Promoting the education of children with a social worker

Virtual School Head role extension

June 2021

Contents

Summary

This non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education intends to support all local authorities as Virtual School Heads take a strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes of the cohort of children with a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker who are aged from 0 up to 18. This guidance has been produced with input from the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

The Government's Children in Need review recognised the crucial role that Virtual School Heads have in helping education settings and local authorities work together, and made a commitment to explore the capacity needed to extend their leadership to the cohort of children and young people with a social worker. Coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected all children and for many of the most vulnerable has increased barriers to education. It is essential that the cohort of children with a social worker are supported to recover from the pandemic.

From September 2021, local authorities will receive funding to resource Virtual School Heads to work with early years settings, schools, colleges and social care leaders to create a culture of high aspirations that helps all children with social workers to make educational progress. With the knowledge and expertise gained from their work promoting the educational outcomes of looked-after and previously looked-after children, Virtual School Heads will enhance the partnerships between education settings and local authorities. Virtual School Heads will work with agencies to further understand and address the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience. The Virtual School Head will help to demonstrate the benefits of attending an education setting, as well as ensuring there are mechanisms in place to offer advice and support to teachers and social workers, with the aim of narrowing the attainment gap.

All local authorities are eligible to receive grant funding to support Virtual School Heads to take on this additional role and will be invited to participate in research to help the Department for Education understand how Virtual School Heads can be most effective in promoting educational outcomes. Funding for this strategic leadership role for children with a social worker is confirmed until March 2022.

The additional role of the Virtual School Head does not require the Virtual School Heads to provide direct intervention, help and support for individual children with a social worker or their families. This guidance does not change existing duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children, and should be read in conjunction with statutory guidance Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

Expiry or Review Date

This guidance will be reviewed before the end of March 2022 but will not be revised if it is no longer required.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- Virtual School Heads in local authorities
- Local authority officers (including Directors of Children's Services, social workers for children and young people, Troubled Families key workers, family support workers)
- Early Years leaders
- School and Alternative Provision leaders (including Designated Safeguarding Leads, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Headteachers, Designated Teachers, Directors and Chief Executives of Multi-Academy Trusts and Mental Health leads), school staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and free schools.
- College leaders in all Further Education (FE) settings, which includes FE colleges, sixth form colleges, independent training providers (ITPs) and special post-16 institutions.
- Educational Psychologists
- Managers and staff (including Designated Safeguarding Leads and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) in early years childcare settings.

Funding for the role extension

All local authorities are eligible to receive grant funding provided under Section 31 of the Education Act 2002 to deliver the extended Virtual School Head role.

Funding provides Virtual School Heads with the additional resource required to take on the strategic leadership role for children with a social worker and is sufficient to recruit additional team members to support them with these responsibilities.

A funding formula, based on the number of education settings within a local authority, has been used to establish the allocations for each local authority. Local authorities are eligible for baseline funding and those with the greatest number of education settings will

receive 'top up' funding to reflect the additional capacity they will need to work with these settings.[1]

- The **Grant Determination Letter** sets out what each local authority can expect to receive and the conditions by which this funding must be used. This funding is intended to provide Virtual School Heads with the additional capacity they require to become the strategic leader that promotes educational outcomes for children with a social worker. Local authorities **must not** use this funding for any other purpose.
- In addition to the Grant Determination Letter, all local authorities will need to sign and return a **Memorandum of Understanding** to the Department for Education.
- On receipt of the Memorandum of Understanding, the Department for Education will make **three payments**, in September 2021, December 2021 and March 2022 to all local authorities.

Funding has been allocated as the annual resource for extending the Virtual School Head role, up to 31 March 2022. The Department for Education recognises the short time frame between announcement of the role change and the start of these new responsibilities in September 2021. Funding allocations have not been reduced to a pro-rata allocation for 21-22.

