Looked After Children
Education Support:
The Virtual School,
The Virtual School Head
and Pupil Premium
**Statutory Duty:**

All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to promote the Educational achievement of looked after children under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004, further strengthened by the Children and Families Act 2014. This duty has been further strengthened from April 2014 by the role of the Virtual School Head and the establishment of a Virtual School for all looked after children.

**Promoting Educational Achievement of Looked after children**
Statutory guidance for Local Authorities 2014

The Virtual School:

The virtual school is an organisational concept that creates the basis by which the education of all looked after children for whom the local authority has a responsibility is monitored to ensure:

- Access to school places and full-time education for looked after children
- Progress, attainment and outcomes is in line with need and ability
- The attainment and progress gap between looked after children and the full cohort of children is reducing
- The use of pupil premium for looked after children is monitored and impact known
- Issues impacting on engagement in learning, including attendance and exclusion, are identified and rectified
- Positive transition between educational phases - Early Years to Primary, Primary to Secondary and Secondary to Post-16 and beyond
- Trends in the educational needs of looked after children are identified and addressed
The virtual school includes:

Looked after children for whom County Durham is responsible who:

- Require a school place
- Are on the roll of a County Durham maintained school or academy school
- On the roll of non-Durham maintained school or academy school
- Placed with independent educational providers within or outside County Durham
- Children and Young People who are placed under secure accommodation order by the local authority
- Looked after children for whom another local authority has the responsibility and:
  - Are on the roll of a County Durham maintained school or academy school

All looked after children remain the responsibility of the school in which they are enrolled.

Statutory Duty:

All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to promote the Educational achievement of looked after children under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004, further strengthened by the Children and Families Act 2014. The following the DfE document provides additional guidance:

- Promoting Educational Achievement of Looked after children
  - Statutory guidance for Local Authorities 2014

This duty has been further strengthened from April 2014 by the role of the Virtual School Head and the establishment of a Virtual School for all looked after children.
The Virtual School Head (VSH)

All local authorities must have a VSH who manages the Virtual School of looked after children and leads on the promotion of educational achievements of looked after children. It is a statutory role.

The Virtual School Head is responsible to:

- maintain an up-to-date roll of looked after children for whom the local authority is responsible
- have knowledge and information about every looked after children attending the local authority schools
- inform head teachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a looked after child on roll
- support the identification of, and access to, school places for looked after children
- know how looked-after children are doing academically
- gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress
- monitor progress and achievement, identify where individual or groups of looked after children are underperforming and work with school to address any issues

The Virtual School and Virtual School Head role in County Durham:

In County Durham a team of Senior Managers and a dedicated staff team provide a shared role in meeting the requirements of the both the Virtual School and Virtual School Head role and responsibilities as follows:

Jane Le Sage  Strategic Lead for Send and Inclusion
Clive Horton  Placement and Performance Manager
The Virtual School Head (VSH)

All local authorities must have a VSH who manages the Virtual School of looked after children and leads on the promotion of the educational achievements of looked after children. It is a statutory role.

The Virtual School and Virtual School Head role in County Durham:

In County Durham a team of Senior Managers and a dedicated staff team provide a shared role in meeting the requirements of the both the Virtual School and Virtual School Head role and responsibilities as follows:

- Looked After Children Education Support Team (LACES)
  - Chris Reynolds: Inclusion Support Manager
  - Sarah Blenkinsopp: Education Key Worker Manager

- provide guidance to parents/carers, designated teachers and other professionals regarding the education of looked after children
- help school staff and social workers to find out about the extra needs of these children and any additional support available to them
- work with schools to agree the use of Pupil Premium, expected outcomes and impact
- ensure every looked after child has an up-to-date, effective and high quality PEP that focus on educational outcomes
- ensure the educational achievement of looked after children is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare
- report regularly on the attainment of looked after children through the authority’s corporate parenting structures.
When a child is looked after, the local authority has a duty to act as the “corporate parent” to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare and to take action as any good parent would. This includes supporting education and ensuring children and young people have every opportunity to fulfil their potential and make a positive transition into adulthood.

Many looked after children and young people perform well academically however, from a national perspective, the educational achievements of looked after children remains lower than their peers. This is reflected on a regional basis and also within County Durham.

