teachers from both the current and proposed schools must be consulted, along with the Independent Reviewing Officer. The child's wishes and feelings should be sought, as well as those of their parents if the child is accommodated. Even where a care order is in place, parental views should be considered unless it is inappropriate or not possible to do so.

The local authority must be satisfied that any new placement will promote the child's educational achievement and align with their Personal Education Plan. The plan must be updated to reflect arrangements for minimising disruption, including how any changes to syllabus or course content will be managed.

Appropriate Education Provision

All education provision should be appropriate to a Cared For Child's assessed needs. It should be judged as the provision that will best support and maximise the child's academic progress and enable them to achieve in line with their peers.

For the majority of Cared For Children, this will mean a mainstream school, including local authority maintained schools, academies, and free schools. However, for some children, a specialist school for children with special educational needs or alternative provision may be more suitable.

When securing a new school place, the child's wishes and feelings should be considered, taking into account their age and maturity. Every effort should be made to enable the child to visit the school informally beforehand.

The school chosen should be at a reasonable distance from the care placement; the child should not have to travel more than one hour each way.

The school chosen may not be a school from which the child has previously been permanently excluded.

It is expected that a range of schools in the area will be researched by the carer and social worker, in consultation with the child's Virtual School Officer. All schools now have easily accessible websites with a range of information, including their curriculum and pastoral offer, exam results, and extracurricular activities. Most websites will also include the school's most recent Ofsted reports. If not, these can be found using a search engine. A useful website for researching schools is [Find and compare schools in England – GOV.UK](#). Carers may also use local knowledge of schools to assist in their choice.

The educational provision for Cared For Children of statutory school age must be full-time, which means 23 or 25 hours of education per week depending on their Key Stage. The school chosen should have an OFSTED rating of 'exceptional', 'strong' or 'expected standard'. Schools rated below should be avoided, and unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, no Cared For Child should be placed in a school rated 'Needs Attention' or 'Urgent Improvement'.

Securing a Place

Cared For Children are given the highest priority within [school admission arrangements](#). In practice, this means they are offered first choice, even above siblings. The only exception is in faith schools, where Cared For Children of that faith are given higher priority.

Applications for school places are usually made by the carer or the social worker, in consultation with the child's Virtual School Officer.

Most applications for mainstream school places are now submitted online, either directly to the school or to the admissions department of the local authority in which the school is

located. If the application is made directly to the school, it is good practice to send a copy of the application form to the child's Virtual School Officer.

When an 'in-year' application (i.e. during the school year) is made, mainstream schools are required to prioritise Cared For Children in their oversubscription criteria. In practice, this means that a school **must** admit a Cared For Child, even if it is full.

Schools must not formally interview a child. They may hold an informal meeting with the young person, their carer, and social worker, but under no circumstances should a formal interview take place.

The Virtual School Head should be kept informed of the progress of all school admissions applications to ensure timely action is taken if there are any delays, avoiding protracted negotiations.

School Refusal to Admit a Cared For Child

If a Cared For Child is refused admission by a school, the social worker, carer, and Virtual School Officer should seek the support of the Virtual School Head without delay. Together, they should discuss whether the local authority may direct the school to admit the child.

If a school maintained by a local authority refuses to admit a Cared For Child, the home local authority has the legal power to direct the school to do so – even if the school is full. This power does not apply if the child has previously been permanently excluded from that school. Any such direction must be carried out in accordance with the [School Admissions Code](#).

If an academy or free school refuses to admit a Cared For Child, the home local authority may request that the school admits the child, but it does not have the power to direct them. If there are strong grounds to support that the school is the most suitable to meet the child's needs, the local authority may escalate the matter by asking the Secretary of State to intervene.

School Admissions During Normal Transition Times

Cared For Children often find transitions between schools particularly challenging due to past experiences and disruptions. It is essential that carers and social workers are aware of the key transition points and take timely action to support smooth transitions. Normal transition times are:

Nursery to Key Stage 1 (Infant)

Even when a nursery is attached to a primary school, a separate application is usually required for a place in the primary school. Carers and social workers are responsible for knowing when this is necessary and ensuring that applications are submitted within the appropriate timescales.

Key Stage 1 (Infant) to Key Stage 2 (Junior)

In some areas, infant and junior schools are separate institutions with different headteachers. Carers and social workers must check whether a formal transition process is required and ensure that any necessary applications are completed on time.

Key Stage 2 (Junior) to Key Stage 3 (Secondary)

This is a major transition for any child and can be particularly traumatic for a Cared For Child. Children must adjust from being the oldest in a small, familiar environment to the youngest in a much larger, often more complex school setting. They move from having one teacher for all subjects to multiple teachers, and from learning in a single classroom to navigating several classrooms across a busy school site.

To support this transition, carers – supported by the social worker and Virtual School Officer – should:

- Begin searching for an appropriate secondary school in the autumn term of Year 5.
- Ensure that transition is discussed at each Personal Education Plan review from the autumn term of Year 5 onward.
- Attend all transition advice meetings arranged by the child's primary school.
- Attend open sessions at a minimum of three secondary schools with the child, allowing them to ask questions about academic and pastoral support, explore the wider life of the school, and compare environments.
- Speak with the designated teacher at each school being considered to understand the support available for Cared For Children.
- Listen to the child's views about which school they would prefer to attend.
- If the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan, consult with the primary school SENCO and the local authority's SEND department to identify schools best suited to meet the child's needs. It is also good practice to involve the Virtual School Officer in these discussions.
- For Cared For Children without an Education, Health and Care Plan, ensure that an application for a secondary school place is submitted by the required deadline in October of Year 6, clearly stating the child's looked after status.
- Throughout Year 6, prepare the child for transition through motivational and aspirational conversations at home.
- Request that the designated teacher from the receiving secondary school (and the SENCO if applicable) attend the final Personal Education Plan meeting in Year 6 during the summer term to focus on ensuring a smooth transition.

In the summer term of Year 6, most secondary schools will invite incoming Year 7 pupils to attend a transition day to familiarise themselves with the school layout, meet some teachers, and connect with future classmates. Carers and social workers should ensure the child attends these sessions.

Where a child is particularly anxious about the move, carers and social workers can request additional transitional support from the secondary school. The Virtual School Officer can advise on appropriate activities to help ease the transition.

Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4

The vast majority of Cared For Children will remain in their current education provider when transitioning from Year 9 to Year 10. However, some may wish to explore alternative options, such as applying to a University Technical College or a Studio School.

These schools admit pupils in Year 10 and offer a different approach to education at Key Stage 4. They allow children to study core subjects such as English, Maths, and Science, while also gaining qualifications in specialist areas not typically offered in mainstream schools.

University Technical Colleges are established by universities and businesses and focus on one or two technical subjects. Alongside the standard curriculum, they provide opportunities to develop skills in areas such as engineering, digital technologies, or health sciences.

Studio Schools are similar in structure, with strong involvement from employers. They focus on preparing students for the workplace through personal coaching, work experience, and a curriculum that supports both academic and practical learning.

When a child is in Year 9, they have the right to apply to one of these schools to complete their studies at Key Stage 4. More information about these options, including local provision in Hillingdon, can be found through the [local authority](#) or by speaking with the child's Virtual School Officer.

Key Stage 4 (Secondary) to Key Stage 5 (Sixth Form, Further Education or College):

All young people are expected to remain in education, training, or employment until the age of 18. This may include a variety of pathways such as apprenticeships, traineeships, work experience, internships, voluntary work, or formal study in schools and colleges.

Preparation for this transition should begin during the Personal Education Plan meeting in the spring term of Year 10 and should remain a standing item on the agenda throughout Year 10 and Year 11.

The views and aspirations of the young person should be central to all discussions about post-16 plans. All courses at this stage will have specific entry criteria, so enquiries should begin in Year 10. The likelihood of the young person meeting these criteria should be reviewed at each Personal Education Plan meeting, with appropriate targets set and support provided to help them succeed.

Carers are expected to attend any transition advice sessions offered by the young person's secondary school. They should accompany the young person to open evenings at schools and colleges of interest, helping them prepare questions, explore course options, understand entry requirements, and review past performance data. The Virtual School Officer is available to offer guidance and support to both the carer and the young person during this time.

Carers should also support the young person in completing and submitting applications, ensuring forms are accurate and submitted on time. While it is not mandatory, young people should be encouraged to disclose their looked after status on application forms. This can help them access additional support and funding, such as the 16–19 Bursary.

Carers should accompany the young person to college enrolment and ensure they bring all necessary documentation, including identification and qualification certificates.

In Hillingdon, Personal Education Plans continue until the young person turns 18, and they will continue to have a named Virtual School Officer assigned to them throughout this period.

Attendance

Children must be educated in school while they are of statutory school age – that is, from the school term following their fifth birthday until the last Friday in June of the school year in which they turn sixteen. From the age of sixteen to eighteen, they must be in some form of education, training, or employment. This can include voluntary work, internships, and work experience.

To help each Cared For Child reach their academic potential, it is strongly recommended that they maintain an attendance rate of at least 95%.

When a child misses school for reasons other than illness, they not only miss out on teaching and learning, but also on developing essential life skills – such as how to interact and communicate positively with others. Regular school attendance is a protective factor in the life of a Cared For Child.

Carers, social workers, and schools share a joint responsibility to ensure that every Cared For Child attends school every day. They are expected to work together supportively if attendance rates begin to decline.

As part of our duty as corporate parent, the London Borough of Hillingdon commissions external providers to monitor school attendance for each Cared For Child via an online platform. An Establishment Data Import, facilitated by System C, is used to monitor the attendance of Cared For Children attending schools within the borough. For those attending schools outside the borough, Groupcall is commissioned to carry out attendance monitoring.

