

Your Role as a Foster Carer



This section will help with:

- knowing what the national picture of attainment for children in care looks like and why your help to support your child's education is so vital
- being clear about your role in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process
- preparing for a PEP meeting
- finding out more about the PEP document and its role in your child's education
- talking to your child about their aspirations

Your Role as a Foster Carer

Setting the Scene: The Attainment of Children in Care

There is a significant gap between the achievements of children in care and those who are not looked after. This is evident through each stage in their education, and this is why the work that you do as a foster carer can make so much difference to your child's outcomes.

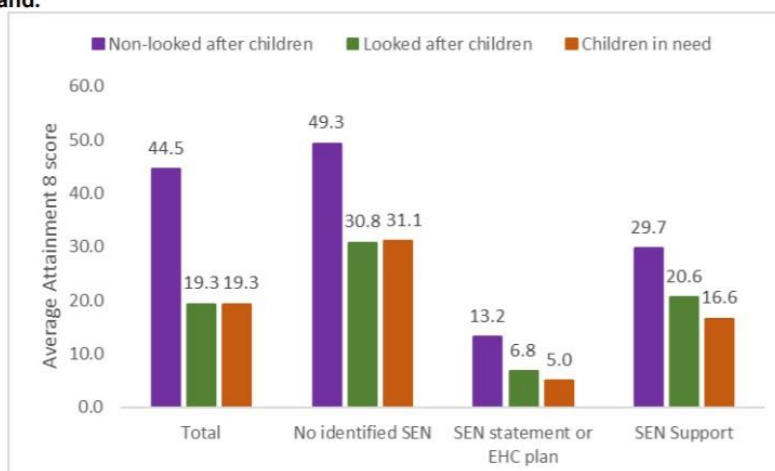
Key attainment statistics: (Source: *Statistics: Looked After Children, www.gov.uk*)

- Key Stage 1: In 2017, 51% of looked after children reached the expected standard in reading, 39% in writing, 46% in mathematics and 60% in science. (In comparison to 76%, 68%, 75% and 83% of all children, respectively.)
- Key Stage 2: In 2017, 32% of looked after children reached the expected standard combined reading, writing and mathematics. Nationally 61% of all children achieved expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Key Stage 4: The average Attainment 8 score for looked after children is 19.3 compared to 44.5 for non-looked after children.
- In 2017 17.5% achieved a pass (i.e. 4 and above) in English and mathematics as opposed to 58.5% for all children.

Where a pupil has a special education need, the attainment gap is widened further.

The figures show that 56% of looked after children at the end of key stage 4 have a special educational need (SEN) identified, compared to 48% of children in need and 14% of non-looked after children and attainment rates for children with a SEN are much lower.

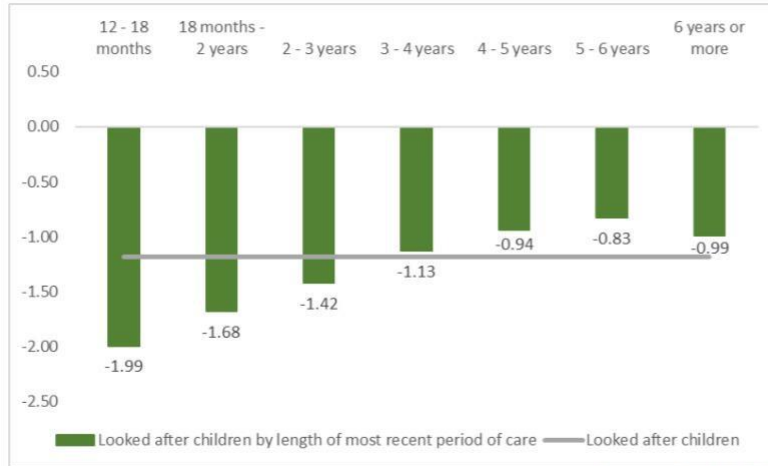
Figure 8: Average Attainment 8 score for looked after children, non-looked children and children in need, by SEN, 2017, England.



Source: CLA-NPD, CIN-NPD

The length of time that a child is in care for has a significant impact on their attainment. As the chart below shows, the longer a child is in care, the higher their progress score:

Figure 11: Average Progress 8 score for looked after children, by length of most recent period of care, 2017, England.



Source: CLA-NPD

Given that a significant number of children enter care during their teens, this reinforces how important your role as a carer is to support your child to gain the best outcomes possible in what can be a turbulent and anxious time.

