Telford & Wrekin Co-operative Council

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Supporting Previously Looked After Children & Children in Kinship Care Policy

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School

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2026-2027

Supporting Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) & Children in Kinship Care

Introduction

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This policy sets out how Telford & Wrekin Virtual School supports the educational achievement, attendance and progress of previously looked-after children (PLAC) and children in kinship care.

Since September 2018, local authorities have had a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children through the provision of information and advice delivered by the Virtual School Head (VSH). From September 2024, the remit of the Virtual School was extended to include championing better outcomes for children in kinship care.

For the purposes of this policy, the term *PLAC and kinship children* refers to previously looked-after children and children in kinship care unless stated otherwise. The Virtual School works in partnership with parents, carers, schools, early years settings and other professionals to promote educational success, remove barriers to learning and improve outcomes for children and young people. *The detailed legislative framework underpinning this policy is set out in the statutory guidance referenced throughout this document*

Role of the Virtual School Head for Previously Looked After Children & Children in Kinship Care

The role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) is to promote the educational achievement, attendance and progress of PLAC and kinship children through the provision of information, advice and strategic support. The duty applies from the point at which a child becomes eligible for funded early education until the end of compulsory education. The Virtual School supports educational settings within Telford & Wrekin regardless of where the child lives.

The Virtual School is not the corporate parent for PLAC or kinship children. Any direct involvement with an individual child must be undertaken with the consent of the person who holds parental responsibility.

As a minimum, the Virtual School will:

- Respond to requests for advice and information from parents and carers.
- Provide advice to schools, early years settings and alternative provision.
- Promote good practice and raise awareness of the needs of PLAC and kinship children.
- Support the effective use of Pupil Premium Plus for eligible previously looked-after children.
- Champion improved attendance, attainment, progress and inclusion for kinship children.

Any intervention in the education of a previously looked-after child or child in kinship care must be with the agreement of the person(s) who have parental responsibility for the child. They, like all parents, are responsible for overseeing their child's progress in education.

VSHs will want to satisfy themselves that the child is eligible for support by asking the child's parents for evidence of their previously looked-after or kinship status. For children adopted outside England and Wales, the child must have been looked after by a public authority, a religious organisation or other provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society. Where parents are unable to provide clear evidence of their child's status, VSHs will need to use their discretion. In such circumstances, VSHs should discuss eligibility with the Designated Teacher at the child's school to agree a consistent approach.

What might providing information and advice look like?

- Providing advice and information to frequently asked questions online.
- Providing advice to individual parents/carers and schools where they have a query.
- Advising schools on how they can support previously looked after children & children in kinship care to improve behaviour to help avoid exclusion becoming necessary.
- Advising schools on how to best use Pupil Premium to support previously looked-after children (not applicable for children in kinship care).

Advice for Parents

The Virtual School aims to empower parents and carers to advocate effectively for their child throughout their educational journey. Advice and support can be provided on a range of educational issues and can be tailored to individual circumstances.

The Virtual School team have extensive experience in Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and specialist settings. All members of the Virtual School Team can be contacted through the Virtual School Inbox: virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

Advice may also relate to:

- how best to support the young person to make progress

- developing consistency between home and school in meeting the needs of the young person
- how to be an advocate for the young person in an education setting
- school admission arrangements
- special educational needs
- attendance
- suspensions and exclusions
- homework
- choosing GCSE options
- managing challenging behaviour
- promoting positive educational and recreational activities
- further education, employment and training options
- the Virtual School in collaboration with Attachment Research Community (ARC) are currently working with schools in relation to the Attachment and Trauma informed school accreditation programme.

As an underlying principle to our work with PLAC and children in kinship care, we respect the need for anonymity that some parents request. We will therefore not proactively contact parents of PLAC, but we will be available to advise and support if parents contact us.

Advice for Schools

The Virtual School works collaboratively with schools, academies, alternative provisions and early years settings to improve attendance, attainment, wellbeing and inclusion for PLAC and kinship children. Support is available through consultation, training, networking opportunities and targeted advice.

In accordance with the regulations (section 20 of the 2008 Children and Young People's Act and regulations) to promote the educational attainment of looked-after and previously looked after children including those aged 16-18 who are registered at the school, schools must appoint an identified staff member to undertake this role.

The Virtual School is also able to provide advice and support directly to schools to help them provide for the needs of PLAC.

This advice and support might include:

- Ensuring PPG+ is available for PLAC
- Using the PPG+ to provide appropriate interventions to meet the needs of the young people who were previously in care

- Developing high expectations and interventions to meet these expectations
- Whole-school approaches that promote inclusion, belonging and trauma-informed practice.
- Encouraging education settings to share expertise on strategies to support PLAC and in kinship care.
- Signposting other professionals who might provide further support, including health professionals as well as those in education.

