



# Effective use of Pupil Premium Plus to improve educational outcomes for looked after children

**Dr Stuart Read, Dr Mel Macer and Dr Anne Parfitt**

**School of Education, Bath Spa University**

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## (i) Glossary

**Additionality** Specific services and support for looked after children's education that is above and beyond that available to non-looked after peers.

**Allocation** The Virtual School Head-led administrative process for Pupil Premium Plus funding.

**Benchmarking** A baseline assessment of key outcome measures.

**CPD (Continuing Professional Development)** Additional skills and training for professionals.

**'Conventional' versus 'other' measures of success** Conventional measures of success describe data that is typically collected within a school setting (e.g. attainment, progress, attendance). Other measures of success describe broader, but equally valuable, factors that reflect the more holistic educational needs of learners (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing, behaviour, satisfaction).

**Designated Teacher** The teaching professional within a physical school setting who has responsibility for supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children.

**Looked after child** A child or young person (pre-school to 18 years) who is under the care of a Local Authority for at least one day. Other terminology is often used to describe looked after children, such as 'children in care' 'children looked after' and 'care experienced children'. This report has used the term 'looked after children' throughout as this is the terminology that has been used within the statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) (2018a, p. 5). We acknowledge that 'looked after child' may not be the preferred term for those who are care experienced.

**Paired dialogue** A data generation approach involving two stakeholder professionals discussing their experiences, with a research topic guide to focus their conversation.

**Personal Education Plan (PEP)** A statutory document (hardcopy or electronic) that describes and collates the education-related needs of a looked after child and records a course of action to support their education-related outcomes. It is a legal requirement for every young person in care of statutory school age to have at least two PEP meetings each academic year. Statutory guidance from the DfE (2018a) states that "*The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the child's identified educational needs, raises aspirations and builds life chances. The school, other professionals and the child's carers should use the PEP to support achieving those things.*" (p. 14). Throughout this report, the term Personal Education Plan will be abbreviated to PEP.

**Pupil Premium Plus** Statutory guidance from the DfE (2018a) describes Pupil Premium Plus as “*additional funding provided to help improve the attainment of looked-after children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers*” (p. 19). Throughout this report the term Pupil Premium Plus is abbreviated to PP+.

**Service Level Agreement** This is an official agreement between a Virtual School Head/Local Authority and a service provider, confirming the terms and conditions for specific service/s provided by the named provider.

**SMART targets** Statutory guidance from the DfE (2018a) states that SMART targets are targets that are “*specific ... measurable ... achievable ... relevant ... [and] time bound.*” (p. 17).

**Virtual School** The Virtual School describes an organisational framework to help plan and deliver education support to looked after children. The team or service acts as a Local Authority champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of children and young people who are or who have been in care, so that they achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers. The Virtual School does not exist as a physical building but invites local authorities to consider the cohort as if they were a school.

**Virtual School Head** The Virtual School Head is appointed by the Local Authority to lead the Virtual School and the related team of professionals, to promote the educational achievement of looked after children cared for by the authority. It is the Virtual School Head’s role to ensure that the Local Authority is fulfilling its legal obligation towards looked after children.

## **(ii) Executive Summary**

This research project aimed to study and inform the effective use of PP+-funded interventions to support educational outcomes for looked after children, by:

- Evidencing the range of guidance and support that exists currently to equip stakeholder professionals, including Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers, to use PP+ effectively;
- Generating evidence and insights into how PP+ is used and allocated, and how the impact of PP+-funded interventions is evidenced; and
- Illuminating any gaps in support and guidance that need addressing to optimise the impact of PP+-funded interventions on educational outcomes for looked after children.

To explore these areas of inquiry, the research consisted of four stages:

- i. A rapid, scoping review of academic and policy literature to establish how PP+ is currently used and allocated, and how the impact of PP+-funded interventions is evidenced, so that we can better understand what works and where improvements may be needed.
- ii. An online survey of Virtual School Heads, Designated Teachers and other key professionals to generate insights into their experiences of: accessing information and guidance on PP+; using PP+; evidencing impact of PP+-funded interventions; and the factors they feel are important enablers or barriers to effective use of PP+.
- iii. 'Paired dialogue' sessions to provide two professional stakeholders the opportunity to discuss their experiences of using PP+.
- iv. One-to-one telephone interviews with stakeholder professionals to illuminate a deeper understanding of their experiences of using PP+.

