

BECOME IN CARE.
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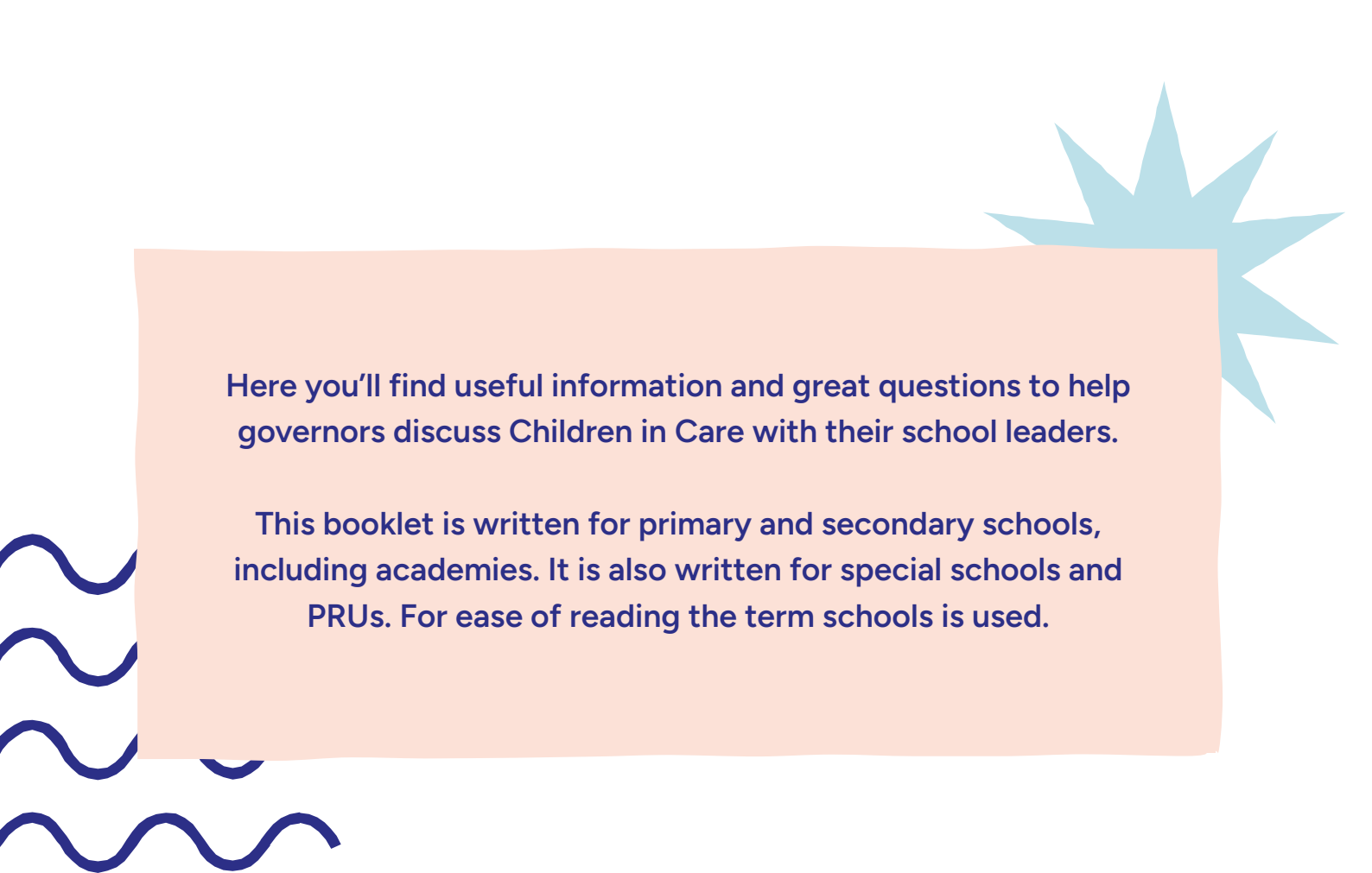


Improving lives of people with SEND
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CHILDREN IN CARE* GUIDE FOR GOVERNORS



*Also known as looked-after children (LAC) or children looked after (CLA)



Here you'll find useful information and great questions to help governors discuss Children in Care with their school leaders.