The Virtual School provides ongoing support and training for Designated Teachers and Nominated Governors for children in care, previously looked after children, children in kinship care and children with a social worker. There are network meetings and an Annual VS Conference. In addition, the VST also offers a variety of training packages. Schools are requested to contact the VSHT/VST directly to discuss this.

For further reading, the Virtual School highly recommends:

Meeting the needs of adopted and permanently placed children – A guide for school staff; PAC-UK

Introduction and advice - Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) - Telford & Wrekin Council

Previously Looked After Children & Children in Kinship Care:

To meet the needs of adopted children & children in kinship care, schools need to recognise the impact of early life experiences. Having a key adult in school will allow for good communication between home and school. In your school, know who the PLAC are as identified by parents/guardians (parents/guardians are not required to disclose).

Pupil Premium Plus for PLAC – Compulsory School Age

Children who have ceased to be looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because of adoption, a special guardianship order, or a child arrangement order will have their entitlement to Pupil Premium Plus paid directly to the school. The school will need to work with the adoptive parents to ensure the status of the young person is recorded on the census return - the Pupil Premium Plus funding will then be received through the normal school funding routes. However, it is the right of the parents to decide whether to declare the status of the child or not. The school should not pursue parents to include this information if the parents choose not to.

There is no direct responsibility for the Virtual School Head to monitor the use of this Pupil Premium Plus and there is no expectation of a PEP. Children in kinship care arrangements have no PPG+ funding from the Virtual School. Looking after someone else's child - GOV.UK What is kinship care? - Kinship

Pupil Premium Plus for PLAC – Early Years

Children who have ceased to be looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because of adoption, a special guardianship order, or a child arrangement order will have their entitlement to Pupil Premium Plus paid directly to the setting (see eligibility criteria 9.1: Early years funding: 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK

The setting will need to liaise with the Early Years Funding Officer and provide evidence of the child's status. However, it is the right of the parents to decide whether to declare the

status of the child or not. The setting should not pursue parents to include this information if the parents choose not to.

The Virtual School strongly recommends to parents that they do declare the previously looked after status to the school or setting; this will enable the school/setting to access the PPG+/EY PPG+ funding and therefore provide additional support.

Admissions:

The schools should give looked-after children and previously looked-after children the highest priority on their admission arrangements. "Such children **must** take precedence over those on a waiting list and **cannot** be refused a place because of challenging behaviour."

The 2021 School Admissions Code requires children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England, and who have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted, to be given equal first priority in admission arrangements alongside looked after children (LAC) and children who were previously looked after by English local authorities (PLAC). The advice refers to these children as internationally adopted previously looked after children – "IAPLAC".

School admissions code 2021 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Role of Governors:

Governors should:

- Appoint a Designated Teacher in accordance with statutory guidance.
- Ensure the Designated Teacher receives appropriate training and professional development.
- Ensure appropriate monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place.
- Ensure the governing body has regard to current statutory guidance.

The governing body should ensure that the Designated Teacher:

- Contributes to a wider understanding of the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children.
- Is a member of teaching staff with sufficient seniority to influence whole-school practice.
- Has the skills, experience and authority to provide leadership, challenge, training and advice to colleagues.

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities - SEND:

SEND professionals must work closely with other relevant professionals including parents involved in the child's life to ensure that the child's **Education Health Care** plan works in

harmony with his/her **Adoption Care Plan** and transition **Personal Education Plan** so that it adds to, but does not duplicate, information about how education, health and care needs will be met. When referencing information contained within the EHC plan, the PEP should only include relevant information to the child's SEN from the looked after children care plan.

SEND Code of Practice - updated September 2024 SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

SEND Review – updated August 2024 - Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Mental Health and Well-Being:

Many looked-after, previously looked-after and kinship children have experienced significant disruption, loss or adversity in their early lives. These experiences can impact emotional wellbeing, relationships, behaviour and educational engagement. Schools should therefore adopt a trauma-informed and relational approach to supporting children and young people. Designated Teacher statutory guidance DfE - Feb 2018

Designated teachers are not expected to be mental health experts; however, they have an important role in working with other staff in school who link with mental health services ensuring they and other school staff can identify signs of potential issues and understand where the school can draw on specialist services, such as CAMHS and educational psychologists. Collectively with the VST as a multi-agency approach, we can advise schools further to understand the impact that trauma, attachment disorder and other mental health issues can have on Children in Care and previously looked-after children and their ability to engage in learning. The VST can support the school to become "attachment aware", i.e. ensuring that the school understands attachment theory and the impact of attachment disorders on a child's emotional development and learning, and adopt a whole school approach to identifying and supporting pupils with attachment difficulties. The VS offers a Youth Mental Health First Aider course via the T&W CPD booklet (at a cost) to support schools further.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024: policy summary - GOV.UK
Keeping children safe, helping families thrive - GOV.UK