Unacceptable Reasons for Absence

- ➔ Medical, dental, and therapy appointments should be scheduled outside of school hours wherever possible. Carers and social workers should work with medical professionals to ensure that Cared For Children are prioritised for appointments at times that do not disrupt their education.
- ➔ Holidays must not be taken during term time. Those with parental responsibility may be subject to a fine if a Cared For Child is taken on holiday when they should be attending school.

Punctuality

Cared For Children should be supported to achieve 100% punctuality. Missing the start of the school day can lead to confusion and anxiety. For example, schools often use morning assemblies and registration time to share important notices, check home-school diaries, and ensure pupils have the correct equipment and uniform. Pupils who arrive late are disadvantaged by missing these key moments.

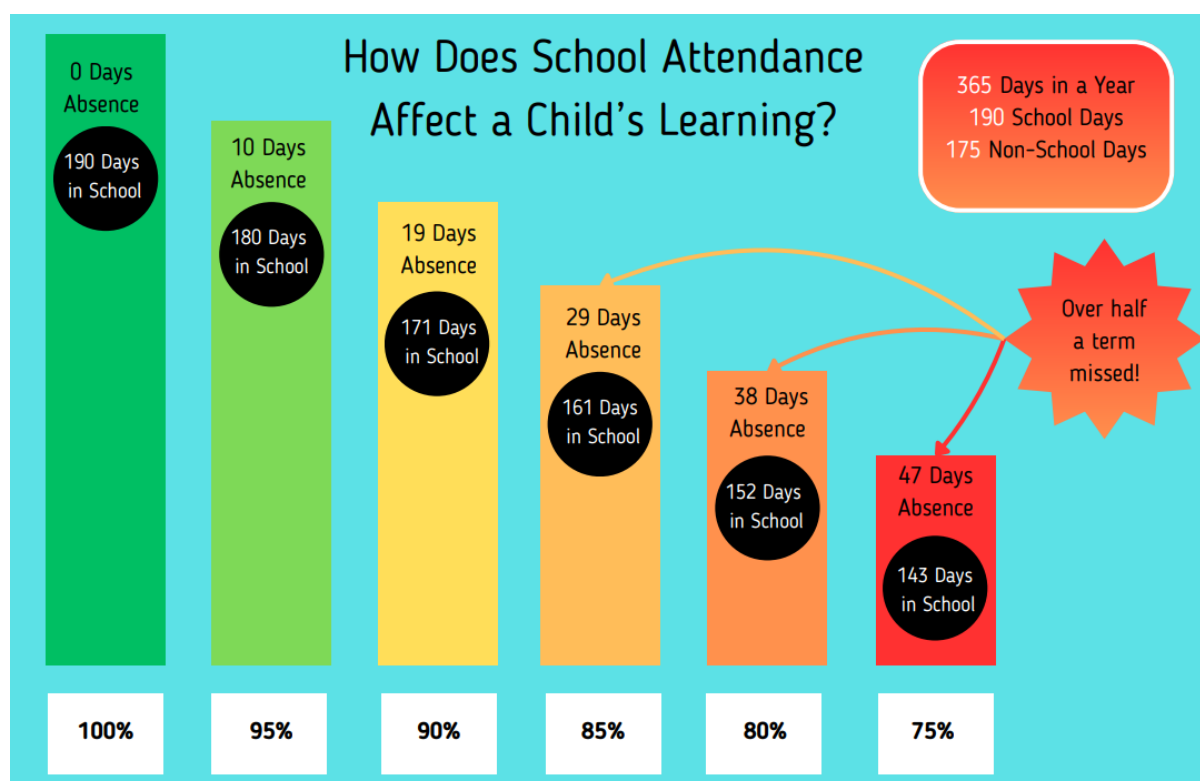
If a child arrives late but before the register closes, they will be marked as late. If they arrive after the register has closed – this time varies between schools – they will be marked as absent. Registers are taken in both the morning and afternoon, and each mark counts as half

a day. Persistent lateness can negatively affect a child's overall attendance figure, as each late arrival may be recorded as an absence.

Advice on Attendance and Punctuality

- Clear and consistent communication between school and home is essential to support good attendance and punctuality. From the first day a Cared For Child joins a school, there should be an agreed process between the school and the carer regarding who to notify (e.g. attendance officer, designated teacher, head of year, tutor, or school office) and how to notify them (e.g. phone call, text message, email, or written note) when a child is absent or late.
- If a Cared For Child is too ill to attend school or is going to be late, the carer is expected to inform the school before the start of the school day.
- If a Cared For Child does not arrive at school and no notification has been received from the carer, the school should **immediately** contact the carer, the child's social worker, and the Virtual School Officer to agree on appropriate next steps.
- If a Cared For Child is in school but is truanting from lessons, the school should contact the carer, social worker, and Virtual School Officer on the same day to agree strategies to prevent further incidents.
- If such absences are persistent, or if the child is truanting from school entirely, a meeting should be convened **without delay** between the school, carer, social worker, and Virtual School Officer to explore underlying causes and agree on preventative measures.
- Encourage good attendance and punctuality at every opportunity within the home environment.
- Ensure that the child's social worker and Virtual School Officer are informed of any concerns regarding attendance.
- Promote and support engagement in Out-of-School Hours Learning opportunities.
- Ensure the child is well-prepared and organised for school, including having the correct uniform and necessary equipment.

Missing Out



Only 3% of pupils who miss more than 50% of school manage to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades 5 to 9, including English and Maths. In contrast, 73% of pupils with over 95% attendance achieve five or more GCSEs at grades 5 to 9.

Responsibilities of Other Professionals:

Social Workers:

- Hold schools to account and explore what support they can offer to address any issues with attendance or punctuality.
- Promote good attendance and punctuality at every opportunity, including during Cared For Child Reviews and statutory visits.
- Ensure the Virtual School is informed of any emerging concerns regarding attendance or punctuality.

Designated Teachers:

- Share information about a child's care status sensitively. Most Cared For Children prefer not to be identified to their peers as being Cared For.
- Maintain regular contact with carers and promote high expectations for both looked after and previously Cared For Children.
- Keep the child's social worker and Virtual School Officer informed of any concerns about attendance.
- Raise aspirations by offering opportunities for children to develop their strengths and talents – this is a key factor in educational success.
- Encourage participation in extracurricular activities such as trips, outdoor learning, sports, drama, art, or any other clubs that may interest the child.

- Promote attendance at informal school events such as plays, concerts, social gatherings, and sports matches.
- Use positive reinforcement strategies – such as vouchers, day trips, or token rewards – for improved attendance and punctuality. Set realistic targets tailored to the child's circumstances and avoid traditional sanctions.
- Consider reduced hours or phased returns following traumatic events, with a clear plan for returning to full attendance over time.
- Provide a consistent adult in school for the child to have regular, trusted contact with. Ideally, this should be someone the child chooses and who is likely to remain at the school long term. This key adult does not have to be the Designated Teacher.
- Explore peer mentoring opportunities to offer supportive social relationships with peers.
- Make use of school counselling services to help children work through complex factors affecting attendance.
- Ensure the needs of Cared For and Previously Cared For Children are explicitly addressed in school development plans and reflected in school policies and procedures. Tailored support and flexibility may be required to meet complex needs. Provide training to school staff on the specific needs of Cared For and Previously Cared For Children.

Strategies for improving attendance

Attendance Reports: Daily and lesson-by-lesson attendance reports provide a clear way to monitor patterns and identify concerns early.

Pastoral Support Plans: A school-led intervention designed to support individual pupils in developing their social, emotional, and behavioural skills. These plans can help pupils regulate their behaviour and improve attendance.

Transport: Providing transport to school can help a child or young person re-establish a regular routine. Carers must ensure that a designated member of staff is available to receive the child upon arrival.

Incentives: Long-term rewards agreed between the school and carer – such as tickets to a football match – can be effective in encouraging consistent attendance.

Patterns: When reviewing a young person's attendance, look for patterns in the days or lessons missed. If a pattern is identified, the school should explore what support can be put in place to address the underlying issues.

Experiencing Barriers to Attending School: Anxiety around attending school can build up quickly. Carers should sensitively explore the reasons (e.g. bullying, learning difficulties) and seek appropriate support (e.g. therapeutic input, peer mentoring, special educational needs support). If the child shows signs of emotionally based school avoidance, this should be shared with the named officer from the Virtual School as soon as possible.

Collaboration: Schools should keep all relevant professionals informed. Where possible, regular review meetings should be held to ensure a robust plan is in place and that attendance is improving.

Mentoring: Allocated time with a trusted adult or peer mentor who is invested in the young person's wellbeing can help them feel valued and more motivated to attend school.

Breakfast Club: Many schools offer morning breakfast clubs, sometimes with free breakfast. This can act as an incentive and help reduce lateness, particularly where transport is a barrier.

Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

The lives of many Cared For Children are marked by change and instability – factors that significantly contribute to underachievement in education. When suspension or permanent exclusion is used as a sanction, it increases instability and reinforces feelings of rejection.

For Cared For Children, suspension and permanent exclusion should only ever be considered as an absolute last resort.

Preventing Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

Cared For Children are suspended from school at a significantly higher rate than their peers. They are more than twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school compared to all other children.

Behaviours that may be deemed challenging in Cared For Children often stem from the experiences that led to them becoming Cared For. For example, attention-needing behaviour may reflect earlier experiences of neglect. Traumatized children may require substantial support to develop personal skills – such as emotional regulation – that their peers may have acquired much earlier.

While consistency is essential, schools are encouraged to provide discreet and flexible support for Cared For Children in a subtle and sensitive manner.

When a Cared For Child's behaviour causes concern, this should be discussed with the child's allocated officer from the Virtual School during their Personal Education Plan meeting. Strategies for improvement should be agreed and monitored regularly.

If behaviour escalates between Personal Education Plan meetings, the school should convene additional meetings to explore causes and agree interventions. These meetings should include the carer, social worker, and Virtual School Officer.

