

Meeting the needs of adopted and permanently placed children

A guide for parents and carers of
children in education in England

including those previously looked after in England and Wales
but who left care through an adoption, special guardianship or
child arrangements order (formally known as a residence order)



Includes
information about
support in education
for parents of children
adopted from the
rest of the UK and
overseas who are in
education in
England.

Why adopted children may need additional support in education

Research consistently shows that looked after children and previously looked after children have a high level of need, stemming from their experiences prior to becoming a looked after child. Many will have suffered trauma, neglect and abuse, the emotional impact of which may act as a barrier to their progress at school.

Children who have been adopted from overseas are also likely to need additional support in schools. This guide explains the support in education currently available to them.

In 2014 Adoption UK surveyed 1,500 domestic adopters to gain an understanding of the issues adopted children face in school. The report *Adopted Children's Experience of School - April 2014* found the following:

80%

of adoptive parents said their child needs more support



59%

of adoptive parents said their child was always trying to catch up at school



64% of adoptive parents said that teenage years are, or were, the most difficult time for their child at school

75% of parents said their child's experience of neglect/abuse in early life has affected their schooling



In 2016, only 30%* of children who left care through adoption, special guardianship order (SGO) or child arrangement order (CAO) reached their expected levels at Key Stage 2, compared to 54% of non looked after children. In addition, children who are adopted are more than twice as likely to receive 'poorer' GCSE results. In 2016, fewer than one in four adopted children — 23% — secured five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and maths. The figure for non-looked after children in state-funded schools was 53%.

The Government, in recognition that educational needs are unlikely to change significantly simply because a child's care status has changed, has therefore enabled children adopted from care in England and Wales (in state-funded education in England) to retain many of the entitlements they had whilst they were in care, both in the early years and during the school years.

This additional support is there to help your child realise their full potential. You will need to let your child's pre-school or school know of your child's adoptive status, confirm your child was adopted from local authority care in England or Wales, and provide evidence of their status such as a copy of the adoption order.

Children who have been adopted from overseas are also likely to need additional support in schools. They are not entitled to as much support as children adopted domestically. Pages 8 and 9 have information about their entitlement to school support.

As adoptive parents, your involvement in your child's education is very important – helping early years practitioners and school staff understand your child's needs and how your child can be best supported in education.

* The DfE labels these figures as 'experimental' statistics as they are relatively new statistics with only partial coverage.

What additional educational entitlements can my child attract?

The early years

Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years and a child's experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting and high quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.

The Government and early years professionals describe the time in a child's life between birth and age five as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This is a very important stage as it helps children get ready for school as well as preparing them for their future learning and successes. Nurseries, pre-schools, reception classes and childminders registered to deliver the EYFS must follow a legal document called the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. To find out more visit http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2014/08/EYFS_Parents_Guide-amended.pdf



What support is available?

A free early education place from the age of two

Children aged two years-old who have been adopted from care are entitled to a free early education place. This means they can get 570 hours of free early education or childcare per year. This must be taken over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year, and eligibility starts the term following the child's second birthday. Your local authority will have a list of funded early education settings in your area. Visit www.gov.uk or contact your local council to find out more. The Virtual School Head (see page 7) will be able to advise you on suitable placements (e.g. those experienced in supporting looked after children and children who have left local authority care).

Free early education funding continues when your child is three and four. This could increase to 30 hours per week from September 2017 for working parents.

See <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/> for more information.

The Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) for three and four year olds

Adopted children aged three and four years-old are eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

This is additional funding for early years pre-school settings to improve the education they provide for disadvantaged three and four year-olds including, but not restricted to, those adopted from care.

The funding goes directly to registered early years providers (including pre-schools, nurseries and childminders) that offer children the free early education entitlement.

