

COGNUS

Foster Carers

Guide to

SUTTON VIRTUAL SCHOOL



INTRODUCING THE TEAM:



Sutton Virtual School is made up of a group of professionals who champion the educational journey of the children and young people who come under our remit: Children Looked After (CLA), Previously Looked After (PCLA), children on kinship orders and children with a social worker so they achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers.

Continued...



Kate holds a MA Education and National Professional Qualification of Senior Leaders (NPQSL) BSc in Sport Science and Leisure Management and a PGCE in Physical Education. She has fifteen years of secondary teaching and leadership experience as well as six years experience working as a Virtual School Head.



Sara holds a Masters in Education, a PGCE, BSc (Joint hon) and a Level 5 diploma in Trauma and Mental Health. Sara has 20 years of experience in education, in teaching and senior leadership in schools, including in headship, and as an education advisor and Deputy Head teacher at the Virtual School. Sara is the strategic lead promoting the education of children who have, or had a social worker, and those in kinship care.



Georgia, CLA Lead, holds a BEd in Primary Education with QTS. She has 4 years of teaching experience in EYFS and KS1. Georgia has now worked as a Virtual School Education Advisor for three years. Georgia also has a postgraduate qualification in 'Education of Care Experienced Children'. Georgia holds a Level 5 Diploma in Trauma and Mental Health. Having been in foster care Georgia has lived experience and sits on the LBS Fostering Panel to prioritise young people's care.



Moira holds a PGCE and BA in Modern Languages and a Level 5 Management Diploma. She has twenty years secondary teaching experience including eight years as Assistant Director of Sixth Form. Moira is an experienced UCAS Advisor, Pastoral Lead and Trained Coach supporting young people to achieve their potential



Kieron holds a BA Hons in English Language and Linguistics and a PGCE in Secondary English Media and Drama. He has over 20 years' experience teaching in mainstream and SEND schools, with extensive experience working with students with SEMH and complex needs.



Laura holds an BSc in Criminology and a PGCE in Primary Education alongside QTS. Laura was a primary school teacher for 10 years where she was a UKS2 Phase Lead and Head of Maths and ECT Mentor. Prior to teaching, Laura gained experience as a Behaviour Mentor and Teaching Assistant. Laura also holds a Level 5 Diploma in Trauma and Mental Health



Amy holds a BEd in Primary Education with QTS. She has eight years of teaching experience from EYFS to KS2 with an English and early reading specialism. Amy is a trained mentor for children looked after and a qualitative research moderator for children



Hannah holds a MSc in Child and Adolescent Mental health, PgDip in teaching children with SEMH and BSc (Hons) in Psychology. With over 20 years of educational experience, Hannah has worked across a variety of sectors; including mainstream education as a Senior Mental Health Lead. Hannah has managed alternative provisions for young people who have experienced trauma and at risk of permanent exclusion.



Robyn holds a Primary Education 5-11 years BA(Hons) with QTS degree and a CACHE Diploma in Childcare. She has over 10 years of experience working with children, ranging from coaching cheerleading, being an Au Pair and teaching abroad.

MISSION AND VALUES

OUR MISSION IS TO ENSURE POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

OUR VALUES

ASPIRE TO BE OUR BEST, ACT WITH INTEGRITY, SHOW COURAGE AND BE KIND.

OUR MOTTO

AIM, ASPIRE, ACHIEVE

Introduction

As a Foster carer, you play a vital role in supporting the education and well-being of children in your care. One of the key organisations working to improve educational outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children is the Virtual School. This guide will help you understand what the Sutton Virtual School is, how it supports children in care, and how it fulfils its extended duties.

What is Sutton Virtual School?

Sutton Virtual School is not a physical building but a team of education professionals who work to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children looked after (CLA) and previously looked after children (PLAC). Every local authority in England has a Virtual School Head (VSH) responsible for overseeing the educational progress of these children.

Sutton Virtual School works closely with social workers, schools, foster carers, and other professionals to ensure children in care receive the support they need to succeed in their education.

Who Does the Sutton Virtual School Support?

Sutton Virtual School provides direct and indirect support to:

- Children Looked After (CLA) (those in care of the local authority).
- Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) (those who were in care but have since been adopted, placed under special guardianship, or in another permanent arrangement).
- Children with a social worker (under extended duties, Sutton Virtual School also offer advice and guidance to schools and professionals for children who have a social worker but are not in care).



Coming into care

When a young person comes into care, Sutton Virtual School will allocate a VS case manager. The case manager will work with the young person, foster carers, the social worker and school. The VS case manager will contact the young person's school (if they are in education). The first PEP meeting should take place within 20 working days of coming into care. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting takes place once a term. It ensures educational planning is strong to support the child's educational journey. The school, social worker and foster carer must attend the PEP meeting. Where possible, the VS case manager will join the meeting too.

