

Meadowhead School and Sixth Form



Children Looked After (CLA) Policy

This is a policy of Meadowhead School and Sixth Form.

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Governor Link:	Lynda Taylor
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At Meadowhead, we make a difference



Meadowhead School Academy Trust. A company limited by guarantee. Registered in England

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Meadowhead School aims to promote the educational achievement and welfare of students in public care.

Designated Teacher (DT) for CLA: Designated Safeguarding Lead

Designated Teacher for CLA Support: Designated Safeguarding Lead

Governor with responsibility for CLA: Mrs Lynda Taylor

The governing body is committed to providing quality education for all its students based on equality of access, opportunity and outcomes. This policy includes requirements set out in “*Statutory guidance on the duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children under section 52 of the Children Act 2004*” (Nov 2005) and associated guidance on the education of CLA. We aim to contribute towards achieving the five outcomes of Every Child Matters, which is the Government’s aim for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances:

- **Stay safe**
- **Be healthy**
- **Enjoy and achieve**
- **Make a positive contribution**
- **Achieve economic well being**

The aims of the school are to:

- ensure that school policies and procedures are followed for CLA as for all children
- ensure that all CLA have access to a broad and balanced curriculum
- provide a differentiated curriculum appropriate to the individual’s needs and ability
- ensure that CLA students take as full a part as possible in all school activities
- ensure that carers and social workers of CLA students are kept fully informed of their child’s progress and attainment
- ensure that CLA students are involved, where practicable, in decisions affecting their future provision.

Who are Looked After Children?

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked-after by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following:

- is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, [Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21]
- is subject to a care order [Children Act 1989, Part IV]
- is subject to a placement order

It is possible that a placement order is made without a care order or interim care order being made, or the child not being subject to section 20 of the 1989 Act. For example, the local authority working with a family and believing that the child should be removed and be placed for adoption. The local authority does not have to apply for a care order first (though this would be the usual situation) and then a placement order; it could apply simply for a placement order.

Local authorities can provide children with accommodation under a wide range of circumstances, for example:

- as the result of an agreement between the local authority and the child’s parents or guardians that being accommodated would be in the child’s best interest
- the child has been remanded to the care of a local authority by a criminal court

- because the child is helping the police with their enquiries
- the child has been placed for adoption, and the local authority is acting as the adoption agency
- the child is subject to a police protection order.

In all these examples, the child will be subject to a different legal status, and the circumstances will be very different. However, in every case, the child is being looked after under the terms of the act because he/she is being accommodated.

Section 22 of the Children Act stipulates very clearly that for a child to be looked-after by a local authority, he/she needs to be accommodated for a continuous period of more than 24 hours.

A child is looked-after when subject to a care order. There are no exceptions to this rule.

In these circumstances however, there is no obligation for the local authority to accommodate the child. For example, a child under a care order can be placed with their parents or other relative.

A care order continues in force until either:

- it is discharged by a court
- the child reaches his/her 18th birthday
- the child leaves care through an adoption order, special guardianship order or child arrangement order.

A local authority cannot unilaterally end a care order, and therefore a child, once subject to a care order, will remain looked-after until one of the above events occurs. However, when a placement order is made the care order no longer has effect but is reactivated if the placement order is revoked.

Exception

The only two exceptions to the rule that for a child to be looked-after is that he/she needs to be accommodated for a continuous period of more than 24 hours relates to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children with a legal status of V3 (short-term breaks when each break is being recorded as an individual episode). For statistical purposes, information is required for this group of children for receiving respites for periods of less than 24 hours duration, providing the periods include an overnight stay.

The term 'in care' refers only to children who are subject to a care order by the courts under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 - they may live with foster carers, in a Children's home, in a residential school, with relatives or with parents under supervision. Children who are cared for on a voluntary basis are accommodated' by the local authority under section 20 of the Children Act – they may live in foster care, in a Children's home or in a residential school. All these groups are said to be 'Children Looked After -CLA. They may be looked after by our local authority or may be in the care of another authority but living in ours.

Admissions

The Governing Body endorses council policy whilst acknowledging that as an Academy, the governing board is its own admissions authority. The Council, as the Admission Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools, believes that admissions criteria should not discriminate against CLA students. This stance is also endorsed by the LEA and the school's Admissions Policy. Due to care placement changes, CLA may enter school mid-term. It is vital that we give them a positive welcome. If necessary, we may offer additional support and pre-entry visits to help the new student settle.

Inclusion

This policy recognises that all students are entitled to a balanced, broadly based curriculum. Our CLA policy reinforces the need for teaching that is fully inclusive. The Governing Body will ensure the school makes appropriate provision for all CLA students.

Allocation of resources

The Governing Body will ensure that the school allocates resources to support appropriate provision for CLA, meeting the objectives set out in this policy.

