



Looked-after and Previously Looked-after Children Policy

Approved by:	Paula Tucker	Date: 1/9/26
Review by:	15/9/27	

1. Policy Statement

Legislation and statutory guidance

This policy reflects the Children Act 1989, Children and Families Act 2014, Education Act 2002, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, Working Together to Improve School Attendance and relevant statutory guidance on looked-after and previously looked-after children.

The statutory designated-teacher duty applies directly to maintained schools and academies. As an independent alternative provision school, ReFocus is not subject to it in the same way, but appoints a designated lead and follows the guidance as good practice.

From September 2026, ReFocus will follow the statutory information-sharing duty and final guidance, sharing relevant information promptly, securely and proportionately to safeguard or promote a child's welfare.

The identity of our designated teacher

The designated lead is Paula Tucker, supported by Katie Close. Contact: Paula@refocus.school or Katie@refocus.school

The designated lead takes responsibility within ReFocus for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after pupils receiving education at the school and is the initial point of contact for the matters set out below.

Where a pupil remains registered at a commissioning school, its statutory designated teacher retains formal responsibility and ReFocus supplies the necessary information. Where ReFocus is the sole registered school, its designated lead coordinates with the responsible authority, social worker and Virtual School Head. Written placement arrangements will define registration, attendance, safeguarding, PEP, SEND, funding, review and placement-ending responsibilities.

2. Definitions

For this policy, looked-after children are pupils receiving education at ReFocus who are:

- In the care of a local authority, or
- Provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of its social services functions, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours

Previously looked-after children are pupils who ceased to be looked after through adoption, a special guardianship order or a child arrangements order, including qualifying children adopted from state care outside England and Wales. Parents and carers decide whether to disclose this status; evidence will be handled sensitively.

They were looked after by a local authority but ceased to be as a result of any of the following:

- A child arrangements order, which includes arrangements relating to who the child lives with and when they are to live with them
- A special guardianship order
- An adoption order
- For children adopted from state care outside England and Wales, appropriate evidence should show that they:
Been in state care in a place outside of England and Wales because they would not have otherwise been cared for adequately, and

Ceased to be in that state care as a result of being adopted

3. Principles of the policy

The school aims to ensure that:

- ReFocus appoints a suitable member of staff as designated lead for looked-after and previously looked-after pupils as proportionate good practice for an independent alternative provision school.
- The designated teacher promotes the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children and supports other staff members to do this as well.
- Staff, parents, carers, and guardians are aware of the identity of the designated teacher, how to contact them, and what they are responsible for

4. Role of the Designated Teacher

The following is based on the responsibilities listed in the DfE's statutory guidance

4.1 Leadership responsibilities The designated lead will:

- Act as ReFocus's central point of contact for matters involving looked-after and previously looked-after pupils and liaise with the statutory designated teacher at the commissioning school where applicable
- Promote the educational achievement of every looked-after and previously looked-after pupil receiving education at ReFocus by:
 - Working with VSHs
 - Promoting a whole school culture where the needs of these pupils' matter and are prioritised
- Take lead responsibility for ensuring school staff understand:
 - The factors which can affect how looked-after and previously looked-after children learn and achieve
 - How the whole school supports the educational achievement of these pupils
- Contribute to the development and review of whole school policies to ensure they consider the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children
- Promote a culture in which looked-after and previously looked-after children are encouraged and supported to engage with their education and other school activities
- Act as a source of advice for teachers about working with looked-after and previously looked after children
- Work directly with looked-after and previously looked-after children, and their carers, parents, and guardians, to promote good home-school links, support progress and encourage high aspirations
- Contribute to PEP development and review, providing timely information about attendance, attainment, progress, needs and provision
 - Work closely with ReFocus's designated safeguarding lead so concerns are addressed promptly
- Involve parents and guardians of previously looked-after children in decisions affecting their child's education, subject to the pupil's registration and commissioning arrangements

4.2 Supporting looked-after children The designated lead will:

- Work with the responsible local authority, social worker, Virtual School Head and commissioning school so each PEP reflects the pupil's needs and ReFocus provision
- Contribute to clear and aspirational PEP targets and identify the actions for which ReFocus is responsible

- Monitor and track how looked-after children's attainment progresses under their PEPs
- Where a pupil is not on track to meet their targets, work with the pupil and relevant professionals to agree the best way forward, update the PEP and ensure that actions allocated to ReFocus are implemented
- During the development and review of PEPs, help the responsible local authority, commissioning school and other professionals decide what arrangements work best for the pupil

Ensure that:

- A looked-after child's PEP is reviewed before the statutory review of their care plan – this includes making sure the PEP is up to date and contains any new information since the last PEP review, including whether agreed provision is being delivered
- PEPs are clear about what has or has not been taken forward, noting what resources may be required to further support the child and from where these may be sourced
- ReFocus's updated contribution is supplied to the child's social worker, Virtual School Head and commissioning school in sufficient time for the statutory review of the care plan
- Provide current educational and safeguarding information promptly when a looked-after child transfers, while recognising that the social worker, responsible local authority and registered school retain responsibility for the formal PEP and transfer arrangements