For clarity, some children with social workers are eligible for Pupil Premium by virtue of current or past free school meal claims and education settings will continue to use this funding to improve their attainment. Only looked-after and previously looked-after children are eligible for Pupil Premium Plus (PP+).

Defining the cohort of children with a social worker

From September 2021 Virtual School Heads are being asked to become strategic leaders for the cohort of children who have been assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker.

For ease, the term 'children with a social worker' will be used to refer to this group of children throughout this document. It covers all children who were assessed as needing a social worker at any time due to safeguarding and/or welfare reasons, which includes all those subject to a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan. This includes children aged from 0 up to 18 in all education settings.

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[1] There are two exceptions to the baseline funding that all local authorities will receive. The City of London and Isles of Scilly will receive less than the baseline funding due to a much smaller number of education settings in these areas.

This cohort has been identified as a group of children who face significant barriers to education as a result of experiences of adversity and trauma, most commonly abuse and neglect.

Under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, all local authorities have duties to children with special educational needs and disabilities. Virtual School Heads should not duplicate support available to children under existing local authority duties. The remit of the extended Virtual School Heads role will include children who are disabled and have, or have had, an allocated social worker.

Non-statutory responsibility for promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker will be in addition to the existing statutory duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children.

The strategic leadership of Virtual School Heads

Using their knowledge and expertise from promoting the educational outcomes of looked-after and previously looked-after children, Virtual School Heads will become the strategic leader who champion the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker.

This means that they will help to:

- make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children.

- promote practice that supports children's engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting can be an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm.

- level up children's outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential. This will include helping to make sure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

What is not in scope for Virtual School Heads

The Virtual School Head role for children with a social worker is a strategic leadership responsibility. For clarity, this means that Virtual School Heads are **not** being asked to:

- work with individual children and their families - including tracking and monitoring educational progress of individual children or providing academic or other interventions.

- respond to requests from parents or carers to offer advice, intervention and support in relation to individual children with a social worker.
- take responsibility for children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) who do not require or need a social worker, as defined above.

Barriers to education for children with a social worker

1. While there is no single cause for the poor educational outcomes for children with a social worker, experiences of adversity and trauma can create barriers to good outcomes.

2. Children with a social worker are more likely to have experienced complex family circumstances; some may have been at risk of, or have suffered, physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. At home, children with a social worker may have lived in families where there is domestic abuse, mental ill-health, or substance misuse, and outside of the home, may be at risk of extra-familial harms, such as experiencing criminal or sexual exploitation or serious violence. Data tells us that children with a social worker are much more likely to experience frequent transitions, including moving home or school and experience changes in the professionals that are supporting them and their families.[2]

3. These experiences can affect children's attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing and, if children cannot access support, they may struggle to reach their full potential. Even after a child no longer has a social worker, poor educational outcomes can persist.[3]

4. Despite the challenges that children with a social worker face, with the right support in place, some children make progress and achieve better than their peers. It is crucial that those supporting children with a social worker have high aspirations for the children; children expect those that are supporting them to believe in them and do not want professionals to lower their expectations or treat them differently.

Findings from the Children in Need review

5. The Government's [Children in Need review](#) (concluded June 2019) identified for the first time that 1.6 million children needed a social worker between 2012 and 2018, equivalent to 1 in 10 children or 3 children in every classroom. These children are present in 98%[4] of state schools and face barriers to education due to experiences of adversity and trauma, most commonly as a result of domestic abuse, mental ill-health,

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[2] Children in Need review: interim publication, December 2018.
[3] Children in Need review: data and analysis, June 2019.
[4] Children in Need review: data and analysis, June 2019.

and substance misuse, with 62% of children needing a social worker having experienced one or more of these.[5]

6. On average, children with a social worker do worse than their peers at every stage of their education. In 2018, 50% of children who had a social worker in the last six years were able to achieve a good level of development in the early years, compared to 72% of children who never had a social worker.[6] Pupils who had a social worker in the year of their GCSEs were around half as likely to achieve a strong pass in English and Maths than their peers, and at the end of Key Stage 4 were around 3 times less likely to go on to study A levels at age 16, and almost 5 times less likely to enter higher education at age 18. After age 18 of those who needed a social worker in the year of their GCSEs, 6% were in higher education compared to 27% of those who did not have a social worker; and by age 21, half had still not achieved Level 2 qualifications (which include GCSEs), compared to 11% of those not in need of a social worker.