Additional useful resources in addition to the VS website:

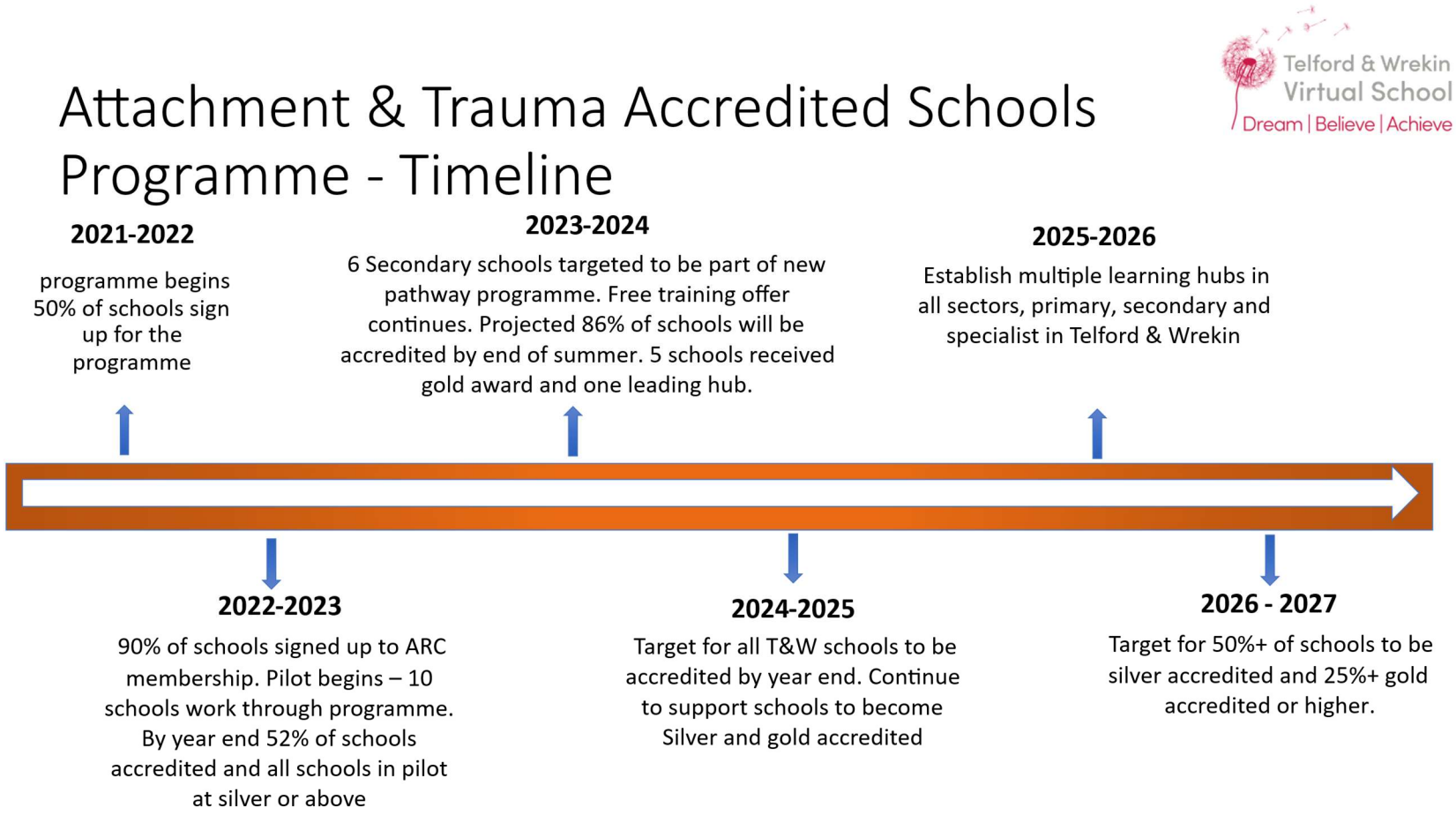
Emotional, mental health and wellbeing - Telford & Wrekin Council

Mentally healthy schools | Primary, secondary school and FE settings mental health resources (annafreud.org)

Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Attachment and Trauma Informed Schools - Relationship Model Approach:

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School is currently on an ambitious journey with local educational establishments to ensure they are all accredited through the Attachment Research Community (ARC). Membership has been purchased by the Virtual School for all Telford & Wrekin schools. [Attachment & Trauma Aware approaches in education | ARC (the-arc.org.uk)]