Chapter 1 introduces the key terms used within the report; chapter 2 describes the methodology; chapters 3 to 7 discuss the findings; and chapter 8 identifies areas for further research.

Chapter 3 reports on the scoping literature review to gauge current knowledge on the allocation, use and impact of PP+. It revealed that there is limited available academic literature to guide professionals involved in supporting education outcomes of looked after children. However, information and guidance was available in depth within policy documentation. Although the review located some examples of interventions that are used to support educational outcomes for looked after children, it revealed a paucity of academic literature on the effectiveness of such interventions, resulting in a lack of: i) fully-informed information and guidance for stakeholder professionals; and ii) evidenced-based interventions to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. To address this gap, the following recommendation is made for consideration.

**Recommendation 1**

Identify evidenced-based interventions that improve education-related outcomes for looked after children, through further research.

Chapter 4 describes the PP+-related information and guidance that participants accessed. Our findings suggest that, although the majority of the professionals reported accessing available information, advice and guidance (IAG) on PP+ and being supported by formal training opportunities through their Virtual School, there were some (mainly Designated Teachers) who indicated that they did not know where to access these resources, had unmet training needs and felt they were left to 'learn on the job'. To address this gap, the following recommendations are made for consideration.

**Recommendation 2**

Provide information, advice and formal training on PP+ that is accessible to, and meets the particular needs of, all professionals who play a key role in supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children.

**Recommendation 3**

Extend the resources available on the NAVSH website to develop a repository for:

- Policy, academic and practitioner publications that focus on supporting the education of looked after children, including the effective use of PP+; and
- Evidenced-based interventions and resources that can be funded by PP+.

Chapter 5 shares the ways in which participants use PP+ to support education-related outcomes for looked after children. Although PP+-funded interventions initiated by Virtual School Heads and Designated Teacher are many and varied, our findings indicate that many professionals want more information and guidance to inform how they use PP+ to effectively support educational outcomes for looked after children. These insights further support consideration of recommendation 3 above. This chapter also reports on the concerns of many participants about the lack of PP+ for looked after children beyond the age of 16, and this informs our fourth recommendation for consideration.

**Recommendation 4**

Extend PP+ funding to support the educational outcomes for looked after children beyond the age of 16 years.

Chapter 6 examines the PP+ allocation process that participants experienced and illuminates how the effective allocation of PP+ centres on: i) an informed Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is tailored to the needs of the looked after child; and ii) multi-agency team collaboration to inform and support educational outcomes for these children. However, the findings provide insights into specific challenges faced by some professionals involved in supporting looked after children. These include difficulties in managing the PEP process, especially for those Designated Teachers who have to work with PEPs from more than one Local Authority. Additional challenges were also raised regarding the practicalities of managing multi-agency team meetings, notably ensuring attendance from all the key professionals involved. These insights inform our fifth recommendation.

**Recommendation 5**

Increase opportunities for networking within and between professional stakeholder groups, to share good practice.

Chapter 7 focuses on insights regarding the evidencing of impact from PP+-funded interventions and indicates that evidencing impact of PP+-funded interventions was typically achieved using conventional measures of education success i.e. attainment and achievement and increasingly, exclusion rates were also being used. However, many participants expressed the concern that this risked undermining successes that looked after children make in other areas, such as readiness to learn or social and emotional development. The findings suggest that education-related outcomes for looked after children would be improved by: i) Developing an evidence base of 'what works' for this specific cohort; ii) Providing information, advice and guidance on how to evidence the impact of PP+-funded interventions; and iii) Benchmarking education-related data at the point the child enters the care system. These insights inform recommendations 1, 3 and 5 above and our sixth and final recommendation for consideration.

