

## Key information about schools for adoptive parents and special guardians



## Introduction

PAC-UK exists to improve the lives of families and individuals affected by adoption and other forms of permanence, by providing access to a range of individually tailored services and appropriate support depending on need. Our vision is that all people affected by adoption and other forms of permanence are supported and enabled to live their lives to the full. PAC-UK's Education Service provides training, consultation, advice and support for parents, special guardians, schools and social care professionals.

This booklet is to help you navigate the school environment, to work with schools and ensure that your child is receiving the support they need.

## **Admissions**

Your local authority has a school admissions department and they are responsible for ensuring your child gets a school place. Since September 2013, Looked After Children (LAC) and children who left UK care on an Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order (formerly Residence Order) have the highest priority. The authority which placed your child can provide a letter confirming your child's status. PAC-UK suggests questions to hold in mind when choosing a school, such as:

- Have staff received training on attachment and the impact of early trauma and loss?
- Where is the safe base for children when they need to calm down or regulate?
- How does the school support the Year 6 to Year 7 transition?

You can find full guide on key questions for primary and secondary schools on our resources page <https://www.pac-uk.org/our-services/education/education-resources/>

## Pupil Premium *Plus*

**'We believe that teachers and schools have a vital role to play in helping adopted children emotionally, socially and educationally by providing specific support to raise their attainment and address their wider needs.'**

*~Department for Education (2013)*

Pupil Premium began in 2011 for children eligible for free school meals (FSM), children whose parents serve in the armed forces, and looked after children; its purpose was to close the attainment gap between these groups and their peers. Pupil Premium is currently £1,320 per eligible FSM pupil for primary schools and £935 per FSM pupil for secondary schools.

In 2013 the DfE introduced Pupil Premium **Plus** for looked after and previously looked after children. In doing this, the DfE acknowledged the enduring impact of trauma and loss in children's lives and the key role of schools in supporting children who have had a difficult start in life. Pupil Premium **Plus** is currently £2,300 per child per year.

Pupil Premium **Plus** is available to schools for pupils from Reception age to Year 11 in state-funded education in England who:

- Are in local authority care in England.
- Have been adopted from care in England or Wales.
- Left care under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).
- Left care under a Child Arrangements Order (formerly known as a Residence Order).

In respect of children adopted from care, the Pupil Premium *Plus* was initially restricted to children adopted on or after 30 December 2005, but in the summer of 2014 was extended to **all** children adopted from care.

Pupils must be attending either:

- A local authority maintained school or maintained special school.
- An academy or free school.
- A non-maintained special school, an independent school or other alternative provision (e.g. home educated) where the place or provision is funded by the local authority.

Children who are educated at home or attend private schools are not currently eligible unless these placements are funded by the local authority.

### **Who decides how the money is spent?**

It is up to each individual school to decide how to spend the money. The DfE has clearly said that the funding should not be used to supplement the general school budget, or to support other groups of pupils such as those with special educational needs or those who are low attaining. Some children who are eligible for Pupil Premium *Plus* will have special educational needs or low attainment, but these needs should be met through the usual or additional funding streams available to the school.

The DfE has clearly stated that it is good practice to consult parents and guardians when making the decision. Some schools are consulting with individual parents and guardians, while others have invited adopters and special guardians to group consultations or task groups about how to spend the funding. PAC-UK has a guide about effective use of Pupil Premium *Plus*. You can find this on our website <http://www.pac-uk.org/education/>

### **Types of School**

All children in England between the ages of 5 and 16 are entitled to a free place at a state school. Most maintained schools, including faith schools, have to follow the national curriculum. Academies and free schools do not have to follow the national curriculum. You might choose to send your child to an independent school. You also have the right to educate your child at home.

### **Key People in School**

Schools can be complex organisations and it is helpful to know who the key members of staff are for your child. These are some of the school staff who may support your child:

- Class teachers
- Teaching Assistants (TAs), Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and Emotional Learning Support Assistants (ELSAs)
- Learning Mentors
- Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO)
- Heads of Year / Form Tutors / Heads of House
- Designated Teacher/Person
- Pastoral Team

### Parent/Carer Meetings

There will be many meetings to attend through your child's school life. There will be set Parents Evenings through the academic year, but you may have other meetings if your child is still looked after, such as Personal Education Plan Meetings (PEPs), or if your child has special educational needs (SEN). If your child has additional needs, it can be helpful to have half termly review meetings, even when things are going well.