Partnership Working:

Sutton Virtual School is committed to improving educational planning and outcomes for Sutton's children. We continue to work collaboratively with many services including:

- Social Care teams across Children's Services Sutton
- Foster Carers Association and Foster Forum Sutton
- Therapeutic Hub
- CLA Nurses
- Youth Offending Team
- Advocacy and mentoring with MAPS
- Cognus Educational Services Sutton
- Designated Teacher Network / Designated Safeguarding Lead Network Sutton Headteacher networks (Secondary, Primary and Special Schools)
- Children in Care Council
- Pan London Virtual School Headteacher and CWSW Networks & National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH)
- Adopt London South and Kinship



How Sutton Virtual School Supports Children Looked After:

Monitoring Educational Progress:

- Keeps track of the academic progress, attendance, and achievements of children in care.
- Works with schools to ensure appropriate interventions are in place for children falling behind.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs):

- Every CLA must have a Personal Education Plan (PEP), reviewed each term.
- The Sutton Virtual School helps develop high-quality PEPs by supporting schools, carers, and social workers.
- PEPs include targets, aspirations, and additional support for the child's education.

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) Funding:

- Each CLA is entitled to Pupil Premium Plus funding
- The Sutton Virtual School ensures this funding is used effectively to enhance learning opportunities, such as:

One-to-one tuition

Educational trips and resources

Therapeutic support

Mentoring and coaching

Training and Support for Schools and Carers:

- Provides training to teachers, school staff, and foster carers on trauma-informed approaches and attachment-aware strategies.
- Offers guidance on supporting children with special educational needs (SEN) and emotional well-being.

Advocacy and Partnership Working:

- Works with schools to ensure children are placed in the right educational setting that meets their needs.
- Advocates for CLA in school admissions, exclusions, and additional support services.



How the Sutton Virtual School Supports Previously Looked After Children:

Children who were previously in care may still need support, even though they are no longer under local authority care.

Sutton Virtual School provides:

- Advice and guidance to schools and families about available support.
- Help in accessing Pupil Premium Plus funding (which is given directly to the school).
- Support with transitions between schools and key stages.
- Training for schools and carers on attachment and trauma-informed practices.

While the Sutton Virtual School does not directly monitor the education of previously looked after children, they provide a consultative role to ensure schools meet their needs.



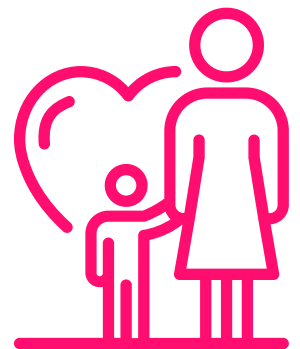
Your role as Foster Carer:

Your Role as a Foster Carer in Supporting Education:

As a foster carer, you are a key part of the child's educational journey. Here's how you can work with the Sutton Virtual School:

- Attend PEP meetings and contribute to discussions about the child's progress.
- Encourage education at home by creating a supportive learning environment.
- Advocate for the child in school settings if they need additional support.
- Communicate with the Sutton Virtual School if you have concerns about the child's education.
- Support attendance and encourage a positive attitude toward learning.

The role of a Foster Carer is crucial to supporting children to achieve their academic potential!



Our Offer:

Our Sutton Virtual School offer is underpinned by the development of strong relationships with the families and professionals to support the child

High quality education provision
Ensuring prompt admissions to good or better schools



Support and challenge
Ensuring professionals have the support they need and are challenged to provide the best



Aspirations and enrichment
Ensuring young people access a broad education and aim ambitiously high



Using EPEP

Using ePEP for the first time:

Sutton Virtual School use eGOV an online ePEP system for PEPs. All the educational information and decision making is recorded within ePEP.

Social workers, foster carers and Designated Teachers access the ePEP system via a login. When using the system for the first time, you will need to click the green button to register.

Here are details on how to access ePEP for the first time

<https://secure.epeponline.co.uk/login>

If you have any concerns, please call eGOV on **0333 772 0944**

Foster Carers ePEP guidance

PEPs are education plans discussed at a meeting, either held in school or virtually.

They are a Statutory part of the care planning for each child and must take place termly.

They are designed to ensure that all important decisions, about the education of Children Looked After are made jointly by all professionals supporting the young person.

The PEP is an evolving record of what needs to happen for children looked after, to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential.

Quality assurance of the PEP

Sutton Virtual school believe that all of our children looked after deserve a high-quality PEP to support them in achieving to their full potential.

- **Pre-populate Educational Information:** Ensure all educational information is ready before the PEP meeting.
- **PEP Meeting:** Conduct the PEP meeting with all necessary discussions.
- **Finalisation by Designated Teacher:** The Designated Teacher finalizes the PEP within **7 days** of the meeting.
- **Quality Assurance by Sutton Virtual School:** Sutton Virtual School reviews and quality assures the PEP within **14 days**.
- **Quality Assurance Criteria:** Apply criteria to each section of the PEP to determine the overall grade.
- **Grading:** PEPs must meet a minimum standard of Good. If not, the PEP concern process is initiated.
- **Feedback and Improvement:** Actively seek feedback to improve PEPs towards Outstanding.



Personal Education Plan (PEP)

All children looked-after (CLA) must have a care plan, of which the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is an integral part. The PEP (pre-school, to age 18) should be initiated as part of the care plan.

