



Minerva
Learning Trust

Children Looked After Policy 2023-24

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Changes to this Edition

- Updated associated statutory documents and legislation (Section 3)
- Updated the requirement to review a child's PEP termly (Section 6)
- Changed the terminology of exclusion to exclusion/suspension to reflect statutory guidance and added additional information in the section on suspension and exclusion (section 11)

1. Purpose

Minerva Learning Trust is committed to providing quality education for all our students, based on equality of opportunity, access and outcomes. We recognise that, nationally, there is considerable educational underachievement of Children Looked After, when compared with their peers, and we are committed to ensuring that we provide the best education possible for Look After Children.

2. Aims

Educational achievement and subsequent life chances for LAC and previously LAC are of real concern. Students who are looked after often require additional support and attention in order to improve their situation.

Our schools endeavour to provide positive experiences and offer stability, safety, and individual care and attention for all our students. With this in mind, we aim to:

- Encourage students to reach their potential and to make good progress in relation to their professional, social and emotional development.
- Ensure that students enjoy high quality teaching and a curriculum which meets their needs and the requirements of legislation.
- Plan support for LAC realistically and use the school's resources efficiently to ensure the school meets their needs.
- Promote a positive culture in all aspects of school life.
- Help students develop their cultural, moral and social understanding.

3. Links to other Documents

This policy takes into account statutory guidance:

- Children Act 1989
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- DfE (2018) 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children'
- DfE (2018) 'The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children'
- DfE (2023) 'Suspension and permanent exclusion from maintained schools, academies, and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement'
- DfE (2023) 'Keeping children safe in education 2023'
- DfE (2018) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'

This policy operates in conjunction with in conjunction with the following school and Trust policies:

- Admission Policy
- Behaviour and Exclusions Policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- SEND Policy
- Personal Development Policy
- School Equality and Diversity Policy

4. Definition of Child Looked After

“Children Looked After (CLA)” are defined as:

- Children or young people who are the subject of a Care Order or Interim Care Order under the Children Act 1989.
- Children who are placed in foster care, children’s residential homes, with relatives or friends, in semi-independent or supported independent accommodation.
- Children subject to a Care or Interim Care Order whilst placed with a parent, where the LA has parental responsibility.
- Children who are not subject to an order, but are accommodated by the LA under an agreement with their parents.

“Previously CLA (PCLA)” are defined as:

- Children who are no longer looked after by an LA in England and Wales because they have either been adopted or are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order.
- Children who were adopted outside England and Wales from ‘state care’ (care that is provided by a public authority, religious organisation, or other organisation whose main purpose is to benefit society).

5. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 The Trust Board will:

- Ensure the Trust has a coherent policy for CLA and PCLA which are compliant with legislation and statutory guidance
- Ensure all Trustees, Members and Governors are fully aware of the legal requirements and Guidance for Children Looked After
- Appoint a Lead Trustee for Vulnerable Groups and ensure effective liaison with Lead Governors for Vulnerable groups, ensuring these roles are carried out in line with the Trust Governance Handbook

- Ensure the Lead Trustee provides an update to the Trust Board on CLA provision and progress at least annually and as set out in the Trust's Governance Handbook and Lead Governor role guidance
- Review the provision and progress for CLA children at least annually.

2.2 Local Governing Bodies will:

- Ensure the school has a coherent policy for LAC and PLAC.
- Review the school's policies and procedures in conjunction with legislation and statutory guidance.
- Ensure the designated teacher for LAC and PLAC has received the appropriate training.
- Ensure that appropriate staff have the information they need in relation to each looked after child's:
 - Legal status (i.e. whether they are looked after under voluntary arrangements with consent of parents or on an interim or full care order) and contact arrangements with birth parents or those with parental responsibility.
 - Care arrangements and the levels of authority delegated to the carer by the LA.
- Ensure that staff have the skills, knowledge and understanding to keep LAC and PLAC safe.
- Ensure that there are clear systems and processes in place for identifying and reporting possible safeguarding or mental health concerns amongst LAC and PLAC.
- Ensure LAC and PLAC have equal access to all areas of the curriculum and that reasonable adjustments are made, if necessary.
- Review reports produced by the designated teacher to evaluate the progress of LAC in the school.
- Receive feedback from the headteacher regarding the effectiveness of the policy.
- Appoint a Lead Governor for Vulnerable Groups which must include a focus upon CLA
- Ensure there is a Lead Governor who links with the Designated Teacher in every school, receive regular progress reports and providing feedback to the governing body and ensure this role is carried out in line with the Trust's Governance Handbook
- Ensure effective liaison and communication with the Lead Trustee for Vulnerable Groups.