### Curriculum Hotspots

Adoptive and permanently placed families are not yet well represented in the curriculum, and certain topics can be particular hotspots for children, e.g. bringing in a baby photo, drawing a family tree, or identifying genetic patterns of inheritance for eye and hair colour, can be difficult and upsetting for adopted and permanently placed children. Topics addressing children's welfare, such as Children in Need or NSPCC assemblies, can touch very personally on children's experiences. Topics in English and history, such as World War Two evacuee children, can trigger difficult feelings. Sex education and drug and alcohol awareness can be hard for children who have been exposed to these issues in their birth families.

It can be helpful to ask schools for a breakdown of the curriculum plan for each subject on a termly basis, so that together you can work out an alternative, more inclusive lesson plan. This also gives you time to prepare your child for tricky topics, and to plan a strategy to help your child cope with difficult feelings that may arise from the subject matter. It can be helpful to have an 'opt in/opt out' option worked out with your child and the teachers, so that your child can give the lesson a try, but has a planned and rehearsed exit strategy for if they begin to struggle.

### Homework

Every school varies on how homework is set. You should be able to find out more about your child's school homework policy on their website. Some primary schools and secondary schools enforce sanctions if homework is not completed on time. If your child is struggling to complete the set homework, speak to the teacher about a realistic expectation; it may be helpful to work for an agreed amount of time with your child. Some schools do offer homework club so that children can receive support from a member of staff to complete their homework.

### Monitoring and Assessment

#### **Monitoring**

Your child's progress will be monitored by their teachers through a range of methods from informal observations to more formal assessments. If your child has special educational needs, they will have a SEN Support Plan. These plans should be reviewed regularly to make sure that your child is making progress.

#### **Assessment**

Teacher Assessment processes have recently been updated, so there may be changes in how your child's progress is being recorded. Schools no longer have to use National Curriculum levels,

however some schools do still use them. As schools can set their own assessment and recording criteria, it is advisable to speak to your child's school and ask them to outline the assessment methods they use at each key stage, along with age related expectations in accordance with these levels – though it should be remembered that these are a guide only and all children progress at different rates.

The different stages at which children are often assessed are listed below:

- Key stage 1 (primary/infant)
- Key stage 2 (primary/junior)
- Key stage 3 (junior/secondary)
- Key stage 4 (secondary)

### **Key Stage 2**

The national average level for a child by the end of Year 6 is Level 4, although some schools have their own higher expectations.

### **KS3 and 4**

Pupils will enter secondary school with test results expressed as scaled scores. Often, summative assessments will take place at the end of Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 against the end of year outcomes. In summer 2017, students' GCSE English and GCSE Maths exams became numerically graded from 9 – 1, replacing the traditional grading system of A\* - G. Other subjects followed and all subjects are now assessed in this way, below is a guide to translating what the numerical grading system equates to:

Numerical grade	Old system equivalent
Grade 9	A*+
Grade 8	A*
Grade 7	A
Grade 6	B+/B
Grade 5	B-/C
Grade 4 (national pass rate)	C
Grade 3	D
Grade 2	E
Grade 1	F/G
Grade 0	U

### **Looked After Children**

#### **Personal Education Plan (PEP):**

If your school-aged child is still looked after, they must have a PEP at least termly. The PEP should be initiated by your child's social worker, in partnership with the Designated Teacher for LAC at your child's school. The PEP should include your child's views and information about their progress and the support and interventions in place. Some schools and local authorities continue to offer PEP meetings after a permanency order. It's helpful to make sure you have a copy of the completed PEP and that the next PEP meeting has been set.

### **Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**

The CAF is a shared assessment and planning framework for use across all children's services in England. It aims to help the early identification of children's additional needs and encourage schools, parents/special guardians and other agencies to work together to meet these needs. At this stage there may be Team Around the Child (TAC) or Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings.

If you have concerns about your child's development and educational needs and there are external agencies involved, ask if the school have completed a CAF and whether this is an option for your child.

### **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

#### **Local Offer**

Every local authority must outline all education, health and social care services in their local area for children and young people who have SEN or disabilities and include them in an information directory called the Local Offer.

The Local Offer also needs to include details of services provided outside your local area that local people are likely to use. You can view your local offer on your local authority's website.

