



Department  
for Education

# **Promoting the education of children with a social worker**

**Virtual School Head role extension**

**June 2022**

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Expiry or Review Date	5
Who is this publication for?	5
Funding for the role extension	5
Defining the cohort of children with a social worker	6
The strategic leadership of Virtual School Heads	7
What is not in scope for Virtual School Heads	8
<b>Barriers to education for children with a social worker</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>How Virtual School Heads should promote the educational outcomes of children with a social worker</b>	<b>11</b>
Enhance partnerships between education settings and social care	12
Identify the cohort's needs and address barriers to education	15
Advise and support key professionals	22
<b>Research and emerging practice</b>	<b>25</b>

## Summary

This non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education intends to support all local authorities as Virtual School Heads (VSHs) continue to develop their 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 VSHs](#) (NAVSH).

Our ambition is to transform the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and in care, and ensure that those who have lost the most from the pandemic can recover and flourish, and that prosperity benefits all.

The Government's [Children in Need review](#) (2019) evidenced for the first time that at least 1.6 million children have needed a social worker between 2012/13 and 2017/18 – equivalent to 1 in 10 of all children. The review showed that these children do significantly worse than others at all stages of education and that poor educational outcomes persist even after social work involvement ends. The review recognised the crucial role that VSHs 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. VSH leadership is vital now more than ever given the impact the pandemic has had on the learning of all children but none more so than the most vulnerable. For example, in the 2020/21 academic year Children in Need (CiN) lost an average of 4.1 months of learning in secondary school reading compared with 2.4 months for all children.<sup>1</sup>

That is why in September 2021 local authorities began receiving funding to extend the role of VSHs to include strategic responsibility for children with a social worker. Using their expertise and knowledge from working with looked-after and previously looked-after children, VSHs have made excellent progress in understanding and addressing the disadvantages and barriers that these children experience. VSHs have worked to strengthen partnerships between education settings and local authorities, establish a culture of high aspirations that helps these children to make educational progress, and demonstrate the benefits of good attendance.

All local authorities are eligible to receive continued grant funding to support VSHs in delivering this responsibility and are asked to participate in the research programme to help the department understand the impact of the new duties and identify emerging practices that could help VSHs deliver their role. Funding for this strategic

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<sup>1</sup> [Understanding Progress in the 2020 to 2021 Academic Year extension report covering the first half of the autumn term 2021 to 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

leadership role for children with a social worker is confirmed until the end of March 2023.

This extended role does not require VSHs to provide direct intervention, help or 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 2023 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.
- Directors of Children's Services.
- Local authority officers (including 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 (DSL), Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO), Headteachers, Designated Teachers (DT), Directors and Chief Executives of Multi-Academy Trusts, and senior mental health leads (SMHL)), 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 (ITP) and special post-16 institutions.
- Educational Psychologists.
- Managers and staff (including DSL and SENCO) in early years childcare settings.

## Funding for the role extension

1. All local authorities are eligible to receive grant funding provided under Section 31 of the Education Act 2002 to deliver the extended VSH role.
2. Funding provides VSHs 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.
3. 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.<sup>2</sup>

4. The [Grant Determination Letter and Memorandum of Understanding](#), issued to all local authorities, set 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 VSHs with the additional capacity they require to become the strategic leader that promotes educational outcomes for children with a social worker. Local authorities **should not** use this funding for any other purpose.
5. All local authorities need to sign and return the Memorandum of Understanding to the Department for Education.
6. On receipt of the signed Memorandum of Understanding, the Department will make three equal payments, in September 2022, December 2022 and March 2023 to all local authorities.
7. Local authorities will be asked to submit to the Department for Education a brief *financial progress report*, prior to the final payment, detailing the actual spend and forecast spend on the VSH extended duties up to and including the date of the request. Details will be set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.
8. 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

9. In September 2021 VSHs became, with agreement and support from their local authority, 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.
10. For ease, the term ‘*children with a social worker*’ (CWSW) will be used to refer to this group of children throughout this document. It includes all children who have been assessed as needing or previously needing a social worker within the past 6 years due to safeguarding and/or welfare reasons. It includes all

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

children aged 0 to 18 across all education settings subject to a CiN plan or a Child Protection plan.<sup>3</sup>

11. This cohort has been identified as a group of children who face significant barriers to education as a result of experiences of adversity, most commonly abuse and neglect.
12. Under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, all local authorities have duties to children with SEND. VSHs should not duplicate support available to children under existing local authority duties. The remit of the extended VSHs role includes children who are disabled and have, or have had, an allocated social worker.
13. The non-statutory responsibility for promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker is in addition to the existing statutory duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children.

