



Department  
for Education

# Virtual School Head Role Extension

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JUNE 2021

# Virtual School: Roles and Responsibilities

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- Statutory guidance (Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children February 2018) sets out duties  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>
- Local authorities have a duty to safeguard and to promote the welfare of children in care. This includes a particular duty to promote their educational achievement. Since April 2014, every local authority in England has had to appoint a Virtual School Head (VSH) to ensure that arrangements are in place to fulfil this duty and to improve educational experiences and outcomes.
- A VSH is supported by a Virtual School Team whose approach is to work with children in care as if they attend a single school.
- Local authorities are the ‘corporate parents’ for children in care

# Virtual School: Roles and Responsibilities

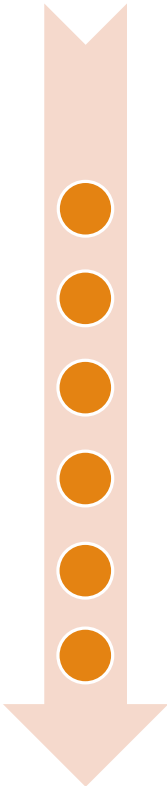
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- In September 2018, the statutory duty was extended to previously looked after children. These are children who had been looked after by the LA but who ceased to be so because of a child arrangements order, a special guardianship or an adoption order. We are required to make advice and information available for the purposes of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children.
- The role of the Designated Teacher for looked after and previously looked after children was made statutory in 2009 and the duties and requirements are laid out in statutory guidance, updated in 2018.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children>

# The role of the Virtual School Head

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The DfE Guidance outlined key areas of responsibility for the VSH :

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- To ensure CLA are in appropriate educational placements
  - To develop a system to track and monitor attainment and progress
  - To ensure a robust and effective Personal Education Plan (PEP) is in place
  - To provide challenge, support and training to all involved professionals
  - To champion the educational needs of CLA across and outside the authority
  - To manage the Pupil Premium Plus to ensure it is used to narrow the attainment gap

# The Children in Need review committed to explore extending the role of the Virtual School Head

**We know that at least 1.6 million children have had a social worker, the equivalent to 1 in 10 children or 3 children in every classroom. They fall behind their peers at every stage of their education, and poor outcomes persist even after social work involvement ends.**

- Most commonly, children with a social worker **experience abuse and neglect, often due to domestic abuse and mental ill-health.**
- They are in 98% of state schools, are almost 3 times more likely to be persistently absent, 3 times as likely to **have SEN**, almost 4 times as likely to be **claiming FSM**, nearly 6 times **as likely to have both FSM and SEN**
- They are **25% - 50% less likely to achieve a strong pass in English and Maths** (even after accounting for other factors e.g. SEND)
- In 19/20, CIN had **average attainment 8 scores of just 21**, compared to 50 for all pupils.

## **2018: DfE Children in Need Review launches**

- A manifesto commitment, the review includes new analysis of CSC and education data.
- A literature review and call for evidence.
- Visits to schools and LAs to understand why poor outcomes persist.

## **2019: DfE Children in Need Review concludes**

- DfE commits to ensuring children are seen, safe and able to succeed so that all children can reach their potential.
- The Review highlights the leadership and impact that VSHs have had for looked-after and previously looked-after children.

## **2020: the pandemic closes schools**

- Plans for a VSH pathfinder are paused.
- Children with a social worker are able to attend schools, but generally only a minority take up this offer. Since schools have reopened, attendance for children with a social worker remains below levels seen pre-pandemic and below that of their peers.
- The impact of the pandemic is likely to have disadvantaged children further, adding to education barriers identified in the Children in Need review.



# Extending the role of Virtual School Heads

**On Wednesday 16 June 2021 the Department for Education announced more than £16m to extend the role of Virtual School Heads from September 2021.**

## **What is in scope of the extended Virtual School Head role**

As strategic leaders who champion children with a social worker, Virtual School Heads should create a culture of high aspirations and drive improved outcomes. They will:

- 1** **enhance partnerships between education settings and the local authority** so agencies can work together
- 2** **identify the cohort's needs and intervene** to overcome barriers to poor educational outcomes and ensure pupils reach their potential
- 3** **support and advise key professionals** to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using **evidence-based interventions**

## **What is not in scope of the extended Virtual School Head role**

- Work with individual children and their families - including tracking and monitoring educational progress of individual children.
- Responding to requests from parents or carers to offer advice and support in relation on individual children with a social worker.
- Responsibility for children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) who do not require or need a social worker, as defined above.



