Halton Virtual School & College

Kinship Care Policy

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Kinship Care

The non-statutory role of Virtual School Heads has expanded from September 2024 to include championing the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children in kinship care.

Virtual School's role for children in kinship care is to:

- raise awareness of the needs and disadvantages of children in different types of kinship care arrangements
- promote practice that supports attendance and engagement
- promote practice that improves the educational attainment and outcomes of children in kinship care

Halton Virtual School Virtual School will provide advice and information to all kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Care Arrangement Orders (CAOs) as part of their non-statutory role.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care is any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent.

This covers a whole spectrum of care arrangements, ranging from informal and private fostering to those with legal orders such as Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs).

Informal kinship care arrangements

When a close family member or friend look after a child for a temporary or permanent amount of time. This arrangement is agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility for the child remains with the parents.

Kinship carers with a Child Arrangements Order (CAO)

Child Arrangements Orders are granted by the family court and determine who a child can live with and/or who a child can stay with and for how long. The kinship carer shares parental responsibility with the child's parents, or others with parental responsibility, until the age of 18 unless the court states otherwise. In 2014, Child Arrangements Orders replaced Residence Orders and Contact Orders.

Kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

These carers have parental responsibility for a child following an order made by the family court. Kinship carers live permanently with their children but need permission from the court to make important decisions, such as changing the child's surname.

Kinship foster carers look after children who are "looked after"

This includes Children in Care with the local authority following a voluntary agreement, if a child spends more than 24 hours in local authority care under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or if a Care Order is made by the family court.

Private Fostering

Private fostering is an arrangement where a child is cared for by someone who is not their parent or close relative for 28 days or more. All private fostering responsibilities and procedures must be followed in these cases. See Looking after someone else's child - GOV.UK

Please note, the local authority must be notified about children living in private fostering arrangements for more than 28 days.

Further information about the different types of kinship arrangements, including who holds parental responsibility and what kinship carers can/cannot do, can be found here: **Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy (publishing.service.gov.uk) (PDF) – page 43.**

What needs may children in kinship care present with?

Children who grow up in kinship care can have better outcomes than children who grow up in other types of non-parental care. However, their outcomes fall behind those children who have had no social worker involvement (**Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK**).

Children growing up in kinship care may have similar needs to children being cared for by the local authority or those who have been adopted from care. Kinship, the leading charity supporting kinship families in England and Wales, reported in 2023 that:

- 66% of children in kinship care have experienced abuse or neglect
- 68% have experienced parental drug or alcohol misuse
- other children experience parental mental illness or have had to cope with their parents' death
- over half of children in kinship care have SEND, and 82% of these are for behavioural or emotional issues
- three quarters of children growing up in kinship care are in deprived households
- often there are significant tensions within the family, particularly in relation to managing contact between the children and their parents

- kinship families' lives are subject to lots of change – often carers take on more children, relationships with the child's parents can improve or worsen, and legal and financial support takes time to implement

Given children in kinship care may have gone through, or be living through, traumatic and adverse childhood experiences, they can present with the following needs:

- they may struggle to regulate their emotions and behaviours
- they may have difficulties with concentration and learning
- they may struggle with their self-esteem and well-being, including anxiety
- they may experience social difficulties, including bullying or bullying others

See Kinship's website for more information: **Homepage - Kinship - The kinship care charity**

How can the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) help kinship families?

Many children who left local authority care on a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order may be eligible for support through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, subject to current eligibility criteria.

Set up to provide essential therapeutic services for children who have experienced trauma, this fund can provide up to £3,000 per year for specialist assessment and therapy for the child.

This support can be used to improve:

- relationships with friends, family members, teachers, and school staff
- engagement with learning
- emotional regulation and behaviour management
- confidence and the ability to enjoy positive family life and social relationships

Other ways children in kinship arrangements can access support through schools

Pupil Premium Plus

If a child in kinship care was previously in the care of the local authority but left care on a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Care Arrangement Order (CAO), they are entitled to Pupil Premium Plus funding.

This is additional funding given by the Department of Education to improve the education and outcomes of children in care and children previously in care. It equates to £2,690 extra funding per year. The school must apply for this through the October school census each year and use it to support the specific educational needs of Children Previously in Care attending the school.

The Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children at the school should work closely with parents/guardians/carers to ensure this money is spent where it is needed and where it will impact children previously looked after. It is worth speaking to the Designated Teacher at school if you think the child you are caring for needs additional support, to see what is available and what can be arranged.

Pupil Premium

If a child in kinship care is eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), or they have been eligible in the past 6 years ('Ever 6'), the school qualifies for additional Pupil Premium funding of £1,550 per primary-aged child or £1,100 per secondary-aged child. This money is not ring-fenced for specific individuals but must be used by the school in line with the 'menu of approaches' to provide high-quality teaching, targeted academic support, and wider strategies (such as supporting SEMH needs/attendance) to help close any gaps. **Using Pupil Premium: Guidance for School Leaders (publishing.service.gov.uk)**. All schools must publish their Pupil Premium Strategy on their website, showing how they spend the funding to help disadvantaged children.

If a child in your care is struggling and attracts Pupil Premium, it is worth reviewing the school's Pupil Premium Strategy and discussing with the school how they might be able to support.

The Graduated Response to SEND

Schools and settings use a graduated response to support all children with any additional needs. If you have any concerns that the child is presenting with additional needs, you should speak to the child's teacher or the school SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator).

If they agree and the setting identifies areas of need, they can put in place interventions using the 'assess-plan-do-review' approach (see SEND section for more details).

What to do if your child is experiencing difficulties in school

In the first instance, it is usual to contact the child's class teacher or form tutor, but you can also speak to the Designated Teacher, SENCO and pastoral staff working in the school. If you are not sure, ring the school reception and they will be able to signpost you to the most suitable member of staff.

You can also get advice from us at any point – email Halton Virtual School:

virtual.school@halton.gov.uk

We can provide advice, guidance and signposting around the area of education.

How the Virtual School can support Kinship families

By Improving the visibility of kinship carers through a new definition of kinship care that will be used in statutory guidance. This will be shared with Virtual Schools by the Department for Education in 2025.

We will create trust between kinship carers and practitioners by improving social worker training and developing knowledge and skills for family help lead practitioners.

Virtual School Heads play a key part in a local authority's role as corporate parent for children in care, they also promote the education of children who are previously looked after, through the provision of information and advice to their parents, educators and others who the Virtual School Head considers necessary.

Virtual Schools have been found to help raise the aspirations and promote the educational achievement of these groups of children.

Virtual School Heads provide advice and information, on request, to kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangements Orders as part of their non-statutory role.

The Virtual School Head Strategic Role

The Virtual School Head Strategic role will include:

- Raising the visibility of the needs of children in different types of kinship care arrangements and the disadvantage that they can experience.
- Promoting good practice that supports attendance and engagement in education.
- Promoting good practice that improves children in kinship care outcomes to narrow the attainment gap, so that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Government will extend Virtual School Heads' provision of advice and information, on request, to all kinship carers with Special Guardianship and Child Arrangements Orders as part of their non-statutory role. This will be an important step in helping more kinship carers to navigate the education system, in turn helping them to advocate for the educational achievement of their children. More children in kinship care will receive the help they need to thrive at school.

Admissions

From 1 September 2021, the School admissions code - GOV.UK states that children being raised by Kinship carers under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order, will be supported in obtaining a school place.

Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension highlights the inclusion of children in kinship settings having access to the virtual school head program to continue to support their academic achievement.