## The strategic leadership of Virtual School Heads

14. The new responsibilities for VSHs were introduced in September 2021 – giving them a strategic leadership role to champion the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children with a social worker. This means that they should be:
  - making visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities, including with children’s social care, to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children.
  - promoting 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.
  - levelling up children’s outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child has the opportunity to reach their potential. This will include helping to ensure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover educationally from the impact of the pandemic.

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<sup>3</sup> Children who have been assessed as needing or previously needing a social worker within the past 6 years due to safeguarding and/or welfare reasons i.e., *Ever6 CWSW*. This definition is similar to the definition of children who qualify for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the past six years i.e., *Ever6 FSM*.

## What is not in scope for Virtual School Heads

15. The VSH role for children with a social worker is a strategic leadership responsibility.
16. VSHs are **not** expected to:
  - work directly with individual children and their families - including tracking and monitoring of individual educational progress, 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 SEND who do not require or need a social worker, as defined above.



# Barriers to education for children with a social worker

17. The CiN review 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%<sup>4</sup> of state schools and face barriers to education due to experiences of adversity, most commonly as a result of domestic abuse, mental ill-health, and substance misuse, with 62% of children needing a social worker having experienced one or more of these.<sup>5</sup>
18. 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.
19. 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 CiN plan in the previous 5 years and 39% had spent some time on a Child Protection plan.<sup>7</sup>
20. 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.
21. The CiN review found that VSHs, 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. VSHs 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

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<sup>4</sup> Children in need of help and protection CIN review: final data and analysis June 2019. Pupils aged 4-15 at the start of academic year 2017-18 in state-funded school provision.

<sup>5</sup> Children in Need: data and analysis: June 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Children in Need: data and analysis: June 2019

<sup>7</sup> CIN review: final data and analysis, June 2019.

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 CiN 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.

22. 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.<sup>8</sup>
23. While there is no single cause for the poor educational outcomes for children with a social worker, experiences of adversity can create barriers to good outcomes. 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, they 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.<sup>9</sup>
24. Despite the challenges that children with a social worker face, with the right support, the aspirations of these children can be raised, and they can go on to achieve more than their peers. It is crucial that those supporting children with a social worker have the vision, awareness, and the right tools to enable these children and young people to achieve their best and ensure there is equal access to education opportunities.

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<sup>8</sup> CIN review: final data and analysis, June 2019.

<sup>9</sup> CIN review: interim publication, December 2018.

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

25. As strategic leaders for children with a social worker VSHs should work to create a culture of high aspirations across both education and social care that helps to ensure children with a social worker make educational progress and reach their potential no matter their starting point.
26. VSHs should bring greater awareness to the disadvantage that this cohort of children can experience, promote engagement in education and help to narrow the attainment gap. VSHs will advocate for and model a strengths-based approach to supporting children and promoting their educational outcomes.
27. Local authorities should ensure they continue to make effective use of the funding provided to their VSH as they embed this strategic leadership role. Consideration should be given to the additional capacity VSHs need to work with a variety of education settings and social care partners to champion children with a social worker and should recruit staff with the right knowledge and skills.
28. VSHs should work closely with their Director of Children's Services to understand the needs of the cohort in their local authority and how best to improve their educational outcomes. There will be no single model for delivering improved outcomes and VSHs may want to consider how to make use of peer support, including through NAVSH as they share learning and develop good practice.

### Activities for all Virtual School Heads

29. VSHs should take note of the CiN review, including the findings on how to improve children's outcomes. Although VSHs will adopt a flexible leadership approach to meet the needs of their local area, there are some activities which are critical for all, including:
  - enhancing partnerships between education settings and the local authority so agencies can work together in a child focused manner.
  - identifying the needs of the cohort and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes to ensure pupils make educational progress.
  - offering advice and support to key professionals such as Social Workers, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers, and school leaders to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using evidence-based interventions.