Children must receive free early education in order to attract EYPP funding but they do not have to take up the full 570 hours in order to get it. Currently the funding equates to £302 per child per year (pro-rata for children who access less than the full free early years entitlement) and early years providers can choose how they use the money to improve the quality of provision they offer. For instance, they could:

- Pool the Early Years Pupil Premium to purchase shared services such as an Early Years Graduate or Speech and Language Therapist
- Provide additional training for staff
- Enhance speech and language development initiatives

Talk to your child's key worker about how the EYPP can help your child.

The onus will be on you to let your provider know that your child is adopted. You do not necessarily need to provide the setting with a copy of the court order but can instead choose to provide a letter (or show a letter) from the local authority which placed your child.

The DfE will use the early years census to collect information on how many eligible children are

taking up their entitlement to EYPP and the eligibility criteria these children meet. They will use this data to calculate how much funding to give each local authority in future financial years. It is important that if you would like extra support you should act now to let your provider know of your child's adoptive status.

Children become eligible for free early education at different points in the year depending on when they turn three. To find out more about the EYPP, including eligibility dates, visit <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-and-education-for-2-to-4-year-olds>

The Children & Social Work Act 2017

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (expected to be implemented early in 2018) seeks to significantly enhance support for previously looked after children. Local authorities and schools will have a new duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children by giving these children and their parents (including children adopted from care outside England and Wales) access to the Virtual School Head for advice and support, and access to a designated teacher in school.

The school years

As previously mentioned, recent school performance data confirms that adopted children significantly underperform compared to children who have never been in care. The need to adopted children's education and learning remains vitally important during the school years.

What support is available?



Priority School Admission

If your child was previously looked after in England prior to being permanently placed, your child has the right to priority admission to the school you think will best meet their needs. This entitlement will be made clear in the published admission arrangements for schools.

Your local authority's Virtual School Head will have a good understanding of

schools in your area and you can ask them for advice on a suitable school.

Pupil Premium Plus

The Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is extra funding for schools to provide additional support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

It is currently worth £1,900 per child and is available to pupils from reception to year 11 in state-funded education in England who were previously looked after in England and Wales under an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order (formally known as a residence order).

To ensure your child attracts the PP+, let your school know that your child was adopted from care in England or Wales and provide evidence (e.g. the adoption order) to confirm their status. You must do this before the annual **January School Census** as this is when schools are asked to identify eligible children. You will need to repeat this process when your child moves school.

It is important to understand that the PP+ is not ring-fenced funding for the child that attracts it. This gives the school flexibility to decide how the additional funding can best be deployed to have the maximum impact. Schools could, for example, decide to train their staff in recognising and responding to attachment-related issues, or provide tailored support for an adopted child that is in excess of the value of the individual premium. Alternatively, a school could decide that a whole class intervention is appropriate which would benefit all pupils in the class. The flexibility also enables schools to support disadvantaged and vulnerable children who move schools during the year and not just those on roll on school census day in January when children are identified and recorded for the purposes of attracting the pupil premium.

You are encouraged to work in partnership with your child's school to help inform decisions on additional support. Talk to the school's designated teacher for adopted children (DT). The DT can help ensure the needs of your child are understood and met in the school environment.

The Department for Education encourages schools to use robust evidence when making decisions about how to spend the funding to support previously looked after children and recommends seeking advice from the local authority, the Virtual School Head and the designated teacher. Schools are also encouraged to see advice from national organisations that specialise in adoption support.

Schools are accountable to Ofsted on how they have used the funding to benefit children on roll who were eligible to attract it. Ofsted will look at the impact your school has made with the pupil premium to close the attainment gap. Your child's school should also say on its website each year how it has used the pupil premium for the benefit of disadvantaged pupils.

Access to advice and information from the local authority's Virtual School Head (VSH)

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (when implemented in 2018) places a duty on your local authority to make advice and information available to parents, early years settings and schools for the purposes of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children who are educated in their authority. This includes children who were adopted from care outside England and Wales. The Act expands the role of your local authority's Virtual School Head for looked after children. Virtual School Heads will be responsible for discharging the new duty. You will be able to get advice and information from them, for example, about early years settings and schools in your area who may best meet the needs of your child.