You will make a real difference to your child's outcomes and their life chances, and this booklet has been designed to support you in this role.

The Personal Education Plan and your Role in the Process

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is central to improving educational outcomes for children in care. It is how the views of the school, parent/carer, other relevant professionals, and the child or young person are gathered to inform and shape the provision that will support the child to achieve the best grades possible. It considers what is going well and what is going less well, identifies the needs the plan should try to meet and how they will be met through the use of supported **SMART** targets.



Historically, the PEP meeting and the PEP document have been completed together. However, feedback from children in care showed that they felt that this did not promote a person-centred approach to meeting their needs. As a result, in Suffolk the PEP meeting and the PEP document have been separated, with the school taking the lead for the PEP document and the pupil's social worker taking the lead for the PEP meeting.

Schools have a statutory duty to complete a PEP each term. The PEP is a record of the provision that the school is putting in each term to support the pupil to make as much progress as possible.

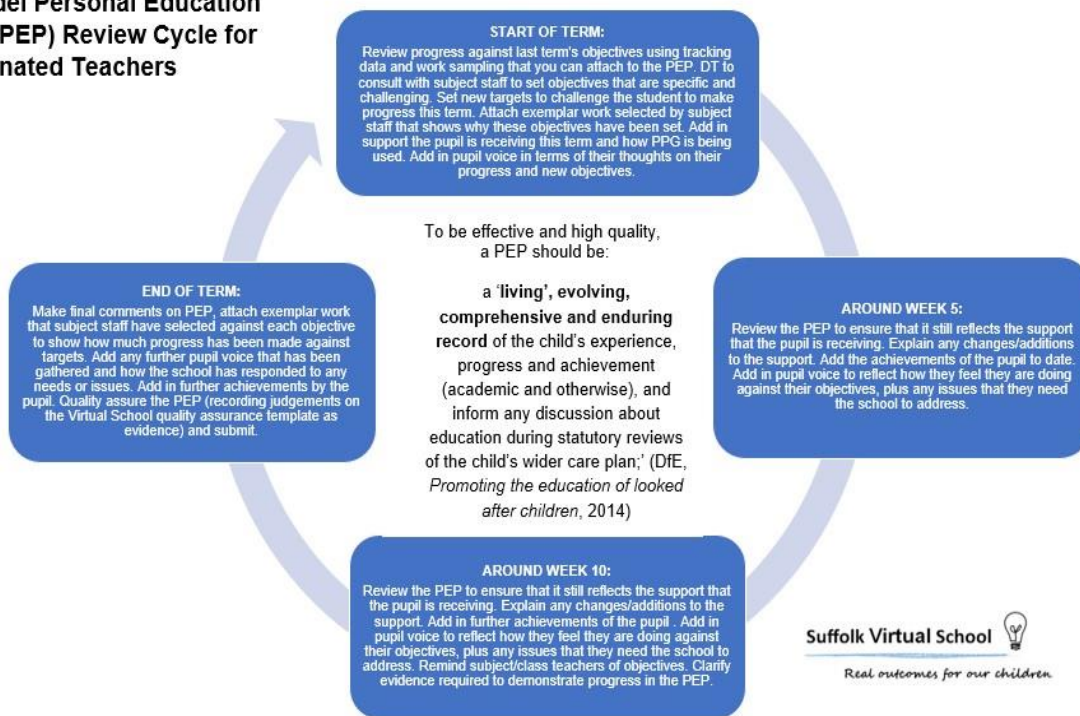
It should detail:

- The pupil's current attainment and the progress that the pupil has made against last term's term
- The learning targets that the pupil will be working during the term
- The academic and pastoral support that the pupil will receive to help them to achieve these targets, and how pupil premium funding will be spent to fund these strategies
- The pupil's wishes and feelings about school, their progress and the school's response to any arising actions

As best practice, schools have been advised to instigate the PEP at the beginning of term to outline an initial provision map, with changes and amendments to this throughout the term. The submission date is always near to the end of term so that the school can ensure that the PEP captures a holistic view of the provision and progress made.

The diagram below shows the best practice review cycle that the Suffolk Virtual School shares with schools:

A Model Personal Education Plan (PEP) Review Cycle for Designated Teachers



(Source: Suffolk Virtual School)

The deadline for the PEP document is near to the end of each term so that the school can make sure that the provision and progress for the whole term has been recorded.

As a carer, you can ask the school for a copy of each PEP so that you are able to support your child to work on their targets during the term and to engage with the support in place.

The PEP Meeting

There will be two PEP meetings per year.