**Recommendation 6**

Benchmark conventional measures (e.g. attainment, progress and attendance) and other measures of education-related success (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing, attitude) at the point of entering the care system, using a more bespoke 'first PEP'.

Chapter 8 discusses five specific areas that would benefit from further research, to provide a better understanding of:

- The impact and role of the PEP in supporting improved educational outcomes for looked after children;
- The use of PP+ for 'additionality' versus 'plugging the gap' in education and social care budgets;
- How looked after children experience PP+-funded interventions;
- The specific education-related needs of post-16 year old looked after children; and
- What 'impact' means to the different stakeholders involved in supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children.

### **(iii) Foreword from NAVSH**

The National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) was set up by members in response to the role becoming statutory. NAVSH exists to improve the educational outcomes of care experienced children by working with partners and commissioning research to ensure that the educational needs of looked after children are better understood. One of the charity's central research priorities is to develop best practice in the use of Pupil Premium Plus in order to maximise its impact.

The Pupil Premium introduced in 2011 is additional funding for publicly funded schools in England. It is designed to help disadvantaged pupils of all abilities perform better and close the gap between them and their peers. Whilst the majority of this funding is targeted at children from lower income families it also includes additional funding for looked after children: Pupil Premium Plus.

There is no doubt that the Pupil Premium has enabled schools to do more to improve the results of less advantaged pupils. A strong evidence base has been developed particularly via the development of the Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit that is increasingly used by teachers as a reference point for what interventions are most likely to have an impact on vulnerable students in schools. The toolkit however is a generic tool for use on all vulnerable children and does not isolate interventions that may be particularly helpful for children in care.

The reality of 150 Virtual Schools distributing an estimated £132 million to support more than 60,000 children in care, a cohort that is often in flux inevitably leads to a complexity of practice across the country. NAVSH commissioned this research to better understand the impact of Pupil Premium Plus on looked after children and shine a light on practice across England to share with our members, schools and our partners.

Lynsey Burridge, Chair and Michael Bettencourt, Research Lead

NAVSH, May 2020

# 1. Introduction

The [National Association of Virtual School Heads](#) is a charitable organisation, established in 2016 in response to the role of Virtual School Head becoming statutory. This membership organisation exists to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children by working with key stakeholders and commissioning research to ensure that the educational needs of these children are better understood and addressed.

## Looked after children

The term 'looked after children' is given to those children and young people, from pre-school to 18 years, who are taken into care by an English Local Authority, for at least one day. This cohort of children and young people is at risk of poor educational outcomes ([Department for Education \(DfE\), 2019](#)). Narrowing the education attainment and progress gap between these pupils and their non-looked after peers is a current priority for all stakeholders.

## Virtual School Head

There are 150 Virtual Schools and, as the name implies, they are not physical schools. Rather, they comprise a Local Authority team, led by a Virtual School Head, that works with schools, education providers and other stakeholders (looked after children, parents, guardians, carers and other professionals) to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. Virtual School Heads have lead responsibility for ensuring that looked after children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential. They have to monitor the progress and attainment of the Local Authority's looked after children, including those placed out of their Local Authority area. The statutory role of the Virtual School Head is one of only seven statutory roles in Local Authorities. This underlines the important role they play in championing the education of all looked after children. Virtual School Heads are positioned to provide both direct and strategic support, working proactively with multiple agencies to address the factors that impact negatively on the educational outcomes and experiences of looked after children.

## Personal Education Plan

Statutory guidance from the [DfE \(2018a\)](#) states that all looked after children should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) as part of their Care Plan. PEPs should include SMART targets and be "*a living, evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's experience, progress and achievement (academic and otherwise)*" (p. 16). They should capture the looked after child's journey through learning until the age of 18 years. Although PEP targets focus on academic progress to expand the educational experience of looked after children, they also encompass extracurricular activities such

as sport and the arts, where activities are shown to stimulate engagement and progression in learning.

It is the responsibility of the Virtual School Head to ensure that there are effective systems in place to enable the key stakeholders (Designated Teachers, Social Workers, parents/carers) to produce effective and high quality PEPs. These PEPs should identify and address the personalised education-related needs of each looked after child, in order to raise aspirations and expectations amongst both the looked after children and the professionals that engage with them. The Virtual School Head is also responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to support the voice of the looked after child within the PEP process.