This booklet is written for primary and secondary schools, including academies. It is also written for special schools and PRUs. For ease of reading the term schools is used.

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Children in Care: The Basics

Who is a Child in Care (CIC)?

They are a pupil who is not looked after by their parent and the Local Council is responsible for their care.

This could have been decided by a court (e.g. due to abuse) or by social care (e.g. during a safeguarding investigation). It can be long term (e.g. unaccompanied asylum seeker) but can also be short term (e.g. due parents spending time in prison). It can include foster parents and children's homes.

Why are there other terms for CIC (Looked-after Child and Child Looked After)?

The law and the Department for Education (DfE) use the term looked-after children, so we're stuck with it for now. However, lots of people prefer the terms child in care or child looked after because these put the child first. This guide uses the term child in care whenever possible.

Who is a 'Previously Looked-after Child?'

They are a child who, immediately after leaving care, was given an adoption order, a special guardianship order or a child arrangements order.

The previously looked-after category also includes any children who were in state care outside of England which ended because they were adopted.

What is special guardianship?

It's when a court agrees that carers (who aren't the child's parent) will become responsible for a child. It's different to adoption because it keeps more links to the birth family than adoption. With adoption, legal ties to the birth family are severed permanently. With special guardianship, this is not the case as it is revocable.

What is kinship care?

It's when a child lives with the family or friends of their parents. Some children in kinship care are classed as CIC, others are not. It depends on what involvement the local council and courts have played in the arrangement. Some kinship carers are granted special guardianship.

What is a Designated Teacher for LAC?

It is a staff member who is responsible for the success of children who are CIC or who were previously CIC. Even though aspects of the role can be delegated (e.g. admin tasks), the role itself can only be taken on by a qualified teacher.

Can a recently qualified teacher be Designated Teacher for LAC?

No. DfE guidance says it must be someone suitably trained and experienced. They should have appropriate seniority and have completed their first two years of teaching.



What is a Personal Education Plan (PEP)?

It's a plan that all CIC have. It tells us what needs to happen for a CIC to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. The social worker and school are jointly responsible for it. The child (according to their ability) and parents / carers (where appropriate) should also help write and review the plan.



What is Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)?

PP+ is extra funding for schools to spend to close the gap between CIC and their peers. Schools also get PP+ for children who were previously CIC. PP+ is for children from Reception to Y11. For children in Early Years settings, there is an alternative called Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

How much is PP+ and EYPP?

- In 2025-26, PP+ is set at £2,630 per year.
- In 2025-26, EYPP is set at £1 per hour or up to £570 per year. It's paid for the universal 15 hours per week (and not the extra 15 hours for eligible working parents).

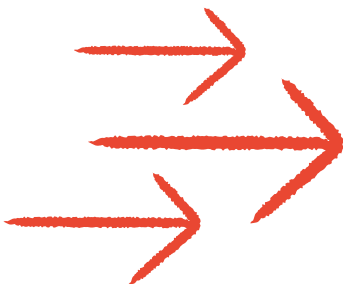
For CIC, the money goes to the local council. They normally use some of it to provide services for all CIC and pass the rest on to schools. Therefore, a school will receive less than £2,630.

For previously looked-after children, the funds are paid directly to the pupil's school.



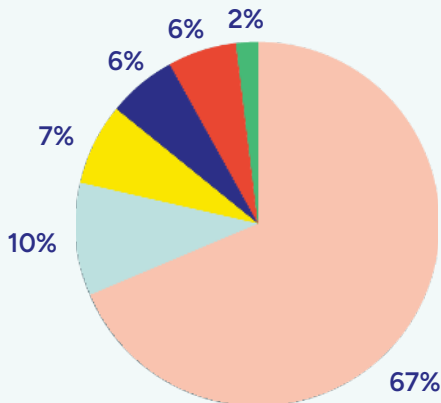
Facts and figures

(England, DfE data for year ending 31st March 2024)



Where are children in care (CIC) living?

