

Suspensions

For many looked after children, September signals a welcome return to the routine, security and reassurance of school life. Many of you will have seen a number of recent news reports highlighting the unacceptably high incidences of suspensions and exclusions of young people from school nationally.

Whilst all children are at risk of poorer outcomes and life chances when access to education is withdrawn or interrupted, these risks are greatly magnified for children in care. In partnership with all the professionals around our children, we are committed to working closely with all schools to support the uninterrupted attendance of looked after young people, and to reduce risks of suspensions. This is a key aim for the coming academic year.

We would strongly request that schools communicate promptly with the Virtual School and professional network should the behaviours of our children present particular difficulties that put them at risk of suspension. We will discuss over the phone and/or attend meetings even at short notice to discuss support available to children and schools in this endeavour.

Should any Looked After Child present as at risk of suspension, please contact the Virtual School and Social worker to discuss prior to making a decision to suspend.

After discussions have been had with the Virtual School and a suspension as an appropriate sanction has been agreed, please send relevant paperwork as soon as possible to: virtualschool@enfield.gov.uk cc'ing in the child's social worker.

Suspension Data 23-24

- During the academic year 23-24, 33 (19%) of our Looked After Children were suspended; in total there were 70 suspensions.
- The most prominent reasons recorded amongst the suspensions were assault against a pupil (20%) and persistent disruptive behaviour (19%)
- Secondary schools suspend more than primary schools. The year group with the highest number of suspensions is Year 11 (30%), followed by Year 8 (21%).

Below are outlined the key points of expectations and also support available for schools. These are also included in the Virtual School Suspensions Policy, shared with all schools.

Whilst we support schools in applying suspensions in cases involving serious breaches of behavioural policy such as assaults on staff or peers and significant damage to property, and recognise unequivocally a school's duty of care to staff and pupils, we would like all schools to collaborate with us to aim to reduce suspensions overall and to consider carefully the alternatives, particularly when responding to low level disruption and defiance.

What the Virtual School require from schools and professionals working with LAC

- Working knowledge of the statutory guidance governing [suspensions and permanent exclusions](#).
- Timely information sharing about LACs at risk of suspension / permanent exclusion
- Prompt (same day) notification of the intention to suspend or exclude.
- Copies of relevant documentation, including the pastoral support plan.
- Inclusion of VS colleagues in re-integration meetings.
- Accurate record of suspensions entered onto the online PEP document.
- Reasonable adjustments to be made to accommodate LAC with SEN needs.
- Practise a 'trauma informed' approach to managing the behaviour of LAC (training availability will be shared).
- Make use of the speech and language tool provided by the VS to screen all LAC

What schools and professionals working with LAC can expect from the Virtual School

- Face-to-face tuition, VS funded, through our tuition partners for LAC during periods of absence due to suspension.
- Attendance at re-integration meetings to support school strategies and responses.
- Access to therapeutic mentoring provision (Precious Moments) for LAC who are suspended or at risk of suspension / permanent exclusion (see details below).
- School staff training on child-on-child abuse and Brooks Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool.
- Access to 'trauma informed practice training for school staff (speak to your Virtual School colleagues)
- Informed guidance on the range of multi-agency support on offer to support schools.
- Additional funding to support suspension / exclusion prevention strategies. This can be discussed with the VSH and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Here are some points to reflect on:

- When poor behaviour becomes more evident or increases in frequency, contact the professional network to discuss what pre-emptive support is available. There may be external factors in the young person's life triggering certain behaviours.
- If the behaviour is of a low level, disruptive or defiant nature, could other sanctions be considered that keep the young person in school whilst reinforcing boundaries and expectations?

- There is no better place for a child to be than in school and no temporary provision matches the academic and interpersonal support offered by the school community.
- It is likely that challenging behaviours of looked after children reflect past trauma. The professionals' response should also reflect our understanding of that trauma. Rigid application of school-wide behaviour policies may not be the most appropriate or constructive sanction.
- Sending looked after children home as a sanction is likely to achieve little in terms of addressing behaviours. It may also put added pressure on those foster placements which are already under strain.

We very much look forward to working with schools over the coming year and appreciate the care and support you offer to our looked after children. Virtual School colleagues are always on hand to offer any guidance or support you require.

Below are links to some interesting and illuminating articles on this topic that you and your staff may find thought-provoking, and which may generate discussion.

- [BBC news: Suspensions in England set for highest number in a school year](#)
- [The Guardian: the school that is working to reduce suspensions](#)
- [The Guardian: Is the tide turning against zero tolerance in schools](#)
- [How a schoolboy's heartache rewired a head teacher's view of challenging behaviour](#)

Key reminders:

“Where a looked-after child (LAC) is likely to be subject to a suspension or permanent exclusion, the Designated Teacher (DT) should contact the local authority’s VSH as soon as possible. The VSH, working with the DT and others, should consider what additional assessment and support need to be put in place to help the school address the factors affecting the child’s behaviour and reduce the need for suspension or permanent exclusion. Where relevant, the school should also engage with a child’s social worker, foster carers, or children’s home workers.” DfE ‘Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance’, August 2024

“An informal or unofficial exclusion, such as sending a pupil home ‘to cool off’, is unlawful when it does not follow the formal school exclusion process and regardless of whether it occurs with the agreement of parents.” DfE ‘Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance’, August 2024

“During a reintegration meeting, the school should communicate to the pupil that they are valued, and their previous behaviour should not be seen as an obstacle to future success. Where possible this meeting should include the pupil’s parents. It is important to note that a pupil should not be prevented from returning to a mainstream classroom if parents are unable or unwilling to attend a reintegration meeting.” DfE ‘Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance’, August 2024