## Designated Teacher

According to [DfE guidance \(2018b\)](#), the Designated Teacher leads on how the PEP is used within their school, ensuring that looked after children progress towards their agreed, personalised education-related targets and that their achievement is appropriately rewarded. The Designated Teacher should liaise closely with the Virtual School Head and the Social Worker who is tasked with managing the overall Care Plan of the looked after child.

## Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)

The additional education-related needs of looked after children, as compared to the needs of their non-looked after peers, are supported by extra Government funding to Local Authorities, through a centrally allocated PP+ grant. A PP+ grant of £2,300 per looked after child is received by the Virtual School for the Virtual School Head to allocate and/or use to support the education-related outcomes of children and young people from reception to Year 11. This is undertaken by implementing evidence-based interventions that are in the best interests of the looked after child. The grant is specifically aimed at helping to close the attainment gap between looked after children and their non-looked after peers. The PP+ grant is not a personal budget, Virtual School Heads may choose to allocate all the £2,300 to a school for an individual looked after child, or withhold a proportion to fund central activities that benefit the cohort. Virtual School Heads may also allocate the Early Years PP+ grant for children in early year's settings. This grant is currently set at £302 per child. There is no PP+ funding available for young people in post-16 education, although Virtual School Heads still have PEP responsibility for this post-16 cohort.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research aim**

The aim of this research project is to identify the range of guidance and support that exists currently to equip stakeholder professionals to use PP+ effectively, and illuminate any gaps in support and guidance that need filling to optimise the impact of PP+ on educational outcomes for looked after children.

### **2.2 Research questions**

Three questions guide the study.

1. How do Virtual School Heads and other stakeholder professionals use, allocate and measure the impact of PP+?
2. What guidance and support is available to Virtual School Heads and other stakeholder professionals to guide optimal impact from PP+ allocation and use?
3. Are there any gaps in the guidance and support to Virtual School Heads and other stakeholder professionals, to guide optimal impact from PP+ allocation and use?

### **2.3 Research approach**

This research employed a mixed-methods approach to generate quantitative and qualitative data. The online survey provided the opportunity to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Additional qualitative data was generated through the paired dialogues and one-to-one interviews with Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers.

Ethical approval for this study was granted through the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, Bath Spa University.

### **2.4 Research stages**

The research, undertaken between April and September 2019, had four stages:

#### **2.4.1 Scoping literature review**

A rapid, scoping literature review was undertaken to outline the existing literature and gauge current knowledge on the allocation, use and impact of PP+, and to illuminate any identified gaps in guidance and support. This involved reviewing academic papers,

policy guidance (e.g. from the DfE), and specialist documentation (e.g. NAVSH and Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)).

The scoping review process employed a number of educational/academic databases (Academic Search Premier, Science Direct and Google Scholar) and searched for articles that mentioned key terms of interest, including 'looked after child\*', 'Virtual School Head', 'Designated Teacher' and 'pupil premium'. The selection criteria were set to provide a realistic focus for the review given the limited timescale. The reference sections of publications were manually searched for relevant articles.

The inclusion criteria for the scoping review are as follows:

1. Relevant documentation published from 2013 (following the introduction of the Pupil Premium grant). Key historical documents were included in the review if they were considered to provide context to understanding the development of PP+.
2. Papers that described professionals' experience of supporting looked after children, including how PP+ allocation, use, and impact is evidenced; and how professionals sought guidance and support to assist their practice.
3. Documentation that described educational interventions for looked after children.

## **2.4.2 Online survey**

The online survey, created using Bristol Online Survey, was open for five weeks, throughout May and early June 2019. The survey was distributed by NAVSH to its membership body of Virtual School Heads. Virtual School Heads were then invited to cascade the survey to other stakeholder professionals with whom they work, notably Designated Teachers.