A PEP meeting must take place each term for every Child Looked After.

It is an evolving record of what needs to happen for children looked-after to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential.

The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the child's identified educational needs, raises aspirations and builds life chances.

The school, other professionals and the child's carers should use the PEP to support achieving those things.

The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority that looks after the child and the school. Social workers, carers, Sutton Virtual School, designated teachers and, as appropriate, other relevant professionals will need to work closely together to ensure every pep meets the quality assurance criteria.

All of those involved in the PEP process should ensure the child is involved (according to understanding and ability).

Please refer to the PEP section of the statutory guidance for more information.

In Sutton, we use eGOV to record all the information needed for a PEP. eGOV is a web based portal which provides the Virtual School, teachers, social workers and other named professionals access to the child's current and past PEPs.



EPEP

Each term, every child looked-after who attends an educational setting has a PEP meeting to discuss educational planning. We use ePEP for all our PEPs. We invite foster carers to contribute to the PEP and be able to access it by visiting the ePEP website ('click here for first time users'). Once you have completed the initial sign up you will be able to access the young person's PEPs.

The Foster Carer is responsible for:

- Sharing the child's current progress, strengths, interests, and any challenges or concerns from a home perspective.
- Offer insight into how the child's care situation or past experiences may be affecting their education
- Help ensure the child's views, wishes, and feelings about their education are represented, especially if the child is not attending or does not feel confident speaking.
- Work alongside professionals to support educational targets and support strategies.
- Be a part of identifying interventions or resources needed (e.g., tutoring, SEN support, emotional wellbeing services).
- Support the implementation of SMART targets at home, such as encouraging routines, homework, and attendance
- Attend follow-up PEP reviews (usually termly) to monitor progress and update on any changes in the home environment that may impact education.
- Raise any concerns if the child is not receiving the support they need.



SMART Targets

SMART TARGETS:

Targets can be: in-school targets, young person led targets or be identified as a result of the discussion and link to Pupil Premium Funding.

Targets need to be SMART:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | S | Specific: The goal must be very specific and grounded in something that's significant to you. |
|  | M | Measurable: The goal must have some sort of measurement (days, pounds, miles, etc.). |
|  | A | Achievable: The goal must be realistic and reasonable. |
|  | R | Relevant: The goal must relate to what you're hoping to accomplish. |
|  | T | Time-bound: The goal must have a timeframe and that timeframe must be reasonable. |

There should be a minimum of one target relating to Pupil Premium Plus. There also needs to be targets linked to literacy (specifically writing in KS1/2), numeracy or at least two academic targets.

An example of a SMART Target:
Improving School Attendance

To increase Tom's school attendance from the current 60% to 90%. His attendance will be tracked weekly using the school's attendance records. Progress will be reviewed every month to ensure the target is on track.

Tom will receive support from a designated mentor who will check in with them daily to encourage attendance. A reward system will be implemented where Tom can earn small rewards for each week of improved attendance. The target is to achieve 90% attendance by the end of the current school term (e.g., within the next 12 weeks).

Pupil Premium Funding:

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is additional government funding given to schools in England to help improve the educational outcomes of:

1. Children Looked After (CLA) - Children currently in the care of a local authority.
2. Previously Looked-After Children (PLAC) “ Children who were in care but have since been adopted, subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), or a Child Arrangements Order (CAO).

The aim of PP+ funding is to close the attainment gap between looked-after and previously looked-after children and their peers by providing additional support tailored to their needs.

It should be used to:

- Improve academic progress and attainment
- Support emotional well-being and mental health
- Enhance engagement and attendance
- Provide additional learning resources or interventions

Sutton Virtual School receives the following PPP per year:

- £2570 for each Child Looked After aged 5-16
- £300 for age 2-4 and post 16 (year 12/13) **CLA in year 12/13 can also claim £1200 Education Bursary from their college / sixth form to support educational costs (transport, food, equipment)
- Requested when SMART targets are set in a PEP
- Previously CLA (adopted / SGO) – school receives £2570

How Can Schools Use PP+ Funding?

Schools have flexibility in how they use PP+ funding, but it must be used effectively to benefit the child's education. Examples include:

- Academic Support

1:1 tuition or small group interventions in literacy and numeracy.
Specialist teaching support for subjects where the child is behind.

- Social, Emotional & Mental Health Support

Counselling or therapy (e.g., play therapy, art therapy, trauma-informed support).
Mentoring and coaching to build confidence and resilience.
Nurture groups or safe spaces in school to support emotional regulation.

- Enhancing Engagement & Attendance

Behaviour support interventions to prevent exclusions.



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- Training for Staff

Attachment and trauma-informed training to help teachers understand the needs of LAC and PLAC.

Specialist SEND training for staff working with children who have additional needs.

Who Decides How PP+ is Spent?

For CLA, the Sutton Virtual School Head (VSH) oversees PP+ spending and works with schools, social workers, and carers to decide how its used. Schools must request funding from the child's local Virtual School.

For PLAC, the funding goes directly to schools, but they should consult with parents/guardians on its use.