## Enhance partnerships between education settings and social care

30. 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.
31. To support effective partnerships, VSHs should:
  - establish strong relationships with education settings and social care to raise awareness and expertise of schools to meet the needs of CWSW in their LA and of social workers to advocate effectively for CWSW in all educational settings. Where a child is educated in another LA the VSH should work with that authority to ensure awareness and expertise match that of their own LA.
  - develop an expectation that all leaders and professionals supporting children with a social worker hold high aspirations for this cohort of children regardless of the child's background or stage of learning.
  - clarify their role to education settings and social care services, including communicating their offer of advice and support to teams including promoting the concept that education settings are a safe and protective space for all CWSW. Work with social care professionals to communicate the need to and benefit of including education in all plans aimed at protecting the child.
  - consider how to bring together education and local authority leaders to develop goals and set direction for improving children's outcomes most effectively. 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.
  - be involved in developing local authority messaging to schools on the barriers the cohort faces, the virtual school offer of support for the cohort, up to date information on best practice, the importance of all professionals working with children and/or families in a coordinated and transparent manner (where possible) to minimise disruption to the child's education.

The below is an example of emerging practice from a local authority on partnership working with education settings.

*Seven lead practitioners for the education of CWSW have been selected by the VSH and Assistant Director of Education, mostly Designated Safeguarding Leads or Designated Teachers but some are deputy or assistant heads who have demonstrated excellent practice as well as passion and drive. The VSH described wanting to set a clear 'gold standard' so that the virtual school can be confident that the lead practitioners will demonstrate the very best practice for CWSW. They are part of a forum that the virtual school uses to train the trainers in the aims, priorities, and style of training that they then deliver across all the schools.*

*The virtual school noted that all schools in the LA have a named person, usually the DSL, who is the lead for CWSW. This person receives up-to-date information regarding CWSW, training and support through the DSL forum, and half termly round-up emails. If they are new to the post, they are invited to bespoke training led by the VSH. Schools that have particularly effective practice and provide good quality support for CWSW are recognised and used to support those schools that may need to develop their practice.*

*The VSH reported that at the virtual school conference attended by school staff and social workers included training sessions and workshops explaining the extended role. They noted that the virtual school psychologist ran training sessions at the conference about mental health, support, and advice on what impacts on CWSW.*

## **Sharing data and information**

32. Information sharing is key in promoting the welfare and educational outcomes of children with a social worker. It is vital that all parties, be that a VSH, relevant other local authority officer, school, trust/multi-academy trust, or another local authority where a child attends for their education, working with these children recognise the importance of information sharing and adopt effective procedures and principles to enable this.
33. As strategic leaders VSHs should receive or be provided access to necessary data which enables them to maintain effective oversight of the progress of children with a social worker under their care, regardless of where they may be educated. This may include, but not limited to, data on attendance and attainment, including cases of exclusions or persistent absence, as well as all safeguarding information. The expectation is that VSHs will use this information to develop and implement targeted cohort-level interventions to improve attendance and attainment, reduce exclusions and persistent absence, and ensure safeguarding of children with a social worker under their responsibility.

34. When requesting or providing access to data on children with a social worker, all interested parties, be that a VSH, school, trust/multi-academy trust, or another local authority where a child attends for their education, should consider statutory guidance:
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) which states ‘*information sharing is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour when a child is at risk of going missing or has gone missing, when multiple children appear associated to the same context or locations of risk....*’ Furthermore, it states ‘*the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe.*’; and
  - [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#), which states ‘*information sharing is vital... in promoting children’s welfare, including their educational outcomes.*’ Furthermore, it states ‘*...arrangements are in place that set out clearly the processes and principles for sharing information within the school or college and with children’s social care.*’

The below is an example of emerging practice from a local authority on sharing data and information.

*An educational psychologist, assistant head and three area-based leads for children with a social worker (CWSW) and a Virtual School SENCO were appointed to the virtual school from the extension grant (with some additional LA funding) and met regularly with the data team. The VSH reported that an attendance dashboard had been created that recorded numbers of CIN and CP, their attendance, suspensions, and exclusions. A more integrated dashboard was being developed (using Power BI) to provide ‘live’ recording of locality and entry into CIN/CP. Use of it had been limited thus far by the fact that schools were readjusting following the pandemic, but it had provided an oversight at a cohort level, previously unavailable and not managed by the virtual school. The VSH suggested that previous use of data was linked to each professional area (e.g., SEND, social care) and provided siloed knowledge. Over 30 schools (including some academies, independent schools, and some small LA schools) had not signed the data sharing agreement. The Assistant Director commented that their strategy of admissions to ‘local schools’ with only a few CWSW outside their LA, made access to data less problematic.*