Appendix 1 Key Contacts

Service	What they can offer	Key contact details
Regional adoption agency for T&W, Shropshire, Stoke and Staffordshire	Together 4 Children – For adoption, for family… we're Together4Children Together4Children is a partnership between Shropshire Council, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. We are the regional adoption agency for the four councils. We also provide other services and initiatives that support children's permanency. The partnership is a new way of delivering our adoption services within your area. Working together means we can offer greater choice and a better support service for both children and adopters.	**0300 111 8044** **Contact form: https://www.together4children.co.uk/contact/**
Adoption UK	Adoption UK is the leading charity providing support, community and advocacy for all those parenting or supporting children who cannot live with their birth parents. They connect adoptive families, provide information and signposting on a range of adoption-related issues and campaign for improvements to adoption policy and legislation at the highest levels. With over 8,000 members, they provide a strong, supportive community and are the largest voice of adopters in the UK.	**0300 666 0006** helpline@adoptionuk.org.uk https://www.adoptionuk.org/contact-us
Family Rights Group	The Adoption Support Fund and Special Guardians The Adoption Support Fund pays for a range of therapeutic support for adopted children and their adoptive family and, since April 2016, for children cared for by Special Guardians who are eligible. The Adoption Support Fund is available to those Special Guardians living in England who obtained a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) for a child aged 21 and younger (or 25 and younger if they have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan) who was looked after immediately before the SGO was granted.	Family Rights Group Second Floor The Print House 18 Ashwin Street London E8 3DL **Telephone/Email: Advice** **Tel:** 0808 801 0366 Kinship carers - Family Rights Group (frg.org.uk)

For kinship carers - Kinship - The kinship care charity (previously Grandparents Plus)	Information about kinship care – whether you are an informal kinship carer, have a Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order or Care Order. Website offers advice pages and further support.	**Advice line:** 0300 123 7015 https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/talk-to-someone/contact-the-kinship-advice-team/
Kinship Compass (part of Kinship.org.uk)	An independent online information, advice and support hub just for kinship carers. Kinship Compass provide information, expert advice and support for every stage of your kinship care journey, tailored to your situation.	https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/kinship-compass/

Appendix 2 useful websites

Useful websites

Adoption UK Education Resources:
https://www.adoptionuk.org/pages/category/education-resources

PAC-UK education services:
https://www.pac-uk.org/our-services/education/

Beacon House resources:
https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/

First4Adoption
https://www.first4adoption.org.uk/adoption-support/education-support/

Coram Life Education – resources
https://www.coramlifeeducation.org.uk/

Together 4 Children – For adoption, for family… we're Together4Children
www.together4children.co.uk

Appendix 3

Key Terms and Definitions:

Adoption: Adoption is a way of providing new families for children who cannot be brought up by their biological parents. It is a legal procedure in which all parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters. Once an adoption has been granted, it cannot be reversed. An adopted child loses all legal ties with their birth parents and becomes a full member of the adoptive family, usually taking the family's name. Recently adopted children will be classed as looked after until the final court hearing (usually 6 months after placement in new family). Adopted children will remain the responsibility of the placing local authority for 3 years from the date of the adoption.

Child Arrangement Order (Residence Order): the granting of a residence order to someone automatically gives him or her parental responsibility for the child if they do not already have it. Parental responsibility obtained as a result of a residence order will continue until the order ceases or until the child is 16 unless the circumstances of the case are exceptional, and the court has ordered that it continue for longer.

Exit from Care

Children and young people can exit care for a number of reasons; including returning home to their family, being placed with a family member or put under a post care order; e.g. adoption, special guardianship.

Kinship Care

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or close family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them.

Legal parent

During Adoption, Parental Responsibility for a child is transferred from their birth parent or other person with Parental Responsibility to their adopters; it is a legal procedure. An adopted child loses all the legal ties with their original parents. It is a significant legal order and is not usually reversible. When an adoption order is made in respect of a child, the child becomes a full member of their new family, usually taking the family name, and assumes the same rights and privileges as if they had been born to the adoptive family, including the right of inheritance.

Private Fostering

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16, (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made

between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more. T&W Council have to be told about a child's living arrangements.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO): Special Guardianship was introduced as a permanence option for children in December 2005. It provides a legally secure foundation for building a permanent relationship between the child and their special guardian, while preserving the legal link between the child and their birth family. The order ceases when the child turns 18.

Title:	Supporting Previously Looked After Children & Children in Kinship Care		
Version:	1.0	Andy Cooke	14/9/18
	1.1	Andy Cooke	17/9/18
	1.2	Michelle Salter/Anna Loveland	13/9/19
	1.3	Michelle Salter/Anna Loveland	24/6/20
	1.4	Michelle Salter/Anna Loveland	13/7/21
	1.5	Michelle Salter	9/8/22
	1.6	Michelle Salter	18/5/23
	1.7	Michelle Salter/Zoe McLaughlin	1/7/24
	1.8	Michelle Salter/ Suzy Rogers/ Zoe McLauglin/ Rebecca Best	1/06/25
	1.9	Michelle Salter	15/07/26