Accountability & Reporting

Schools must track the impact of PP+ spending and demonstrate how it improves outcomes for eligible pupils.

The school's Designated Teacher for Looked-After Children should ensure PP+ is used effectively.

Schools report on PP+ spending in their Pupil Premium Strategy Statement, published on their website.

Key Takeaways

PP+ supports education and well-being.

Schools must use it to improve progress, engagement, and emotional support.

For CLA, PP+ is managed by the Virtual School Head; for PLAC, it goes directly to schools.

Schools must track and report how the funding benefits pupils.



EDUCATIONAL Transitions

Educational transitions

Planning around transitions are key for Children Looked After due to attachment needs.

Transitions may include:

- moving to a new Key Stage/class teacher in the same school
- moving to a new Key Stage in a different school/college
- moving to a new school due to a care placement move
- getting ready to leave care either at age 18 or due to end of care status.

Support that may support a young person includes:

- sharing learning information and strategies with new teachers / setting
- building a relationship with new school and inviting them to a PEP meeting to meet the young person and professional network
- ensuring any SEND specific information is handed over to the SENCO
- introducing high aspirations to the young person early and helping them begin to develop career ideas from an early stage
- providing opportunities for Widening Participation visits to university in KS4/5



Supporting Educational Transitions

How Foster Carers Can Support Education Transitions:

Emotional Preparation and Reassurance

- Talk openly with the child about the upcoming change in a calm and positive way.
- Acknowledge and validate any anxieties, fears, or past negative experiences the child may have.
- Reassure them that they'll be supported through the process and are not alone.

Visit and Familiarisation

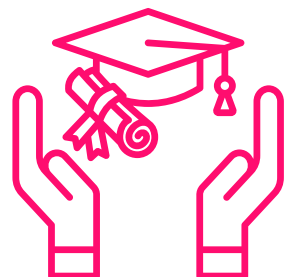
- Arrange visits to the new school (ideally multiple, if needed), so the child can become familiar with the setting, staff, routines, and layout. (Education advisors can support with this)
- If possible, attend open days, transition days, or informal meet-and-greets with teachers or key staff.

Share Relevant Information

- Collaborate with social workers, the designated teacher, and other professionals to ensure the new school receives full information about the child's background, educational needs, and support strategies.
- Provide educational history and practical insights that will help ease the transition.

Promote Routines and Readiness

- Help establish or maintain consistent routines (sleep, meals, homework), particularly in the lead-up to starting a new school.
- Encourage a positive attitude towards learning and school, including reading, school preparation, and independence.



Supporting Educational Transitions

Liaise with the Sutton Virtual School and Social Worker

- Work with the Virtual School Education Advisor and social worker to ensure:
 - The transition is planned and supported.
 - A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is updated to reflect the transition.
 - Any extra resources or transition funding are accessed (e.g., one-to-one support, mentoring, uniforms).

Monitor Wellbeing and Behaviour

- Look for signs of distress, anxiety, or withdrawal during or after the transition.
- Communicate promptly with school staff or professionals if the child is struggling, so support can be put in place quickly.

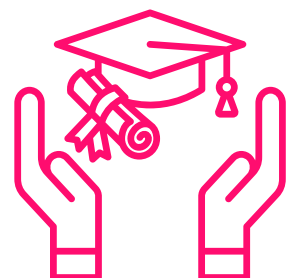
Celebrate Milestones and Successes

- Acknowledge achievements, no matter how small – such as attending the first day, making a friend, or completing homework.
- Positive reinforcement helps build self-esteem and resilience.

Support Post-16 or Post-School Transitions

- Help the young person explore further education, apprenticeships, or employment.
- Attend college visits, support applications (e.g. UCAS, bursaries), and help them develop life skills like budgeting or travel planning.

Foster carers act as stability anchors during educational transitions. Their encouragement, advocacy, and care can make the difference between a disruptive transition and a positive, empowering step forward in the child's education journey.



Special Educational Needs (SEND)

Children and young people in care are up to four times more likely to have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) compared to those not in care.