2.3 Headteachers will:

- Overseeing this policy and monitoring its implementation, feeding back to the Local Governing Body on the following:
 - The number of CLA and PCLA in the school
 - An analysis of assessment scores as a cohort, compared to other student groups

- The attendance of CLA and PCLA, compared to other student groups
- The level of fixed term and permanent exclusions, compared to other student groups
- Appoint a Designated Teacher for Children Looked After, whose role is set out below. It is essential that another appropriate person is identified quickly should the Designated Teacher leave the school or be absent
- Ensure that procedures are in place to monitor the admission, progress, attendance and any exclusion of Children Looked After and take action where progress, conduct or attendance is below expectations and ensure regular training is provided for all staff
- Ensure regular and effective communication between the Designated Teacher and the Lead Governor for Vulnerable groups
- Report on the progress, attendance and conduct of Children Looked After to all parties involved
- Ensure that staff in school receive relevant training and are aware of their responsibilities under this policy and related guidance.
- Ensuring PP+ funding for CLA and PCLA is managed effectively.

2.4 The Designated Teacher will:

- Build relationships with health, education and social care partners and other partners so that they and the VSH understand the support available to CLA and PCLA
- Promote the educational achievement of CLA and PCLA at the school; this includes those that left care through adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement orders or were adopted from state care outside England and Wales
- Act as the main contact for social services and the DfE
- Promote a culture of high expectations and aspirations
- Ensure CLA are involved in setting their own targets
- Where appropriate, advise staff on teaching strategies for CLA
- Ensure that CLA are prioritised for one-to-one tuition and support
- Lead on how the child's PEP is developed and used in school to ensure the child's progress towards targets is monitored
- Liaise with the SENDCo to ensure all student needs are met
- Be vigilant in observing any potential safeguarding concerns that could arise surrounding CLA and PCLA due to their increased vulnerability to harm, and reporting these to the DSL as soon as they arise
- Work with the child's Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) and social worker to develop and implement their Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- Work with the VSH to discuss how funding can be used to support the child's progress and meet the needs identified in their PEP
- Work with the headteacher to submit reports to the Local Governing Body, which details the progress of all LCLA and PCLA
- Be an advocate for Children Looked After
- Ensure a smooth and welcome induction for the child and carer when new to the school, and note any specific requirements, including care status

2.5 The DSL will:

- Keep up-to-date records of LAC's respective social worker and VSH.
- Promote amongst staff the importance of recognising and reporting safeguarding concerns surrounding LAC and PLAC as soon as possible due to their increased vulnerability to harm.
- Where a child ceases to be looked after and becomes a care leaver, keep up-to-date contact details of their LA personal advisor and liaising with the advisor as necessary regarding any issues of concern affecting the care leaver.

2.6 The SENDCO will:

- Ensure they are involved in reviewing PEP and care plans for LAC and PLAC.
- Liaise with the class teacher, designated teacher, specialists and parents when considering interventions to support the progress of PLAC.

2.7 All staff will:

- Have high expectations of Children Looked After involvement in learning and educational progress
- Be aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation from birth families, the reasons for the separation and that some children may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences
- Understand the reasons which may be behind a looked after child's behaviour, and why they may need more support than other children, however this should not be an excuse for lowering expectations of what the child is capable of achieving
- Understand how important it is to see Children Looked After as individuals rather than as a homogenous group and to not publicly treat them different to their peers
- Appreciate the importance of showing sensitivity about who else knows about a child's looked after status
- Appreciate the central importance of the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) in helping to create a shared understanding between teachers, carers, social workers and most importantly, the child and what everyone needs to do to help in order for them to achieve their potential
- Have the level of understanding they need of the role of the social workers, virtual school in local authorities and how education and the function of the PEP fits into the wider care planning duties of the authority which looks after the child
- Maintain a CLA child's confidentiality and ensure they are supported sensitively
- Respond promptly to the Designated Teacher's request for information.