Access to a designated teacher

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (when implemented in 2018) also places a duty on the governing body of your child's school to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children including eligible children adopted outside England and Wales. They must appoint a designated teacher for previously looked after children. The Governing Body must designate a member of staff (a designated teacher) to have responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children. They must ensure that the designated teacher undertakes appropriate training and has regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

The designated teacher's enhanced knowledge and understanding of your child's needs and how these can most appropriately be met will help other school staff ensure that they deploy strategies and create an environment which effectively supports your child. The designated teacher will also be able to play a key part in decisions about how the pupil premium plus is used to support the children who attract it.

Intercountry Adoption

Some children adopted outside of England and Wales will have been in an equivalent form of care prior to adoption and that they too are vulnerable. This is in addition to moving to a new country and a new culture.

Intercountry adoptees may be transracially adopted and their adoption is therefore very visible. School can be a place where peers ask difficult questions and where being and feeling different is hard to manage particularly during the teenage years. Both research and anecdotal evidence indicate that this can be a challenging time for intercountry adoptees and that part of the challenge may include learning to deal with racism. Adoptive parents need to be alert to the need to provide children with both strategies and support at this time.

In April 2016, children adopted outside England and Wales were given access to the Adoption Support Fund so that they could access much needed therapeutic support services. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 enhances support for these children by also placing new duties on local authorities and schools to promote their educational achievement. This means that when the Act is implemented in 2018, you and your child will have also have access to information and advice from your local authority's Virtual School Head, and access to support from a trained designated teacher in your child's school.

To be eligible for support in education, your child must have been adopted from care provided by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society. You will be asked to provide evidence of your child's eligibility.

Case Study One*

Sophie was adopted from an orphanage aged six. She was found as an abandoned baby when she was about a year-old and spent all her time in an orphanage. She had one meal a day, she had to clean the orphanage and also clean her own clothes. She watched cartoons or spent her time lying in a cot. She had very poor social and communication skills, and was developmentally very immature. Her play reflected her life experiences so she would just clean everything, re-enacting all the activities that she knew from her life in the orphanage.

On coming to the UK Sophie was at least two years behind her developmental norms. She was physically, emotionally and intellectually delayed. This included speech, which was further complicated by not having her first language spoken to her in her new home in the UK. She had survived extreme neglect and was used to having to charm adults for food, water, clothes, attention and love.

Sophie's mother described some of the challenges.

"Her delays are emotional- she does not cry when she is in pain or sad, she has silent tears when she is upset. She does get angry but her behaviour is definitely emotionally immature. She has major educational delays from lack of stimulation and experience. She has never had a birthday, never had a present, never had her own clothes, never lived in a

family, never been to a zoo, or beach or funfair – her life experience is so limited. She’s never done an inset jigsaw puzzle, never matched stickers, never done any mark making, can’t draw, can’t write, never read a lift the flap book, or noise-making book - nothing. The list is endless.

She is drawn to all adults who she charms easily with her smile. She has had to be told only to hug and kiss family, but she still has a tendency to stroke random strangers and adults she meets. She gets very, very anxious about food, meals and snacks. She has reported that she was starving in the orphanage. She needs to know when and where she will be having every meal. She will eat everything that she is given, so portion size needs to be appropriate. Initially on her arrival she would hoard food, and she would also eat really fast and stuff food into her mouth until she was nearly sick.

Discussions with the school

Sophie’s parents were already experienced adoptive parents with a child in school and had already had discussions with the school in preparation for her arrival.

She had been given a July birthday (estimated, as her true date of birth was unknown), and following discussions between the parents, the school, the Education Authority and the Adoption Agency, Sophie’s mother managed to get her a two-year deferral in school so that she could start in Reception. She is now in Year 1 and still the bottom of the class, but the two-year deferral has given her a chance at building a peer group.