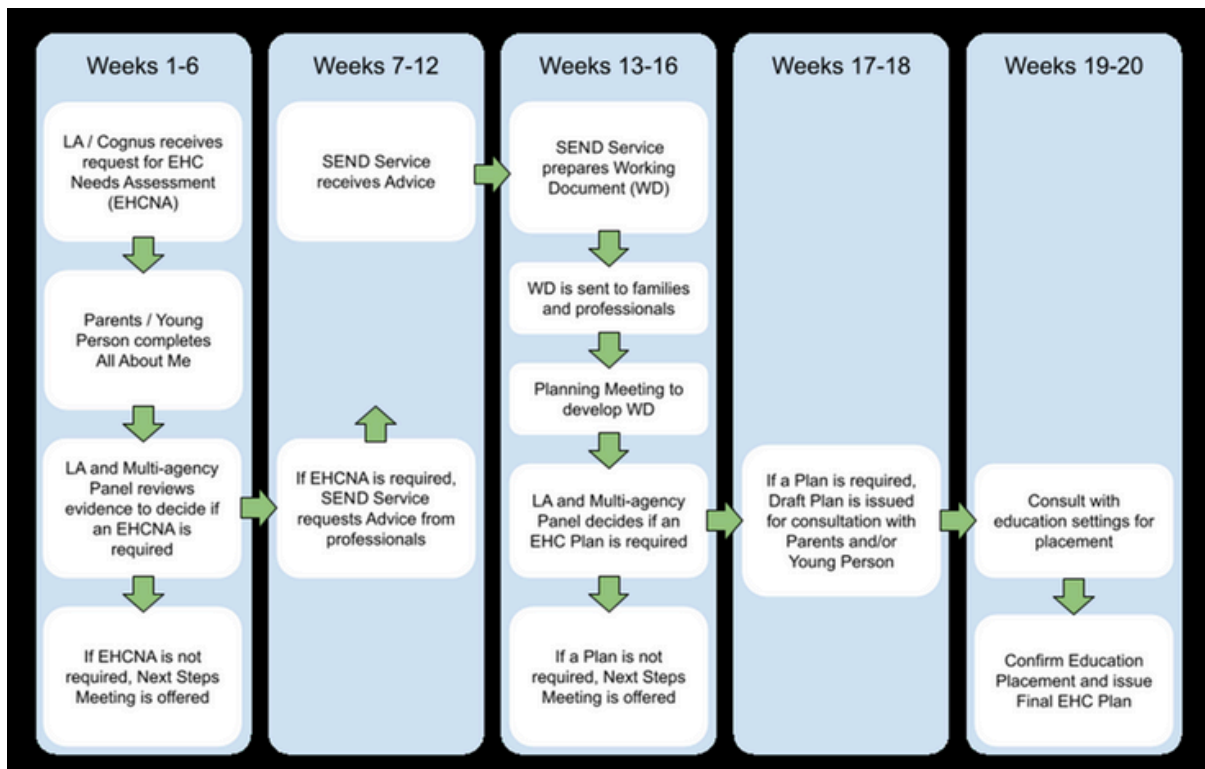
Most children and young people's SEND can be managed in a mainstream school. The extra support they need is in a SEND Support Plan.



Sometimes, even with extra support in place, a child or young person may require further interventions. The support can go beyond a SEND Support Plan. It may be more appropriate for them to have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

At this stage, the school, parent/carer or young person can make a request to the local authority for an Education, Health and Care Plan Needs Assessment (EHCNA). Information on how to make a parental request can be found on the Local Offer website.

This is the 20 weeks EHCNA Process:



To get more detailed information on the EHCP application process or SEND admissions, please watch our [foster carer videos](#).



Admissions:

In-year admissions

Where a young person needs to move school / college, we will help find an appropriate setting. The admissions process differs depending on the local authority so we support the application process to the appropriate local authority.

The foster carer and social worker should complete the admissions application forms. They should also inform Sutton Virtual School of the progress of the application.

End of key stage admissions

Where a young person needs to move school due to an upcoming change in Key Stage, we will ensure early planning. The applications deadline is early January for primary school applications and in October for secondary schools. The process for those applying to special schools can differ.

Most open days at schools take place in October / November in the Autumn term and foster carers should arrange to take the young person to visit the new potential schools. They should discuss the options with social worker and Sutton Virtual School. A final decision is then reached.



SEND Admissions:

SEND ADMISSIONS:

EHCP in-year admissions

School admissions is different for children and young people with an EHCP. An in year move to a new school usually happens when a child/young person moves to a different area. The local SEND team will make all applications for prospective schools. They will consult with identified settings. Schools have 15 days to respond to a consultation. We suggest that foster carers:

- Use the local authority's 'Local Offer' website to see what schools/colleges may be suitable.
- Consult with a range of setting as many specialist provisions will be full.
- Seek advice from your local Independent/Information Advice & Support Service (IASS).

The new school/college place will be named in the final EHCP.

EHCP end of key stage admissions:

When a child/young person with an EHCP moves key stage, this may involve a school move. A transition annual review should take place in the summer term. For example, in Year 5 when planning transition to high school. The meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the child/young person's aspirations. Planning to meet needs in the next stage of their education is important. Not all schools can meet the needs of children/young people with SEND. Many specialist provisions have limited spaces. It is advisable to consider a range of prospective settings. In the autumn term, the SEND Case Manager will begin to consult with prospective settings. During the spring term, the school place is confirmed. The SEND Case Manager will update the EHCP naming the new school for September. The deadline to issue the final EHCP is 15th February for EYFS, primary and secondary transfers. It is 31st March for transfers to further education.



Supporting Admissions:

How Foster Carers Support Admissions:

Foster carers have a vital role in supporting school admissions for children looked after (CLA). Because CLA often face delays, disruptions, or gaps in education due to care placements, timely and well-supported school admissions are crucial. While the local authority holds legal responsibility for admissions decisions, foster carers play a key advocacy and support role throughout the process.

Advocate for Prompt and Suitable Placement

- Ensure urgency is maintained—admissions for looked after children should be treated as a priority under the School Admissions Code (England).
- Work closely with the social worker and Sutton Virtual School Education Advisor to push for swift school placement, especially after a placement move.