Monitoring the progress of CLA

The social worker for the CLA should initiate a Personal Education Plan – PEP - within 20 days of joining the school, or of entering care, and ensure that the young person is actively involved. It is vital that the school assesses each CLA's attainment on entry to ensure continuity of learning.

The school will monitor and track the achievement and attainment of all students at regular intervals. CLA will require their PEP to be reviewed, according to their needs, as initiated by the reviewing office or social worker, and the young person's views should be sought by the Designated Teacher and noted on the PEP.

Record Keeping

The Designated Teacher will know all the CLA in school and will have access to their relevant contact details including parents, carers and social worker. The Designated Teacher will also be aware of any CLA from other authorities. It is important that the school flags CLA status appropriately in the school's information systems so that information is readily available as required.

Staff Development

We encourage staff to attend courses that help them to acquire the skills needed to support CLA. Part of the Designated Teacher's role is to develop awareness of issues associated with CLA.

Partnership with parents/carers and care workers

At school we firmly believe in developing a strong partnership with parents/carers and care workers to enable CLA to achieve their potential. Review meetings are an opportunity to further this partnership working.

Links with external agencies/organisations

We also recognise the important contribution that external support services make in supporting CLA. Colleagues from the following support services may be involved with individual CLA:

- CLA teams
- Educational psychologists and others from Local Authority SEN services
- Medical officers
- School nurses
- CAMHS
- Education Welfare Officers
- Social care worker/ Community care worker/ Residential child care worker
- Youth Offending Service
- LACES team
- Team Fostering
- MAPs
- Virtual School

CLA policy review and evaluation

We consider the CLA policy to be important and we undertake a thorough review of both policy and practice each year. The outcomes of this review inform the School Improvement Plan.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rationale for roles and responsibilities:

Children Looked After – CLA - are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and it is nationally recognised that there is considerable educational underachievement when compared to their peers. For example, they may experience:

- a high level of disruption and change in school placements
- lack of involvement in extra-curricular activities
- inconsistent or no attention paid to homework
- poor attendance and punctuality

This may result in:

- poor exam success rates in comparison with the general population
- underachievement in further and higher education

These issues may also affect adopted young people.

The majority of children who remain in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect. The Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme aims to improve outcomes for all children. To date the outcomes achieved by CLA have been unacceptably poor and the Government is committed to addressing this disparity. As corporate parents we all have a part to play in this by vigorously applying the principles of good parenting by:

- giving priority to education
- listening to children
- providing stability and continuity
- taking corporate responsibility
- promoting inclusion
- raising standards
- intervening early
- promoting early years experiences
- celebrating success

Post-16 Support

We recognise the importance of providing tailored support to CLA as they transition to Post-16 pathways, including further education, apprenticeships, or training programs. The school will:

- Offer career advice and guidance tailored to the needs and aspirations of CLA through regular one-to-one sessions with the Careers Advisor or the Designated Teacher.
- Ensure CLA have access to information on local Post-16 opportunities, including open days, apprenticeship programs, and vocational courses.
- Provide practical support with applications for college, sixth-form, or apprenticeships, including assistance with personal statements, CV writing, and interview preparation.

- Collaborate with Virtual Schools and other agencies to ensure that Post-16 plans are incorporated into Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
- Arrange mentoring or coaching to build confidence and prepare CLA for the increased independence required in Post-16 settings.
- Monitor CLA's progress in their Post-16 placements, offering follow-up support during their transition period.

Post 18 Support

As CLA approach the age of 18, Meadowhead School will work closely with Virtual Schools, leaving care teams, and other agencies to ensure a smooth transition to further/higher education, vocational training, or employment.

Support will include access to mentorship opportunities, guidance on higher education applications, and connections to alumni networks where possible. The school will maintain contact with care leavers to provide ongoing support and advice during this critical transition.

The Designated Teacher will:

- be an advocate for CLA within school
- give regard to the impact of relevant decisions for CLA on both the CLA and the rest of the school community
- know all the CLA in school, including those in the care of other authorities, and ensure the availability of all relevant details from school record-keeping systems as required
- attend relevant training about CLA
- act as the key liaison professional for other agencies and carers in relation to CLA, seeking advice from the CLA team when appropriate
- ensure that CLA receive a positive welcome on entering school, especially mid-year and, if necessary, offer additional support and a pre-entry visit to help the new student settle
- ensure that all CLA have an appropriate PEP that is completed within 20 days of joining the school or of entering and ensure that the young person contributes to the plan However, if a child becomes looked-after in an emergency, the PEP must be initiated within 10 working days of the start of the first placement. An initial version must be available for the 20 working-day review of the care plan.
- keep PEPs and other records up to date and review PEPs at transfer and at six monthly intervals
- convene an urgent multi-agency meeting if a CLA is experiencing difficulties or is at risk of exclusion
- ensure confidentiality on individual children, sharing confidential and personal information on a need to know basis, bearing in mind the wishes of the individual student
- act as the key adviser for staff and governors on issues relevant to CLA
- ensure that care and school liaison is effective including invitations to meetings and other school events
- in conjunction with other agencies, actively encourage and promote out of hours learning and extra-curricular activities for CLA
- ensure a speedy transfer of information, records and coursework, where appropriate, when a CLA transfers to another educational placement
- contribute information to CLA reviews when required
- report to the Governing body on CLA in the school and inform of relevant policy and practice development
- agree with the social worker the appropriate people to invite to parents' evenings etc.
- prepare reports for Governors' meetings to include:
 - the number of CLA on roll and the confirmation that they have a Personal Education Plan – PEP
 - their attendance compared to other students