The school was very flexible and Sophie built up the time in school very gradually over several months, starting with stay-and-play for an hour, then increasing this time over weeks. After three months she attended school every day for a period, increasing the time she spent without a parent. After two terms she was able to attend full-time without parent support.

Sophie’s parents felt that their school worked hard to understand the challenges for a child entering the UK from overseas and responded to their concerns. Key areas were:

- Being flexible about school start time, gradual introduction to school to reduce separation anxiety and appreciating the importance of parents being the key attachment figures.
- Understanding that Sophie was indiscriminately affectionate and that this needed to be discouraged through not hugging, or being over affectionate towards her, and always directing her back to parents for things that parents are responsible for.
- Understanding that Sophie has significant anxieties about food with a tendency to overeat, so not awarding stickers for eating all her food and encouraging her to stop eating when full.
- Providing a visual timetable to help her to structure and understand the day, including pictures of meals and snacks to reduce anxiety about food.
- Encouraging her to play with peers at all times, to talk with them, and to interact with them when possible.

- Remembering that for her English is a new language so this will limit understanding. Simplifying language and using signs and pictures where possible were helpful.
- Her attention levels are very low, and concentration is very poor, so long assemblies, or long complicated stories are stressful. Repetition is essential when teaching her new information.
- Remembering that Sophie needed to move through earlier developmental stages that were previously denied – knowledge of early years’ development was important so that key stages could be encouraged such as the toddler stages of emptying and filling containers.
- Helping staff to manage the disclosures that emerged of previous care/carers which can be upsetting to parents and staff alike.

*Case study one was provided and written by the IAC the Centre for Adoption www.icacentre.org.uk/adopters

Sharing Good Practice

There are still many misconceptions about adoption, one being that it provides a ‘happy ending’ for children who can no longer live with their birth families. Most adopters will suggest that adoption is just the beginning of another journey for that child and outmoded beliefs or ideas about contemporary adoption can get in the way of a child’s progress, particularly in education. Adoptive parents report educational professionals’ misconceptions and express frustrations that some schools lack insight into the long-term impact of trauma and loss on children.

However, we have chosen just a few from many examples of schools and teachers who are willing to work alongside adopters to create the best possible learning environment for adopted children. Awareness is growing in schools about the detrimental effects of early trauma on adopted children and their ability to flourish in education. Adoptive parents play an important role in working with educators to describe their children’s needs and help teachers understand the impact the adopted child’s early life experiences can have on their behaviour in the classroom.

Case Study Two

Jennifer Jones, children’s worker and parent to three adopted children, has come up with some ideas for how schools could spend the PP+ such as; whole school training in attachment and trauma, additional teaching assistant hours, specialist assessments (e.g. educational psychologist), child mentoring, music lessons, training and implementation of a key worker, small group tuition in targeted subjects, start up or development of, school-based programmes (e.g. peer massage, forest school, social groups, circle of friends groups, food dudes)

Jenny said: “One of the things I recommend as a priority to schools when spending the PP+ is to gain training on attachment and trauma issues in children. I firmly believe that you can provide endless clubs, extra tuition and revision books – but if the staff members at the school do not understand the cause of the child’s difficulties then these can become meaningless. The first step to making a difference is to understand why these children need something different.”

“ The first step to making a difference is to understand why these children need something different. ”



Case Study Three

Seven-year-old Sam is one example of a pupil eligible for the funding. An only child living with his adoptive mother, Sam attends a small local primary school with 150 pupils.

The school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) consulted Sam's mother and the school's other adoptive parents on an informal basis about how best to spend the PP+ funding.

Before starting school, Sam had been assessed by CAMHS as having problems with attachments and his home life deteriorated over his first term at school. He became self-critical and destructive of his toys and possessions. He developed habitual and repetitive physical clicks, ticks and grunts and pulled at his hair. He became hyperactive to the extent that he needed five-mile walks with his adoptive mother to expend his energy and calm himself down.

In school Sam is not particularly disruptive, although he often finds it hard to stop talking and fidgeting. Very occasionally, his behaviour is more extreme.