6. Personal Education Plan (PEP)

All CLA must have a care plan; PEPs are an integral part of this care plan.

The PEP is an evolving record of what needs to happen for a student to enable them to make the expected progress and fulfil their potential. The PEP will reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning which meets the identified educational needs of the child. **The PEP will be reviewed termly.**

The school with other professionals and the child's carers will use the PEP to support the child's educational needs, raise the child's aspirations and improve their life chances. All relevant bodies, such as the LA, the designated teacher and carers, will involve the child in the PEP process at all stages.

The PEP will address the student's full range of education and development needs, including:

- **[For Primary schools only] Access to nursery provision that is appropriate to the child's age**
- Access to provision that is appropriate to the child's age
- On-going catch-up support, which will be made available for children who have fallen behind with work
- Suitable education provided by the LA, where the child is not in school because of suspension or exclusion
- Transitional support where needed, such as if a child is moving to a new school.
- School attendance and behaviour support, where appropriate
- Support to help the child meet their aspirations, which includes:
 - Support to achieve expected levels of progress for the relevant national key stage and to complete an appropriate range of approved qualifications.
 - Careers advice, guidance and financial information about FE, training and employment, that focusses on the child's strengths, capabilities and the outcomes they want to achieve.
 - Out-of-school hours learning activities, study support and leisure interests.

The VSH and the designated teacher will ensure that information is included within a CLA or PCLA's PEP surrounding how they are benefitting from any use of Pupil Premium (PP)+ funding to improve their attainment. Any interventions supported by PP+ will be evidence-based and in the best interests of the student.

The PEP should be prepared with the child and the carer, in liaison with the social worker and other relevant support workers/agencies, and be linked to the Care Plan meetings, where in place.

Where appropriate, the PEP should take account of any Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), Individual Educational Plan (IEP), Pastoral Support Plan (PSP), career plan or any other relevant plans.

7. Working with Agencies and the Virtual School Head (VSH)

The school will ensure that copies of all relevant reports are forwarded to the CLA social workers, in addition to carers or residential social workers.

The school will coordinate their review meetings; for example, hold an annual review of CLA with their statutory care review.

The school will work with other agencies to exchange information, such as changes in circumstances, exclusions or attendance issues, taking prompt action, where necessary, to safeguard CLA and PCLA.

Behaviour management strategies will be agreed between the VSH and the school, to ensure challenging behaviour is managed in the most effective way for that individual child.

The designated teacher for CLA and PCLA will communicate with the VSH and child's social worker to facilitate the completion of the PEP.

Through the designated teacher, the school will work with the VSH, social worker and other relevant agencies to monitor any arrangements in place so that actions and activities recorded in the child's PEP are implemented without delay. The designated teacher will communicate with the VSH and agree on how PP+ can be used effectively to accommodate the child's educational attainment and progress.

PP+ for PLAC will be allocated directly to, and managed by, the school. The school will work with the VSH to manage allocation of PP+ for the benefit of our cohort of CLA, or PCLA, and according to their needs. If deemed necessary, the school will allocate an amount of funding to an individual to support their needs.

The designated teacher will ensure consistent and strong communication with the VSH regarding CLA who are absent without authorisation.

The school will share their expertise on what works in supporting the education of CLA and PCLA.

8. The Voice of a Looked After Child

The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After should act as an advocate for Children Looked After. The views of Children Looked After should be heard and opportunities should be provided for these to be voiced privately, via 1:1 meetings as well as informally. Children Looked After need to be clear that all staff will support them and act on any concerns as their advocate and be the link with outside agencies including their social worker and carer.

Children Looked After should always contribute to the PEP process and should attend review meetings wherever possible.

9. Safeguarding

The school recognises that many CLA and PCLA have experienced trauma, abuse or complex family circumstances that have led to them being placed in care, and will ensure that all staff are aware that experiences of adversity such as these can leave pupils vulnerable to further harm or exploitation.

All staff will be trained to recognise signs and indicators of safeguarding concerns and will ensure that extra vigilance is practiced in observing and identifying these indicators amongst LAC and PLAC as soon as possible.