If the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan, the school should consider calling an early annual review to reassess support needs.

Schools, social workers, carers, and Virtual School Officers must work proactively to secure appropriate support and avoid exclusion.

Possible interventions include:

- Developing a behaviour support plan tailored to the child's needs
- Commissioning an educational psychologist to assess the child and provide recommendations
- Providing support from a teaching assistant or learning mentor
- Making classroom adjustments, such as seating arrangements, reviewing lesson content, and adapting teaching strategies
- Involving the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator if the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan

- Referring the child to counselling services or mental health support
- Considering an alternative or flexible timetable

Suspensions

Suspensions can only be authorised by a Head Teacher.

The Head Teacher must, without delay, provide written reasons for the suspension and confirm its duration. This letter should be sent to the child and/or carer, with copies also sent to the child's social worker and the Virtual School Officer.

Suspensions can range from half a day to a maximum of 45 days in a single school year. 'Informal' or 'unofficial' suspensions – such as sending a pupil home to 'cool off' – are unlawful, even if agreed with parents or carers. Any suspension, regardless of its length, must be formally recorded and the local authority notified.

From the first day of a suspension, the school must provide appropriate work for the child, either by email or in person. This work should cover the full duration of the suspension (up to five days) and must be returned to the school for marking.

A reintegration date must be agreed in advance, and carers, social workers, and the Virtual School Officer should be informed. It is important to note that a suspension must not be extended simply to accommodate a reintegration meeting.

If the suspension lasts six days or more, the school and local authority must work together to arrange alternative educational provision from Day 1 following the suspension.

The child must remain at home during school hours (typically 9:00am to 3:30pm). During this time, carers are encouraged to support the child in completing the set work.

It may also be useful to consider:

- If the child understands the suspension and the reasons behind it.
- Whether the child will miss an exam or national curriculum test. If so, the school should explore arrangements for the child to sit the exam. If this is not possible, the school's governing body may be contacted to request a review of the suspension.
- Collecting a statement from the child, if appropriate.
- An appeal, if the suspension appears to be unlawful.

Permanent Exclusions

Head Teachers should, wherever possible, avoid permanently excluding a Cared For Child. However, if a permanent exclusion does occur:

- The school must clearly outline the reasons for the exclusion.
- The local authority must be informed immediately.
- The child's social worker should consider the impact of the exclusion on the care placement and assess whether additional support is needed to maintain stability.

To minimise disruption to the child's education, statutory guidance states that the local authority should work with the school to arrange suitable full-time education from the first day of the exclusion. If this is not possible, alternative provision must be in place by Day 6.

It may be useful to:

- Explore the right to appeal the exclusion.
- Contact the local authority's exclusions officer to identify alternative provisions or options available locally.
- Visit the [exclusions section on LEAP](#) to explore further support and guidance.
- Consider a managed move to another school as an alternative to permanent exclusion.

A decision to permanently exclude a pupil should only be made both:

- In response to a serious breach, or persistent breaches, of the school's behaviour policy.
- And
- Where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others.

If a Cared For Child is permanently excluded, the school may need to inform more individuals than usual about the exclusion and their right to make representations or appeal. Under education law, the definition of a parent includes anyone with parental responsibility, which may include the local authority if a care order is in place, as well as any person with whom the child lives, such as foster carers, and the child's birth parents. Even if the local authority does not hold parental responsibility, the child's social worker must still be informed of any permanent exclusion.

Alternative Provision

Alternative provision refers to educational arrangements for children who, due to illness, exclusion, or other circumstances, require an alternative to mainstream schooling. It is commonly used by schools for children on suspensions and by local authorities for those who have been permanently excluded.

There are various types of alternative provision designed to meet different needs. Some cater for children awaiting a school place, others support those who struggle to attend school, and pupil referral units often provide education for children who are temporarily or permanently excluded. In some cases, children may miss school due to health-related issues – this could include physical or mental illness, injury, or planned hospital admissions. The health condition may be short-term or long-term. Hillingdon's policy on alternative education arrangements for these children is available on [LEAP](#).

Cared For Children are significantly overrepresented in alternative provision. Research indicates that the proportion of Cared For Children attending a pupil referral unit is approximately 11 times higher than that of children who are not Cared For.

What Constitutes a Good Alternative Provision?

Carers, social workers, officers from the Virtual School, and Independent Reviewing Officers should expect the following from any alternative provision offered to a Cared For Child:

- The alternative provision provider will have worked with the child's previous school before the transfer to assess the child's specific needs and ensure the provision is suitable and equipped to meet those needs.
- The provision will have high aspirations for the child's outcomes, aiming to improve attendance, motivation, self-confidence, and engagement with education, as appropriate.
- The alternative provision provider will offer an education that is equivalent to that provided in mainstream schools, particularly in core subjects such as English, Maths, and Science. The provision must also offer appropriate qualifications and accreditation.
- The provision will have clearly defined objectives. For children up to Key Stage 3, the goal should be reintegration into mainstream education. For older children, the focus may be progression into further education, apprenticeships, training, or employment.
- All key professionals involved in the child's care and education should be actively engaged in planning and reviewing the provision, ensuring a holistic and coordinated approach to supporting the child's progress.

When is Alternative Provision Appropriate?

Since January 2013, governing bodies of maintained schools have had the power to direct a pupil off-site for education to improve their behaviour. This change has made it more difficult for carers, social workers, officers from the Virtual School, and Independent Reviewing Officers to challenge the commissioning of alternative provision for Cared For Children.

However, statutory guidance requires governing bodies to ensure that the corporate parent is given clear information about the placement – specifically, why it is being made, where the child will be placed, when it will begin, and how it will be reviewed.

In considering the use of alternative provision for a Cared For Child, governing bodies and headteachers **must** carefully assess whether it is genuinely in the child's best interests. *Where negative behaviour stems from past trauma and a life marked by instability and change, further disruption to education may worsen the behaviour and reduce the child's life chances.*

Although behaviour is the most common reason for using alternative provision, it may also be appropriate in other circumstances, such as illness (including physical or mental health conditions) or short-term arrangements while waiting for a school place, particularly for children newly arrived in the local authority.

Governing bodies are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education from the sixth day of a suspension. However, for Cared For Children, schools are expected to provide this from Day One. Full-time education means the same total amount of learning time as the child would receive in a maintained school.

Commissioning Alternative Provision

There is specific statutory guidance on alternative provision that governing bodies of maintained schools and local authorities must follow.

When commissioning alternative provision to support the improved behaviour of a Cared For Child, schools must ensure the following:

- The child's needs have been clearly identified, and all possible strategies and interventions have been used to support them within the school setting.
- A personalised written intervention plan is created, with clear objectives for improvement and attainment based on the child's individual ability.
- The intervention plan includes arrangements for assessing and monitoring progress, timeframes for achievement, and a baseline of the child's current position to measure progress against.
- Where reintegration into mainstream school is the objective, the plan must specify how the alternative provision will align with the child's current curriculum, schemes of work, and qualification pathways.
- The intervention plan is linked to any other existing plans the child may have, such as an Education, Health and Care Plan.
- The plan includes a clear schedule for regular progress reviews, with defined criteria for evaluating success.
- Objectives for the child's next steps in education are clearly outlined. For children in Key Stage 4, this may include reintegration, progression to further education, training, or employment.
- The plan specifies the criteria that will be used to determine when the child is ready to return to their mainstream school, where appropriate.
- Records of the child's progress within the alternative provision are maintained.

- There is effective staff liaison between the school and the alternative provision provider.
- If a Cared For Child is attending alternative provision on a part-time basis, the intervention plan must also include arrangements for their attendance at school on the remaining days.

When Hillingdon Virtual School commissions alternative provision for any Cared For Child, this must be done via Hillingdon's Dynamic Purchasing System. This ensures that all commissioned settings meet essential standards, including Ofsted registration, safeguarding compliance, and suitability for the young person's individual needs.

The End of a Placement at an Alternative Provision

At the end of a placement at an alternative provision, the school must have a clear plan and processes in place to support the child's reintegration. This should include well-defined strategies tailored to the child's needs.

- The alternative provision provider should produce a full written report for the school's governing body. This report must detail the child's attendance, academic achievements, and progress in personal, social, and emotional wellbeing. It should also be shared with the carer, social worker, and officer from the Virtual School.
- The governing body should seek the child's views on the success of the placement and give due consideration to their feedback.
- If the aim of the placement was progression to further education, training, or employment, the alternative provision provider and the school should work together to ensure appropriate next steps are in place.
 - ❖ The child's views about the alternative provision should be gathered to inform future planning.
 - ❖ The child's destination following the placement should be recorded by the school.

Hillingdon's guidance for Alternative Provision can be found [here](#).

Early Years Provision

The Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage runs from birth to age five and is taught up to the end of Reception (Year 0). This stage lays the foundation for school readiness and future learning success. Early years education supports children's social, physical, and mental development, helping them to thrive as they transition into formal schooling.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is based on the principles that:

- Every child is a unique individual who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments that respond to their individual needs and foster strong partnerships between practitioners and parents or carers.
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

While these principles are important for all children, they are especially vital for those who have experienced early trauma. For Cared For Children, the Early Years Foundation Stage plays a crucial role in helping them develop the fundamental skills needed to succeed in primary and secondary education. These skills include:

- Trusting adults
- Building self-esteem
- Developing empathy
- Learning cooperation skills
- Learning self-control
- Building positive relationships
- Developing language and communication skills

Most children acquire these skills naturally through secure, nurturing, and stable family relationships. However, many Cared For Children require these skills to be taught explicitly by carers and early years practitioners.