#### **School Offer / SEN Information Report**

Every school must have a copy of their SEN Information Report on their website. The report will outline what universal, targeted and specialist services the school provides for children with SEN.

#### **SEN Support**

SEN support replaces school action/school action plus (in schools) and early years action/early years action plus (in early years settings). Schools will use the graduated approach at this level of support. This means children's support plans are revisited, refined and revised, leading to a growing understanding of the pupil's needs and what supports the pupil to make progress. This cycle is sometimes called Assess, Plan, Do, Review. Your child will have a specific SEN Support Plan (sometimes called Individual Education Plan – IEP) outlining their support and specific targets. Your child may also have a Pupil Passport, where they are able to express their own thoughts and feelings about the support they want.

#### **Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan):**

If your child's needs cannot be met through SEN Support they may need an EHC plan. An EHC plan is a legal document that describes a child or young person's special educational, health and social care needs. It explains the extra help that will be given to meet those needs and how that help will support the child or young person to achieve their goals in life. EHC plans replace Statements of SEN and Learning Difficulties Assessments. The EHC plan process is as follows:

- The parent or school asks the local authority to carry out an EHC assessment, providing evidence of the child's needs.
- The Local Authority reviews the existing evidence of the child's needs and either agrees or declines to carry out an assessment.
- Professionals, school staff, family and the child all contribute to the assessment.

- The Local Authority reviews the assessment evidence and either agrees or declines to grant an EHC plan.
- If the plan is granted, the Local Authority writes this in partnership with the child and those that know him/her best.
- The parent or guardian tells the Local Authority which school they wish their child to attend.
- The Local Authority consults with the school about whether it can meet the child's special educational needs.

There are statutory timelines for this process. If you as the parent or guardian disagree with the Local Authority at any stage of the process, you have the right to appeal at the SENDIST tribunal.

### **Transitions**

Your child will experience many transitions in their school life from daily to yearly transitions. It is important that each transition is planned for and managed well, to ensure that your child feels safe. There will also be times when there are potentially more difficult transitions, such as moving from Primary to Secondary, which will need careful planning by the school.

#### **Nursery to Reception:**

Reception teachers will sometimes visit children in their Nursery setting or at home before they start school. This is an excellent opportunity to talk with the teacher about the support and scaffolding your child needs.

#### **Year 2 to Year 3:**

At the end of Year 2, children who are in an infant school will move to the junior school. The transition could include a change of playground, school, head teacher and school site, so it is important that your child is prepared for this move.

#### **Year 5:**

If your child has a statement/EHC plan, you are usually asked to discuss your secondary school preference at your child's Year 5 annual review.

#### **Year 6 to Year 7:**

A member of staff from the chosen secondary school should meet with the primary staff in the summer term to discuss your child's needs. Make sure that your child has had sufficient visits to the school, so they are comfortable with this important transition.

#### **Year 9 to Year 10:**

Parents/Carers evening is very important, as this is when you assist your child to choose their Key Stage 4 options.

#### **Year 11 to 12:**

Your child must stay in education or training, at least part time, until their 18th birthday. Your child will be making decisions about staying at school, going to college or starting an apprenticeship. They can access careers advice at school, but you may need to request further

support if required.

Each transition should be carefully considered and planned for to help your child to manage the changes. PAC-UK has a [free downloadable transition plan](#) and template adaptable for your needs.

### **Exclusions**

Occasionally a head teacher may decide that a child can no longer attend the school either permanently or for a specified period of time (fixed-term exclusion) because of their behaviour.

Children can be excluded for up to 45 school days in one school year. If a child has been excluded for a fixed period, the school should set and mark work for the first five school days. If the exclusion is longer than five school days, the school must arrange full-time education from the sixth school day. If your child is still looked after, the school must arrange education from the first day of exclusion. When the exclusion ends, the school must invite you and your child to a reintegration meeting. This meeting should be used to plan how to support your child to avoid further exclusions.

Permanent exclusion means that your child is expelled. The local authority must arrange full-time education from the sixth school day. If your child is still looked after (before excluding), schools and your child's social worker must plan together with the local authority, to consider all possible options before excluding them. You are entitled to appeal against a permanent exclusion with the board of governors.