Where a CLA or PCLA has a social worker, this will inform decisions about safeguarding, e.g. responding to responding to absence from education where being absent from education may increase known safeguarding risks within the family or in the community.

The Headteacher will implement appropriate pastoral support services in place throughout the school to ensure that the welfare of CLA and PCLA can be adequately protected to the extent that reflects their increased vulnerability.

Staff will be encouraged to report to the DSL any concerns they have over CLA or PCLA in line with the processes outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Staff will be regularly encouraged to look for signs of bullying and report to the designated teacher if they believe a CLA or PCLA is being bullied, as this can have a particularly negative impact on pupils who have early experiences of rejection or abandonment.

10. Students with SEND

Support for CLA with SEND, who do not need an EHC plan, will be covered as part of the child's PEP and care plan reviews.

The SENCO, class teacher, designated teacher and specialists will involve parents when considering interventions to support their child's progress. If appropriate, the VSH will be invited to comment on proposed SEND provision for PCLA.

The designated teacher and the SENCO will ensure that CLA and PCLA with SEND are supported in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy, with extra consideration given to the fact that some of the usual procedures for supporting pupils with SEND may lack applicability for CLA, e.g. where CLA are in residential care and, thus, will have their EHC plans taken care of by the LA rather than the general stipulation of the place where they are ordinarily resident.

11. Suspension and Exclusion of Children Looked After or Previously Looked After

Every school within the Trust does its best to avoid excluding children and in the case of Children Looked After it is even more important.

Where the school has concerns about a child's behaviour, the VSH will be informed at the earliest opportunity. As far as possible, the school will engage proactively with the social worker or carer of a CLA to provide appropriate support for underlying issues that may be causing poor behaviour and improving this behaviour.

Exclusion and suspension will only be used as a last resort, after the school and VSH have considered what additional support can be provided to prevent exclusion, and any additional arrangements to support the pupil's education in the event of exclusion.

The school will have regard to the DfE's statutory guidance '[Suspension and permanent exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement](#)' and recognises that suspending or excluding LAC can make them more vulnerable to harm due to not having the protection and opportunities school provides. The headteacher will balance this recognition alongside the need to ensure calm and safe environments for all staff and pupils, devising strategies that take both into consideration.

Where the school has concerns about an LAC's behaviour, the VSH will be informed at the earliest opportunity. As far as possible, the school will engage proactively with the social worker or carer of an LAC to provide appropriate support for underlying issues that may be causing poor behaviour and improving this behaviour.

As part of the termly review of a pupil's PEP, any concerns about their behaviour will be recorded, alongside information on how they are being supported to improve this and reduce the likelihood of exclusion.

Suspension or permanent exclusion will only be used as a last resort. Permanent exclusion will only occur where there has been serious and/or persistent breaches of the school's Behaviour Policy or where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of others.

Where a looked-after child is at risk of being suspended or permanently excluded, the school will engage with the designated teacher and the pupil's parents, or other individuals involved in the pupil's care. The designated teacher will contact the VSH as soon as possible to work together, and with other relevant individuals, to consider what additional assessment and support needs to be put in place to help the school address the factors affecting the pupil's behaviour and reduce the need for suspension or permanent exclusion.

The school will inform parents that they can seek the advice of the VSH on strategies to support their child to avoid exclusion.

Where a looked-after child is excluded, the school will document the provision of immediate suitable education in the pupil's PEP.

The school will inform parents that they can seek the advice of the VSH on strategies to support their child to avoid exclusion/suspension.

Permanent exclusion will only occur where there has been serious and/or persistent breaches of the school's Behaviour Policy or where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of others.

Designated Teachers in partnership with school staff and the Local Governing Body, as necessary should:

- Be involved in any discussions related to decisions about potential exclusions of Children Looked After
- Make sure the Virtual School, Local Authority which looks after the child and the child's carer are involved in such a decision
- ensure all formal interventions have been implemented prior to an exclusion.

Data for suspension rates within the school as a whole will be reviewed by the Designated Teacher for Children Looked After to identify any trends in respect of Children Looked After.

12. Transition and Admission

All Children Looked After who apply to Trust schools will be offered transitional visits in addition to being able to attend open day/evenings. The Designated Teacher will lead and arrange all visits as necessary.