7. Children with a social worker are around 3 times more likely to be persistently absent from school and between 2 to 4 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers. This group are also over ten times more likely to attend state-funded alternative provision settings than all other pupils.

8. Some children with a social worker go on to become looked-after: of the cohort of children who were looked-after children in 2017-18, 62% had spent some time on a Child in Need plan in the previous 5 years and 39% had spent some time on a Child Protection plan.[7]

9. The Children in Need review found that Virtual School Heads, who can bridge the gap between and support education settings and local authorities, could present opportunities to promote the educational needs of children with a social worker. Virtual School Heads are already raising aspirations and promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children and the cohort of previously looked-after children, through local authority duties which are set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Families Act 2014. Unlike looked-after children, or previously looked-after children, the cohort of children with a social worker who are subject to Child in Need plans or Child Protection plans have not had the benefit of a strategic leader that is able to champion the educational needs of their cohort and help them make educational progress.

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[5] Children in Need review: data and analysis: June 2019.
[6] Children in Need review: data and analysis: June 2019.
[7] Children in Need review: data and analysis, June 2019.

How COVID-19 has affected children's education

10. The pandemic has had a significant impact on children's learning, particularly the learning of the most vulnerable. In 2019-20, Children in Need had an average Attainment 8 score of only 21.1 key stage 4[8], compared to average scores of 50.2 for the wider population and 38.6 for pupils eligible for Free School Meals.[9] In order for every child to reach their full potential, children with a social worker will require a greater degree of support in their learning to improve their attainment.

11. For many children with a social worker, the pandemic will have increased some of the existing barriers that they faced in education across attendance, learning, behaviour and mental health and wellbeing.

12. Going forward, the priority is to reduce the impact of lost learning on all children and ensure that they are supported to progress and fulfil their potential. For children with a social worker, this will involve addressing existing barriers to education as well as ensuring that they can benefit fully from support available, including as part of the Government's support to boost education recovery.

Attendance

13. Regularly attending school or college[10] is vital for children's educational progress, for their wellbeing, and for their wider development. For children with a social worker, attending school is also a protective factor – at its best, offering a safe space to access support, ensuring that children are visible to and supported by professionals, and helping children make educational progress. That is why, throughout the pandemic, education settings have remained open for vulnerable children, including children with a social worker. Throughout the pandemic, during periods when schools have been open to all pupils, attendance of children with a social worker has remained lower than that of all pupils.

14. For some children with a social worker, as with other children, the pandemic will have increased barriers to attendance. The reasons for this may include:

- increased mental health and wellbeing needs;

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[8] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2020

[9] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance-revised/2019-20#dataDownloads-1

[10] The term college is used to capture all those who are in attendance at sixth form colleges, general FE colleges, independent training providers, designated institutions, and special post-16 institutions.

- living in a household where someone is clinically vulnerable or at a comparatively increased risk from COVID-19 and anxiety resulting from this;
- living in a household where risks and vulnerabilities, such as financial pressures or domestic abuse, have been exacerbated;
- disruption to routine and school as a source of safety and stability during periods of restricted school attendance.

Learning

15. Almost two-thirds of children assessed as in need had at least one of either domestic violence, mental health (adult or child) or substance misuse recorded in their assessments.[11] For some families, these issues may have been exacerbated by the pandemic and increased the barriers to learning that children with a social worker experience.