Entitlement

Local authorities have a duty to encourage the take-up of early years education places. Two-year-old Cared For Children are eligible for a funded early education place, providing 570 hours per year over no fewer than 38 weeks, starting from the relevant date below:

- Children born between 1 January and 31 March: eligible from the start of the term beginning on or after 1 April following their second birthday.
- Children born between 1 April and 31 August: eligible from the start of the term beginning on or after 1 September following their second birthday.
- Children born between 1 September and 31 December: eligible from the start of the term beginning on or after 1 January following their second birthday.

Once a place has been taken up, the child remains eligible even if they cease to be a Cared For Child.

For three- and four-year-olds, local authorities are required to secure early education places offering 570 hours per year over no fewer than 38 weeks, from the relevant date below until the child reaches compulsory school age:

- Children born between 1 January and 31 March: eligible from the start of the term beginning on or after 1 April following their third birthday.
- Children born between 1 April and 31 August: eligible from the start of the term beginning on or after 1 September following their third birthday.
- Children born between 1 September and 31 December: eligible from the start of the term beginning on or after 1 January following their third birthday.

Early Years Personal Education Plans

Personal Education Plans for children in the early years will look different from those for older children, but they should still focus on the child's individual learning and development needs. These plans should highlight the child's current stage of development and outline the actions required to support progress towards appropriate goals.

There are seven areas of learning and development within the Early Years Foundation Stage framework:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts

Children should mostly develop the prime areas first:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development

As they grow these areas will help them to develop in the remaining four areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

Personal Education Plans should include information about the child's access to early years provision that is appropriate to their developmental needs. They should also address what is required for a successful transition to Key Stage 1.

In addition, there is specific funding available for children in early years settings known as the Early Years Pupil Premium. The use of this funding should be discussed at each Personal Education Plan meeting and agreed in collaboration with the officer from the Virtual School. This funding is released directly to the education provider by the local authority where the child resides.

After a child turns two, a Progress Check at Age Two should be completed. This is a written summary by professionals outlining how the child is progressing in the three prime areas of development and identifying any areas where additional support may be needed.

In the summer term of the child's Reception year, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is completed by teachers. This assessment focuses on all seven areas of learning and provides a clear picture of the child's development at the end of the early years stage. It also helps inform planning for their learning as they move into Year 1.

Statutory Framework Information

Educational programmes in early years settings must include a range of activities and experiences that support children's development across the following areas:

Personal, social and emotional development

This involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves and others, form respectful relationships, build social skills, and learn to manage their feelings. Children are supported to understand appropriate behaviour in group settings and to develop confidence in their own abilities. They also learn to manage their basic needs, including hygiene and making healthy food choices.

Communication and Language

Giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment, develop confidence in expressing themselves, and practise speaking and listening in a variety of situations. Regular exposure to a range of texts helps embed new vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Physical Development

This includes opportunities for children to be active and interactive, developing coordination, control, and movement. Children build both gross and fine motor skills, beginning with sensory experiences and progressing to strength, coordination, and spatial awareness.

Literacy

Children are encouraged to link sounds and letters and begin to read and write. They should have access to a wide range of reading materials – such as books, poems, and other texts – to spark interest. Literacy development includes language comprehension, word reading, and writing skills.

Mathematics

Children are supported to develop skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, and solving simple addition and subtraction problems. They also learn to describe shapes, spaces, and measures.

Understanding the World

This area involved guiding children make sense of their physical world and community through exploration, observation, and discovery. They learn about people, places, technology, and the environment.

Expressive Art and Design

Children are encouraged to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials. They are supported to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings through activities such as art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology.

Learning Goals for the Different Learning and Development Areas:

The Prime Areas:

Personal, social and emotional development:

→ Self-Regulation:

- ❖ Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
- ❖ Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
- ❖ Give focused attention to what adults are saying, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

→ Managing Self:

- ❖ Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- ❖ Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.
- ❖ Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.

→ Building relationships:

- ❖ Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others.
- ❖ Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers.
- ❖ Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

Communication and language:

→ Listening Attention and Understanding:

- ❖ Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- ❖ Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.

- ❖ Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

→ Speaking:

- ❖ Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- ❖ Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate.
- ❖ Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from adults around them.

Physical development:

→ Gross Motor Skills:

- ❖ Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- ❖ Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
- ❖ Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing.

→ Fine Motor Skills:

- ❖ Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing – using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- ❖ Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paint brushes and cutlery.
- ❖ Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.

The specific areas:

Literacy:

→ Comprehension:

- ❖ Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- ❖ Anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories.
- ❖ Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems and during role-play.

→ Word Reading:

- ❖ Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs.
- ❖ Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by soundblending.
- ❖ Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.

→ Writing:

- ❖ Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- ❖ Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- ❖ Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others

Mathematics:

→ Numbers:

- ❖ Have a deep understanding of number to 10, including the composition of each number.
- ❖ Subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5.
- ❖ Automatically recall (without reference to rhymes, counting or other aids) number bonds up to 5 (including subtraction facts) and some number bonds to 10, including double facts.

→ Numerical Patterns:

- ❖ Verbally count beyond 20, recognising the pattern of the counting system.
- ❖ Compare quantities up to 10 in different contexts, recognising when one quantity is greater than, less than or the same as the other quantity.
- ❖ Explore and represent patterns within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds, double facts and how quantities can be distributed equally.

Understanding the world:

→ Past and Present:

- ❖ Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society.
- ❖ Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- ❖ Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

→ People, Culture and Communities:

- ❖ Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps.
- ❖ Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- ❖ Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, nonfiction texts and – when appropriate – maps.

→ The Natural World:

- ❖ Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants.
- ❖ Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- ❖ Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

Expressive arts and design:

→ Creating with Materials:

- ❖ Safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.
- ❖ Share their creations, explaining the process they have used.

- ❖ Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.
- Being Imaginative and Expressive:
 - ❖ Invent, adapt and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher.
 - ❖ Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs.
 - ❖ Perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and – when appropriate – try to move in time with music.

Assessment

Children following the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum are assessed against the Early Learning Goals to determine whether they are:

- Working at age-related expectations, or
- Working below age-related expectations in each area of learning.

Early years practitioners should be able to inform the Virtual School Officer of the level at which the child is currently working.

As with other key stages, progress is also monitored from the child's starting point. This is typically recorded as:

- Above expected progress
- Expected progress
- Below expected progress

This approach ensures that each child's development is tracked in a meaningful way, allowing for timely support and intervention where needed.

When looking at early years data to make predictions for Key Stage 1 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), the following Early Learning Goals are particularly important

- Word Reading
- Writing
- Comprehension
- Number
- Numerical patterns

Reception Baseline Assessment

The Reception Baseline Assessment will be completed by the class teacher within the child's first six weeks of starting Reception. It is a short, activity-based assessment designed to establish the pupil's starting points in language, communication, literacy, and mathematics. Pupils will use practical resources to complete tasks, and teachers will record the outcomes using a laptop or desktop computer.

The assessment is approximately evenly split between mathematics and literacy. No numerical scores will be shared, and the data will only be used at the end of Year 6 to contribute to the school-level progress measure. Instead, teachers will receive a series of

brief narrative statements indicating how each pupil performed in the assessment. These statements can be used to inform teaching during the first term.

If possible, Hillingdon Virtual School would appreciate it if schools could share these narrative statements with us during the Personal Education Plan meeting in the autumn term.

Special Educational Needs and Disability

The [Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice](#) places emphasis on supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, along with their carers. It aims to raise aspirations, listen to their views, wishes and feelings, support their active participation in decisions regarding provision and reviews, and prepare them for adulthood.

The Local Offer

Each local authority is required to publish, in one place, clear and comprehensive information about the support they expect to provide for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This applies whether or not the child or young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan. The local authority must also explain how this support can be accessed.

One of the key aims of the Local Offer is to ensure that local provision meets local needs. This is achieved by involving children, young people, and those with parental responsibility in the development and ongoing review of the Local Offer.

The Local Offer is usually available on the website of the relevant local authority. Hillingdon's Local Offer can be accessed [here](#).

Outcomes for Cared For Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The most common reasons for children in care having special educational needs are:

- Social, emotional and mental health needs
- Moderate learning difficulties
- Speech, language and communication needs

Children in care with special educational needs and disabilities generally perform significantly below national expectations at the end of Key Stage Two and Key Stage Four. However, there have been improvements, particularly for children in care attending primary school.

Identifying Special Educational Needs

Robust arrangements should be in place to ensure that any previously unidentified special educational needs are recognised and addressed when children first become Cared For. Given the existing gap in educational attainment between children in care and their peers, carers, designated teachers and social workers should treat this as a high priority. In doing so, they should consider the potential impact of insecure attachment on the child's ability to learn.

Not all children with special educational needs and disabilities will require an Education, Health and Care Plan. For many, additional support in school for a limited period may be sufficient to help them achieve in line with their peers. However, some children will need funding for support that goes beyond what schools are typically able to provide, and may require this support to continue beyond the age of compulsory education. In such cases, an

Education, Health and Care Plan should be considered. This plan may cover support needs up to the age of 25.

Some Types of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

There is a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities that may affect a child's learning to varying degrees. Some examples include:

Moderate, Severe or Profound Learning Difficulties:

This category covers a broad spectrum of learning challenges. For instance, it includes global developmental delay, where a child experiences difficulties across several areas of learning, such as understanding language and communication. It also includes specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia (difficulty with reading), dyscalculia (difficulty with mathematics), and dyspraxia (difficulty with coordination and movement).

Communication and Interaction Difficulties:

A child may struggle to interact with peers, teachers, carers or other adults. They may find it hard to express themselves clearly or to interpret social situations and understand others' intentions. Children with more pronounced needs may be described as being on the autistic spectrum. However, it is important to recognise that Cared For Children who have experienced insecure attachment may also display similar behaviours.

Physical Disabilities:

Children with physical disabilities should be assessed to determine whether their condition affects their education and what strategies can be used to reduce any negative impact. It is important to remember that learning does not only take place in the classroom, and children with even mild physical disabilities may require specialist support to access the wider life of the school.