Survey questions addressed:

- a) Where they accessed information and guidance to aid them in supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children;
- b) The factors that they feel have an influence in supporting how PP+ is used;
- c) Their thoughts on how the effectiveness of PP+-funded interventions is evidenced;
- d) Enablers and barriers to the successful allocation and use of PP+; and
- e) Their recommended 'game changers' to help support how PP+ is used to support looked after children.

187 responses to the online survey were received. The breakdown in survey respondent roles was as follows:

- Designated Teachers: 79 (42%)
- Virtual School Heads: 61 (33%)
- Head Teachers: 13 (7%)
- Local Authority professional: 9 (5%)
- Social Services professional: 5 (3%)

- School Teacher: 2 (1%)
- School Governor: 1 (<1%)
- Other school or professional role: 17 (9%)

In terms of participant length of service:

- 36 (19%) had been working in their role for less than one year
- 77 (41%) for one to five years
- 73 (39%) for over five years
- (1 missing response)

For Virtual School Heads:

- 13 (21%) had been in their role for less than one year
- 28 (46%) for one to five years
- 20 (33%) for over five years

For Designated Teachers:

- 14 (18%) had been in their role for less than one year
- 38 (48%) for one to five years
- 26 (33%) for over five years

### **2.4.3 Paired dialogues**

Paired dialogues are a novel approach to generating qualitative data. They involve two stakeholder professionals discussing their thoughts and experiences, framed by a topic guide to focus their conversation. The presence of a facilitator from the research team offered prompts and guidance, where required.

Three 'paired dialogue' sessions explored experiences and practices regarding their use of PP+, and included:

- a) Their understanding of PP+ for looked after children;
- b) Whether and how they demonstrate that PP+-funded interventions are effective at supporting looked after children;
- c) Examples of good practice;
- d) Awareness of any gaps in guidance and support, and
- e) Recommendations to improve outcomes from PP+-funded interventions.

Pairs for these sessions were selected from survey participants who had expressed an interest, in their survey response, in discussing their experiences further with the research team. Selections were based on their role, location and availability. Two paired dialogues involved Virtual School Heads from different local authorities, and the third pair included Designated Teachers, one primary and one secondary, from different Local Authorities. Each paired dialogue lasted approximately one hour and was audio-recorded and transcribed in full.

## **2.4.4 Interviews**

Five semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with one secondary school Designated Teacher and four Virtual School Heads. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. They were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. The line of questioning explored the same issues as in the paired dialogue sessions (above).

## **2.5 Steering group**

Each stage of the research, including the development of recommendations, was supported by a steering group consisting of: NAVSH representation, a Virtual School Head, a post-looked after university student, Bath Spa University academics and a member of Bath Spa University's professional service team involved in supporting students with a background of care.

## **2.6 Data analysis**

Approaches to the analysis of the data were designed to address the research questions and the project aim.

### **2.6.1 Online survey data**

Descriptive statistics (totals and percentages) were completed on the survey quantitative data. Qualitative responses (free text) to survey questions were analysed using manual thematic analysis, framed by the research aims.

### **2.6.2 Transcripts**

Manual thematic analysis was conducted on full transcripts from the paired dialogues and interviews. This analysis was framed by the research aims and employed the four key themes:

- PP+ guidance and support;
- Use of PP+;
- Allocation of PP+, and
- Measuring impact of PP+-funded interventions.

## **2.7 Limitations of the research**

### **2.7.1 Stakeholder representation**

As reported in section 2.4.2, the participants reflected an array of stakeholder professionals, including Virtual School Heads, and Designated Teachers. In total, 61 Virtual School Heads responded to this research, reflecting approximately 41% of the

NAVSH membership. The findings and recommendations that have been developed are formed directly from the data provided by participants. This report should not be taken to reflect the individual experiences of all Virtual School Heads or other stakeholders whose roles support educational outcomes for looked after children, but rather the collective issues encountered by the field.

It was also not within the scope of this project to discuss the accuracy of what the participants shared. As such, the project team does not endorse nor challenge any specific experiences that have been described.

### **2.7.2 Body of literature**

The purpose of completing a rapid, scoping literature review was to gain a broad understanding of the current landscape of PP+ use, allocation, and impact measurement, within the short timescale of the study. We did not conduct a thorough search of all information that was specific to each of our research questions. The content included in this report should therefore not be taken as a description of all available literature to date.