He is also hyper-vigilant and on guard if someone unfamiliar enters the classroom and he has particularly low self-esteem and confidence.

The school uses the PP+ to fund a key worker for Sam. To ensure that he is not left in the playground at the start of the school day, his mother takes him to his key worker in the special needs room or to a named person in the Breakfast Club. The key worker also spends time with Sam outside the classroom on a one-to-one basis at least once a week, usually on a Thursday afternoon. She engages with him through board games and art activities with the specific aim of boosting his confidence and self-esteem. Occasionally his key worker is also available to support him in class. Sam also has access to the school's Rainbow Room with the SENCO and his key worker one day a week and can choose a friend to accompany him. He has attended a Rapid Readers course to build his confidence as a reader. This involved him reading one-to-one with an adult a couple of times a week.

The school's SENCO, Sam's teacher and his mother are also working on an Action Plan for Sam. It will have a focus on the steps that need to be taken to address his emotional issues that are barriers to his learning.

Sam's teacher or the SENCO also consults his mother if any activities are being considered or planned that may disturb or upset Sam, such as autobiographical story telling or watching DVDs with an adoption-related story line.

He appears to relish the one-to-one attention of his key worker and the SENCO. He similarly enjoyed his Rapid Reader course.

Sam's mother has become aware that he now appears to go into school 'more happily than ever before' and his confidence and self-esteem are also growing. She attributes these changes and his thriving to the introduction of a key worker. She said: "It's just doing him so much good. He knows he's got this special person that he can go to at any time." Sam's confidence as a reader has also grown significantly. He has recently begun to pick up books at home to read without any prompting.



Case Study Four

Kate is at a junior school in Brighton & Hove. She's doing well these days – much better than previous school years – because her school has put their Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) to good use to benefit adopted children. Here's how:

How the school used its PP+

The school has used its PP+ to part fund the recruitment of a qualified teacher with a therapeutic background and an understanding of attachment and early developmental trauma. A tall order, yes, with agreement that the role should:

- involve direct work with children and families
- provide support for the children with their learning
- support children with friendships and peer relationships
- be an educator for other staff within the school – teaching staff and mid-day supervisors.



Teacher One was successfully recruited as an attachment support teacher and the school now benefits from a constant attachment figure for the adopted children in the school. Teacher One is open to building on her skills and learning from parents and from attachment experts such as Louise Bomber (a qualified teacher and therapist working with individual pupils and whole schools).

Involving adoptive parents

This school in Brighton & Hove is a busy city school, with 5 adopted children. The school's Inclusion Officer (INCO) involved adoptive parents in her decisions about how to spend the PP+. Her first step was to set up a few meetings allowing adoptive parents to share ideas and discuss their children's needs. As well as providing insight into children's needs within school it allowed adoptive parents to develop a support network of others experiencing similar issues.

The school INCO and a school governor (an adoptive parent) drafted the job description. The group of adoptive parents and the head teacher reviewed it and an adoptive parent was on the interview panel. Key to the success of this was the head teacher's willingness to welcome a new way of working and to use the school budget in a creative way.

Meeting a therapeutic need

Adoptive parents know that it's not just parenting, it's therapeutic parenting. The same goes for schools.

Previous school years have seen Kate managing to 'hold it together' while at school (well behaved and compliant no less!), only to let it all out in an attack (verbal and physical) the minute she made the transition from school to home. Attachment, hyper-vigilance and the impact of early developmental trauma are what adoptive parents and schools are managing.

Her mother said, “We’ve been lucky – the junior school has always worked hard to meet Kate’s needs and offered good support with transition and day-to-day support. However, now having someone with a therapeutic approach is making all the difference. By being a constant attachment figure, Teacher One provides a therapeutic approach in a way that feels safe and acceptable to Kate, not something she’s wary of.”

It’s having a positive impact and helping to ensure a culture in the school which is caring, nurturing and supportive. Not all schools will be able to recruit an ‘attachment teacher’, but Teacher One suggests that perhaps the three most important things a school can offer all adopted children are: a daily meet and greet, a safe base and individual child profiles for teachers.

