

The Designated Teacher and Adopted Children

In the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the duties of designated teachers were extended to include previously looked-after children, including adopted children. The following is a summary of the relevant information in the statutory guidance for designated teachers, issued by the Department for Education in February 2018.

Key points

- School governing bodies have a duty to designate a member of staff (the designated teacher) to promote the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, including those aged 16-18, who are registered pupils at the school.
- The designated teacher should ensure that all staff are aware of the particular needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children over a wide range of issues, and have input into the formulation of school-wide policies and procedures to ensure those children are not disadvantaged.
- When working with previously looked-after children, the designated teacher should be a contact point for parents and guardians and work closely with them to ensure the best outcomes for the child, socially, emotionally and educationally.

What is the designated teacher?

School governing bodies have a duty to designate a member of staff (the designated teacher) to promote the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, including those aged 16-18, who are registered pupils at the school.

Previously looked after children are defined as those who are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order. The duties also extend to children who were adopted from 'state care' outside of England and Wales, as long as the 'state care' was provided by a public authority, a religious organisation or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

The governing body of a maintained school, or the proprietor of an academy, must ensure that the designated teacher undertakes appropriate training and carries out their duties in line with any guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education.

The designated teacher must be a qualified teacher who has completed their induction period and is working as a teacher at the school, or the head teacher (or acting head teacher) of the school.

Why do schools need a designated teacher?

The role of designated teacher recognises that many looked-after and previously looked-after children have suffered disrupted learning, may have missed long periods of school and may have special educational needs. Gaps in their learning and, in many cases, the emotional

impact of their experiences are likely to be significant barriers to their progress. Attainment data shows that looked-after and previously looked-after children do not perform as well as their peers at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.

The statutory role of the designated teacher is designed to help ensure that excellent practice in supporting this cohort of children is embedded and becomes universal. However, the role is not to be seen in isolation, but rather part of a support system including other professionals, and parents and carers.

The role of the designated teacher with regard to previously looked-after children

The specifics of the role of the designated teacher will vary from school to school, depending on the nature of the school, the proportion of previously looked-after children on roll, and the children's individual needs.

While the designated teacher takes lead responsibility for this cohort, not all the tasks need necessarily to be carried out by them. Individual schools will decide how pastoral and administrative tasks are most appropriately carried out.

The designated teacher should have appropriate seniority and professional experience to provide leadership and training, and to help ensure that school policies appropriately reflect the needs of previously-looked after children.

For instance, the school may wish to consider:

- whether there are unintended barriers to the admission of previously looked-after children
- whether the children have made at least expected levels of progress in line with their peers, both educationally, and socially and emotionally
- whether any of the children have special educational needs and/or mental health needs and how these needs are identified and met
- whether the behavioural policy of the school is flexible enough to respond to challenging behaviour in the way that is most appropriate for previously looked-after children
- what impact the use of PP+ has in supporting the educational achievement of previously looked-after children

The designated teacher should support the governing body of a school to hold the school to account as to how it supports previously looked-after children, for instance, by providing a regular report.

While the specific activities of the designated teacher may vary from school to school, they should include:

- being the central point of contact in the school for matters relating to previously looked-after children
- promoting a culture across the school where the personal, emotional and academic needs of previously looked-after children are prioritised
- taking lead responsibility for helping other staff to understand the factors which can affect how previously looked-after children learn and achieve, including the

emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness)

- ensure that teachers understand the needs of previously looked-after children with regards to, for example, special educational needs, attendance and exclusions, homework, GCSE options, understanding and managing challenging behaviour and understanding the link between emotional wellbeing and being able to make educational progress, making staff aware that trauma and attachment issues will continue to affect previously looked-after children and the school will need to continue to respond appropriately to their needs
- be a contact point for parents or guardians of previously looked-after children, and understand the importance of their involvement in decisions affecting their child's education, working closely with them and respecting their views at all times
- contributing to the development of whole school policies and procedures to ensure that previously looked-after children are not disadvantaged, particularly in admissions, transitions into and on from the school, opportunities to achieve, careers advice and guidance
- ensuring that parents and guardians are aware of the requirement to inform the school if their child is eligible to attract PP+, play a key part in decisions on how PP+ is used to effectively support previously looked-after children, and encourage parents and guardians' involvement in deciding how PP+ is best used to support their child
- promoting a culture in which previously looked-after children are able to be heard, contribute to discussions and take responsibility for their learning, talk with an empathetic adult about difficult issues, participate in school activities, have high aspirations, and be prioritised for one-to-one tuition
- providing advice to teachers about appropriate differentiated teaching strategies and the use of Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches to assess children's attainment, set goals and formulate strategies to achieve those goals
- working directly with parents, carers and guardians to promote good home school links, ensure they understand how the school teaches key skills, and encourage high aspirations
- working with the virtual school head (VSH) to access training and keep up to date on research and good practice
- ensuring they and other school staff can identify signs of potential mental health issues (including trauma and attachment disorder), and understand how to access specialist services, working closely with school mental health leads if available

The full statutory guidance for designated teachers can be found online here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683561/The_designated_teacher_for_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

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