4.3 Supporting both looked-after children and previously looked-after children The designated teacher will:

- Ensure pupils' specific needs are understood by relevant staff and reflected in ReFocus's provision. Any additional funding received will be used and monitored against the written arrangement and agreed outcomes.
- Work with the Virtual School Head, responsible local authority and commissioning school so Pupil Premium Plus meets needs identified in the PEP. The Virtual School Head manages this funding.
- Help parents and guardians seek advice about Pupil Premium Plus and other support, making clear that ReFocus does not automatically receive this funding directly
- Contribute evidence to funding and provision decisions made by the responsible authority, Virtual School Head or commissioning school
- Encourage parents' and guardians' involvement and direct funding queries to the organisation responsible for allocation
- Ensure teachers have awareness and understanding of the specific needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children in areas like attendance, homework, behaviour, and future career planning
- Be aware of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) of looked-after and previously looked-after pupils, make sure relevant teachers understand those needs and follow the SEND Code of Practice as it applies to the pupil and placement
- Make sure PEPs work in harmony with any education, health, and care (EHC) plans that a looked after child may have
- Ensure that they and other staff can identify signs of possible SEND in looked-after and previously looked-after pupils and know how to seek assessment and support through the registered school and responsible local authority

- Ensure that they and other staff can identify signs of potential mental health issues in looked-after and previously looked-after children and understand where the school can draw on specialist services
- The designated teacher will also be aware of DfE guidance on promoting mental health and wellbeing in schools and will liaise with the school's senior mental health lead where applicable.
- Use relevant Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire information, where it is shared through the child's care-planning arrangements, to inform educational planning and the PEP. Responsibility for arranging the SDQ remains within those care-planning arrangements.
- Put in place mechanisms for understanding the emotional and behavioural needs of previously looked-after children

4.4 Relationships beyond the school - The designated teacher will:

- Proactively engage with social workers and other professionals to enable the school to respond effectively to the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children
- Discuss with social workers how ReFocus should engage with birth parents, and make sure the school understands who has parental responsibility, who may make educational decisions and what information may be shared with whom
- Be open and accessible to parents and guardians of previously looked-after children and encourage them to be actively involved in their children's education
- Proactively build relationships with local authority professionals, such as VSHs and SEND departments
- Consider how ReFocus works with others to maximise the stability of education for looked-after pupils, including:
 - Finding ways of making sure the latest information about educational progress is available to contribute to the statutory review of care plans
 - Promptly notifying the commissioning school and, as agreed, the carer, social worker, responsible authority and Virtual School Head of unexplained or concerning absence
 - Consulting relevant professionals about care-placement changes that may disrupt education
 - Also providing advice about the likely impact and what the local authority should do to minimise disruption
- Making sure that, if a looked-after child moves school, their new designated teacher receives any information needed to help the transition process
- With parental agreement, seek Virtual School Head advice about individual previously looked-after pupils

Agree how ReFocus will work with the carer, social worker, Virtual School Head, responsible authority and commissioning school to review progress and maintain clear contacts
- Teachers know the most appropriate person to contact where necessary, such as who has the authority to sign permission slips
- Where a looked-after pupil is at risk of suspension, placement breakdown or placement termination, ReFocus will act early. Ending a placement will be a last resort and will follow ReFocus's Behaviour and Placement-Termination procedures. The statutory exclusions guidance applies to maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units rather than directly to ReFocus as an independent school.

- Contact the commissioning school, carer, social worker and Virtual School Head as soon as possible; review unmet SEND, safeguarding and support needs; consider additional assessment and provision; and plan continuity of education and transition before any placement ends
- Where a previously looked-after pupil is at risk of placement breakdown or termination, consult their parents or guardians and the commissioning school and, with consent where required, seek advice from the Virtual School Head

Personal education plan (PEP) is part of a looked-after child's care plan. It is developed through the responsible local authority and social worker with the child, education setting, Virtual School Head, carer and other relevant professionals. It records what needs to happen, who will act and how progress will be reviewed.

Virtual school head (VSH) is a local authority officer responsible for promoting the educational achievement of their authority's looked-after children, working across schools to monitor and support these pupils as if they were in a single school. The VSH is also responsible for providing information and advice to schools, parents, and guardians in respect of previously looked-after children.

5. Complaints

Concerns about ReFocus's provision for a looked-after or previously looked-after pupil should be raised with the Headteacher under the school's Complaints Policy. Where appropriate, unresolved concerns may be escalated to the proprietor or a nominated governing-board representative. Concerns about another organisation's statutory responsibilities should be directed to that organisation.