The majority live in foster care.



- 67% Foster placement
- 10% Children's home or secure home
- 7% Independent and semi-independent living
- 6% Other (e.g. residential school, prison, hospital)
- 6% With parents or adult with parent responsibility
- 2% Placed for adoption



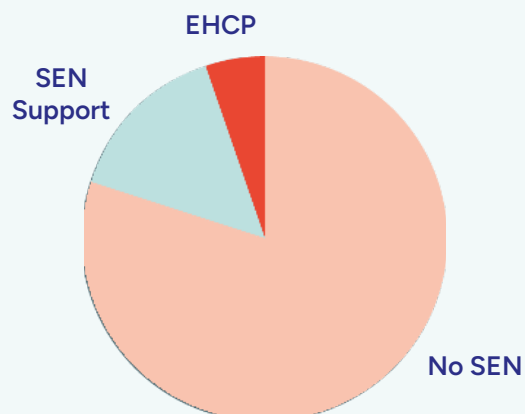
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

58% of CIC are identified as having SEND (compared to about 20% of all pupils). Furthermore, more almost 30% of CIC have an EHCP (a plan for pupils with the most complex SEND), compared to about 5% of all pupils.



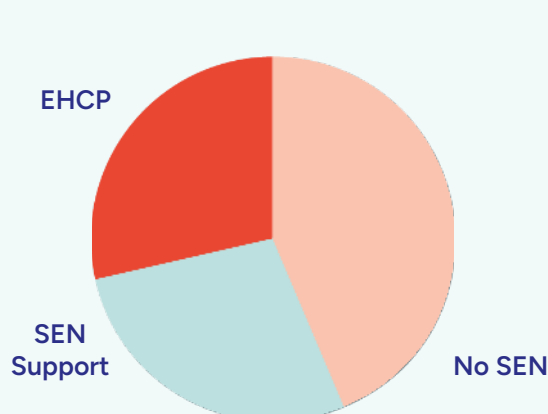
How common is SEND among all Pupils?

(England, DfE Jan 2024 school census)



How common is SEND among CIC?

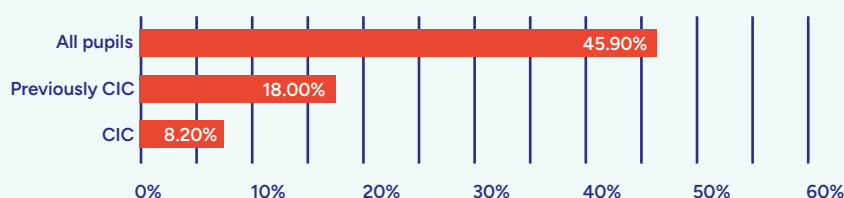
(England, at 31st March 2024)



Outcomes for 16 year olds

GCSE outcomes for CIC (and students who were previously CIC) are lower than all pupils by a large margin.

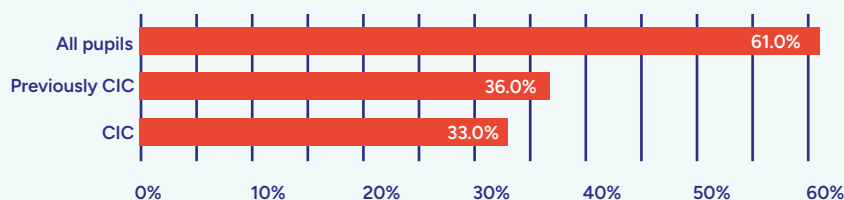
Pupils gaining Grade 5 or above in GCSE English and Maths (England, Summer 2024, DfE data)



Outcomes for 11 year olds

Outcomes for Year 6 children who are in care (and those who were previously CIC) are much lower than all pupils.

Percentage achieving expected standard in reading, writing and Maths (England, Summer 2024, DfE data)



The two graphs above demonstrate the importance of making sure that PP+ is having an impact, and of governors making sure they are supporting and challenging their school leaders on outcomes for CIC.

