**Children with a Social Worker - Update for Designated Safeguarding Leads**

In addition to the Virtual School’s core duty to promote the education of Children We Care For, the Virtual School has a duty to promote the education of children with a social worker.

**Who are children with a social worker?**

The Department for Education (DfE) define the cohort as being children who have been assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker (CWSW) and those who have ever had a social worker in the last 6 years (known as Ever6 CWSW). This includes all children subject to a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan aged from 0 up to 18 in all education settings, including children who have a social worker because of a disability but are not in care.

**Why are Designated Safeguarding Leads well placed to promote the education of children with a social worker?**

As part of your role as a Designated Safeguarding Lead, your additional responsibilities include providing advice and support to other staff on child welfare, safeguarding and child protection matters, taking part in strategy discussions and inter-agency meetings, and/or supporting other staff to do so, and to contributing to the assessment of children.

It is important that you work closely with your school’s Designated Teacher for Children We Care For and Previously Cared For Children as children with a social worker often have many of the same needs and challenges as care-experienced children.

**Advice and guidance for Designated Safeguarding Leads on promoting the education of children with a social worker**

Children with social workers have 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.  These are known as [Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)](https://www.acesonlinelearning.com/).

Children with a social worker should have access to the following support in school:

* [National Tutoring Programme (NTP)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-tutoring-programme-simplified-to-reach-as-many-pupils-as-possible)
* [Summer Schools Programme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-led-tutoring-grant)
* [Recovery Premium](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-tutoring-programme-simplified-to-reach-as-many-pupils-as-possible)

Regularly attending school, education or college is vital for children’s educational progress, their wellbeing, and their wider development.  Children and young people become more vulnerable when they are not in education every day – for some, not being in education will be a significant safeguarding risk.  Children of statutory school age should be in education for 25-hours a week. If a child with a social worker is not in school, education settings have a duty to inform the social worker without delay. Where a child or young person has not attended school for more than 15 days because of illness, it is the duty of the Local Authority to ensure access to education. Refer to guidance on [reintegration timetables](https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/reintegration-timetables) or contact the [County Attendance Team](https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/county-attendance-team) if you have any questions regarding this.

Disruptive behaviour or sudden changes in behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs or a change in another aspect of a young person’s life.  Relationship-based and restorative approaches are most effective for supporting children’s emotional regulation. The Virtual School promotes that schools adopt a trauma-informed relational approach to behaviour. Refer to [Restorative Practice](https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/restorative-practice) webpage for more on Restorative Practice and to the [Virtual School’s website](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/our-work-schools/virtual-school-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers-0-25) for more on staff training opportunities.

Children with a social worker are more likely to experience social, emotional and mental health issues than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills, forming trusting

relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties, foetal alcohol syndrome and coping with transitions and change.

For these children and young people, we would encourage settings to make use of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (see below) – the SDQ is an effective tool to help professionals identify emotional and behaviour concerns and devise/implement a needs-based intervention plan. Tracking SDQ data is important as unmet SEMH needs are one of the key reasons for educational underachievement in children with a social worker. Many settings have a Senior Mental Health Lead who might be a good person to link up with regarding identifying [additional sources of support](https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/mental-health-and-wellbeing).



Some children with a social worker may have a diagnosed or undiagnosed Special Education Need or Disability (SEND).  Education settings have a duty to assess children’s needs and use their best endeavours to meet the educational needs of children with SEND.  It is essential that you work closely with your school’s Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and ensure, where necessary, that needs-based plans are in place/consistently followed. For more information, visit the following webpages [Special educational needs and disability: The local offer](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/children-education-and-families/education-and-learning/special-educational-needs-and-disability-local-offer) and [Guidance and policies about SEN and disability](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/children-education-and-families/education-and-learning/special-educational-needs-and-disability-local-offer/guidance-and-policies).

**What are my responsibilities as Designated Safeguarding Lead with the support of my colleagues?**

* Champion the needs of children with a social worker and promote effective practice in meeting the needs of this group.
* Promote aspiration and ensure this vulnerable group is carefully planned for, that reasonable adjustments are always put in place and that these children meet their potential.
* Attend relevant [training](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/our-work-schools/virtual-school-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers-0-25) - this can include other staff members from your school or setting (e.g. Designated Teacher).
* Raise the profile of this group of children across the school and ensure their progress and attainment are adequately tracked, that staff are aware of the types of barriers to success these children may face and are equipped to help them overcome them - the biggest barrier is non-attendance at school.
* Help leaders plan holistic support for children with a social worker across the school. Help leaders consider what systematic barriers may hold these children back, e.g. Are your school policies flexible and trauma-informed? Do you offer a range of provision? Do you adopt a restorative approach to managing behaviour? Are there effective interventions in place to help these children meet/exceed age-related expectations?
* Report at least annually to the Governing Board (or equivalent) on the progress, attainment, attendance and exclusions for this group, on interventions in place and the impact it has made.

**Where can I go for support and more information?**

Do access the Virtual School for training and signposting to other organisations. The Virtual School has a strategic duty to make known the vulnerabilities of this cohort of children, promote their attendance in school and promote good practice that supports school in further narrowing the attainment gap.

The Virtual School does not follow the attendance and progress information of individual children with a social worker in the same way that we do for Children We Care For but may look at general trends in the school regarding progress, attainment and suspensions/exclusions data for this particular group.

For more information and sources of support, visit:

[**Children with a social worker | Oxfordshire County Council**](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/our-work-schools/virtual-school-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers-0-25/children-social-worker)