Social Emotional and Mental Health:

Many Cared For Children have experienced trauma due to neglect or abuse before entering the care system. Those with insecure attachment may behave differently from children who have experienced secure relationships. Difficulties in understanding their own strengths and weaknesses as learners, or in managing their thoughts and emotions, may lead to behaviours that express unmet emotional needs. These behaviours may sometimes be misinterpreted as anti-social.

Identifying the Need for an Education, Health and Care Plan

While carers and teachers are often the first to recognise that a child may have special educational needs and disabilities, anyone involved in the life of a Cared For Child who suspects they have unmet needs should raise this during the Personal Education Plan meeting.

Information such as the child's previous and current attainment data, along with feedback from teachers, will form part of the Personal Education Plan. This will help determine whether the child is achieving and progressing in line with their peers. A plan should then be developed to assess the child's needs further and ensure appropriate support is in place.

This plan is likely to include a discussion with the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator about the child's needs and how they can best be met within the school setting. Based on the Special Educational Needs Coordinator's assessment, targeted interventions and strategies will be introduced to support the child, and their impact will be monitored. The coordinator may also involve external specialists, such as educational psychologists, occupational therapists, specialist teachers or mental health professionals. Carers may be asked to implement certain strategies outside of school to support the child's development.

The Special Educational Needs Coordinator will maintain a record of the strategies and interventions used, along with their impact on the child's learning. A timeframe for reviewing and refining these approaches will be shared with carers and social workers.

If, despite these efforts, the child does not make progress in line with their peers over the agreed period, and it is determined that their needs go beyond what mainstream education can typically provide, a request for an assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan may be made. This request should be informed by the statutory guidance outlined in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice.

This request will be submitted to the local authority in which the child lives.

The request can be made by:

- The child's parent or person with parental responsibility, which could be the social worker
- A young person over 16 and under 25 years of age
- A person acting on behalf of the child or young person's educational institution, such as the SENCO. It is expected that this will be made with the agreement of those with parental responsibility or the young person.

The Drafting of the Education, Health and Care Plan

Once a request for an assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan has been submitted, the process must be completed within a maximum of 20 weeks, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The statutory guidance makes clear that for Cared For Children, there should be no delay.

The local authority has **six weeks** from the date of the request to decide whether or not to carry out the assessment and must communicate this decision to those with parental responsibility or to the young person. If the decision is not to proceed with the assessment, the local authority must inform those with parental responsibility or the young person of their right to appeal. They will then have up to six weeks to submit an appeal.

If the local authority agrees to carry out the assessment, it has a further **six weeks** to gather the necessary information.

After reviewing all reports, strategies and interventions, the local authority will decide whether the child or young person requires an Education, Health and Care Plan. If the

decision is not to issue a plan, the authority must notify those with parental responsibility of their right to appeal. This appeal must be submitted within **16 weeks** of the initial request for assessment.

If the decision is to issue a plan, the local authority must prepare a draft and send it to those with parental responsibility before the end of the **twelfth week** from the initial request.

Those with parental responsibility or the young person then have **15 calendar days** to provide feedback on the draft plan, if they wish. During this time, they may also request that a specific school or educational setting be named in the plan.

The local authority will then consult with the requested school to determine whether it can meet the child's needs as outlined in the draft plan. The school must respond within **15 calendar days**. If the school declines, other schools will be consulted, and they too must respond within **15 calendar days**.

It is considered good practice for the social worker, carer and birth parents (if appropriate) visit the proposed school before it is named in the plan. If appropriate, this visit may be supported by the Virtual School Officer. Once a school is named, the child or young person should be supported in visiting the school and offered the same transition support as any other pupil.

Once a school has been named in the draft plan, the Education, Health and Care Plan can be finalised.

Once the Child or Young Person Has an Education, Health and Care Plan

The Education, Health and Care Plan will be reviewed annually. The review meeting, usually chaired by the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator, will evaluate the impact of the strategies and interventions used and may recommend amendments to the plan. It is standard practice for the coordinator to write an individual education plan for the child, outlining the strategies and interventions to be used by teachers and other professionals to meet the child's identified needs.

The Special Educational Needs Coordinator and the Designated Teacher must work closely together to promote the achievement of Cared For Children with special educational needs and disabilities. They should ensure that all teachers and support staff understand the implications of the child being both looked after and having special educational needs, and that appropriate teaching strategies are in place and regularly monitored for effectiveness.

To avoid duplication of plans for Cared For Children, it is advisable for the annual review of the Education, Health and Care Plan to be held at the same time as the Personal Education Plan meeting. The Personal Education Plan forms part of the child's care plan, and the information it contains will contribute to the review of the Education, Health and Care Plan.

When a Cared For Child lives outside the area of the local authority responsible for their care, the local authority in which they reside is responsible for maintaining and funding their Education, Health and Care Plan. This authority must review the plan at least annually and make amendments where necessary.

If a Cared For Child with an Education, Health and Care Plan moves to a different local authority area, the authority that maintains the plan must send it to the new area authority.

Post 16

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice makes it clear that sixth forms, further education colleges and training providers should promote high aspirations for students with special educational needs. They must offer careers guidance and make every effort to support young people in achieving their ambitions.

Transitions can be particularly challenging for Cared For Children. When a Cared For Child aged 14 to 16 is considering a college course as part of their Key Stage Four offer or is preparing to transition to college after Key Stage Four, this process should be carefully planned in consultation between the current school and the college. It is good practice for the young person to be given a tour of the college facilities, to meet prospective tutors, and to have their views and aspirations taken into account. The college has a duty to ensure the young person knows who to approach for support at all times.

From the age of 13 onwards, all annual reviews must include a focus on preparation for adulthood.

Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium Plus is funding allocated to local authorities to support the educational needs of Cared For Children, as outlined in their Personal Education Plans.

The amount each local authority receives is based on an allocation of £2,570 per child. This applies to children of statutory school age who have been in care for at least one day, as recorded in specific data returns. The confirmed amount for the financial year 2025/26 is £2,630, although this is subject to review and may change. Guidance from the Department for Education on Pupil Premium Plus can be viewed [here](#).

This funding is allocated according to the financial year. If it is not spent, it cannot be carried forward by Hillingdon Virtual School to the next financial year. Any unspent funds are returned to the Department for Education.

Pupil Premium Plus is managed by the Virtual School Headteacher. This is based on the principle that the Headteacher is best placed to determine how the funding can be used to maximise educational outcomes for Cared For Children within the local authority.

Virtual School Headteacher's Responsibilities

When deciding how to use Pupil Premium Plus funding, the Headteacher of the Virtual School will consider the following:

- The use of Pupil Premium Plus should contribute to meeting the needs identified and recorded in the child's Personal Education Plan.
- There is no requirement for the Headteacher to allocate Pupil Premium Plus funding directly to schools. They may choose to do so in full, in part, or not at all, depending on the child's individual needs and the school's ability to demonstrate appropriate use and measurable impact.
- Where funding is passed on to schools, it may be provided as a single payment or in instalments.
- The funding should be used according to the specific needs of each child. Some children may receive more or less than others, depending on their circumstances.
Although the funding is allocated on a per-child basis, it is not an entitlement.
- Allocation of Pupil Premium Plus should be clearly linked to the content and targets outlined in the child's Personal Education Plan.
- Pupil Premium Plus may be pooled to support activities that benefit Cared For Children across the local authority more holistically.
- In agreement with Hillingdon Virtual School, schools with more than one Cared For Child may choose to pool their funding to provide additional support, such as employing a teaching assistant.
- There is no requirement to pass on Pupil Premium Plus funding to non-maintained schools.
- The Virtual School Headteacher must be able to demonstrate how the use of Pupil Premium Plus funding contributes to raising educational achievement for Cared For Children within the local authority.

- A full account of all Pupil Premium Plus spending must be maintained to enable reporting on its use and effectiveness. At a minimum, the Headteacher is required to report annually on the use of this funding.

While Pupil Premium Plus cannot be used to fund posts that are the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parent, it may be used to support *‘the work of a person where it can be very clearly demonstrated that their role has a significant contribution to promoting the educational achievement of Cared For Children by the authority.’*

Pupil Premium Plus is also paid in respect of children who have ceased to be looked after due to adoption, special guardianship, residence, or child arrangements orders, provided they were looked after for at least one day in the preceding financial year. This funding is paid directly to schools and is not monitored by the Virtual School Headteacher.

Hillingdon Virtual School’s Approach to Pupil Premium Plus

- Hillingdon Virtual School allocates Pupil Premium Plus funding to schools on a monthly basis. Where possible, this will be the month following the Personal Education Plan meeting. However, this depends on the timing of the meeting. For example, if a meeting is held in early October, funding will be released in November. If the meeting takes place in mid to late October, funding will be released in December. The Virtual School Officer will confirm the expected release date of funds during the Personal Education Plan meeting.
- Schools may request up to £2,000 per academic year.
- The Headteacher of the Virtual School will allocate funding based on the targets agreed during the Personal Education Plan meeting.

Working with Schools

The Virtual School Headteacher has had responsibility for managing the Pupil Premium Plus grant since April 2014. Guidance from the Department for Education states:

“The grant allocation for Cared For Children must be managed by the Virtual School Head to be used for the benefit of the Cared For Child’s educational needs as described in their Personal Education Plan”.

The Virtual School Headteacher has the discretion to withhold payment if this condition is not met. However, Hillingdon Virtual School aims to work collaboratively with schools to build on the good practices already established within Hillingdon’s Schools.

Virtual School staff are available to provide advice and guidance on effective use of the funding and monitor its impact through Personal Education Plans and termly evaluations.

All schools and educational settings are encouraged to have a Pupil Premium Plus policy approved by their Governing Body. This policy should outline the role of school staff in ensuring the effective use of the funding, the process for monitoring expenditure, and the approach to evaluating its impact on pupil progress.