# Activities to promote the education of children with a social worker

We expect that some activities will be critical to championing children with a social worker, but there will not be a single delivery model. We want Virtual School Heads to develop and share good practice to support one another.

1

Enhance partnerships with education settings



**1. Work with education settings** to encourage anyone supporting children with a social worker to hold high **aspirations** for this cohort of children.



**1. Convene education and LA leaders** to develop shared goals and set direction for improving outcomes, including **addressing links with other strategic priorities** e.g. working with Violence Reduction Units to tackle serious violence



**1. Clarify VSH role and communicate offer of support** to education settings and others in LA so everyone has clear expectations of the VSH and what help is available.

2

Identify needs and intervene



**1. Use data and analysis to understand and monitor local trends in accordance with strategic priorities**, e.g. safeguarding trends, attendance rates



**1. Promote evidence and good practice** that prioritises consistency, high support and high standards for children with a social worker, and recognises the importance of stability and strong information sharing.



**1. Share knowledge and training** to strengthen how education settings and social care are understanding the impact of adversity on education (newsletters, webinars and workshops)

3

Support and advise key professionals



**1. Engage and support key professionals and local services** including social workers and school staff to promote improved outcomes for children.



**1. Advise on evidence-based interventions and strengthen links with research organisations** to participate in work that will build a stronger evidence base for what works for children.



**1. Encourage schools and social care to be creative and thoughtful in communicating with children and families**, including taking account of children's wishes and feelings.

# Southwark Children in Need VSH Role Extention Plan

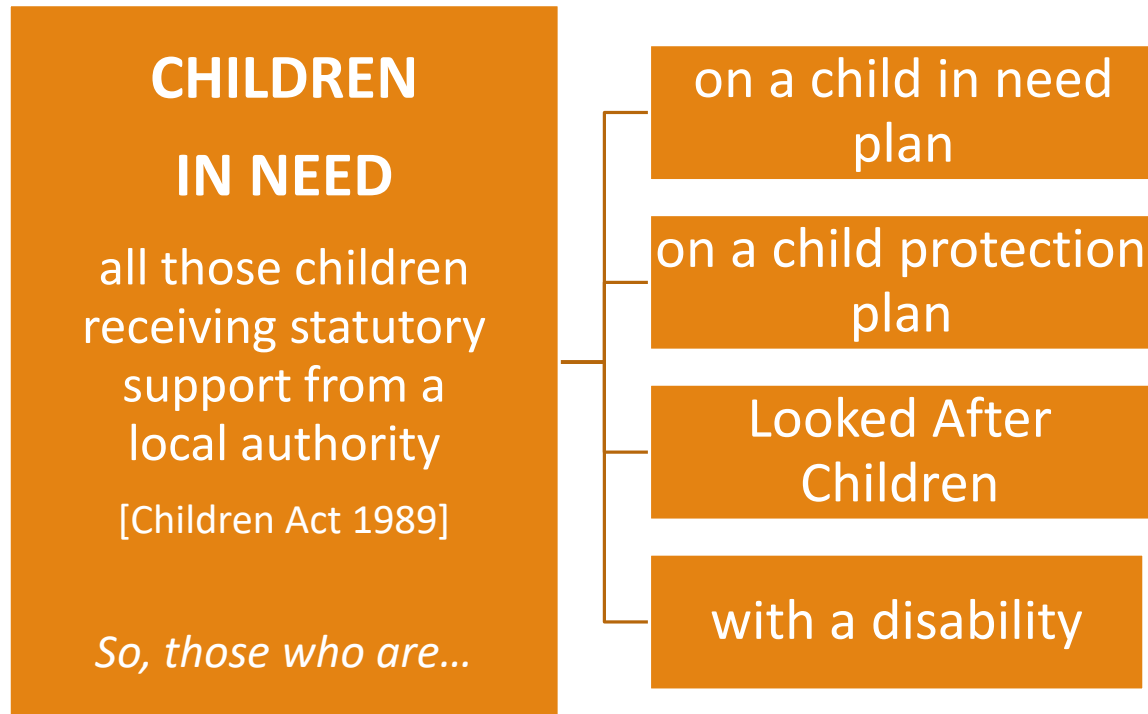
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# Children in need – *who are they?*



Category	Current Number
Subject to Child in Need Plan	329
Subject to Child Protection Plan	926
Looked after children	412

## Summarising the data challenges of identifying children with a SW/schools Craig Benning / Kelly Wilson

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1. Identifying children with a SW is simple. Matching to schools is the tricky part
2. The UPN in Mosaic is not always accurate, however this can (and has) be used to match with the Southwark School Census to get the most recent school information. This does then leave a gap for children attending out of borough schools.
3. Schools on Mosaic are not always accurate, and to make matters worse, there are duplicates of the same school and so there will be a need for the CHAD Systems Team to be involved to tidy this up (Craig has a Hornbill call open for this).