### **The Local Authority (LA) and External Professionals**

Local education authorities have some responsibility for all state schools in their area. Legislation has strengthened the role of schools, so that they are now largely self-governing.

### **Virtual Schools**

All local authorities must have a virtual school head (VSH) who oversees the educational achievement of the children looked after by the authority. The VSH's role is to know how looked after children are progressing and help schools and social workers to identify the extra needs of these children and any additional support available to them. From September 2018 VSHs will also be responsible for providing advice and guidance to adopted and other permanently placed families around education. You can find the details for your virtual school via online search engines or by contacting your local authority.

### **The Adoption Support Fund**

Every adopter and special guardian is entitled to an assessment of their child and family's needs at any time. The Adoption Support Fund will pay for therapeutic services for adoptive and special guardianship families. In October 2016 a fair access limit of £5,000 was introduced requiring local authorities to share the costs of support above £5,000, through a match-funding. Things that might be included under ASF funding:

- Therapeutic parenting training
- Further more complex assessment (e.g. CAMHS assessment, multidisciplinary assessment including education and health, cognitive and neuropsychological assessment, other mental health needs assessment.)

- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy
- Theraplay
- Filial therapy
- Creative therapies e.g. art, music, drama, play
- Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR)
- Non-Violent Resistance (NVR)
- Sensory integration therapy/Sensory attachment therapy
- Multi Systemic Therapy
- Mentalisation Based Therapy
- Psychotherapy
- Specialist clinical assessments where required (e.g. Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder)
- Extensive life story work with a therapeutic intervention.
- Respite care (where it is part of a therapeutic intervention)

### **Educational Psychologists (EPs)**

Educational psychologists work in local authorities, in partnership with schools and families, to support children and young people with additional needs. Schools will liaise with their EP about specific children about whom they would like advice. They will only do this though with the parent or carer's consent. EPs may use consultation, observations or assessments with children and families. Educational psychologists sometimes provide in-service training for teachers and other professionals.

### Further Resources

- A Good Practice Guide for Schools. Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Children who are Looked After, Fostered, Adopted or otherwise Permanently Placed'. Order from:  
<http://www.pac-uk.org/education/>
- Becoming an Adoption Friendly School by Dr E G Langton and K Boy, order from:  
[www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) bulk orders from [www.pac-uk.org](http://www.pac-uk.org)
- Let's Learn Together- booklet produced by NI branch of Adoption UK  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/shop/lets-learn-together-england>
- Understanding Why. Understanding attachment and how this can affect education (Mary Ryan).  
Order from:  
<http://www.ncb.org.uk/books>
- Calmer Classrooms- booklet produced in Australia.  
[http://www.cyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/calmer\\_classrooms.pdf](http://www.cyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf)
- SEN Code of Practice  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>
- Statutory guidance for Designated Teacher:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/683561/The\\_designated\\_teacher\\_for\\_looked-after\\_and\\_previously\\_looked-after\\_children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683561/The_designated_teacher_for_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf)

### Glossary

PEP	Personal Education Plan
PSP	Pastoral Support Plan
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
TAF	Team Around the Family
BSP	Behaviour Support Plan
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
IEP	Individual Education Plan
TA	Teaching Assistant
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEN Code of Practice	The legal document that sets out support for children with SEN
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
INCO	Inclusion Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability

### Other useful organisations

#### **ACE**

ACE Education Advice & Training provides independent advice and information for parents on education issues in England.

<http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/>

#### **Adoption UK**

Adoption UK provides support, awareness and understanding for those parenting or supporting children who cannot live with their birth parents.

<http://www.adoptionuk.org/>

#### **Contact a family**

Contact a Family is a national charity for families with disabled children. They provide information, advice and support.

<http://www.cafamily.org.uk/>

#### **Grandparents Plus**

Grandparents Plus champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances.

<http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/>

#### **IPSEA (Independent Parental Special Education Advice)**

IPSEA provides independent legally based advice and support for the families of children with SEN and/or a disability

<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/>

#### **SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)**

SENDIASS (formerly Parent Partnership) provides Information, Advice and Support to children and young people with SEN or disabilities, and their families. Each local authority provides SENDIASS and you can find your local service on your LA website.

#### **SOSISEN**

SOSISEN offer an independent and confidential telephone helpline for parents and others looking for information and advice on Special Educational Needs (SEN).

<http://www.sossen.org.uk/>