Contribute to Choosing the Right School

- Share insights about the child's personality, needs, and interests to help identify a school that's a good match.
- Raise concerns if a suggested school does not appear to meet the child's educational, emotional, or social needs.

Support the Application Process

- Help gather or provide relevant documents such as:
 - Previous school records or reports
 - Pupil Premium Plus eligibility
 - SEN/EHCP information (if applicable)
- Liaise with professionals to ensure all forms are completed correctly and on time.



Supporting Admissions:

Attend Admission or Transition Meetings

- Join meetings or visits with school staff (e.g. headteachers, SENCOs, designated teachers) to help share information and advocate for appropriate support.
- Help the child prepare questions or express feelings about the new school.

Prepare the Child Emotionally and Practically

- Talk to the child about the new school, answer questions, and validate any worries.
- Organise uniforms, school supplies, transport, and other practical needs in advance.
- If needed, support with travel arrangements or request assistance through the local authority.

Liaise After Admission

- Stay in contact with the designated teacher for CLA once the child starts school.
- Monitor how the child is settling in and report any concerns or support needs early.

Key Takeaways:

Children in care must be given the highest priority in oversubscription criteria for schools.

Admissions should not be delayed due to awaiting paperwork, funding, or EHCP decisions—interim support can be arranged.

Schools cannot refuse admission to a CLA without a valid, lawful reason—if this happens, it should be escalated via the Virtual School Head or local authority.

Foster carers are not responsible for the formal admission decision, but they are key advocates and emotional supports throughout the process. Their input can ensure the child gets a safe, stable, and supportive start in their new educational setting.



Suspension and Exclusion:

Foster carers play a critical role in supporting children looked after (CLA) who face suspension or exclusion from school. Given the trauma and instability many children looked after (CLA) have experienced, exclusions can be especially damaging – both emotionally and educationally. Foster carers act as advocates, emotional anchors, and collaborators during these difficult moments.

Advocate for the Child's Rights and Needs

- Children looked after are highly vulnerable and should be excluded only as a last resort.
- Challenge decisions where necessary and ensure the school follows proper procedures, including:
 - Involving the Designated Teacher for CLA
 - Notifying the Virtual School Head (VSH) and social worker immediately
 - Exploring all alternatives before excluding

Work Closely with Professionals

- Notify and liaise with:
 - The child's social worker
 - The Sutton Virtual School Education Advisor
 - The school's Designated Teacher
- Attend reintegration or review meetings and offer relevant context (e.g. recent trauma, placement changes, or emotional struggles). Please also ensure the Sutton Virtual School Education Advisor is also invited and present.

Provide Emotional Support and Stability

- Listen non-judgmentally to the child's experience of the incident.
- Offer reassurance, as exclusion can trigger feelings of rejection, shame, or failure—especially for children who have experienced abandonment or instability.
- Help them reflect on what happened and prepare for a return to school.

Help Plan for Reintegration

- Support the child in returning positively to school (if it's a suspension), by:
 - Attending reintegration meetings with school
 - Supporting any agreed strategies (e.g. behaviour plans, mentoring, reduced timetables)
- Monitor how the child settles back and communicate any ongoing difficulties.



Suspension and Exclusion:

Challenge Unfair or Inappropriate Exclusions

- Raise concerns if:
 - The exclusion does not take into account the child's care status, trauma history, or SEND needs.
 - The child has been informally sent home (this is illegal unless it's a formal exclusion).
- Escalate concerns via the VSH or Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) if needed.

Ensure Continuity of Learning

- Make sure the child receives schoolwork during suspension (required by law for exclusions over 5 days).
- Encourage routines and engagement in learning at home, even if temporary.
- Ask for additional support from the Virtual School where necessary (e.g. tutoring).

Support Long-Term Planning if Permanently Excluded

- Collaborate with the local authority to secure a suitable alternative provision.
- Support the child emotionally through the transition and help rebuild confidence.
- Ensure a new PEP meeting is arranged promptly.

Key Legal and Policy Points:

Permanent exclusion of a CLA should be a last resort and requires notification to Kate Leyshon Sutton Virtual School Head.

Schools must consider the impact of trauma and care experience before deciding to exclude

The Virtual School Head must be informed on the same day as the exclusion.

Foster carers are essential in ensuring exclusions are handled lawfully, compassionately, and in the child's best interests. By staying calm, involved, and focused on both advocacy and emotional support, carers can help prevent further disruption to the child's education and wellbeing.



Attendance

Foster carers have a key role in supporting the school attendance of children looked after (CLA). Regular attendance is crucial for academic success, emotional stability, and building relationships. However, children in care often face barriers to attendance such as trauma, anxiety, disrupted routines, or placement instability. Foster carers are central to identifying and overcoming these challenges.

Establish and Maintain Routines

- Set up consistent morning and bedtime routines to help the child feel secure and ready for school.
- Prepare school uniforms, meals, and transport in advance to reduce stress or last-minute issues.