*The data manager worked across children’s services and closely with the virtual school to provide analytical and performance support. They noted that CWSW had had much less attention than Children Looked After (CLA) previously, though this gained momentum during the pandemic and data on CWSW stood out as having the lowest attainment and attendance, and highest rates of exclusion. They commented that:*

*'...having this project has really ...brought the recognition that we need to have oversight of this cohort at senior level, strategic level, there's not always been the resources available to have oversight of what is an increasingly large cohort... but one that's really vulnerable ...the elements that we've implemented through the extension of the role of the VS have really tightened that up. It's been well received and arguably desperately needed for quite a long time in terms of a service taking ownership of a cohort, rather than just individuals.'* [Data Manager]

## Identify the cohort's needs and address barriers to education

35. Children with a social worker may face multiple barriers to education because of their complex circumstances, which will have been further compounded by the pandemic and related restrictions. Even though the initial impact of the pandemic has subsided, and restrictions have ended, a significant detrimental influence on all children's learning, particularly that of the most vulnerable, remains.
36. The Government's white paper, [Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), sets out how it will introduce and implement standards that will improve children's education, deliver the right support if they fall behind and give them the tools to lead a happy, fulfilled, and successful life. This includes targeted support for every child who needs it.
37. To effectively identify the needs of children with a social worker and ensure they can access interventions that make a difference to their education, including government support to boost education recovery, VSHs 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 SEND rates.
  - share knowledge and expertise to strengthen how education settings and social care understand the impact of adversity on learning and educational outcomes of children.
  - promote professional practice for education settings and local authorities which:
    - champion high levels of support alongside high standards for children with a social worker.



- recognise how stability and consistency in relationships can help children to overcome barriers to learning.
- encourage effective information sharing between professionals so that anyone supporting children and families understands their context.

## Attendance

38. Regularly attending school or college<sup>10</sup> is vital for all children’s educational progress, for their wellbeing and for their wider development. 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 (NEET). Prior to the pandemic in 2018/19 the average absence rate for all pupils was 4.8% and 10.7% for CiN, during the pandemic in 2020/21 these figures were 4.7% for all pupils and 13.4% for CiN. Prior to the pandemic in 2018/19 the average persistent absence rate for all pupils was 11.2% and 30.5% for CiN, during the pandemic in 2020/21 these figures were 12.3% for all pupils and 41.2% for CiN. In 2018/19 the average Attainment 8 score for CiN was 18.8 at key stage 4 compared to 46.7 for all pupils. In 2020-21, CiN had an average Attainment 8 score of 22.6 at key stage 4 compared to 50.9 for the wider population.<sup>11</sup>
39. For children with a social worker, attending school is also a protective factor, offering a safe space when home is not, away from the threat of gangs, crime, or exploitation. School also provides access to support from professionals helping these children make educational progress while ensuring that they are visible.
40. Designated Safeguarding Leads and Designated Teachers, present in every education setting, will likely have the most regular contact, sometimes daily, with these children. As such, the VSHs may wish to strengthen engagement with these professionals through established local networks to share advice, best practice, or training to support attendance and raise awareness of the barriers these children can face. Further information on improving attendance for schools and local authorities can be found in the following guidance [‘Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities’](#).

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting Year 2020 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)



Below is an example of emerging practice from a local authority on supporting attendance.

*A new advisor for CWSW was appointed to the virtual school and has been running weekly attendance surgeries for Social Workers who report positively on these, stating that they are able to drop in and talk about any educational problems influencing attendance, and where appropriate, they are signposted to other services. Data (including attendance) on CWSW have improved with schools agreeing to add an 'Ever6 CWSW' marker (similar to the existing Ever6 FSM (Free School Meals)) to their systems and to the common transfer document (used when pupils transfer from one school to another). The virtual school is represented on the LA working group on the attendance of vulnerable groups, led by the attendance team integrating the work on CWSW into existing LA provision. This work is part of developing a culture across social care and education that recognises attendance is everyone's responsibility, and the virtual school has contributed to the draft LA Attendance Strategy. The VSH suggested that locating the work on CWSW within the LA's prevention approach reduces the impact of barriers to CWSW's attendance, while also reducing the need for individual interventions from the inclusion team or the virtual school.*

## **Mental health and wellbeing**

41. Children with a social worker are more likely to experience social, emotional, and mental health issues<sup>12</sup> than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills<sup>13</sup>, forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g., shame, sadness, anxiety, and anger), sensory processing difficulties and coping with transitions and change. Furthermore, 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.<sup>14</sup>
42. 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

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> The mental processes enabling us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. ([Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child](#)).

