

Supporting Looked After Children

This course focussed on

The role of the Virtual School

The issues and barriers to education facing Looked After Children

How Board members can act as advocates for the education of Looked After Children.

The roles and responsibilities of the governing board in relation to Looked After Children (LAC)

Excellent course giving a good understanding of the Virtual School and the issues, impact and barriers to learning of being LAC. We discussed why children might be 'looked after', behaviours that they might display and the importance of supporting this vulnerable group.

Looked After Children

The term 'looked after' has a specific, legal meaning based on the Children Act 1989.

Children are 'looked after' by a local authority either under a court order or through a voluntary arrangement made with the child's parents.

Section 20 (of the Children Act) is voluntary accommodation - children live at home with their parent or carer and parental responsibility remains with the natural parents. Children continue to live at home because it is hoped that by providing support to child and family, the problems affecting the child can be resolved, without the need to separate them from their family.

Asylum seeker children are always Section 20.

Interim care order – Children are placed in the care of the local authority by a court. The court decides whether the child goes back to the parent/carer or into full time care.

Virtual School

What is the Virtual School?

The Virtual School in Rotherham exists to support the educational progress and achievement of looked after children, wherever they live.

Children do not 'attend' the Virtual School, and they do not have a school building; looked after children remain the responsibility of the schools that they attend.

What does the Virtual School do?

They:

Aim to raise educational achievement, promote emotional well being and improve life chances of children and young people in care.

Attend termly PEP meetings for looked after children and support the ePEP process. They monitor the progress, attainment and attendance of LAC and help the designated teacher to set tight and clear targets.

Ensure LAC Pupil Premium is allocated effectively to support the education of looked after children and narrow the attainment gap.

Provide advice, support and training to professionals, schools, colleges and institutions.

Improve access to specialist services.

Provide access to professional advice and guidance on education, training and employment.

The issues and barriers to education facing Looked After Children

We discussed attachment issues and the effect that a disturbed attachment to a parent can have on a child. They may become disengaged, have little self worth or feel invisible or unloved. This may lead to having difficulties in trusting and forming relationships with others.

Looked after children can experience social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and this can impact on their ability to learn – it is important that they find success apart from academic progress. The school's behaviour policy should include LAC. Rewards and consequences do not work for children who have impulsive behaviour; we need to modify experiences for them so that success can be achieved.

Changes in care settings and developing new relationships can make it difficult for a child to concentrate on learning.

LAC need stability in school and in care. Solution focussed staff meetings disclosing children's past history can result in gaining the compassion of staff and result in a plan of action in order to support them.

The roles and responsibilities of the governing board in relation to Looked After Children (LAC)

There should be a designated teacher (DT) for LAC – either a qualified teacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). If the designated person is not a teacher then a member of the SLT needs to take on a champions role.

The DT should report on the attendance and progress of LAC and the governing board should act upon any issues raised by the report – this may include any support or resources needed.

The DT should share information about the graduated response to the pupils needs. This should be person centred and needs-led, include action taken, and the support and resources needed.

The DT needs time to fulfil their role and preferably not be the SENCO as the role is too great.