16. Where risk factors such as adult mental health and domestic violence are the reasons for the involvement of social care services and additional pressures created by the pandemic are present, this is likely to have impacted the stability of the home environment and parents' capacity to support home learning. This will have particularly impacted those children with a social worker who did not attend school during periods of restricted attendance.

Mental health and wellbeing

17. For many children, mental health and wellbeing will have been affected by the pandemic due to increased isolation, anxiety caused by uncertainty and concerns related to employment and health issues for family and friends. A report published in October 2020 by the NHS found that the proportion of children and young people with probable mental health disorders increased from 1 in 9 in 2017 to 1 in 6 in July 2020.[12]

18. The adversity and trauma that children with a social worker experience or have experienced mean that they are already more likely to have poor mental health and emotional wellbeing. For some of these children, the pandemic will have exacerbated pre-existing mental health issues and new needs around their emotional health and

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[11] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809108/CIN_review_final_analysis_publication.pdf

[12] https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up

wellbeing will have arisen, thereby further increasing barriers to learning and attainment.

Case study from Salford Virtual School

Partial school closures due to COVID-19 presented schools and local authorities with significant challenges, particularly around the low attendance of children with a social worker. A co-ordinated, multi-agency response was required to ensure there was local authority oversight of this cohort.

The Salford Virtual School Head was well placed to co-ordinate the strategy for children on a Child in Need or Child Protection plan, using established links with schools, social workers, the Education Welfare Service and other relevant service leads. Attendance data was gathered from local authority systems, enabling analysis and identification of attendance patterns during and after periods of lockdown. A designated officer led on this work and shared data with social work teams to raise the profile of attendance and as part of a triangulation system. A communications system was devised to provide a link between education settings and social care and work was undertaken alongside Educational Psychology, the Education Welfare Service and Early Help colleagues. This included an Emotionally Based School Avoidance Pathway to combat anxiety-driven absence.

This work put in place robust systems to gather attendance data for the cohort and share this information with relevant teams. Multi-agency working was strengthened, and attendance of vulnerable children increased.

How Virtual School Heads will promote the educational outcomes of children with a social worker

19. As the strategic leader for children with a social worker, Virtual School Heads will bring greater awareness to the disadvantage that this cohort of children can experience, promote engagement in education and help to narrow the attainment gap. Virtual School Heads will advocate for and model a strengths-based approach to supporting children and promoting their educational outcomes.

20. Local authorities should ensure they make effective use of the funding provided to their Virtual School Head as they adopt this strategic leadership role. Local authorities will need to consider the additional capacity Virtual School Heads require to work with education settings and social care to champion children with a social worker and should recruit staff with the right knowledge and skills.

21. As strategic leaders, Virtual School Heads will need to be mindful of children's needs at different stages of education and use this knowledge to work closely with educational settings in their area.

22. Virtual School Heads, working with their Director of Children's Services, will be best placed to understand the needs of the cohort of children with social workers in their local authority and how best to promote their educational outcomes. There will be no single model for delivering improved outcomes and Virtual School Heads may want to consider how to make use of peer support, including through the NAVSH as they develop and share good practice.

Activities for all Virtual School Heads

23. Virtual School Heads may want to take note of the [Children in Need review](#), including findings on [how to improve children's outcomes](#). Although Virtual School Heads will adapt their leadership to meet the needs of their local area, there are some activities which will be critical for all Virtual School Heads, including:

    - enhancing partnerships between education settings and the local authority so agencies can work together.

    - identifying the needs of the cohort and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes and ensure pupils make educational progress.

    - offering advice and support to key professionals to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using evidence-based interventions.

