

Looked-After Children Policy



RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE



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1. Introduction

Riverside Bridge School is committed to ensuring that Looked After Children (LAC) and Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) receive the highest standard of care, education and emotional support. We recognise that children who are, or have been, in the care of the Local Authority have often experienced trauma, instability, loss and disrupted attachments. As a specialist school catering to pupils with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), we understand that the impact of early adversity can present not only as academic difficulty, but also as challenges with communication, behaviour, regulation and mental health.

This policy sets out how Riverside Bridge School fulfils its statutory responsibilities to promote the educational achievement, wellbeing and long-term outcomes of all LAC and PLAC pupils. It reflects our ethos of *Inspire, Empower, Achieve*, reinforces our trauma-informed and attachment-aware culture, and ensures that every child in care is provided with a stable, safe and aspirational environment in which they are encouraged to thrive. We are committed to being both educators and advocates, ensuring that LAC pupils are not further disadvantaged by the systems that are designed to support them.

2. Aims

- To establish clear procedures for identifying, monitoring and supporting LAC and PLAC pupils.
- To define the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, designated staff and all employees.
- To ensure the school complies fully with statutory guidance, including *Promoting the Education of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children* (DfE, 2018) and *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE, 2024).
- To strengthen multi-agency collaboration with Virtual Schools, social workers, carers and health services.
- To embed trauma-informed, attachment-aware and SEND-aware practices across the school community.

This is not a standalone safeguarding document; rather, it supports and interacts with our Child Protection Policy, Safeguarding procedures, SEND provision, Behaviour and Regulation Policy, Mental Health frameworks and statutory responsibilities under the Children Act.

3. Statutory and legislative framework

This policy is underpinned by a strong legal and statutory framework which requires schools to provide additional support, protection and advocacy for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children.

Riverside Bridge School adheres to the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Children Act 1989 & 2004 (including Section 22(3A) duty to promote educational achievement of LAC)
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008

- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- DfE (2018) Promoting the Education of LAC and PLAC
- DfE (2018) The Designated Teacher for LAC and PLAC
- Health and Well-being Guidance (DoH/DfE, 2022 Update)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024).

These documents establish clear expectations that all professionals involved in the care, education and protection of LAC must act as 'corporate parents', promoting their welfare with the same commitment and vigilance as any responsible parent would for their own child.

4. Definitions

Looked After Children (LAC)

Under the Children Act 1989, a Looked After Child is one who is in the care of a Local Authority as a result of a care order (Section 31) or is accommodated voluntarily with parental consent (Section 20). This includes children placed with foster carers, in residential settings, kinship care arrangements, or secure accommodation.

Previously Looked After Children (PLAC)

Previously Looked After Children are those who were once in the care of a Local Authority but have since left care through:

- Adoption Orders
- Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)
- Child Arrangements Orders (CAO)

Although they are no longer in care, they may continue to experience difficulties arising from trauma, attachment disruption or developmental loss. Schools are required under statutory guidance to offer PLAC pupils continued priority, particularly in relation to mental health and inclusion.

Care Leavers

Care Leavers are young people aged 16–25 who remain entitled to support after leaving care. They may be supported by a Personal Adviser and have an active Pathway Plan. Riverside Bridge School acknowledges specific duties towards post-16 LAC/PLAC learners under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

5. Riverside Bridge School context and ethos

Riverside Bridge School provides education for pupils with complex SEND, including autism, severe learning disabilities, profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and significant communication needs. Many of our LAC pupils face dual disadvantage: they are both care-experienced and have significant cognitive or emotional needs. For these

children, education must be more than academic; it must be relational, therapeutic and protective.

We operate as a trauma-informed school, implementing practices such as Thrive, Zones of Regulation, sensory integration and structured communication approaches. Staff understand that behaviour is a form of communication, and that inconsistency, perceived rejection, and changes in attachment figures can trigger dysregulation in LAC pupils. Consequently, Riverside Bridge School prioritises emotional safety, predictable routines and strong, trusted adult relationships.

Our ethos - *Inspire, Empower, Achieve* - requires us to act as champions for every child in care. We actively challenge the national pattern where LAC pupils experience lower attainment, higher exclusion and poorer life outcomes. We ensure that every LAC/PLAC pupil is treated as an individual with unique strengths, aspirations and potential.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body

The Governing Body holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the school is fulfilling its statutory duties towards LAC and PLAC. Governors will:

- ensure a named Designated Teacher is in post;
- review an annual report on LAC attainment, attendance, well-being and PP+ funding;
- monitor the impact of interventions, training and pupil outcomes;
- challenge any practice where LAC are excluded, disadvantaged or unsupported.

