



# One minute guide

## The Virtual School in Leeds

No. 79, November 2024

### What is the Virtual School?

The Virtual School holds the statutory responsibility to promote the education of children looked after and previously looked after children to help ensure these children have the opportunity to reach their educational potential.

Whilst children looked after attend different schools in Leeds as well as in other local authorities, the Virtual School ensures that their educational attainment and progress is monitored and evaluated as if they all attended a single school. For previously looked after children, the Virtual School is a source of advice and information to help their parents to advocate for them as effectively as possible.

Since 2021, the Virtual School role has included a strategic approach for children with a social worker to improve understanding across the workforce of how meeting children's learning and educational needs can be protective for them, and in 2024 the Virtual School expanded our offer of advice for kinship family carers where arrangements were put in place without a prior care episode.

The Virtual School champions the learning and education of children in all our cohorts to better enable schools, settings and services support them to overcome the barriers they might have had in their early lives that can impact on their attainment and progress as they move through every age and stage of learning.

### What are the responsibilities of the Virtual School?

Some of the Virtual School responsibilities for all our cohorts include:

- **Ensure Corporate Parenting** principles are central to the local authority's ethos;
- **Maintain an up-to-date 'school' roll** of children looked after and gather information about their attendance, attainment, achievements and progress;
- **Give children a voice and promote a culture** that takes account of children's views;
- **Support social workers** to ensure timely provision of a suitable education placements for children looked after, including navigating SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) and admissions protocols;
- **Ensure all children looked after have an up-to-date, effective and high quality personal education plan (PEP)**, wherever they are placed and that social workers, designated teachers, schools, carers and Independent Reviewing Officers understand their roles and responsibilities in the child's PEP;
- **Provide information and advice** to adoptive parents, carers and special guardians, working with the regional adoption agency and services for kinship and special guardian families with or without a prior care episode;
- **Distribute pupil premium plus (PP+)** for children looked after and encourage schools to use evidence-based approaches to using PP+ for previously looked after children;
- **Ensure that learning and education** are reflected in child in need/ child protection plans;
- **Provide comprehensive training and development** for schools and services;
- **Support transitions from care**;
- **Work with others to promote a culture** of high aspiration and expectations for all pupils;
- **Ensure that designated safeguarding leads** understand their responsibilities for children with a social worker, as in the [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) statutory guidance;
- **Promote the benefits of relational and trauma informed practices** in schools and services to understand and respond to the social, emotional and mental health needs of all our cohorts.

## What does the Virtual School deliver?

The Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of all the groups of children for whom we're responsible, including those who are in care and live away from Leeds. The Virtual School works closely with designated teachers and designated safeguarding leads to ensure schools and other educational settings - including early years and higher education providers, foster carers, social workers, school governors and other relevant partners - understand and deliver their responsibilities.

For individual children looked after and care leavers, the Virtual School works to ensure they can access an appropriate offer of education and supports social workers to secure timely provision of a suitable education placement, including progression into post-16. The Virtual School works with internal and external partners to secure a range of support and interventions that promote good educational outcomes, such as our partnership with Leeds City College and enrichment opportunities like our year six summer camp.

The Virtual School allocates Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) for children looked after of compulsory school age directly to schools, providing training and advice to Designated Teachers on using it effectively. Please see the [PEPs and Pupil Premium one minute guide](#) for more information.

The Virtual School is also responsible for providing advice to parents and carers of children who are adopted and those living in kinship arrangements or on Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements orders and works closely with regional adoption agencies, third sector partners and support services for kinship and previously looked after children to deliver this duty. The Virtual School also provides advice and guidance for schools about effective interventions that have a good evidence base to support these groups of pupils.

For children with a social worker, the Virtual School are piloting a strategic approach to ensuring the learning and education needs of these children are understood as protective factors. The Virtual School role is to ensure better understanding of the needs of the cohort, enhance partnerships with settings and services, raise aspiration and promote engagement in and access to an education that is well suited to each child's needs.

For all our children and young people, whichever group they belong to, the Virtual School aims to keep in mind wish number 10 of our [Child Friendly Leeds 12 Wishes](#); that all children and young people are in learning settings that meet their needs.

## Who are the key contacts?

If you are working with children looked after, previously looked after children, children living in kinship families, children with a social worker or care leavers and would like to speak to someone about their learning and education, you can contact the Virtual School team.

If you would like to request support for yourself or your team in supporting the education of the children you work with, the Virtual School can provide information, advice and guidance, as well as a comprehensive training offer around promoting learning for all our cohorts.

Jancis Andrew is the Head of the Virtual School for Children Looked After in Leeds. Jancis and her team can be contacted on 0113 37 81469 where you can leave a voicemail, or at [VirtualSchool@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:VirtualSchool@leeds.gov.uk). This email address is for general enquiries only, so please do not send personal or sensitive information relating to individual children and young people.