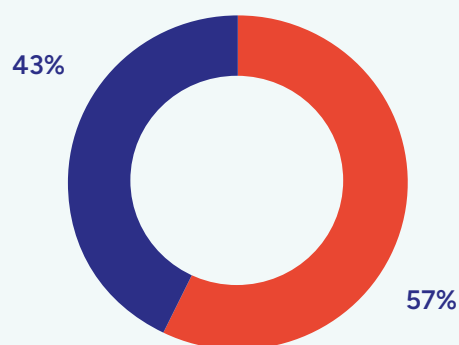
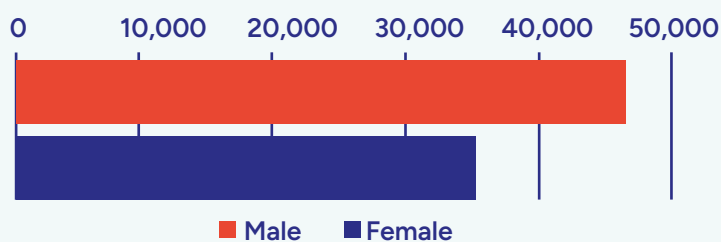
Outcomes for CIC are significantly affected by their stability. This includes having a stable

school place and the stability of where they are living. The data is complex but other predictors of lower performance include:

- Changing school in Year 10 or 11
- Later entry to care (after age 10)
- Being male

Gender

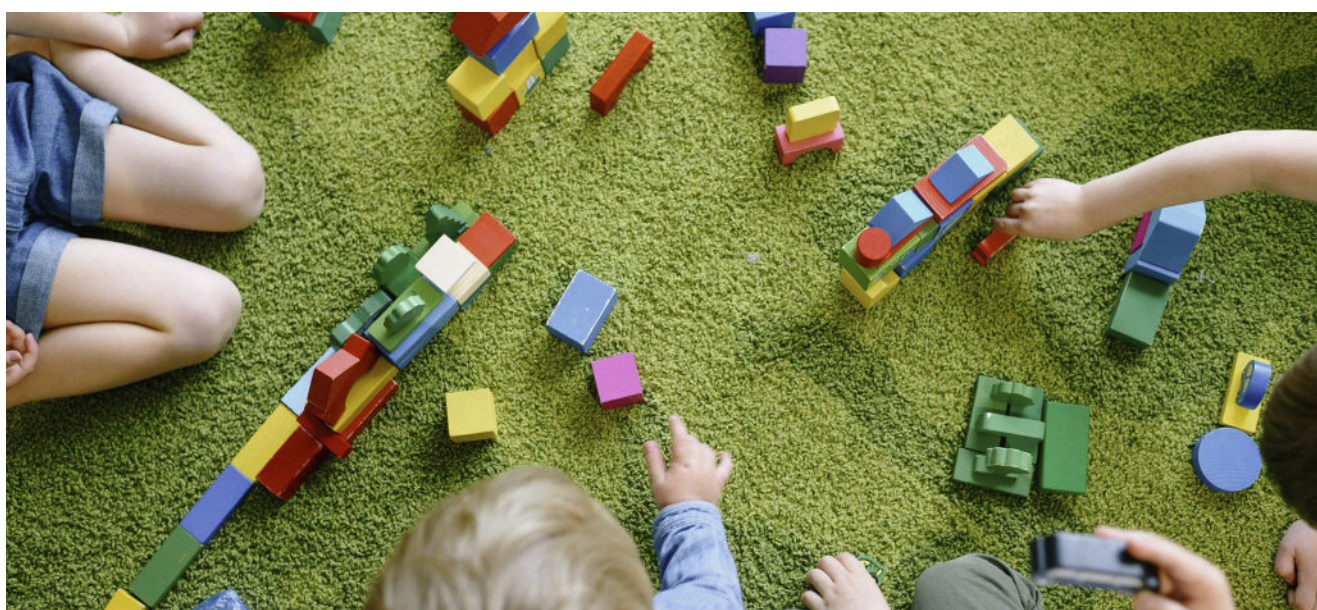
There are about 12,000 more boys in care, and this has been broadly the same for over 5 years.