The Headteacher

The Headteacher ensures LAC provision is integrated across whole-school planning. They:

- promote a culture of high expectation for LAC;
- provide time and authority for the Designated Teacher to fulfil their role;
- ensure training for staff on LAC needs, attachment and trauma;
- guarantee that safeguarding systems prioritise LAC pupils' safety.

The Designated Teacher for LAC/PLAC – the Designated Safeguarding Lead

The Designated Teacher is responsible for leadership, coordination and advocacy of provision for LAC/PLAC pupils in school. Responsibilities include:

- maintaining the LAC/PLAC register and individual pupil profiles;
- coordinating Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and ensuring quality targets;
- liaising with Virtual School Heads, IROs, social workers and carers;
- overseeing PP+ funding use and evidencing impact at PEP reviews;
- ensuring staff use trauma-informed strategies and communicate consistently;
- working with health professionals to support mental health and care needs.

All School Staff

All staff are corporate parents. They must:

- know who LAC pupils are and understand their vulnerabilities;
- respond to behaviour with empathy and stability, not judgement or punishment;
- uphold confidentiality, ensuring sensitive data is protected;
- immediately report safeguarding concerns using school procedures.

7. Admissions, induction and transitions

Riverside Bridge School recognises that admission to a new school can be a period of heightened anxiety, especially for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children who may already have experienced multiple placement or school changes. To reduce instability, the school prioritises the prompt and supportive admission of LAC pupils, ensuring that no unnecessary delay contributes to educational discontinuity.

Prior to the pupil starting, the Designated Teacher will seek relevant documentation, including the Personal Education Plan (PEP), Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), care plan, risk assessments, medical information and reports from previous settings. Where necessary, a multi-agency transition meeting will be held involving the child's social worker, carers, Virtual School and family where appropriate.

Every LAC pupil will be provided with a structured and personalised induction plan. This may include familiarisation visits, social stories, introduction to key staff, and the appointment of a named adult to support settling in.

For pupils with complex communication needs, visual supports, personalised transition books and sensory profiles will be used to build trust and security.

The school is proactive in ensuring that all transitions, including mid-year moves, are managed with consistency and emotional clarity.

8. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a statutory document and essential tool to support the educational progress of Looked After Children.

Every LAC pupil must have an up-to-date PEP in place, initiated within 20 school days of becoming looked after and reviewed at least termly.

The PEP must be a living, child-centred plan that captures not only academic learning but also communication, therapeutic needs, sensory regulation, well-being, independence and life skills. It will clearly identify strengths as well as barriers and include SMART targets which align with the pupil's EHCP outcomes where relevant.

PEP meetings at Riverside Bridge School are chaired or co-ordinated by the Designated Teacher, with attendance from social workers, carers, the Virtual School, teaching staff and the pupil whenever appropriate.

The Designated Teacher ensures that any unmet needs or concerns identified at the PEP are escalated to relevant agencies. Failure by external partners to provide timely support

will be formally raised through the Virtual School Head or Local Authority escalation procedures.

The PEP is also the principal mechanism for planning and evidencing the use of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding. All proposed spending must be linked to PEP outcomes and reviewed for impact by the Designated Teacher and senior leadership team.

9. Attendance, behaviour and emotional regulation

Regular attendance and engagement in education is a critical factor in promoting the success and stability of Looked After Children.

Riverside Bridge School monitors attendance of LAC pupils daily and will act immediately upon any unexplained absence. Early contact will be made with carers and social workers, and persistent absence will be escalated through multi-agency protocols.

We recognise that behaviour in LAC children is often rooted in trauma, anxiety and disrupted attachment rather than defiance. As a trauma-informed and attachment-aware school, behaviour is viewed as communication. Staff are trained in relational practice, Zones of Regulation, Thrive principles and de-escalation approaches.

Exclusion of Looked After Children is avoided wherever possible and only considered in exceptional circumstances after consultation with the Virtual School Head and Local Authority.

Support plans, sensory regulation strategies, counselling, key adult attachment work and structured emotional regulation programmes are used to ensure that behaviour responses are therapeutic and fit for purpose.

Riverside Bridge School is committed to creating consistent, predictable relationships which reduce triggers associated with fear, abandonment or loss.

10. Health, mental health and well-being

Children who have been in care are statistically more likely to experience difficulties with physical health, speech and language development, mental health, attachment disorders and trauma-related conditions such as anxiety or hypervigilance.

Riverside Bridge School works in collaboration with health professionals, including the school nursing team, CAMHS, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and clinical services, to ensure that every LAC pupil receives appropriate medical oversight and therapeutic provision.