Children Looked After will have dedicated and named person to provide on-going support and to act as their first point of contact throughout their time at school.

Once enrolled, records will be requested from the student's previous school. This will provide information to inform the PEP. Contact arrangements will be clarified at this meeting including who to call first in an emergency.

When Children Looked After leave the school, either due to progression into Higher Education or transfer to another educational provider, contact will be made with the new educational establishment.

Where appropriate a LAC should receive a planned induction process which would involve time spent in school, meeting the teachers, orientating themselves. This will ideally take place as multiple sessions over the course of the week.

13. Careers Advice and Progression Planning

All students are able to receive careers guidance within their school and 1:1 appointments can be made throughout the year for further support. Children Looked After, as all other students, will have a dedicated member of staff who will support them with their progression planning, HE applications and also employability skills.

Destinations will be monitored and reported at the end of every academic year.

14. Additional Support

The Designated Teacher and SENDCO should make sure that Children Looked After are prioritised in any selection of students who would benefit from interventions and that they will have access to academic focused study support.

Referrals to other agencies e.g. counselling services will be made with the child, carer and social worker.

Children, carers, social workers and the Virtual School will be involved in all SEND reviews, which if possible will be combined with PEP reviews.

15. Communication around Children Looked After

It is important that all teaching staff within the school who are in contact with the child are aware that they are being looked after by the local authority. This will be identified on SIMS and, where appropriate, staff will receive a formal notification through email. This will be the responsibility of either the Designated Teacher or Safeguarding Lead.

Good communication is essential between professionals. It is important to exchange information in-between formal reviews if there are significant changes in a young person's circumstances eg. if there is a change of course, there is a change of care placement or there are significant issues such as behaviour and attendance. The Designated Teacher and/or the pastoral link will be the central point of contact.

Schools, and social workers within Local Authority Children's Services should endeavour to co-ordinate their review meetings eg. to have an Annual Statement or Education Health Care Plan Review and a Personal Education Plan or PEP meeting or review. This is necessary to ensure the child does not feel overwhelmed

by the number of meetings and the same information is not having to be repeatedly shared.

The Designated Teacher for Children Looked After will be responsible for providing reports on the progress and attendance of all children in care to the Local Governing Body, Virtual School and Board of Directors as requested.

16. Record Keeping and Information Sharing

Appropriate and specific arrangements for sharing reliable data are in place to ensure that the education needs of CLA and PCLA are understood and met. The arrangements set out include:

- Who has access to information on LAC and PLAC and how data will remain secure.
- How pupils and parents are informed of, and allowed to challenge, information that is kept about them.
- How carers contribute to and receive information.
- Mechanisms for sharing information between the school and relevant LA departments.
- How relevant information about individual pupils is passed between authorities, departments and the school when pupils move.

The Designated Teacher will co-ordinate record keeping for all Children Looked After in School. Children Looked After status will be appropriately “flagged” on SIMS.

Sensitivity is a priority in sharing information with members of the school staff. Wherever possible students’ wishes are taken into account in sharing information within the staff team.

17. Partnership Working

Minerva Learning Trust and its schools values the views of parents/carers. We firmly believe in developing strong partnerships with carers, parents and residential care workers to enable students to achieve their full potential.

We recognise the essential contributions that external support services make in assisting Children Looked After and we are committed to developing positive partnerships with all involved.

18. Confidentiality

Information on Children Looked After will be shared with school staff on a “need to know” basis. The Designated Teacher will discuss what information is shared

with which school staff at the PEP meeting. Once this has been agreed with the social worker, carer, young person, and other parties, complete confidentiality is to be maintained.

19. Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually. At every review, it will be approved by the Trust Board and Local Governing Body.

20. Equality Impact Assessment

The Trust will carry out an Equality Impact Assessment in order to ensure that policies, procedures and practices cater for individuals who share protected characteristics in relation to the Equality Act 2010. The purpose of these assessments is to ensure that policies, procedures and practices within the organisation are fair to all. If unfairness is highlighted, the assessment will also seek to show how this can be changed and, where it can't be changed, how it can be improved.

The Trust will monitor the impact of the policy to assess whether there is evidence of a detrimental impact on anyone with a protected characteristic as a result of the application of this policy. The assessment will include consideration of adaptations or changes which can be made to address any issues identified.