Case Study Five

“ In a different school, in a different environment my little boy would just be looked at as naughty. ”

Jack is living in a two-parent adoptive family with a sister from his birth family. He has three older siblings who are living in two other permanent placements. Jack was fourteen months old when he and his four siblings were removed from their birth family. All five children in the family had experienced chronic neglect and witnessed domestic violence while living at home. After being removed, Jack lived in two foster placements before being placed with his adoptive parents.

Jack is five-years-old and currently in Year One. He and his sister attend the same small local Catholic primary school in a semi-rural location in the north of England which has 233 pupils on its roll and a staff of 11.

Discussions between the adopters and school

Jack’s adoptive parents met with the head teacher before their children were offered school places. They were attracted to the school’s kind, nurturing, and child-centred approach to the education and care of its pupils. Jack’s parents have always been very open with the head and other staff at the school about their children’s early life experiences. His mother said, ‘I know loads of people who don’t tell school and I urge them to be open.’ The head planned a meeting with Jack’s parents during his first term. Subsequently, regular meetings have been held to discuss Jack’s progress involving all the key people involved in his education and care – his parents, head teacher, teachers, teaching assistants, therapist, and adoption support social worker. His parents have also given permission for key information to be cascaded to all the staff who interact with Jack.



At school

Jack's adoptive mother described him as 'three, five, seven' explaining, 'He's five-years-old, he can talk to you like he's seven, but he behaves like he's three. He's very clever but very emotionally delayed.' His emotional and behavioural difficulties were not particularly apparent in pre-school, but soon after starting in Reception his contemporaries 'stepped up' their behaviour and Jack got left behind. The structure of the school day and environment seemed to cause him to feel anxious and stressed which meant that he then found it difficult to learn. After a couple of weeks in Reception he began to nip, bite, smack, and kick other children, and to throw things. His mother said, 'He was a general nuisance. I'm his mother – I love him very much – but that's how I would have described him'.



The head also described him as controlling. He was also distressed by the noise of large groups of children in the school hall during dinner times and assemblies, although he was very loud himself.

What the school has done

The head employs an inclusion consultant, a specialist in children's special educational needs, one day a week. The consultant assesses individual children, advises staff on meeting individual children's needs and educates the staff group about special needs. She has provided the staff with confidence to work through behaviour management strategies that will work with Jack. The inclusion consultant gave Jack a baseline assessment. Strategies were put in place to build his self-esteem, including a 'book of success' to record his achievements. The book is shared with his parents every evening and they can add comments in it. The school day is broken down into small segments for Jack so that he has the potential to achieve well in each one and start afresh if a previous session has not gone well for him. He has been supported through the 'Every child a reader' programme.

The head explained that her staff group's understanding of contemporary adoption has only developed since Jack and his sister joined the school. The whole group has learned from the advice of both the family's social worker and Jack's therapist about the impact of attachment issues on children in school. They have read and collectively discussed Dan Hughes' and Louise Bomber's publications.



Resources

Department for Education

http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2014/11/EYPP_FAQ.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-parents-and-carers>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-research-priorities-and-questions>

<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=adoption+>

Adoption UK

<http://www.adoptionuk.org/resources/education>

Coram/BAAF case studies

http://corambaaf.org.uk/webfm_send/3879

PAC-UK information flyer

<http://www.pac-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/PAC-UK-Education-Service-Pupil-Premium-Plus-Flyer.pdf>

IAC- The Centre for Adoption

<http://www.icacentre.org.uk>



Jargon busting

Designated Teacher – DT

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – (CAMHS) Local Authority – LA

Looked After Children – LAC (some people prefer Children in Care (CIC))

Virtual School Head – VSH

INCO – inclusion coordinator

Personal Education Plan – PEP

SEND – teachers who have responsibility for special educational needs and disability (previously known as SENCO)