The Governing Body should also be aware of the requirement to publish information about Pupil Premium Plus on the school's website. Since September 2012, schools have been required to publish details of how they have used the funding to improve attainment and outcomes for Cared For Children. It is also considered good practice to include this information in the Designated Teacher's Annual Report to the Governing Body.

Pupil Premium Plus should not be used to pay for items or activities that are already covered by foster carers' allowances or provided through the corporate parent pledge. This includes standard school trips, regular out-of-school activities, and access to a laptop.

Ofsted and Pupil Premium Plus

Ofsted now places a sharper focus on the performance and progress of pupils supported by Pupil Premium Plus during inspections. It is unlikely that a school will be judged as 'outstanding' if its disadvantaged pupils, including Cared For Children, are not making good progress. Schools that are found not to be using their Pupil Premium Plus funding effectively will be expected to commission an external review, led by a system leader, to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils.

Inspectors may ask the following questions during an inspection:

- Is the school making effective and efficient use of the pupil premium for its Cared For Children?
- Does the PEP identify the needs of the child/young person and show the interventions and support the school will provide to secure accelerated progress?
- Are the targets in the PEP sufficiently challenging and do they reflect high expectations?
- Is impact evaluated?

Inspectors may expect the following:

- A list of all Cared For Children on the school roll with an indication of the PPP spend for each.
- To be able to triangulate this by examining a random sample of personal education plans to determine if the assertion in the list can be evidenced at the level of the individual pupil?
- Data on the destination of the secondary looked after cohort post-16 as evidence of the degree to which the PPP spend has supported progression.

Post-16 Pupil Premium Plus Grant

The Post-16 Pupil Premium Plus grant was introduced nationally in April 2023, extending funding to all eligible Virtual Schools in England. Unlike statutory Pupil Premium Plus (which is allocated per statutory school-aged child), this post-16 funding is provided as a block grant to each local authority to support children above statutory school age. It is not calculated on a per-child basis, allowing for greater flexibility in how support is delivered.

The grant aims to:

- Extend educational support beyond age 16
- Improve attendance, retention, and attainment
- Reduce the risk of young people becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Enable flexible, needs-led support
- Build an evidence base to inform future policy

While individual funding requests can be made through a young person's Personal Education Plan in post-16, linked to specific targets, most of the grant is devolved to strategic projects. These may include:

- Evening classes to support English and Maths attainment
- NEET prevention and mentoring programmes
- Transition support for care leavers in further education or training

Post 16

This section explains some of the local authority's responsibilities towards young people who are Cared For as they make the transition to adulthood, and the routes open to them beyond 16 in education, training and employment.

Pathway Plans

For all children who will be 16 by 31 August, statutory school age ends on the last Friday of June in that year. However, young people are required to remain in some form of education, training, or employment until at least the age of 18.

To support their transition to adulthood, young people who are Cared For will have a pathway plan. An assessment for this plan must be completed within **six weeks** of the young person's 16th birthday. The plan identifies their needs as they move into adulthood and outlines the advice, assistance, and support required to meet those needs. The Personal Education Plan continues until the young person turns 18 and forms part of the pathway plan.

In respect of their education, the Personal Education Plan and pathway plan should include:

- The young person's aspirations and career ambitions and actions and support to achieve this
- Access to careers advice
- Education objectives and support
- Arrangements to support the young person in further or higher education
- Support to enable suitably qualified young people to enter apprenticeships, make applications to university or gain necessary qualifications
- Arrangements for work experience, career mentoring or pathways into employment.

Pathway plans are kept under review and maintained until the young person reaches the age of 21, or 25 if they remain engaged in education or training.

Once the young person turns 18, a Personal Adviser is responsible for maintaining contact, providing advice and support, coordinating services, and participating in reviews of the pathway plan. The Personal Adviser ensures that the young person is properly supported in education, training, or employment, in line with their wishes and needs. In some cases, the child's social worker may also fulfil the role of Personal Adviser alongside their other duties.

Educational Pathways Beyond Age 16

Post-16 educational pathways cater to a wide range of abilities and prior attainment. Some examples include:

- **A Levels:** Subject-based qualifications that can lead to university, further study, training, or employment. Students typically study at least three subjects over two years.
- **BTECs:** Designed for young people interested in a particular sector or industry but who may not yet be certain of their career path. Students can study up to Level 3 post-

16 and are awarded a pass, merit, distinction, or distinction*. A Level 3 BTEC is equivalent to one or two A Levels.

- **T Levels:** Two-year courses broadly equivalent to three A Levels. These prepare students for skilled employment, apprenticeships, or further technical study. T Levels combine classroom learning with an industry placement of at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days).
- **NVQs:** National Vocational Qualifications help young people develop workplace skills. Available at five levels and in over 1,000 subjects, National Vocational Qualifications are assessed through portfolios and observation. Levels 1–3 typically take one year to complete.
- **Access Courses:** Designed for young people aged 18 and over who do not have traditional qualifications (GCSEs or A-Levels) but wish to return to education and progress to university. These courses usually take one year to complete.
- **Apprenticeships and Traineeships:** Apprenticeships combine practical job training with study while earning a wage. They can take 1–4 years to complete depending on the level:
 - ❖ Intermediate – Equivalent to 5 GCSEs
 - ❖ Advanced – Equivalent to 2 A Levels
 - ❖ Higher – Can lead to NVQ Level 4 and above, or a foundation degree
 A **traineeship** is a short course with work experience, lasting up to six months, designed to prepare young people for employment or an apprenticeship. Traineeships may also include support with English and Maths if needed.

16 - 19 Bursary

Young people aged 16 to 19 who are Cared For by the local authority are eligible to apply for the 16–19 Bursary Fund to help with education-related costs. This applies if they are studying at a school or college (not university or apprenticeship) in England, or are enrolled on a training course, including unpaid work experience.

The bursary can be used by the young person or their education or training provider to cover costs such as clothing, books, equipment for their course, transport, and lunch on days they attend study or training.

The maximum bursary payment is **£1,200 per year**. Each education or training provider sets their own policy for how the 16–19 Bursary is managed and distributed. The team supporting each young person will help ensure they receive the bursary, understand how it is paid, and know what it can be used for.

The Care Leaver Apprenticeship Bursary

The Care Leaver Apprenticeship Bursary provides £3,000 to eligible apprentices who are care-experienced or currently cared for, helping to reduce financial barriers and support the successful completion of their training.

Introduced nationally in August 2023, the bursary is paid in three instalments of £1,000 over the first year of the apprenticeship. It can be used for any purpose the apprentice chooses –

such as travel, equipment, or living costs – and is not taxed or counted as income for Universal Credit.

The bursary is claimed by the training provider, who then passes the payments directly to the apprentice.

Higher Education Bursary

Care-experienced students starting a UCAS-recognised university course can receive a one-off payment of £2,000 from their local authority. This bursary is applied for through the young person's Personal Adviser and can be used for anything that supports their studies, such as rent, travel, or equipment.

Accommodation

Many young people are expected to live semi-independently once they turn 16. When considering this type of accommodation, the social worker must give careful consideration to the young person's educational needs.

For example, young people in semi-independent accommodation are required to manage a reduced budget, shop for groceries, cook meals, and clean their living space – responsibilities that their peers may not yet face, as many still live at home with parental support. This can place them at a considerable disadvantage, particularly during critical periods of their education.

It is essential that, if a young person is being moved to semi-independent accommodation, their school or college is informed so that appropriate support can be put in place.

Young people should never be moved in the run-up to or during public examinations.

Support for Care Experienced Young People Aged 18+

Hillingdon Virtual School continues to offer advice and guidance to care-experienced young people aged 18 and over. Moving forward, young people – or their Personal Adviser or key worker – can contact the team for signposting and support via: virtualschoolpost18@hillington.gov.uk.

With consent gathered at the final Personal Education Plan, the Virtual School maintains contact to share opportunities such as evening classes, career events, and tailored support. Young people can also request one-to-one careers sessions and are regularly invited to half-term library events with our qualified careers adviser.

For a full overview of available support, visit: [Care leavers' local offer - Hillingdon Council](#)

Hillingdon Virtual School Extended Duties – Children with a Social Worker

Children with a Social Worker – Who Are They?

Children with a Social Worker are defined as those currently being supported under a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan. These children are considered to be in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Children are supported by social care through these plans when there are safeguarding concerns. A Child in Need plan is a consent-based intervention for children whose basic needs are not currently being met by those with parental responsibility. A Child Protection plan is a statutory intervention for children who are deemed to be at significant risk of harm.

Child in Need Plans

When a child is supported under a Child in Need plan, the social worker will determine the category of need, which is recorded in the child's social care file. The category of need will be one of the following:

- Absent parenting
- Abuse or neglect
- Disability
- Family dysfunction
- Family in acute stress
- Low income
- Parental illness or disability
- Socially unacceptable behaviour

Child Protection Plans

When a child is supported under a Child Protection plan, the plan must be agreed at a Child Protection Conference. During the initial conference, core group members vote on the category of need as part of the risk assessment. The social worker will also record their view within their evidence. The Child Protection Chair will then confirm the category of need with the core group.

The category of need may change during subsequent review conferences. The four possible categories of need under a Child Protection plan are:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse

The Extended Remit of the Virtual School Head

Under the non-statutory guidance [Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension](#), the Department for Education has extended the role of the Virtual School Headteacher to include strategic support aimed at improving educational outcomes for children with a social worker. This extension was informed by the [Review of Children in Need \(2019\)](#), which

found that children with a social worker perform less well across all areas of education compared to their peers without social care involvement.

Since their inception, Virtual Schools have successfully narrowed the gap in academic attainment and holistic educational outcomes for children who are Cared For. The Department for Education is keen to replicate this success for all children with a social worker.