Responding to the pandemic

24. To help reduce the impact of lost learning, a range of recovery programmes have been developed and additional funding made available. Some of the key initiatives that Virtual School Heads may want to be aware of are:

- **Summer school programme:** for 2021, secondary schools are offering face-to-face summer schools, mostly for Year 7 pupils to help them transition from primary to secondary school. Secondary schools have been encouraged to identify those most in need of the summer school programme and to encourage children with a social worker to attend.
- **Recovery premium**: a new one-off £320m Recovery Premium has been made available for primary and secondary schools, building on the Pupil Premium. Schools will be able to use this funding as they see best to support disadvantaged pupils including children with a social worker.
- **National Tutoring Programme (NTP):** schools can work with highly trained tutors to run one-to-one, online or small group teaching with specialist tutors. The NTP is designed specifically to support disadvantaged pupils in England, defined by Pupil Premium eligibility. Schools have discretion to identify the pupils most likely to benefit from support and this may include children with a social worker.

Enhance partnerships with education settings

25. Effective support for children with a social worker needs education settings and local authorities to work together. Leaders of all agencies can play a crucial role in establishing a culture where every child is able to make progress. Education settings and local authorities will have different responsibilities but establishing shared priorities can help to drive change for children.

26. To support effective partnerships, Virtual School Heads should:

- establish strong relationships with education settings and social care and develop an expectation that any leaders or professionals supporting children with a social worker hold high aspirations for this cohort of children.

- consider how to bring together education and local authority leaders to most effectively develop goals and set direction for improving children's outcomes. These goals should take account of other local strategic priorities, e.g., meeting Opportunity Area objectives or working with Violence Reduction Units to tackle serious violence.

- clarify the Virtual School Head role to education settings and social care services, including communicating their offer of advice and support to teams.

Identify the cohort's needs and address barriers to education

27. Children with a social worker may face barriers to education because of their complex circumstances. These barriers to education have meant that they have needed the help and support of a social worker. This cohort of children may face multiple and overlapping disadvantages and the cumulative impact of these experiences can affect their attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing. With the right support in place, children can and do achieve, but sometimes it can be challenging for professionals to recognise and overcome the barriers that children experience.

28. To effectively identify the needs of children with a social worker and ensure they can access interventions that make a difference to their education, Virtual School Heads should:
   - use data and analysis to understand and monitor the cohort's needs including making links to local strategic priorities e.g., attendance, suspension and permanent exclusion rates, overlaps with other kinds of disadvantage such as Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) rates.

   - share knowledge and expertise to strengthen how education settings and social care understand the impact of adversity and trauma on learning and educational outcomes of children.

   - promote professional practice for education settings and local authorities which:
     o champions high levels of support alongside high standards for children with a social worker.
     o recognises how stability and consistency in relationships can help children to overcome barriers to learning.
     o encourages effective information sharing between professionals so that anyone supporting children and families understands their context.

Attendance

29. Regular attendance is important for improving outcomes. We know that pupils with higher overall absence tend to do less well in their GCSEs and are also more likely to not be in education, employment or training post-16. Preventing absence among vulnerable pupils is also important because education settings can act as a protective

factor – both where the home is not a safe place, and away from the threat of gangs, crime or exploitation.

30. Virtual School Heads may want to provide support, guidance and challenge to school leaders to strengthen provision already in place, with a specific focus on children with a social worker. This may include advice on how to promote and secure good attendance, working in conjunction with their Education Welfare Service.

31. Virtual School Heads may also want to refer to the ['Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities'](#) guidance which provides support to schools and local authorities on improving school attendance.

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Case Study from Suffolk Virtual School

The Suffolk Virtual School Head chairs a 'Safer in School' board which links Early Help, Social Care and Youth Justice with education services. The board aims to improve the extent to which vulnerable children benefit from the protective factor of full-time attendance at school. Through the work of this board and the support of the Virtual School Head, engagement of vulnerable children into a full offer of education has increased significantly, particularly during the partial closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. A multi-agency strategy was implemented to ensure that as many vulnerable children as possible benefit from the protective factor of school. A robust monitoring system is maintained allowing the board to determine the efficacy of the strategy.