As a foster carer, your role is to attend and contribute to the PEP meeting. There will be action points to support your child's learning agreed during the meeting and it is important that you monitor and support (and possibly implement) the implementation and impact of these actions, so that you are able to provide some feedback at the next PEP meeting, CiC review or even before these formal occasions if you are particularly concerned or pleased about them.

Your child should be set new learning targets at the beginning of each term so that they are able to work on achieving them during the term. These learning targets should focus upon subjects and skills that need attention to improve outcomes. If your child is already at least meeting their targets in their subjects, the learning objectives should reflect this and challenge them to achieve even higher outcomes.

The previous term's targets will have been reviewed with subject staff before new ones have been set, and the school (usually the Designated Teacher) will discuss with your child the progress they have made against these targets at the start of each term. You can ask the school for a copy of the targets set each term and the progress that has been reported against each one.

Once the targets have been set, the school should put into place appropriate interventions to help your child to achieve the targets set. There is no exhaustive list of intervention and support that can be put in place, and the choice of intervention used will, to a large extent, depend upon the way that the child best learns. For example, a one-to-one tuition session with their maths teacher after school every week on Mondays may suit a child who finds it hard to work with adults they don't know and learns better alone than with other children. On the other hand, a child may prefer working in a small group with an external tutor for a series of sessions during lunchtime as it caters for their dislike of being alone with an adult and they learn better through discussion.

Each term's PEP will require the school to gain 'pupil voice' relating to their wishes and feelings about school, their progress and their learning targets. The school is expected to respond to any concerns or issues that the child raises. You could speak to your child about who they are happy to talk to at school about these things and feed this back to the school's Designated Teacher. It may also be useful to discuss how your child is feeling about school on a regular basis so that you can encourage them to speak to a member of staff if an issue arises. They may be happier for you to raise it on their behalf.

After the PEP meeting, your role is to ensure that all agreed actions are implemented and reviewed. You can speak to the school's Designated Teacher and the child's social worker if you wish to follow these up during the term.

Pupil Premium Plus Funding

The pupil premium is additional funding for publicly funded schools in England.

It's designed to help disadvantaged pupils of all abilities perform better and close the gap between them and their peers. It is understood that looked after children have additional needs and vulnerabilities and as a cohort achieve significantly less well, and so they attract additional funding called PP+ Grant.

The Virtual School Head is responsible for allocating pupil premium plus funding to schools where there are children in care on roll.

For Suffolk children in care, their school will receive up to £600 of PP+ per term, providing that their Personal Education Plan (PEP) is submitted by the deadline and meets the required standard. In addition, the Suffolk Virtual School retains a proportion of PP+ to support pupils and schools through commissioned work with key services within the local authority, as well as our own outreach project. Schools can also apply for additional funding if a pupil or pupils require a level of support which costs more than the amount received during a term but will have a significant impact on their educational experience and progress.

The school is expected to use the funding to help each child in care to make the progress and achieve the outcomes expected of them. Schools should adopt an 'Above and Beyond' approach to implementing support and interventions so that children in care can make accelerated progress to meet or exceed their target grades.

The funding can be used in different ways, depending upon the needs of each child and the number of children in care in the school. A school, for example, may use some of the funding to pay for an individual child's one to one tuition, whole staff training about attachment or trauma, or a small group project involving a child in care as a 'stretch and challenge' opportunity for pupils who are exceeding their expected attainment.

The use of funding per term should be recorded by the school in the termly PEP document so that the virtual school can see how it has been used. The virtual school would expect to see a correlation between the targets set and needs outlined in a pupil's PEP and the interventions and support being funded by the pupil premium plus funding.

It would not be expected that pupil premium funding pays for leisure activities that occur in the evenings or weekend or school trips which are not linked to the curriculum.

For more information about the allocation and use of pupil premium please see our webpages.

The DfE guidance Allocations and Conditions of Grant

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-allocations-and-conditions-of-grant-2020-to-2021>

Raising Aspirations

Higher aspirations lead to higher outcomes.

It is not uncommon for vulnerable young people to arrive in care with low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence; difficult previous circumstances mean not every situation your child has been part of will have been an ideal environment for a child to be raised and nurtured.

Carers of vulnerable young people have a unique opportunity where they can influence their foster children for the better; by boosting shattered confidence and rebuilding self-esteem, foster children can follow a more successful path in life; nothing they don't already deserve.

Just because a child hasn't had an optimal start in life doesn't mean they shouldn't achieve the steps necessary for later success. Here's how you can raise aspirations of the foster children or young people in your life.