This extended remit is a strategic role in which Virtual School Headteachers are expected to champion and promote the education of children with a social worker by:

- Making visible the disadvantages these children may experience, and enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities – including children’s social care – to help all agencies hold high aspirations for them
- Promoting practices that support children’s engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting is a key factor in helping to keep children safe from harm
- Levelling up outcomes to narrow the attainment gap, ensuring every child has the opportunity to reach their potential – including supporting recovery from the educational impact of the pandemic

Virtual School Headteachers are **not** expected to:

- Work directly with individual children and their families, including tracking and monitoring individual educational progress or providing academic interventions
- Respond to requests from parents or carers for advice, intervention, or support in relation to individual children with a social worker
- Take responsibility for children with special educational needs and disabilities who do not require or have a social worker

To improve outcomes for children with a social worker, Virtual School Headteachers have flexibility to meet local needs. However, there are specific activities that are critical for all:

- Enhancing partnerships between education settings and the local authority to enable child-focused collaboration
- Identifying the needs of the cohort and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes to support educational progress
- Offering advice and support to key professionals – including social workers, designated safeguarding leads, designated teachers, and school leaders – to help children make progress, including increasing confidence in using evidence-based interventions

The Team Around the Child

Every child is unique and has specific needs that require tailored support. The individuals involved in providing this support form what is known as the team around the child. This team may vary depending on the child’s circumstances, but its purpose remains the same: to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare and to help them realise their full potential.

It is essential that the child remains at the centre of all thinking and actions taken by members of the team. Both legal and moral responsibilities require that the child's best interests are prioritised in every decision and intervention.

The Parent or Legal Guardian:

When a child is supported under a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan, full parental responsibility remains with the parents or legal guardian. There is no shared parental responsibility with the local authority. Therefore, all decision-making and day-to-day care for the child continues to be the responsibility of their parents or legal guardian. As a Child Protection plan is a statutory intervention, parents or legal guardians are required to engage with the support and interventions put in place by social care. Their responsibilities include:

- Encouraging and supporting their child to have a positive attitude towards education and helping them to succeed
- Supporting good school attendance
- Maintaining regular communication with the school
- Advocating for their child's needs
- Providing adequate space at home for the child to complete homework
- Attending parents' evenings and other school-related events

The Social Worker:

Every child supported under a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan has an allocated social worker from the local authority. The social worker's role is to coordinate the team around the child, ensuring that all safeguarding concerns are shared and addressed. They are responsible for creating the child's support plan – either a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan – which outlines the required interventions and identifies who is responsible for delivering each element of support.

It is considered best practice for the child's allocated social worker to attend all meetings related to the child's education, particularly for those supported under a Child Protection plan.

The Child Protection Advisor:

When a child is supported under a Child Protection plan, they will have an allocated Child Protection Advisor who chairs both the initial and review Child Protection conferences. The role of the Child Protection Advisor is to assess and advise on the risk of significant harm to the child.

During conferences, the Child Protection Advisor holds professionals within the team around the child to account, ensuring that all views and decisions are supported by clear evidence. A key part of their role is to maximise the involvement of families in the Child Protection process and to work collaboratively with them to support meaningful change.

Following the initial conference, review conferences are held at least every six months, or sooner if deemed necessary by the Child Protection Advisor.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead:

The Designated Safeguarding Lead holds overall responsibility for safeguarding at the education setting where the child is enrolled. This individual sees the child regularly and is responsible for sharing any safeguarding concerns with the allocated social worker.

Children with a social worker often face additional barriers to education. Therefore, the Designated Safeguarding Lead is expected to adapt and develop appropriate interventions within the school and act as an advocate for the child to help them reach their full potential.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should be the main point of contact at the school for all professionals involved in the team around the child, and regular communication is expected.

Health (Health Visitor or School Nurse):

Local authorities work in partnership with health services to ensure that the health and wellbeing of children with a social worker are effectively promoted. Designated nurses or health visitors play a key role in supporting this work by helping to develop health plans that may influence or contribute to any Education, Health and Care Plan.

Barriers to Education for Children with a Social Worker

The following data is based on the findings of the Review of Children in Need 2019 which formed the basis of the extension of Virtual School Headteacher role.

Attainment

According to the *Children in Need Review (2019)*, children with a social worker consistently perform worse than their peers at every stage of their education. This includes academic outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage Two, and Key Stage Four.

For example, at the end of Key Stage Four, children with a social worker are half as likely to achieve a strong pass in English and mathematics compared to their peers. Among those who had a social worker during their GCSE year, 50% had still not achieved any Level 2 qualifications by the age of 21, compared to just 11% of young people who had not needed a social worker.

Attendance

During the 2021-2022 academic year, children with a social worker were twice as likely to be absent from school compared to their peers. They were also three times more likely to be persistently absent. A child is considered persistently absent when their school attendance falls below 90 percent.

Holistic Outcomes

Children with a social worker face a range of challenges that extend beyond academic performance. They are two to four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers and are suspended at significantly higher rates. Additionally, they are over ten times more likely to attend state-funded alternative provision settings, which often reflect underlying difficulties in mainstream education. These children are also more likely to experience social, emotional, and mental health issues, which can further impact their ability to engage with and succeed in education.

Social Care Escalation

More than half of children who enter care have previously been supported under a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan within the five years prior to becoming looked after.

Why?

There is no single, definitive reason why children with a social worker face additional barriers to education. However, it is known that they are more likely to have experienced trauma, including emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or neglect. These traumatic experiences can significantly affect emotional resilience, self-esteem, and confidence – all of which are critical to a child's ability to engage with and succeed in education. In addition, children with a social worker often experience multiple transitions, such as moving home or school, and frequent changes in the professionals supporting them and their families. These disruptions can further compound the challenges they face in maintaining stability and progress in their education.

Hillingdon Virtual School Support for Children with a Social Worker

Master Spreadsheet

A master spreadsheet is maintained for all children with a social worker currently open to Hillingdon's social care. Within this master, the following information is recorded for each child:

- Identity
- Category of need under Child in Need or Child Protection plan
- School details
- Unique Pupil Number
- Sessions missed due to suspensions
- Attendance
- Open Elective Home Education referral
- Open Children Missing Education referral
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Eligibility for free school meals

A closed master spreadsheet is also maintained for children whose cases have closed to social care during the past academic year. A new master spreadsheet is created for each academic year, and the previous year's master is archived.

New Starter Process

A report is received weekly showing the children who have opened, closed, stepped up, or stepped down from either a Child in Need or Child Protection plan within the past week. These children are then added, removed, or moved between the master spreadsheets and as required.

Checks are also completed to identify any special educational needs and disabilities (including Special Educational Needs Support and Education, Health and Care Plans), as well as whether the child is eligible for free school meals.

Hillingdon Virtual School complete initial checks of the child's file to identify any recorded educational concerns. These are noted on the new starter check.

An email is sent to the networks of all new children – regardless of whether a concern has been identified – signposting the Children with a Social Worker clinic and the frequently asked questions page to the child's allocated social worker and the school the child attends. This is intended to encourage professionals to seek support where there are concerns for the child, giving the child the best chance of achieving positive outcomes.

Education Disruption Master Spreadsheet

The education disruption master spreadsheet holds a record of all children with a social worker who are also open to the following teams:

- Children Missing Education

- Elective Home Education
- Post-16
- Youth Justice Service

The spreadsheet contains identity information as well as the referral date to the team the child is known to. This is used to monitor and reduce disruption to the education of children with a social worker.

During monthly meetings between Hillingdon Virtual School and each relevant team, the education disruption master spreadsheet is updated with the information and updates shared. Actions are discussed for both Hillingdon Virtual School and the other education team(s) to ensure a multi-agency approach in supporting the child's education.

Attendance Monitoring

Attendance for children with a social worker is automatically pulled into System C, where Hillingdon Virtual School conduct weekly attendance checks for the cohort, identifying:

- Average attendance
- The number of children for whom schools have not reported attendance
- The number of persistently absent children with a social worker and the schools they attend
- The number of severely absent children with a social worker and the schools they attend

Where trends are identified – particularly for severely absent children with attendance below fifty percent – the team contacts the professionals around the child to offer support and gather further context regarding the child's attendance.

Hospital Learner Team Around the Child Meetings

The majority of children who are inpatients in hospital are also children with a social worker. A policy has been developed for the education of Hillingdon's hospital learners, whereby a Team Around the Child meeting is chaired by the local authority with a focus on the education the child will receive while in hospital. This applies to all children, not only those with a social worker.

The aim of the Team Around the Child meeting is to:

- Quality assure the education the child is receiving while an inpatient
- Ensure the child's home school maintains active involvement in their education
- Encourage professionals and families to be proactive in planning for the child's reintegration into education in the community upon discharge from hospital

To view the policy, please click [here](#).

Suspension and Exclusion Monitoring

Hillingdon Virtual School conduct weekly checks of all suspensions and permanent exclusions across the borough to identify whether any children with a social worker have

received either sanction in the past week. This information is recorded on the Children with a Social Worker suspensions and exclusions master spreadsheet, where the total number of suspensions and sessions missed per child and school are documented and analysed.

When a child reaches ten sessions of suspension (equivalent to five days), the team contacts the network around the child to discuss the reasons for the suspensions and to explore avenues of support to prevent further suspensions.

When a child is permanently excluded from school, the pilot at The Skills Hub is initiated, and Hillingdon Virtual School offers support through the Team Around the Child protocol.

Team Around the Child Plan for Excluded Children Known to Social Care

When a child with a social worker is permanently excluded from school, Hillingdon Virtual School attends their initial intake meeting at The Skills Hub – the local authority’s main alternative provision provider. During this meeting, a member of the team chairs a Team Around the Child meeting, based on the Personal Education Plan model used for Looked After Children.

The team around the child meeting aims to bring together the professionals around the child to ensure appropriate support is in place, giving the child the best chance of success following permanent exclusion. There is a strong focus on the child’s progress against set targets, with the overall goal of reintegration into a mainstream provision where appropriate.