Co-ordinated efforts between Suffolk's education psychology service and attendance service, in partnership with early help and social care teams, has brought about increased engagement and safety for our most vulnerable children. Virtual School officers provide advice and guidance clinics for teams, sharing expertise to help remove barriers to engagement, drawing on tried and tested approaches used to engage children in care.

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Elective home education

32. Elective Home Education (EHE) is when a parent chooses not to send their child to school full-time but assumes responsibility for making sure their child receives a full-time education other than at school. Some electively home educated children may never attend school, in other cases a child may be removed from their school's roll for EHE.

33. Most parents' decision to home educate is made with their child's best education at the heart of the decision. However, this is not the case for all, and home education

can mean some children are less visible to the services that are there to keep them safe and supported in line with their needs.

34. When a family notifies the local authority of their intention to home educate, we recommend that local authorities, schools and other key professionals (such as social workers) work together to coordinate a meeting with parents/carers where possible. This is to ensure the parents/carers have considered what is in the best interests of each individual child. This is particularly pertinent if a child has Special Educational Needs (SEN), an education, health and care plan (EHCP), or has a social worker. For more information, Virtual School Heads should refer to the Government guidance on elective home education.

Mental health and wellbeing

35. Children with a social worker are more likely to experience social, emotional and mental health issues[13] than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills[14], forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g., shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties and coping with transitions and change. This can impact on their behaviour and education.

36. Many schools will have a senior mental health lead responsible for making links with mental health services; we know that approximately 82% of schools and 77% of post-16 education settings had a staff member(s) leading on mental health in 2018. In the December 2017 Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health: a Green Paper, we outlined plans to encourage schools to identify and train a senior mental health lead. Since then, we have committed to providing training for senior mental health leads in all state-funded schools and colleges in England by 2025. The training will equip senior mental health leads with the knowledge to develop or introduce a holistic approach to wellbeing and mental health in their setting and implement effective processes for ensuring pupils with mental health problems receive appropriate support. To deliver this, we have recently announced that between September 2021 and March 2022, up to 7,800 schools and colleges will be offered a grant to pay for senior mental health lead training with a new investment of £9.5m. Neither mental health leads in schools or colleges nor Virtual School Heads are expected to be mental health experts, to diagnose mental health conditions or deliver mental health interventions; however, they have an important role in sign-

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[13] Social, emotional and mental health is one of the four broad areas of children's SEN identified in Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0 – 25 years.
[14] The mental processes enabling us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. (Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child).

posting teachers and leaders in education settings to appropriate training and specialist services, and this training will enable them to do this.

37. As part of this, Virtual School Heads should work with the local authority officer responsible for making links with mental health services/ Mental Health in Schools Lead – to work with education settings to:

- ensure that education settings are able to identify signs of potential mental health issues and know how to access further assessment and support where necessary

- ensure that education settings adopt the graduated approach[15] to assessing, understanding and meeting the social, emotional and mental health needs of children and young people with a social worker;

- ensure that education settings understand the impact that issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties and other mental health issues can have on children with a social worker and are "attachment aware"

- recognise the value of engaging the child's voice in the process of identification and support

Working with pupils and students with SEND

38. Some children with a social worker will also be identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) or may be disabled. These needs can exacerbate a child's vulnerability and increase the pressure on the family due to additional care demands.

39. Under the SEND Code of Practice 2015, education settings are under a duty to use their best endeavours to meet the educational needs of children with SEND. Where children have a social worker, settings can be supported by the sharing of information which will contribute to their assessment of a child's needs, help them to identify the most appropriate interventions and support a request for a statutory Education, Health and Care assessment where necessary.

40. It is vital that aspirations for children with SEND are high, and that professionals do not make assumptions about a child's ability to progress and achieve solely because they are identified as having SEND. For the cohort of children who have SEND and are in need of the care and protection of a social worker, it can be challenging to identify those needs for which special educational provision is necessary, and those resulting from adverse experiences in the home and outside the home. Attendance at an education setting which provides stability, good quality pastoral support and

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[15] See the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

effective SEND support is both protective for the child and the best way to promote achievement and enable the child to fulfil their potential.