<sup>14</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/809108/CIN\\_review\\_final\\_analysis\\_publication.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809108/CIN_review_final_analysis_publication.pdf)

children and young people with probable mental health disorders increased from 1 in 9 in 2017 to 1 in 6 in July 2020.<sup>15</sup>

43. As such, VSHs should work with their local authority lead for mental health, responsible for linking with education settings, to ensure any mental health training provided includes:
- the value of a graduated approach<sup>16</sup> to assessing, understanding, and meeting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of children and young people with a social worker.
  - how to identify signs of potential mental health issues for children with a social worker and how to access further assessment and support where necessary.
  - understanding the impact of issues that children with a social worker can experience and that settings are able to offer targeted support to meet the needs of these children.
  - how to recognise the value of engaging the child's voice in the process of identification and support.
44. VSHs may also want to work with individual school senior mental health leads (SMHL), where the role exists, to ensure children with a social worker are factored into the school's strategy on mental health and wellbeing. The SMHL is responsible for linking with the wider mental health system, implementing a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, and working with the school senior leadership team and wider community including VSH to raise awareness of mental health. SMHLs are present in most schools and colleges and the government remains committed to offering a grant to support all eligible state-funded schools and colleges to access SMHL training by 2025<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up>

<sup>16</sup> See [SEND Code of Practice 2015](#).

<sup>17</sup> [Senior mental health lead training: conditions of grant for the 2022 to 2023 financial year - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/grants/senior-mental-health-lead-training)

The below is an example of emerging practice on incorporating the voice of the child into virtual school ways of working.

*At the National Association of VSHs (NAVSH) conference a care leaver spoke about their educational experiences, what was helpful and the support they had received from an advocate. This influenced the virtual school to consider how the advocacy support offered to Looked After Children through a charity should be extended to CWSW. The LA extended its commissioning of this charity who currently work with LAC and SEND, to provide an online tutor to support CWSW to develop confidence and voice so that they can give their views to others who represent them or directly contribute themselves.*

*The virtual school has highlighted this support to the Social Workers and DSLs to encourage referrals to this service so that the voices of CWSW can be heard and advocated for in CIN and CPP meetings. Where the CWSW do not attend the meetings, the advocacy service is helping to get their views and experiences represented, which the VSH noted would enhance longer-term capacity and sustainability of CWSW to speak up.*

#### **Lost learning - continuing recovery programmes following the pandemic**

44. 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. 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.
45. 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.
46. Building on the success of the 2021/22 education recovery programme the Department will for 2022/23 directly fund schools to embed tutoring into children's education where they need extra support to progress. VSHs should be aware of the following initiatives, given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on CWSW, and work with education settings to ensure these children are able to access the following support:
  - [National Tutoring Programme \(NTP\)](#): continuing for 2022/23 with £349 million of tutoring funding going directly to schools. Schools that are currently working with Tuition Partners will be able to continue to do so in 2022/23. Similarly, eligible schools can continue to employ Academic

Mentors who are on their staff this year and will also still be able to recruit Academic Mentors directly.

- [Summer Schools Programme](#): Schools are being given the flexibility to deliver tuition over the summer holidays, as the date to use the enhanced School-Led Tutoring (SLT) funding has been extended to the 31 August.
- [Recovery Premium](#): As part of the Spending Review, the Government announced an additional £1bn to extend the recovery premium over the next two academic years (2022/23 and 2023/24). Primary schools will continue to benefit from an additional c.£145 per eligible pupil, with nearly double this amount in secondary schools. The Department will publish further detail around rates, allocations, and conditions of grant shortly. Schools, Tuition Partners, and Academic Mentors already engaged in the programme will be contacted on next steps.

The below is an example of emerging practice from a local authority on including educational targets within CIN/CP plans.