Promote a Positive Attitude Toward School

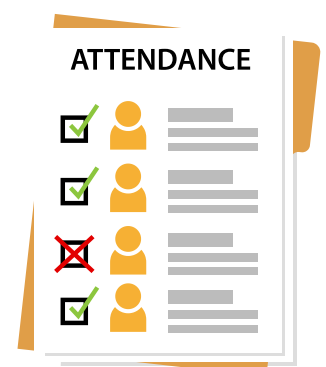
- Talk positively about school and encourage the child's interests, friendships, and achievements.
- Celebrate attendance milestones or personal wins (e.g. "You've been every day this week – amazing job!").

Address Emotional and Practical Barriers

- Be alert to signs of:
 - Anxiety or emotional distress
 - Bullying or peer problems
 - Learning difficulties or school avoidance
- Work with school staff (e.g. the Designated Teacher, SENCO) and professionals to put early support in place.

Work with the School and Other Professionals

- Keep in regular contact with:
 - The child's social worker
 - The Virtual School Education Advisor
 - The school's Designated Teacher for CLA
- Ensure any attendance issues are discussed in Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, and that support strategies are agreed and reviewed.



Monitor and Record Attendance

- Keep track of school attendance and report any concerns or absences promptly.
- Ensure authorised absence procedures are followed if the child is ill or has an appointment.
- Avoid taking holidays or unapproved absences during term time.

Support During Difficult Periods

- During times of transition, placement change, or emotional upheaval, help the child maintain attendance by:
- Working with the school to provide flexibility (e.g. phased return, reduced timetable)
- Supporting with transport or calming routines
- Asking for mentoring or pastoral support if needed

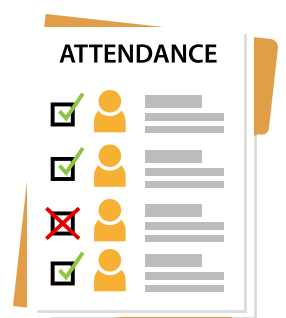
Encourage and Reward Attendance

- Use praise, stickers, charts, or small incentives to encourage and reward consistent attendance.
- Talk with the child about the importance of education and how attending school helps their future.

Challenge Low Expectations

- Advocate if professionals downplay attendance issues due to the child's care background.
- Support the belief that CLA can thrive and succeed with the right support, and that regular attendance is part of that success.

Foster carers support school attendance by being positive role models, structured caregivers, and strong advocates. Your engagement, encouragement, and collaboration with the wider team can make a significant difference to the child's educational stability and long-term outcomes.



Supporting Learning

We send a Cubbie Bear to all our 2-3 year olds in care. We ask foster carers to read daily with the child and Cubbie to promote education in a fun and positive way. We send out Early Years learning activities to foster homes and invite foster carers to engage the child in these activities, which promote inquisitive thinking and learning through play.

Our statutory primary school-age children receive a Booktrust letterbox package each half term, which contains books and learning games to support their literacy development. In years 7 and 8, young people have the option to receive a book token. This allows them free choice of the book they would like to buy.

Research shows that reading to / with a young person every day impacts educational outcomes. We value foster carer support with reading.

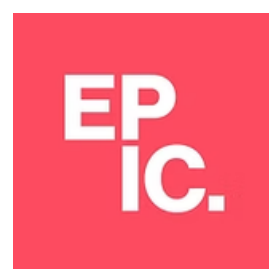
Flashacademy

Any young people who cannot speak a good level of English get access to Flashacademy. an online language learning platform to promote language development. We encourage our ESOL learners to study language skills for 30 mins each day. This helps them learn more words and phrases. They can then access the curriculum and make stronger academic progress.



EPIC Futures:

EPIC Entrepreneurs is open to young people aged 16-25 living in the UK who have faced significant challenges or adversity in their lives. We have a particular focus on individuals who have been through the care system, have refugee status, or have been through (or are on the periphery of) the youth justice system. The structured 3 month programme is a combination of technical masterclasses, presentations and targeted support for you and your business. You will also be partnered with a mentor to guide you through your business growth. With the support of the EPIC team and mentors you will attend a series of Masterclasses, and access a wealth of resources which guide you through the essentials to help get you started. If you are eligible through our entry requirements, the cost of the programme is completely free but is worth £3,417 in value to your business. The programme value includes a £500 grant which you will be eligible to claim for your business launch or growth, and once you graduate from the EPIC programme you will receive further mentoring and support from EPIC as an alumni.



Supporting Learning

I-Can Programme:

I-CAN (Initiating and Supporting Care Leavers into Apprenticeships in Nursing) is the University of Roehampton's 12-month pilot initiative to support care experienced young people aged 18-29 to pursue a career in healthcare.



It is funded through Southwest Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) Priorities Fund.

What we do

I-CAN is an exclusive 8-week programme offering paid learning, inspiring talks and the opportunity to meet with recruiters leading to pathways into healthcare careers.

The programme will include a blend of learning activities and hands-on experience. You'll gain vital skills and unique insights into the NHS, boost your employability skills through 121 guided support and opportunities for career progression. It covers a range of topics from Introduction to Health and Social care to Communication skills and Working in Healthcare.