41. Virtual School Heads should work strategically with the local authority Head of SEND and, where appropriate, with school leaders and SENCOs, to ensure that education settings adopt the graduated approach[16] to assessing, understanding and meeting the special educational needs of children and young people with a social worker.

Advise and support key professionals

42. A diverse range of agencies may be involved in the lives of children with social workers. For a child who is currently known to children's social care and is subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection plan, social workers will play a critical role in supporting children and families. For children who are no longer known to social care as safeguarding risks have been addressed and their case has been closed, relationships with education settings and other universal services will be essential in supporting children to reach their potential.

43. Virtual School Heads are not being asked to work with individual children because replicating existing professional relationships and support mechanisms can be confusing and burdensome to children and their families. Instead, as strategic leaders, Virtual School Heads will be able to offer advice and information to professionals who are supporting children with social workers.

44. In offering advice and information to workforces that have relationships with children with social workers, Virtual School Heads should:

- identify and engage with key professionals, helping them to understand the role they have in improving outcomes for children. This should include Designated Safeguarding Leads, social workers, headteachers, governors, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, mental health leads, other local authority officers, including Designated Social Care Officers for SEND, where they exist.

- provide advice on evidence-based interventions that can address barriers to learning, such as those highlighted by What Works for Children's Social Care in their analysis of the Education Endowment Foundation's schools toolkit, which identified academic interventions which show signs of potential for children with a social worker.

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[16] See the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

- engage with research organisations to help build develop good practice and a strong evidence base for what works to improve outcomes of children with social workers.

- support education settings and social care to be creative and thoughtful in building relationships with children and families, including taking account of children's wishes and feelings when understanding how to meet their needs.

Pupil Premium

Guidance encourages education settings to design their pupil premium strategy to meet the needs of eligible pupils and others who may benefit from extra support, such as those with a social worker. While senior leaders and pupil premium lead teachers are free to choose how best to arrange support, pupil premium strategies should focus on well-evidenced practice such as that published in the EEF's [Guide to the Pupil Premium](#). This highlights the professional development of teaching and support staff as the most effective use of the grant. Virtual School Heads may want to take account of [analysis of the EEF's toolkit by What Works for Children's Social Care](#) which identified the projects that show the greatest signs of potential for children with a social worker.

> ## Case Study from Camden Virtual School
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> Launched as part of the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, Camden Virtual School have been piloting a model of support to promote the education of children subject to child in need and child protection plans since 2017.
>
> The Virtual School has been able to join up the dots in local provision, helping partner agencies understand what support is available to children and families. The Virtual School Head has offered advice to schools and children's social workers to help them understand what children might need to engage in education. This advice has taken account of children's experiences of trauma, as well as attachment difficulties.
>
> The training and coaching that Camden Virtual School has been able to provide social workers has helped them ensure that children and families are offered clear and accurate information about education. Social workers are confident to be able to reach out to the Virtual School Head and their team for support and there is a strong culture of promoting children's education through social care.

Research and good practice

Virtual School Heads will be invited to participate in research commissioned by the Department for Education to help develop a strong evidence base for how they can effectively promote the educational outcomes of children with social workers.

The Department for Education will ask all local authorities to share information about how their Virtual School Head has been supporting children with a social worker and what funding has been used for. This expectation is set out in the Grant Determination Letter and the Memorandum of Understanding issued to all local authorities. This information will be shared with the independent research partner.

In addition, some local authorities will be invited to take part in focussed interviews to understand what helps Virtual School Heads to be effective in supporting children with a social worker. These interviews will involve Virtual School Heads, their teams and partner agencies. These interviews will offer more detailed insights and help ensure Virtual School Heads can learn from each other and the Department for Education can support the sharing of best practice. The independent research partner will produce a report that summarises their findings.

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