

The number of Children in Care continues to rise, now well over 68,000 according to the Department for Education (DfE). Children in Care achieve significantly poorer educational outcomes than their peers but a good education provides a sound basis for transition to a fulfilling and successful adult life and school provides stability, continuity and normality for Children in Care. Following the publication of the **Annual Statistics on the Educational Attainment of Children in Care in December 2012** the DfE then announced measures to help Looked After Children get better grades at school. One of these measures came about following Ofsted emphasising the significant impact that strong Virtual School leadership can have on the attainment of Looked After Children. As a result, the DfE have introduced a requirement for all Local Authorities to have a Virtual School Headteacher, making sure Children in Care get the support they need to succeed at school. Each Local Authority has been asked to put in place strategies to improve the attendance and reduce the need for exclusions of Children in Care and reinforce the principle that exclusion should be an absolute last resort.

Devon County Council is the Corporate Parent for all Children in Care in Devon. This means they are responsible for ensuring that Children in Care have the support good parents provide for their own children. Schools do, and must, continue to play their part and do their best to help. In Devon, the Virtual School for Children in Care has now been established.

What is the purpose of the Virtual School?

Whilst the Virtual School does not bring all of its children into an actual building, it is set up just like any other school with pupils, a Headteacher and a Governing Body. Its purpose is to monitor and improve educational provision for Children in Care, to ensure that every Child in Care has the best opportunity to be the best they can be and to implement strategies to narrow the gap in achievement and attainment between Children in Care and their peers. The Virtual School has a website which provides comprehensive information on its work and the support it offers to schools. Information on our Virtual School Staff can be found here. <https://new.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/young-people/children-in-care/education-of-children-in-care/virtual-school-team>

How does this link to the work of your School?

The Headteacher or Designated Teacher at each school where a Child in Care is educated gives information to the Virtual School Headteacher, to help them monitor and track progress so that they can advise on any support available to help pupils achieve their potential. It is worth remembering that the appointment of a Designated Teacher is a core function of each individual School Governing Body.

The Virtual School make sure that schools have up-to-date information on children and check that there is appropriate support available, by monitoring progress, highlighting gaps and identifying interventions to improve outcomes. They also work with Social Workers and Foster Carers across all relevant areas within Children's Services.

What is the role of a School Governor?

School Governors are required to monitor the attainment and progress of Children in Care and how they are supported and the ways in which Pupil Premium Plus funding is being used to improve outcomes for Children in Care in their school. It may be helpful for governors to consider the following questions in relation to monitoring provision and outcomes for Children in Care in their school:

- Information for Governors

- What actions are being taken to support individual attainment and progress, including assessment, monitoring and reporting?
- Is there a named Governor with responsibility for Children in Care and how does he/she carry out this function?
- How is the progress and wellbeing of Children in Care reported to Governors?
- How do the Governors measure the impact of Pupil Premium funding overall and particularly for Children in Care?
- If the school is 'good' or 'outstanding' but outcomes for Children in Care are poor, what is the school doing about this?
- Is the school offering additional provision to ensure the best possible outcomes for our Children in Care?
- How does the school demonstrate that it is aspirational for Children in Care and their academic success?
- Are the young person's academic, sporting or creative talents recognised, promoted and celebrated in the school?
- What is the attendance rate at school for Children in Care?
- How is bullying logged and reported if it involves a Child in Care?
- What is in place to support the specific social, emotional and wellbeing issues experienced by Children in Care? Is Pupil Premium being used to support their emotional health?
- Do Governors monitor parental engagement or parent evenings for Children in Care?

Individual schools may receive a visit from an elected member of Devon County Council, acting in their role as a Corporate Parent and consideration of these areas would also be useful in preparation for the visit.

The Virtual School also has a Governing body, what is its role?

The Governing Body of the Virtual School exercises its functions with a view to fulfilling a largely strategic role in the running of the Virtual School. It establishes the strategic framework by:

- Setting aims and objectives for the school;
- Adopting policies for achieving those aims and objectives; and
- Setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives.

The Governing Body of the Virtual School works in the same way as all school Governing Bodies but in this instance, to hold the Headteacher of the Virtual School and all other education providers, to account for the outcomes of Children in Care. It also provides advice and guidance to the Local Authority in all matters regarding educational provision for Children in Care, including recommending targets relating to their education, challenging agencies where they are not delivering adequate provision and raising the aspirations of Children in Care and celebrating their achievements. The Governing Body is chaired by Councillor James McInnes and includes the Virtual School Headteacher, Sue Clarke as Head of Education & Learning, representatives from Devon Headteachers, Governors, Fostering organisations and Lead Officers for SEND, Social Workers and Looked After young people.