



One minute guide

The Virtual School in Leeds

No. 79, August 2021

What is the Virtual School?

When a child comes into care, they become the responsibility of the corporate parent. The corporate parent constitutes all professionals working with the child, all carers and elected members. Every parent has high aspirations, wanting their children to have the best possible provision and opportunities to enable them to achieve their potential. The Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that all children looked after (CLA) fulfil their educational potential. Whilst these children attend different schools across Leeds and in other local authorities, the Virtual School ensures that their educational attainment and progress is monitored and evaluated as if they attended a single school.

The role of the Virtual School has been [statutory](#) for all local authorities since 2014 and supports the educational attainment of all children looked after and care leavers between the ages of 0 and 25, so includes children in early years settings and care leavers who may want to re-enter education or learning. Since September 2018, Virtual Schools have also been required to offer advice and guidance to parents or carers of children who left care by adoption, [Special Guardianship Orders \(SGOs\)](#) or [Child Arrangement Orders \(CAO\)](#).

The Virtual School champions our corporate parenting responsibilities regarding the education of children looked after, ensuring that the gap between the attainment of those children and their non-looked after peers is closing. The Virtual School works closely with other local authorities in relation to Leeds children educated out of the city, as well as those children from other local authorities who are placed and/ or educated in Leeds.

What are the responsibilities of the Virtual School?

The role of the Virtual School in supporting the education of children looked after (CLA) includes ensuring there are effective systems in place to:

- Maintain an **up-to-date roll** of CLA in school or college settings, and gather information about their education placements, attendance and progress;
- Ensure **sufficient information** about each child's mental health, special educational needs (SEN) or disability is available to their educational setting to inform the provision of appropriate support;
- **Inform relevant school staff** if there is a child on roll who is looked after by Leeds;
- Ensure social workers, designated teachers, schools, carers and Independent Reviewing Officers understand their roles and responsibilities in **initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP)** and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP (there is a separate one minute guide on PEPs and Pupil Premium);
- **Ensure up-to-date, effective and high quality PEPs** that focus on educational outcomes for all children looked after, wherever they are placed;
- **Avoid drift or delay** in providing suitable educational provision, including SEN provision and unplanned termination of educational arrangements, through proactive, multi-agency co-operation. Where this requires negotiation with other authorities, this should be timely, with a central focus on the best interests of the child;
- **Ensure that the educational achievement** of children looked after by Leeds is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare;
- **Report regularly** on the attainment, progress and school attendance of CLA through the authority's corporate parenting structures; and
- **Promote a culture** that takes account of the child's views according to age and understanding, identifying and meeting their educational needs.

What does the Virtual School offer, for children looked after and for practitioners?

The Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of all the children in our care, including those placed out-of-authority. The Virtual School works to ensure schools and other educational settings - including early years and higher education providers, foster carers, social workers, school governors and other relevant partners - understand and deliver to their corporate parenting responsibilities for children in care, and undertake to promote the education of previously looked after children.

For individual children looked after and care leavers, the Virtual School works to ensure that all children looked after are receiving their entitlement to education and is responsible for supporting social workers to ensure timely provision of a suitable education placement for looked-after children. The Virtual School works with internal and external partners to secure a range of support and interventions that promote good educational outcomes.

The Virtual School allocates funding directly to schools (Pupil Premium Plus) for looked after children of compulsory school age, to support them to close the attainment gap, and provides training and advice to Designated Teachers on making effective use of this grant. Please see the PEPs and Pupil Premium one minute guide for more information.

Under the [2018 guidance](#), the Virtual School is also responsible for providing advice to parents and carers of children who were previously looked after, including adopted children and those living with carers on SGOs and CAOs, and works closely with regional adoption agencies, third sector partners and support services for previously looked after children to deliver this duty. In the October census, schools can claim Pupil Premium Plus for previously looked after children, and the Virtual School provide advice and guidance for schools about effective interventions that have a good evidence base to support this group of pupils too.

For practitioners who work with looked after and previously looked after children, the Virtual School offer includes expert information, advice and guidance, as well as training for foster carers, designated teachers, school governors, social workers and other relevant practitioners on how they can support the educational attainment of children looked after, care leavers and previously looked after children.

Who are the key contacts?

If you are working with a child/ children looked after or care leavers and would like to speak to someone about their educational attainment, either to raise concerns about their education or to request additional support, you can contact the Virtual School team.

In addition, if you would like to request support for yourself or your team in supporting the education of the children you work with, the Virtual School can provide information, advice and guidance, as well as training on the role of corporate parents and championing the educational attainment of children looked after and care leavers.

Jancis Andrew is the Head of the Virtual School for Children Looked After in Leeds. Jancis and her team can be contacted on 0113 37 81469 where you can leave a voicemail, or at VirtualSchool@leeds.gov.uk. This email address is for general enquiries only, so please do not send personal or sensitive information relating to individual children and young people.