Persistent absence

Persistent absence is when a pupil misses 10% or more of possible sessions (a 'session' is half a day).

- CIC at primary schools are less likely than non-CIC to be persistently absent.
- CIC at PRUs, special or secondary schools are much more likely than non-CIC to be persistently absent.



References

- All graphs drawn from latest DfE data (at 01/10/2025): www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children-or-school-census-data.
- Educational Progress of LAC in England, University of Oxford, Luke et al. (2015) is <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Technical-Report-2.pdf>

What is a Virtual School?

Children in Care attend lots of different schools, but one thing that they have in common is support from your local council's "Virtual School."

The Virtual School is a team of professionals, normally employed by the local council, who promote the education achievement of Children in Care. From them, schools and carers can normally expect:

- Expert support for writing and implementing PEPs.
- A named advocate for each CIC.
- Advice on spending PP+ cash so that it has a great impact.
- Training for both schools and carers
- A website with resources and support.

Some Virtual Schools also offer useful tools on attachment needs and traumainformed practice.



What do 'Attachment' and 'Trauma Informed' mean?

Attachment difficulties happen when a child does not have the comfort and security needed from their main carer(s) in their early life. As a result, the child may struggle to form strong emotional bonds with others.

Attachment issues are common in CIC. The impact of their early life often presents in schools as social and emotional needs. Examples include fear, anger, distrust, depression or avoidance behaviours.

What makes forming healthy bonds less likely?

- Abuse, neglect and trauma in a parent or child's life.
- A parent's poor mental health.
- A parent's substance misuse.
- A child having multiple care placements.
- Parents being separated from baby at birth (e.g. if baby is receiving neonatal care).

- Stress (e.g. a low income, being a single or young parent).
- Bereavement or loss of a carer.

Trauma informed means that the school understands the impact of trauma on the child. Trauma can be caused by a wide range of life events, for example abuse, bereavement, inconsistent parenting or even fleeing war.

Pupils who experience trauma often find it harder to regulate their feelings or make good friends. Some behaviours that we then see feel antagonistic to an uninformed adult. Trauma informed staff understand how previous life events can lead to the behaviours we see today. These staff adjust their approach so that we deal with the behaviour even better than before.

In short, trauma informed means that adults respond in a way that sees not only the issue at hand, but also what's gone on before.



Ten great topics for Governors to ask about...

Quick questions for a brand-new Governor

- Who is the leader responsible for CIC (AKA designated teacher for looked-after children)?
- Do they have time to effectively do the job?
- How many CIC do we have?
- Who knows which children in school are CIC? How do we share this information?

Leadership & management



- How are outcomes for our CIC monitored?
- How do the outcomes for our CIC compare with those of other pupils?
- If a care placement breaks down, tell me how leaders proactively work with new placements in the hours, weeks and months after the placement is identified?
- Who writes our CIC's Personal Education Plans (PEPs)?
- How do we know that the PEP is followed by every member of staff working with that child?

Child's voice

Give me an example of when we have listened to the views of CIC?

- How are our CIC asked about what they want other pupils and teachers to know about them and why they are in care?
- Do we ask our CIC for their views on who they want to attend their LAC review? How?

Previously Looked-after Children



- How well are our previously looked-after children achieving?
- How certain are we that their PP+ funding is ensuring they will fulfil their potential?

Inclusion

- How do we make sure that our CIC can access the same opportunities as other pupils?
- How do we assess whether our CIC need extra help (for example, for transitions to new teachers, for friendships, for learning)?
- How effectively have we prevented bullying of our CIC?
- If a CIC has an EHCP, who is accountable for ensuring the CIC pupil gets all the provision that their EHCP requires?

Home-school links

- How do we make sure we know the contact arrangements with birth parents?
- Would foster families and residential units say our communication with them is excellent?
- Do we keep in contact with any birth families of our CIC?
- How do we invite social workers to parents' evenings?

Funding



How much PP+ funding do we get for each CIC?