Those joining without a GCSE pass or equivalent in maths and english will have opportunity to gain functional skills during the programme.

Enrichment

Our vision:

We want our young people to have a range of educational experiences to support their academic, social and emotional development. Enrichment can help build skills and self-esteem. Our programme We offer a range of activities throughout the year for a range of age groups. The activities on offer will vary from year to year.

We have hosted:

- an annual fun day
- a bi-annual writing residential course
- trips to sporting fixtures
- music opportunities
- cultural learning experiences
- interactive science curriculum-based learning



We will contact foster carers with information as appropriate and update our website to show the planned activities over the coming months.

2025 Events:

February - Financial Literacy:

Through interactive workshops, hands-on activities, and expert-led discussions, participants gained valuable insights into budgeting, saving, investing, and making smart financial decisions.

May - Trip to Mote Park Water Sports

Participants will enjoy a variety of water activities including kayaking, paddleboarding, and pedal boating, all set against the beautiful backdrop of Mote Park. The event encouraged confidence, cooperation, and a love for the outdoors—leaving everyone with big smiles and unforgettable summer memories!



July - Summer Family Fun Day!

A heartwarming celebration of connection, joy, and community for foster carers and their amazing foster children. The day is packed with laughter, games, creative activities, and outdoor fun—offering something special for every age



December - Operation Elf

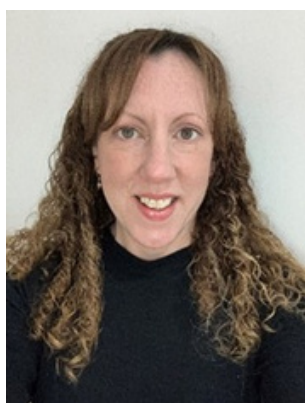
An afternoon filled with festive cheer, joyful activities, and heartwarming moments for children and families. The highlight of the day was a special visit from Father Christmas, who brought smiles, gifts, and a sprinkle of Christmas magic to every child.

EXTENDED DUTIES

Sutton Virtual School has a strategic role to promote the education of children with a social worker, previously looked-after or in kinship care. We work with the professionals supported these children rather than working directly with the child.



Hannah Miles Extended Duties
Education Advisor
Hannah.miles@cognus.org.uk
Please contact Hannah if you
have a query or need advice.



Sara Martin Strategic Lead
for Children with a Social
Worker
Sara.martin@cognus.org.uk

EXTENDED DUTIES

PCLA, Kinship and CWSW

What do we offer:

- please do find a link [here](#) to our booklet for PCLA, Kinship and Children with a social worker.

<https://www.cognus.org.uk/services/suttonvirtualschool/schools/supporting-children-with-a-social-worker/book-a-con>

We run free consultations in relation to a Sutton child or young person under the remit of the Virtual School: Child in Need, Child Protection, Child Looked After, Previously Looked After, has/had involvement from a Social Worker, Kinship, or Special Guardianship. Consultations offer professionals a problem-solving space to work towards tangible next steps to support the young people. To book, complete the consultation form and contact anyone you ask us to invite, so they'll know we'll be in touch. For queries, please contact Eva, the Virtual School Business Support Officer, on Eva.brown@cognus.org.uk.

Introduction:

Sutton Virtual School acts as a local authority champion to promote the education of Children Looked After (CLA), Previously Looked After (PCLA), children with a social worker and children in kinship care, so they achieve the best educational outcomes.

Sutton Virtual School is available to provide educational advice and guidance to the parents of adopted children and children of Kinship care including those under special guardianship. Our contact details are available on the Sutton Virtual School website.



EXTENDED DUTIES

SUTTON VIRTUAL SCHOOL EDUCATION SUPPORT

Who do we
support?

We provide schools, social workers and other professionals educational advice and support in relation to young people who have, or had a social worker:

**Children in Need
Child Protection
Previously Looked-After
Kinship
Special Guardianship**

We also provide information and guidance to families of adopted or kinship care children, which can include those in kinship under special guardianship



What do
we offer?

- Training, support and networking for foster carers, PCLA, SGO and Kinship carers
- Resources and guidance on our website [here](#)
- Training, CPD and consultations for schools and social care
- A package to support schools to embed relational practice

<https://www.cognus.org.uk/services/suttonvirtualschool/families/kinship/kinship-advice/>

Contact us:

Key Contacts and Further Support:

Each local authority has its own Virtual School. If you need advice or support, you can contact:

- Your child's social worker
- The designated teacher at your child's school
- The Virtual School Head (VSH) in your local authority
- The Education Advisor



Conclusion

The Sutton Virtual School plays a crucial role in ensuring children looked after and previously looked after receive the education they deserve. As a foster carer, you are a key partner in this effort. By working together with the Sutton Virtual School, social workers, and schools, we can help these children thrive academically and reach their full potential.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all foster carers for the unwavering support you provide to children in your care. Your dedication to nurturing not only their well-being but also their education makes a lasting difference. By encouraging learning, celebrating achievements, and advocating for their needs, you help build brighter futures. Your belief in the power of education empowers children to dream, grow, and thrive. Thank you for being champions of both care and learning.