High Risk Panel

Hillingdon Virtual School attends Hillingdon’s monthly High-Risk Panel. Through participation in the panel, the team provides advice, guidance, and signposting for children identified as being at high risk of criminal or sexual exploitation.

The panel also offers an opportunity to raise and identify wider educational challenges or emerging trends within the cohort and serves as a forum for roundtable discussion with the multi-agency group.

Fair Access Panel

Hillingdon Virtual School attends the monthly Fair Access Panel, where they advocate for the most appropriate school placement for children with a social worker who are being presented.

Children are presented at the Fair Access Panel when they have not been successful in gaining a school place through the usual admissions route and meet the qualifying criteria. For children with a social worker, they are eligible for presentation under the following additional criterion:

Children either subject to a Child in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan, or having had a Child in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan within 12 months at the point of being referred to the Fair Access Panel.

A child with a social worker may be presented for several reasons, including:

- Those without a school place

→ Those reintegrating into a mainstream school from an alternative provision

Project Manager Role

The Project Manager holds a strategic position, analysing current trends and patterns within Hillingdon's cohort of children with a social worker. The aim is to identify areas where training is needed for professionals working directly with these children. This role will remain in place until the end of 2025.

Support Available to Professionals Working with Children with a Social Worker

Training

Hillingdon Virtual School offers a varied programme of training opportunities for schools and social workers focused on the education of children with a social worker. These sessions are delivered both internally and by commissioned external providers. The offer includes, but is not limited to:

- Lunch and Learn Sessions
- Training in collaboration with other teams e.g. attendance support
- Attachment Lead in Schools Training
- Flourish Education Training
- Sessions on Trauma with Dr Karen Treisman

Clinics

Online clinic slots are available each week for schools and social workers to receive advice, guidance, and signposting regarding educational concerns for a specific child with a social worker, or to discuss wider educational challenges affecting this cohort.

Both schools and social workers can follow the link below to book a clinic slot: [Hillingdon Virtual School Education Clinic 2025-2026 - Extended Duties](#)

Child in Need / Child Protection Meeting Attendance

Where requested, a member of Hillingdon Virtual School may attend a Child in Need or Child Protection meeting for a child to discuss educational challenges and offer advice and guidance to the team around the child collectively.

It is important to note that the extended remit of the Virtual School Headteacher is strategic rather than operational. Therefore, attendance at multiple Child in Need or Child Protection meetings will only occur under exceptional circumstances.

Pupil Premium

Pupil Premium is a grant awarded to state-funded schools in England to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils aged 5–16 years. Funding is allocated to eligible schools based on the number of:

- Pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals (FSM), or who have been recorded as eligible within the past six years
- Children previously looked after by a local authority

This means that not all children with a social worker will qualify for the Pupil Premium grant.

Schools should view the Pupil Premium grant not as a personal budget for individual pupils, but rather as a pool of funding that can be used for whole-class or whole-school interventions.

To develop and deliver an effective Pupil Premium strategy, schools should use data from internal and external assessments to identify the challenges faced by their disadvantaged pupils. Schools should also draw on external evidence, including the [‘What Works’ evaluations and the menu of approaches](#) provided by the Education Endowment Foundation.

Schools should allocate funding to target three key areas:

- **Tier 1: High-quality teaching**
(e.g. developing high-quality teaching, assessment, a broad and balanced curriculum, mentoring and coaching for teachers)
- **Tier 2: Targeted academic support**
(e.g. small group intervention, specific SEND interventions, effective deployment of teaching assistants)
- **Tier 3: Wider strategies**
(e.g. supporting pupils’ social, emotional and behavioural needs, improving attendance, access to extra-curricular activities)

Support for Children in Kinship Care Arrangements, Previously Cared For Children and Adopted Children

Kinship Care Arrangements

Across England, there are more than 130,000 children living in kinship care arrangements. These fall into two categories: **formal** and **informal**. Within each category, there are different types of arrangements.

Formal Kinship Care Arrangements

→ **Kinship Foster Care**

A family member or friend is assessed and becomes an approved foster carer for the child. They receive a regular foster care allowance to help support the child. The child is in the care of children's services, who share parental responsibility with the child's birth parents.

→ **Private Foster Care**

When someone who is not a child's parent or close relative looks after them for 28 days or more. The arrangement is agreed by the individual and the child's parents, and should be reported to the local authority for a short assessment. Private foster carers may make day-to-day decisions for the child, but birth parents retain full parental responsibility.

→ **Special Guardianship Order**

A legal order granted by the family court. The child continues to live with the carer until they reach 18 years old. Parental responsibility is shared with the child's parents, but most major decisions can be made without parental involvement.

→ **Child Arrangements Order**

A legal order granted by the family court, usually lasting until the child is 18 years old. Parental responsibility is shared between the carer and the child's birth parents. The carer can make day-to-day decisions, but major decisions must involve the birth parents.

→ **Testamentary Guardianship**

A person formally appointed in writing by a parent or special guardian. If no one else holds parental responsibility, the testamentary guardian assumes it upon the death of the parent or special guardian.

Informal Kinship Care Arrangements

- A close relative, distant relative, or family friend looks after the child. Parental responsibility remains with the child's birth parents, and no court orders are in place.

Previously Cared For Children

Previously Cared For Children are those who are no longer looked after by a local authority in England or Wales because they are the subject of an adoption, Special Guardianship Order, or Child Arrangements Order. This also includes children who were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales.

These children are often referred to nationally as *Previously Looked After Children*. However, Hillingdon has adopted the term *Previously Cared For Children* to reflect its local language and approach.

Please refer to the [Kinship Care Arrangements section](#) for further details regarding Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangements Orders.

Adopted Children

When a child is adopted, their adoptive parents gain full parental responsibility. The legal and permanent link between the child and their birth parents is severed.

Barriers to Education for Children in Kinship Care Arrangement, Previously Cared For Children and Adopted Children

When a child is raised by someone other than their birth parents, it is likely they have experienced adverse childhood experiences, abuse, and/or neglect in their early life or prior to moving in with family, friends, or adoptive parents. As these children may not have current involvement with children's services, professionals can sometimes overlook or be unaware of their experiences of trauma and associated attachment difficulties.

It is essential that all children in kinship care arrangements and all adopted children are supported using trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice, based on relational approaches, to best support their academic success.

The barriers to education for these children will vary between individuals. However, they are likely to experience similar challenges to those currently supported by social workers. Please refer to the earlier section of this handbook outlining these [barriers](#).

Support Available

Hillingdon Virtual School has developed a bank of resources to address frequently asked education questions for children living in Kinship Care Arrangements and Adopted Children. These resources can be accessed via [LEAP](#) or by contacting the team at: virtualschoolcsw@hillingdon.gov.uk. Carers and adoptive parents can request access to resources by emailing: virtualschoolplac@hillingdon.gov.uk.

The team also offers advice, guidance, and signposting regarding any educational concerns for these children through online clinics. To book a clinic for a child in a Kinship Care Arrangement or an Adopted Child, professionals **must** obtain consent from the carer or adoptive parent prior to booking. Professionals can book a clinic using the following link: [Hillingdon Virtual School Education Clinic 2025-2026 - Extended Duties](#)

Adoptive parents and carers with Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangements Orders can also contact Hillingdon Virtual School directly for information, advice, and guidance regarding their child's education: virtualschoolplac@hillingdon.gov.uk.

Pupil Premium Plus

The availability of funding depends on the type of kinship care arrangement the child is living in. Pupil Premium Plus is funding provided to schools in England for children currently in care or those who were previously in the care of a local authority. This funding is not a personal budget for individual Previously Cared For Children; however, it must be used by schools to improve educational outcomes for children who were previously in care.

Early Years Pupil Premium Plus

- Approximately £380 per year is available, paid directly to the provider (e.g. nursery or childminder).
- The following eligibility criteria must be met. The child must:
 - ❖ Be under 5 years old
 - ❖ Be attending a nursery or childminder
 - ❖ Have been cared for by a local authority and left care through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order, or a Child Arrangements Order

Pupil Premium Plus for Previously Cared For Children

- Approximately £2,500 per year is paid directly to schools for children who:
 - ❖ Are of statutory school age
 - ❖ Are on roll at a school
 - ❖ Were cared for by a local authority and left care through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order, or a Child Arrangements Order
- Carers must contact their child's school to confirm eligibility and provide proof. The school must then record this in the autumn census.
- If the child changes school, carers will need to declare their status again.
- Schools typically consult with carers and other key agencies or stakeholders to determine how best to use the funding. It may be used to support academic progress as well as social and emotional development.
- Schools are required to publish how they have spent their Pupil Premium Plus funding annually. Carers can also speak to the school's Designated Teacher for further information.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund provides funding to local authorities to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive families, special guardianship families, and those with Child Arrangements Orders. Up to £3,000 is available per child per year for therapy or specialist assessment (up to £2,500). The Department for Education has confirmed funding until March 2026.

Families cannot apply for the funding directly; the local authority must apply on their behalf.

The fund is available for children and young people up to and including the age of 21, or up to 25 for those with an Education, Health and Care Plan. To be eligible, the child must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Are living (placed) with a family in England while waiting for adoption

- Were adopted from local authority care in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland and live in England
- Were adopted from abroad and live in England with a recognised adoption status
- Were in care before a Special Guardianship Order was made
- Left care under a special guardianship order that was subsequently changed to an adoption order, or vice versa
- Are under a residency order or child arrangement order and were previously cared for
- Were previously cared for but where the adoption, special guardianship, residency or Child Arrangements Order placement has broken down, irrespective of any reconciliation plans

[Further Reading / Useful Links](#)

[Hillingdon Virtual School Education Clinic 2025-2026 - Extended Duties](#)

[Kinship: Home | The Kinship care charity | England and Wales](#)

[Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK](#)

[Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK](#)
[Virtual School - Leap](#)