- How is this money spent?
- What difference has this made?
- How do we know?

Attendance

- How does the attendance of our CIC compare to all pupils?
- Are our CIC excluded more often than other pupils?
- What measures do we take to prevent exclusion? How are these measures working so far?

Staff skills

- What training is available for (or has been completed by) the Designated Teacher for LAC?
- What does trauma informed mean? How do we know if staff are trauma informed?
- What does attachment aware mean? How do we know if staff are attachment aware?

Information & partnerships

- Who ensures that we have all relevant current and historical information from Social Care?
- Are there other local services (e.g. via the local authority or charities) that we work with to improve outcomes for our CIC?

- Do we have any CIC from neighbouring local authorities? If so, how well do we work with social care and the virtual school from their 'home' local authority?
- Do we have any CIC on distant placements (i.e. they have moved from a local authority further away than all local authorities that border our own)? If so, how well do we work with social care and the virtual school from their 'home' local authority?

Post-16 questions

- Are there any examples of when school leaders proactively worked with social workers and Personal Advisors on a CIC's Pathway Plan?
- How do you ensure you have the knowledge to help our students to navigate their leaving care journey and also get amazing outcomes?
- As relationships are important, how do we make sure that our CIC have trusted staff member(s) they can approach to discuss their worries?
- Have we had CIC who didn't complete P16? If so, what did we learn from their journey?

What does Ofsted say about CIC?

Ofsted's Inspection Toolkit (2025), a handbook for schools and inspectors, says that inspectors will examine the extent to which:

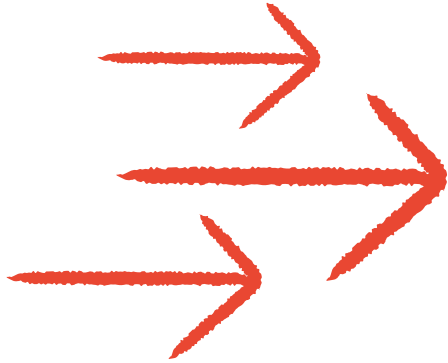
- The designated teacher for LAC and previously LAC is appropriately qualified and experienced.
- Each LAC has a personal education plan.
- Each LAC receives high-quality support to improve their learning and/or well-being.
- The designated safeguarding lead and other leaders use their knowledge of a pupil's social care status to inform decisions about promoting their welfare.
- Leaders share information effectively with the local authority.
- Leaders work well with social workers, virtual school heads and other professionals to plan and provide multi-agency support for LAC and previously LAC pupils.



Role models

Did you know?

Lots of notable people are care-experienced.
Some are listed below but there are many more!



ACADEMIA

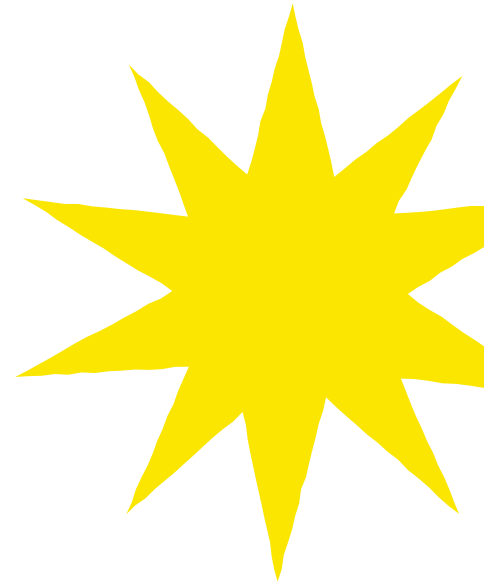
Dame Elizabeth Anionwu (born 1947) is a nurse, lecturer, and Emeritus Professor of Nursing at the University of West London. She spent nine years of her childhood in children's homes.

Dr Jim Goddard is a former senior academic and current Chair of The Care Leavers' Association. Jim spent his childhood in children's homes from the age of three to 17.

SPORT

Callum Wilson (born 1992) is an footballer who has played as a striker for Bournemouth, Newcastle United and the England team. He currently plays for West Ham.