Previous studies have identified key reasons why looked after children frequently underachieve in education:

- Instability in home & school
- Too much time spent out of school
- Insufficient help with education if they fall behind
- Unmet emotional, physical and mental health needs

To support the educational progress and attainment of looked after children a statutory responsibility has been placed on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. This has been further strengthened by the significant changes introduced by the Children and families Act 2014 to ensure the individual needs of each child and young person are identified and supported.
The Department for Education provides statutory guidance for all local authorities. The most recent guidance: **Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities – July 2014** places a statutory requirement for all local authorities to have in place a Virtual School Head for Looked After Children. Looked after children for whom a local authority has responsibility are to be monitored as if they were in a single school, the Virtual School for Looked After Children.

**Local Framework**

There are a number of policies within County Durham that support the legislative framework around the education of looked after children and these are implemented through a number of local plans that prioritise and reinforce the need to raise the attainment of looked after children including:

- Durham County Council Children and Families Plan
LACES provides advice and personalised support for looked after children and other vulnerable children and young people in County Durham schools.

The Looked After Children Education Support team will:

- Ensure a Personal Education Plan (PEP) is in place for each looked after children for whom County Durham are responsible

- Monitor the academic progress of pupils in schools to raise achievement; targeting support to those children and young people most in need

- Offer flexible academic and pastoral support to schools that can be tailored to the needs of individual children and young people

- Provides advice and support to parents, carers, social workers, schools and other key partners.

LACES is part of the County Durham SEND and Inclusion Service and is encompassed within the Virtual School for Looked After Children. The team has specialist knowledge of the specific needs of our looked after children and has strong links with Designated Teachers in schools across Durham and neighbouring local authorities.
Every Durham looked after child of statutory school age will receive the support of an **Education Key Worker** who has the responsibility to:

- Facilitate the Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- Track and monitor the progress of all Durham looked after children
- Work to improve the attendance and reduce exclusions of looked after children
- Deliver individual support
- Provide advice and support to children and young people
- Provide advice and support to parents/carers, schools, social workers and other key partners

The LACES **Education Support Worker** delivers flexible academic and pastoral support to schools that can be tailored to the needs of children and young people by:

- Assessing specific needs
- Working with school staff to plan support in line with curriculum requirements
- Deliver study support to young people to help with completion of coursework, homework and revision for tests and exams.

The support is provided during school term-time and also school holiday periods.
Pupil Premium funding is provided for identified children and young people who are at risk of not achieving as well academically as their peers. A specific amount of funding is identified for looked after children. The amount of funding available is up to £1,900 per financial year for each child or young person who has been in care for 1 or more days in the previous year.

The statutory guidance for local authorities and schools is outlined in the following document:

Pupil Premium 2014 to 2015: Conditions of Grant February 2014

Durham County Council Provide additional guidance on how the pupil premium grant for looked after children will be allocated to schools:

Guidance on the use of Pupil Premium for Looked After Children November 2014

If you require any further guidance on the use of Pupil Premium for Looked After Children please contact:

Clive Horton
Placement and Performance Manager
Durham County Council SEND and Inclusion Service
03000 267800
The Virtual School Head Must:

- identify your local authority’s looked-after children
- let social care and EYPP colleagues in your local authority know which looked-after children are eligible for the pupil premium and the EYPP
- make sure that the method you choose for allocating and spending the funding is simple so that your looked-after children can benefit from the funding without delay
- make sure that schools, non-mainstream settings and early years providers spend their pupil premium funding for looked-after children to help meet the needs identified in the children’s personal education plans (PEPs)
- make sure that any pupil premium funding that you have not passed on to an educational setting or spent by 31 March is returned to DfE
- be able to demonstrate how the pupil premium and EYPP funding you are managing is raising the achievement of your looked-after children
- work with each looked-after child’s educational setting to agree how pupil premium funding will be spent to meet the needs identified in the child’s personal education plan (PEP). This will usually involve working with a school’s designated teacher for looked-after children.
The identified local authority officer point of contact for the Virtual School and Virtual School Head is:

**Clive Horton**  
*Placement and Performance Manager*  
SEND and Inclusion Service  
Broom Cottages Primary School  
Ferryhill  
County Durham DL17 8AN  
03000 267800  
clive.horton@durham.gov.uk