

**To: Headteachers/Principals
and Chairs of Governors**

**Education & Learning
Devon Virtual School for Children in Care**
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Dear Headteacher & Chair of Governors

There are approximately 700 Children in Care to Devon, placed in schools in the County and schools in other Local Authorities. These children are the responsibility of the Virtual School. We are very ambitious for these young people and work closely with schools to ensure that all our children reach their potential.

Far too many Children in Care do not make expected progress from the point they are taken into Care or from prior attainment. Our ambition is for Children in Care to make better than expected progress and we will work with you to provide appropriate support to ensure that this ambition can be met.

One way of supporting schools is through the Personal Education Plan (PEP) which all Children in Care must have and which is reviewed each term. We ask that schools carefully analyse the gaps in knowledge for our children and carefully assess their progress, with accelerated targets for educational progress, alongside the professional and care-based support needed to achieve those targets.

In Devon, over the last two years, attainment for Children in Care has risen significantly so that in the majority of areas, at all Key Stages, it is above the National average for Children in Care. There is still a significant gap between the progress of those in Care and the main school population. As a result, this feeds into the life chances for Care Leavers, with Nationally 34% not in education, employment or training, compared to 15.5% of the general population.

Fixed Term Exclusions for Children in Care is, unfortunately, a real problem, they are far more likely to be excluded than their peers. In 2016/17 there were 104 exclusions for Children in Care but these have increased to 160 this school year. The number of days lost to exclusions has also increased from 207 to 255.5. This is an area where we are seeking your support so that alternatives to exclusion are used.

As part of the Devon Inclusion Project we have developed a new Protocol for Supporting Children in Care in Devon Schools. The Protocol has been written by a group including Primary and Secondary School Headteachers, the Educational

Psychology Service, Children's Social Care and the Local Authority. The Protocol covers support from admission or entry into Care through their time in school and can be found via the link below (under the Designated Teachers tab): <https://new.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/young-people/children-in-care/education-of-children-in-care/information-for-schools-and-settings>. Please share this Protocol with your staff and governors.

By working together, we can ensure that Children in Care are much more successful in education, raise their aspirations and help to improve their life chances. We have listed below some areas where schools can make a real difference - many of you will already have some, or all, of these in place:

- Appoint a Governor with responsibility for Children in Care who meets regularly with the Designated Teacher and reports back to the Governing Body each term;
- Carefully monitor the use of Pupil Premium+ (currently £2,200/year per pupil) to ensure that it is targeted to support Children in Care to make greater progress;
- Work closely with the carers and ensure that the support at home is in place for good attendance and support for home learning;
- Keep in close contact with your Area Learning Advocate so that any concerns over behaviour, attendance or progress can be supported at an early stage;
- Promote positive behaviour through early intervention and a needs-based approach that recognises that the behaviour of Children in Care often comes from a place of insecurity due to past and current trauma;
- Engage fully with external support services at an early stage and ensure staff at all levels attend the free Attachment Based Mentoring training that we have funded across the County, which is available to book via the link below: www.babcock-education.co.uk/ldp/cpd
- Look for alternatives to exclusion where possible. Exclusion for children who have suffered rejection throughout their lives reinforces their negative feelings and often makes matters worse;
- Help us to keep Children in Care in mainstream schools and out of Alternative Provisions, including Pupil Referral Units;
- Help us to ensure that there are no gaps in their education through a speedy admission process;
- Monitor the quality of the Personal Education Plan at regular intervals;
- Ask Designated Teachers to request the question level analysis for Children in Care transferring from Primary Schools so that any gaps in learning are quickly identified and addressed.

As in previous years, the Virtual School, in partnership with School Improvement Advisors, will be holding regular Education Panel meetings, to include telephone calls with Designated Teachers, and also visiting schools to meet with Designated Teachers and our Children in Care to look at work and progress.

The ePEP, introduced over this academic year, offers a more efficient and effective mechanism for detailing additional support for Children in Care and Area Learning Advocates will continue to quality assure the process before releasing the funding.

We would like to thank you for your continued support in improving the educational outcomes for our Children in Care, and hope you have an enjoyable summer break.

If you have any queries regarding this letter please don't hesitate to contact us on 01392 383000 or by email via kate.clarke@devon.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



Ian Hemelik
Virtual School Headteacher



Councillor James McInnes
Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Schools