- their attainment (GCSEs) compared to other students
 - the number, if any, of fixed term and permanent exclusions
 - the destinations of students who leave the school
- attend governor meetings as appropriate – such as the admission, disciplinary and exclusion of CLA
 - arrange a mentor or befriender (adult and /or student) to whom the young person can talk, possibly through the learning mentor scheme or through Connexions, particularly when the student is new to school
 - ensure that any Special Educational Needs are addressed in conjunction with the SENCO and in accordance with the Code of Practice for SEN. CLA are six to eight times more likely to have a statement of Special Educational Needs than the general school population.
 - develop an annual plan for the allocation of Pupil Premium Plus funding, focusing on targeted interventions and monitoring their impact on educational outcomes for CLA. Examples of interventions include academic tutoring, mentoring programs, and pastoral support tailored to individual needs. The effectiveness of PP+ expenditure will be evaluated against clearly defined success metrics and reviewed regularly. Input from carers, social workers, and Virtual School representatives will guide the prioritisation of PP+ funding to ensure accountability and alignment with CLA needs.

The Virtual School:

The Virtual school is responsible for supporting the attainment of high educational outcomes through:

- ensuring that every CLA child has a current Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- ensuring that, where possible, all CLA in need of a new school place attend a school/education setting which is rated by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding. For schools requiring improvement, evidence should be given that the school is providing high quality support to vulnerable students.
- The distribution and monitoring of the Student Premium Plus (PP+) grant for LAC
- supporting the admission of LAC into education
- ensuring access to high quality provision and support. For example: all Sheffield LAC and Care Leavers have access to dedicated access to the MAPs Service (CAMHS for LAC)
- providing expert advice and support to Designated Teachers and other professionals working with LAC/Care leavers
- providing networking opportunities and training events
- reporting on outcomes for Sheffield LAC
- disseminating of effective practice

Good practice suggests that all school staff will:

- follow school procedures
- keep the Designated Teacher informed about a CLA's progress
- have high expectations of the educational and personal achievements of CLA
- positively promote the raising of a CLA's self-esteem
- prioritise the mental health and emotional well-being of CLA by implementing trauma-informed practices and providing regular staff training to understand and address the needs of CLA. Early identification protocols will ensure that any mental health concerns are addressed promptly through regular check-ins and assessments. CLA will have access to in-house mental health resources, such as counselling services or a designated mental health lead, alongside external support from CAMHS, MAPs, and other health services.
- ensure any CLA are supported sensitively and that confidentiality is maintained

- be familiar with the school's policy and guidance on CLA and respond appropriately to requests for information to support PEPs and review meetings
- liaise with the Designated Teachers where a CLA is experiencing difficulties
- only use suspension/exclusion for CLA as a last resort. The school will implement alternative strategies, including restorative practices to resolve conflicts and repair relationships. Personalised behaviour support plans will be developed for CLA to identify triggers, de-escalation strategies, and tailored interventions.

Any suspension/exclusion decision will be made with careful consideration of its potential impact on the child's care placement and well-being. The school will actively involve carers, social workers, and other agencies in exploring alternatives before proceeding with suspension/exclusion.

- contribute to and liaise with social care colleagues and other appropriate professionals and keep carers fully informed at all times
- keep appropriate records, confidentially as necessary, and make these available to other professionals/parents/carers/student as appropriate
- make extra copies of reports available when required

Good practice suggests that the Governing Body will:

- ensure that the admission criteria and practice prioritises CLA according to the DCSF Admissions Code of Practice
- ensure all governors are fully aware of the legal requirements and guidance for CLA
- ensure there is a Designated Teacher for CLA
- liaise with the Headteacher, Designated Teacher and all other staff to ensure the needs of CLA are met
- nominate a governor with responsibility for CLA who links with the Designated Teacher
- receive regular reports from the Designated Teacher
- ensure that the school's policies and procedures give CLA equal access in respect of:
 - admission to school
 - National Curriculum and examinations, both academic and vocational
 - out of school learning and extra-curricular activities
 - work experience and careers guidance
 - annually review the effective implementation of the school policy for CLA
 - ensure that the Designated Teacher is invited to the exclusion meetings of CLA