Gain Their Trust

By showing your child that you are able to provide an open and trustworthy support system, they will be more likely to open up and discuss their future aspirations with you, viewing you as a helping hand on their way to a successful future.

Be a positive mirror to them. A child's self-image comes not only from what the child perceives about themselves, but how others perceive them. Be realistic too, we can't have a smile on our face permanently, and by letting them see this they will be able to trust you for your sincerity.

Communicate Effectively

Should your child suffer a blow to their self-esteem it is important to validate their feelings. After a child feels that their feelings have been validated, they will be open to you bolstering their self-esteem by pointing out the positive things people think about them. Be sure that your child knows that you value them for who they are and not how they perform.

When it comes to career decisions, let young people understand that going on to higher education is a choice that they can make with the help of their foster parents- no doors are closed to them.

Boost Motivation Levels

If you see an ability in your child that they don't, encourage them; they might not have the self-belief to pursue it. If you don't encourage your child to try new things their skills won't improve, and you've lost a valuable confidence builder.

Show enthusiasm for their interests and encourage them to explore subjects which fascinate them. Celebrate their achievements, no matter how small. You will offer positive reinforcement that will inspire them to keep learning and challenging themselves.

Help Them Achieve Their Goals

If your foster child has a career path in mind which they wish to pursue, as well as providing them with adequate support with their studies where you can, it is important to educate them on all options should their chosen route be out of their academic ability. Help them in their search to find work experience in their chosen sector, which should give them a taste of what working life would be like. They will be in a more informed position to make a career decision.

(Source: www.nfa.co.uk)

Pupil Voice: Making school work for children in care

What do children in care say about their education?

The Suffolk Virtual School approached the Children in Care Council (C2C) in October 2018 to find out how we could help to make their educational experience as positive as possible. Feedback received from the C2C group highlighted the best ways that teachers can engage with them, what they expect of the Council's services, and how you as a foster carer play a really important part in making their education an enjoyable and fruitful experience.

Below are statements taken from the feedback sessions with the C2C group with some suggestions about how you can support your child.

“If you have bad news, tell me at home or in a comfortable setting where I can cope with it rather than half way through school”.

School needs to be a place where your child can focus solely on their education and be like everyone else around them.

The C2C group said they wanted school to be a place of stability and somewhere that they're not constantly reminded that they're in care. The conversation surrounding this emphasised that children want to decide who knows they are a child in care. Before a school move or even at the start of each school year, it would be useful to talk to your child about how they would like to approach this issue. If their preference is to keep the subject private, you can agree with them how this is communicated to the school. Some ground rules can then be agreed between your child and the school (and you) about how things like PEP meetings are managed to preserve your child's privacy.

“It feels like the meetings are about ticking a box”

Details of the way that PEP meetings and the online PEPs are managed are outlined in this booklet.

The PEP process in Suffolk has been heavily shaped by the views of our young people, in that we have been told that they do not like paperwork being filled out in PEP meetings and prefer to take part in meetings that are about them, their education and well-being.

The C2C group told us that these meetings are often boring and that most children would not respond well to purely functional and formal meetings. They often prefer a meeting where they are comfortable in a setting that is neutral to both parties rather than in an office. They also highlighted that they would be more willing to open up to teachers about their experiences if they adopt a 'my door is always open' approach and make the effort to their child feel comfortable in an atmosphere where they could also be seen as an equal.

As their carer, you will be able to support your child in making sure that their preferences for meetings are respected. You could talk in advance with your child about how, when and where they would like their PEP meeting to be held and either convey these to the school for them or encourage them to share these details with the PEP meeting organiser.

It's also important that your child has ownership over the meeting and can share their wishes and feelings in the way that best works for them. Some children are creative and will want to illustrate their school experience through a story board or even create a presentation on a computer, whilst others are happy to vocalise their views. Again, talking to your child prior to the PEP meeting will enable them to think about how they will get the most out of the meeting by sharing their views in the most appropriate way for them.

“Don't always have the same expectations of us that you have of other pupils”

Schools are expected to make reasonable adjustment when working with children in care so that they are able to make progress in ways that cater for their learning and emotional needs. The C2C Council told us that they want to be encouraged further when they are doing well. They also want schools and carers to acknowledge that when things aren't going so well, reasonable adjustment is also made to the expectations professionals have of them.

You are able to support your child by getting them to share with an adult they trust at school when things aren't going so well or, if they prefer, to share it on their behalf.