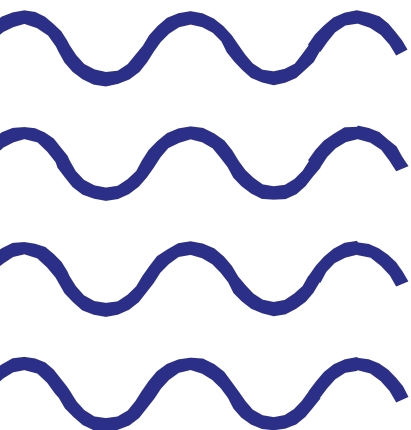
Lloyd Kelly (born 1998) is an professional footballer who plays as a defender for Juventus. From the age of six, he spent twelve years in foster care alongside his siblings.

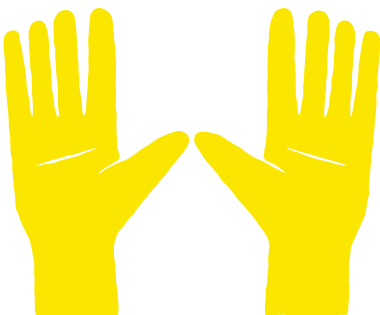


BROADCASTING

Pandora Christie (born 1982) is one of the UK's most recognised radio presenters and presents on Heart. She grew up in London, living in a series of foster homes after her mother's death when Pandora was nine.

Ashley John-Baptiste (born 1990) is a BBC presenter. From the age of two until he was 18, he grew up in four foster families and spent two years in a children's home.





WRITING

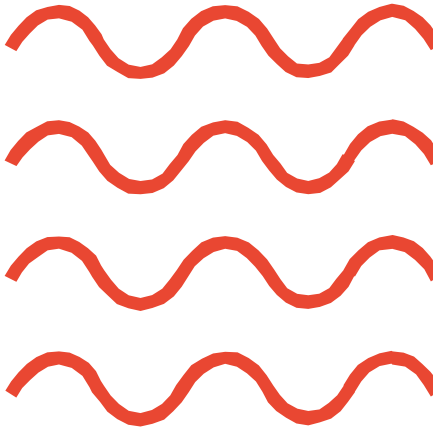
Lemn Sissay (born 1967) is an author who was the official poet of the London Olympics. He spent his whole childhood in the care system and writes about it in his memoir, *My Name is Why*.

Sophie Willan (born 1987) is a writer, comedian and actor. She is best known for her award winning BBC Two series '*Alma's Not Normal*'.

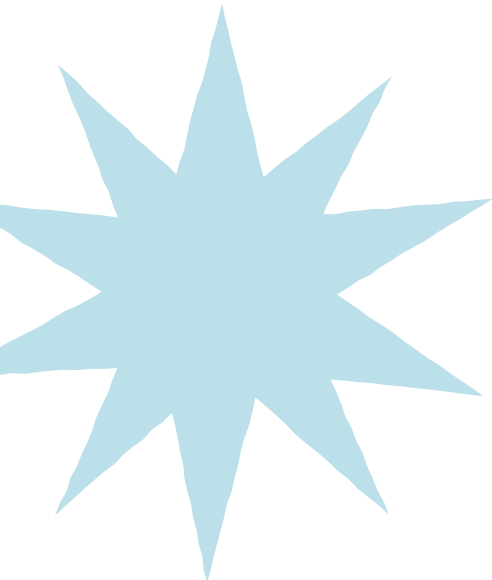
POLITICS

Baroness Floella Benjamin (born 1949) is a presenter, actress and politician. Her career has taken her from Children's TV to the House of Lords, where she played an important part in the coronation of King Charles III. Floella was in foster care as a child.

Darren Paffey MP was elected to Parliament in 2024 and represents people of Southampton. He has been elected to the influential Education Select Committee that scrutinises children's social care (including the support for children in care).



TV & FILM



Samantha Morton (born 1977) is an actress and director. She has a Golden Globe Award (Best Supporting Actress for *Longford*, 2006) and a BAFTA for *The Unloved*, a film about life in care that she directed. She was in residential and foster care from the age of eight.