*The VSH described how they set up a working group of Social Worker team managers, Social Worker advanced practitioners, early support and safeguarding Social Workers who pulled together what they felt SWs might need to know about the education of CWSW. The Virtual School Lead for CWSW talked to Social Workers and their managers who had no previous relationship with the virtual school, about the new duties, education, and the role of the virtual school. These discussions emphasised the importance of stating clear educational targets in the CIN/CP plans, familiarising themselves with names and contact details of the DTs in their CWSWs' schools and ensuring that these Designated Teachers attend CIN/CP planning meetings. The DCS reaffirmed the importance of a clear education focus in the CIN/CP plans. The VSH stated that moving forward, when managers in social care undertake quality assurance where they look at CIN/CP plans or any other assessments, the VSH will be involved to see whether the focus and clarity of information about education has improved.*

*Social Workers acknowledged that schools play a pivotal role in supporting the plans, working alongside a social worker, in terms of sharing information because teachers see the children every day for many years. They noted that some schools had better relationships with the children than the social workers can establish and are thereby more able to access the views of the children.*

*The high number of CWSW with additional SEND needs prompted the Social Workers to request training on SEND provision and what social worker support ought to be in the EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) statutory assessment. The VSH arranged for the SEND team to provide this which subsequently increased Social Worker's contact with the SEND team about Children with a Social Worker.*

## **Elective home education**

48. 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.
49. Most parents' decision to home educate is made with their child's best education and wellbeing at the heart. 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.
50. 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 SEN or has a social worker. For more information, VSHs should refer to the Government guidance on [elective home education](#).
51. Introduced in the [Schools Bill in May 2022](#), the Government will require each local authority to establish a registration system for children not in school. The measures will make each authority responsible for maintaining a register of children not in school, including electively home-educating children, and have a duty to provide support to those families where they request it. The registers will help identify children missing education and target resources to ensuring those children receive a suitable education and are safeguarded.

## **Working with pupils and students with Special Educational Needs and Disability**

52. A significant proportion of children with a social worker may also be identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) or may be disabled<sup>18</sup>. These needs can exacerbate a child's vulnerability and increase the pressure on the family due to additional care demands.
53. 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

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-children-in-need> pg.8 'over a third of pupils in schools in 2017-18 who had been in need at any point since 2012-13 had SEN (35%).'

request for a statutory Education, Health, and Care assessment where necessary.

54. 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 effective SEND support is both protective for the child and the best way to promote achievement and enable the child to fulfil their potential.
55. VSHs should work strategically with the local authority Head of SEND and, where appropriate, with school leaders and SENCOs, to ensure that education settings adopt a graduated approach<sup>19</sup> to assessing, understanding, and meeting the special educational needs of children and young people with a social worker.

## **Advise and support key professionals**

56. A diverse range of agencies and professionals may be involved in the lives of children with social workers. For a child who is currently in receipt of children's social care support and is subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection plan, social workers will play a critical role in supporting children and their families. The Virtual Schools' relationships with education settings and other universal services will be essential in supporting children to reach their potential, sharing their knowledge and experience to improve cultures and practices to promote the learning of these children.
57. VSHs are not being asked to work with individual children with a social worker as replicating existing professional relationships and support would be counterproductive and burdensome to children and their families, as well as resource intensive for the local authority. Instead, as strategic leaders, VSHs will be best placed to offer advice and information to professionals who are providing direct support to these children.

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<sup>19</sup> See the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

58. In offering advice and information to support the outcomes and progress of children with a social worker, VSHs should:
- identify and establish links with key professionals e.g., DSL, social workers, headteachers, governors, SENCOs, SMHLs, other local authority officers, including Designated Social Care Officers (DSCOs) for SEND, where they exist, to help them to understand the role they have in improving outcomes for these children.
  - 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](#).
  - engage with research organisations to help develop good practice and build 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**

59. 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 children 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](#).
60. The guide highlights the professional development of teaching and support staff as the most effective use of the grant. VSHs 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**

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 VSH 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 such as domestic abuse, neglect, and substance misuse.

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 VSH and their team for support and there is a strong culture of promoting children's education through social care.



## Research and emerging practice

61. VSHs will be invited to participate in research commissioned by the Department to capture emerging practice and contribute to the development of a strong evidence base for how they can effectively promote the educational outcomes of children with social workers and impact of the new duties to date.
62. The Department will ask all local authorities to share data and information about how their VSH has been supporting children with a social worker and what funding has been used for that support. 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.
63. In addition, some local authorities, including VSHs, their teams, and partner agencies, will be invited to take part in focussed interviews to build detailed case studies. This will inform our understanding of what helps VSHs to be most effective in supporting children with a social worker and help ensure VSHs can learn from each other.



Department  
for Education

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