The Designated Teacher ensures that statutory Initial and Review Health Assessments are completed as required by the Local Authority. Health and well-being considerations are incorporated into PEPs, and any urgent concerns are shared through appropriate safeguarding or referral channels.

Interventions such as Thrive, Zones of Regulation, sensory diets and trauma-informed safety planning are central to supporting emotional stability for LAC pupils.

The school provides safe spaces and trusted adults for recovery conversations, allowing children to co-regulate and build resilience rather than internalise failure or repeat patterns of instability.

11. Multi-agency collaboration and partnership with the Virtual School

Riverside Bridge School recognises that the success of Looked-After Children is dependent on strong, proactive and consistent collaboration between all professionals involved in their care.

We are committed to working in partnership with the Local Authority, Virtual School Head (VSH), social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), carers, mental health services and health practitioners to provide a coherent and holistic approach to each child's development.

The Designated Teacher acts as the central point of contact for all external agencies supporting the child.

The school actively participates in statutory review meetings, PEP meetings, LAC reviews, annual EHCP reviews and emergency planning sessions.

Where multi-agency responsibilities are not being met, particularly regarding missing support services, delays in assessment or inappropriate care decisions, Riverside Bridge School will escalate concerns formally through the Virtual School Head or Safeguarding Partnership in line with corporate parenting principles.

The school operates in line with the principle that Looked After Children should never be disadvantaged due to system failings.

All key information, including safeguarding reports, attendance updates, risk assessments and interventions, will be promptly shared with relevant professionals under appropriate confidentiality protocols and GDPR compliance.

12. Funding - Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) and resource allocation

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is a statutory entitlement specifically allocated to support the educational progress and wellbeing of Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children.

It is not additional school income; rather, it is targeted funding that must be used to meet individually identified needs.

The Designated Teacher, in consultation with the Headteacher and the Virtual School, is responsible for planning and monitoring the use of PP+ funding through the Personal Education Plan. All PP+ expenditure must:

- be directly linked to PEP targets and wider outcomes;
- address barriers related to trauma, regulation, academic learning or life skills;

- be reviewed for impact at each PEP review.

Appropriate PP+ expenditure may include, but is not limited to:

- specialist therapeutic provision (e.g., Thrive, Play Therapy, Counselling).
- Speech and Language or Occupational Therapy extensions;
- literacy, numeracy or communication interventions;
- key adult mentoring, enrichment access or bespoke curriculum support;
- additional transitions preparation, sensory equipment or life skills programmes.

PP+ may not be used to fill staffing gaps or general school costs.

Any disputes over allocation or withholding of PP+ by the Virtual School will be challenged and escalated by the Designated Teacher in the best interests of the child.

13. Care Leavers and Post-16 transition

Riverside Bridge School recognises its continued responsibility to Looked-After and Previously Looked-After young people transitioning beyond statutory school age.

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, young people leaving care are entitled to the continued support of a Personal Adviser and the implementation of a Pathway Plan. The school will actively support these processes through Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) planning and multi-agency collaboration.

In Key Stage 4 and Post-16 pathways, LAC pupils will receive tailored support through vocational learning, independent living skills, community access and careers education linked to OCR Life and Living programmes.

The Designated Teacher and Careers Lead will work closely with Local Authority Leaving Care Teams, Further Education providers and training hubs to ensure that no LAC pupil exits education without a sustained destination plan.

Care Leavers are entitled to continued advocacy and emotional support beyond the age of 18.

Where appropriate, Riverside Bridge School will continue to liaise with external professionals to ensure that the young person's health, welfare and learning needs continue to be met, particularly during major transitions.

14. Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

The progress, attendance, well-being and outcomes of Looked-After Children will be rigorously monitored.

The Designated Teacher maintains detailed profiles for each child, incorporating academic performance, personal development milestones, therapeutic engagement and changes in care circumstances.

Termly progress checks and PEP reviews inform individual strategic planning.

The Senior Leadership Team receives regular reports highlighting strengths, risks, attendance trends and multi-agency concerns.

Concerns regarding provision breakdown, placement instability or agency non-compliance will be escalated immediately through safeguarding structures.

An annual LAC report will be submitted to the Governing Body, including:

- number of LAC/PLAC on roll;
- attendance and attainment analysis;
- use and impact of PP+;
- safeguarding, well-being and mental health considerations;
- staff training and development related to LAC;
- strategic priorities and policy effectiveness.

15. Links to other school policies

This policy works alongside and supports the implementation of:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy
- Behaviour and Regulation Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Policy

16. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Designated Teacher and the Headteacher or earlier if required due to changes in legislation or statutory guidance. Revisions will be approved by the Governing Body.