Barry Keoghan is an Irish actor. He has appeared in hit films such as *The Banshees of Inisherin* and *Dunkirk*. Barry has both won a BAFTA and been nominated for an Oscar.

Post-16

Leaving Care

Some students leave care at 16 or 17, but it's mostly at 18. Planning for leaving care starts before the student's 16th birthday – thus leaving care is relevant to all secondary schools and colleges.

Social workers develop a plan for the student to leave care (this is called a Pathway Plan). The social worker starts to develop this before the student's 16th birthday so that there's at least 2 years of planning. The plan should involve others, including the student, carers and school. If the student has SEND, it may include advice from SEND advisers.

Pathway Plans include:

- What will happen when the student leaves care (e.g. living arrangements, finances).
- What support workers have promised (e.g. social workers, school).
- What steps the student needs to take themselves.

What's a Personal Adviser (PA)?

It's someone who works with the CIC once the social worker steps away on the 18th birthday. The PA isn't a social worker (although they sometimes happen to have social work qualifications). They help the student to fulfil their pathway plan. So that there's a smooth transition, the PA will often start working with the student from around the age of 16.



Is there a Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) for post-16 CIC?

Yes. Since Sept 2023, for the whole of England, CIC have been eligible for PP+ until their 18th birthday. This includes CIC who are in both FE colleges and schools.

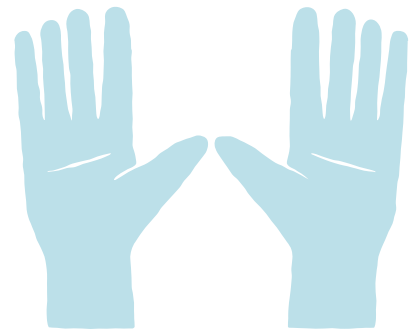
Schools and colleges need to check with their local virtual school to find out how it's currently administered in their area.

What more do Governors need to know?

There are lots of laws and processes for leaving care at age 18. We've not even touched:

- When students can 'Stay Put' with their foster carers.
- The Shared Lives scheme for students who have disabilities.
- Support to 21 vs 25.
- The 16-19 bursary for students in vulnerable groups (up to £1,200)

Put simply, a typical governor doesn't need the details of every possible pathway. Governors should focus on what is most important. The questions on pages 6-7 will help with governors to remain focused on the most important issues.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written by Aaron King, SEND Consultant with 9000 Lives and school governor, with grateful thanks to those who helped along the way...

9000 Lives provide inclusion advice and training to mainstream and special schools.

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ABOUT BECOME

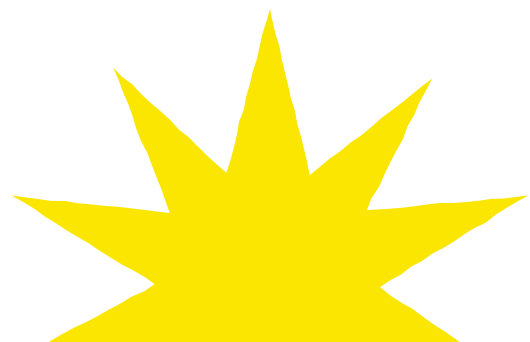
We're the national charity that's here to support every child and young person with experience of the care system.

**They tell us what's not working.
Together, we fight to make change happen.**

We also offer practical and affordable training for organisations that work with children in care and young care leavers.

BecomeCharity.org.uk

Find out more here:



“

**Having this booklet gave me
confidence to ask.**

**When I wasn't sure I'd even say “I've
read some guidance and wondered if
I can ask you some of the questions
they have suggested...”**

**It sort of gives me permission to ask
tough questions.**

”

- School Governor

“

**It feels like lots of schoolteachers
aren't really aware of attachment or
being trauma informed...**

**So this booklet is great for raising
their profile.**

”

- Experienced foster carer

“

**An important and accessible document
for all involved in school governance
on how you and school leaders can
have the vital conversations about
children in care.**

”

- NGA (National Governance Association)



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