Use some of the funding to support the data migration of school census information back into Capita and then from Capita into Mosaic. This would mean that we are all looking at the same correct / most recent data. We could also consider through the work the use of the education section in Mosaic to support this extended role.

# Children's commissioners report

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[CC A4 HEADER \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

## Education Inclusion handbook The three-stage approach to attendance and inclusion Family early help

EIT are Senior Education Welfare Officers that sit within Family Early Help. They provide advice and guidance to schools and professionals in relation to persistent non-attendance and risk of school exclusion, and take enforcement action against parents or carers who do not comply with the legal requirement to ensure their child attends school regularly.



Supporting social workers and other practitioners working with families to prioritise and promote the importance of regular school attendance continues to be a key priority

### SURGERY

1. An opportunity to **review the help and support that has already been offered** to the family
2. Consider the **underlying factors** underpinning poor attendance or behaviour
3. Advise whether the case needs to **escalate to statutory intervention**
4. **Agree a clear attendance and inclusion plan in real time**, which is recorded Mosaic and can be shared with the family and professional network



#### Stage one – initial action

Lead professional (LP) convenes multi-agency review meeting/TAF  
Attendance concerns raised with parent/carer and statutory responsibility of LA made clear (see leaflet for parents below – Improving School Attendance)  
Multi-agency assessment and plan to improve attendance agreed  
If the child or young person is not known to FEH, CSC or YOS, complete FEH referral if criteria met  
Likely consequences if attendance does not improve recorded and shared in writing with parent/carer  
Timescales set for review  
If no improvement in agreed timescale, move to stage 2




#### Stage two – formal action

LP requests consultation with Senior Education Welfare Officer (SEWO) (see across for link to details of the Attendance and Inclusion Surgery)  
LP convenes attendance and inclusion TAF  
Multi-agency review of existing plan and barriers to progress  
Parenting contract negotiated with parent/carer and network by LP with SEWO support  
Decision made by SEWO and LP whether to issue formal Notice of Attendance Concern (court warning)  
If no improvement in agreed timescale, or parent does not agree contract, move to stage 3



#### Stage three – statutory action

LP requests consultation with SEWO  
SEWO completes full attendance and inclusion consultation/assessment  
SEWO and LP agree whether to proceed to education legal planning meeting (ELPM)  
SEWO convenes ELPM within 20 days of consultation  
LP/school complete report to the ELPM and submit no later than 5 days prior to the meeting  
SEWO chairs education legal planning meeting, decision made whether to proceed to interview under caution  
If not, parenting contract agreed or updated /final court warning issued with date for review ELPM



# Funding

Southwark will receive £100000 towards this duty (3 Installments)

- Recruitment of a Virtual School CIN officer
- Focus on the data – capacity to improve current systems
- Attendance monitoring
- Setting up training programmes, conferences webinars to schools, professionals and parents
- Making schools attachment aware and aware of impact of early year Trauma



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# Ambitions for the Virtual School Head role extension

The Children in Need review saw how **effective support for these children relies on this cohort being seen and professionals being able to work together** to help them achieve.

From **September 2021**, Virtual School Heads will be able to use their knowledge and expertise to champion children with a social worker and address the barriers to good educational outcomes.

A

□ **Make the disadvantage of children in need visible and strengthen relationships between education settings and local authorities** to ensure all hold **high ambitions** for these children.

B

Promote **engagement in education**, including as a means of keeping children **safe**.

C

**Level up outcomes and narrow the attainment gap** so children reach their potential. Ensure **education recovery** activity reaches children in need.

**Expectations for the Virtual School Head role extension are described in:**

- The Grant Determination Letter
- Memorandum of Understanding
- Non-statutory guidance: Promoting the education of children with a social worker

**We intend to appoint a research partner to learn about good practice and work with NAVSH and ADCS to encourage sharing ideas over 21-22.**



# Improving children's outcomes depends on more than Virtual School Head leadership

We are **ambitious but realistic about what will be possible from September 2021** and recognise that addressing the challenges that children with a social worker face will take time.

Beyond Virtual School Heads **there is a crucial role for social workers and education settings to support children** and we need a strong evidence base on what works to ensure that interventions have an impact.