### 3. Scoping literature review

The scoping literature review, targeted at literature on PP+ and the work of Virtual Schools, found limited evidence about how PP+ is currently used and allocated, and even less on how the impact is captured. However, we set the scene for this study using the key documents available, which we list below.

#### 3.1 Academic literature

From our search, we identified several important documents. We introduce these and discuss their contents to provide background research for this report. Within each document, various roles and responsibilities with respect to looked after children and PP+ are presented. It is important to acknowledge that the complexity of the topic means that we cannot definitively delineate use and allocation and, although our review deals with these separately, there are some overlaps.

The following five key documents have been singled out for attention because these studies offer pertinent insight and provide a good basis on which to ground our report. However, academic literature in addition to these five key documents has been included where appropriate.

1. Drew, H., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: What is the role of the Virtual School? *European Journal of Educational Psychology*, 34(1), 101-121.
2. Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting the educational transitions of looked after children at Key Stage 4: The role of the Virtual Schools and Designated Teachers. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(2), 110-122.
3. Jackson, S. (2015). The Virtual School for children in out-of-home care: A strategic approach to improving their educational attainment. *Children Australia*, 40(4), 327-334.
4. Rivers, S. (2018). Supporting the education of looked after children: the role of the Virtual School head. *Adoption & Fostering*, 42(2), 151-161.
5. Sebba, J., & Berridge, D. (2019). The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care. *Oxford Review of Education*, 45(4), 538-555.

##### 3.1.1 PP+-related guidance and support

Within this theme, we sought to evidence whether the above five academic papers discussed provision of PP+-related guidance and support. We found that much of the

evidence described training. For example, many of the studies confirmed that a key responsibility of a Virtual School Head is to provide training and support for those professionals who are working to support educational outcomes for looked after children. The narratives of Virtual School Heads presented within Sebba and Berridge's (2019) research show how they were guiding and training specific stakeholders, such as Designated Teachers, Social Workers, and foster carers. Drew and Banerjee (2019), Rivers (2018), and Sebba and Berridge (2019) related in their work how individual Virtual School Heads had provided training on attachment. Jackson (2015) gave the example of a Virtual School that provided training and sources of information, such as briefing papers, to stakeholders.

Jackson (2015) found that some Virtual School Heads reported that their role could be 'lonely' at times and how these professionals appreciated receiving additional support and guidance, such as that provided through networking events, held to "*share ideas and discuss ways to overcome difficulties*" (p. 331).

### **3.1.2 How PP+ is used**

In the studies listed above, there were many accounts of how stakeholder professionals supported the educational outcomes of looked after children. However, it was difficult to determine whether the interventions were facilitated entirely through PP+ funding. Moreover, the Virtual School Head has a degree of discretion in how the PP+ grant is spent, with some being retained centrally to pay for pooled interventions and some being allocated to schools to support their cohort of looked after children. Owing to this flexibility, it was not entirely clear how the PP+ had been drawn down to support the interventions cited. Exemplar interventions covered a number of areas: educational support; mental health or attachment support; extracurricular activities and transition support.

#### **3.1.2.1 Educational support**

Drew and Banerjee (2019) reported that educational attainment was the "*most frequently selected focus for service delivery*" by Virtual School Heads when supporting looked after children (p. 108). These authors provided several examples of educational support interventions including one-to-one support from adults to achieve educational outcomes, such as tuition and mentoring; and additional educational resources such as the Letterbox Club and education workshops. Sebba and Berridge (2019) further described how Virtual School Heads within their research funded one-to-one tuition support for looked after children, as well as study support clubs hosted by the Virtual School, and the allocation of study mentors.

#### **3.1.2.2 Mental health and/or attachment support**

Drew and Banerjee (2019) gave an account of how Virtual School Heads sometimes employed educational psychologists or ensured collaborative working with mental

health teams. In particular, one Virtual School Head from their study described how they used PP+ to work with external providers to ensure that looked after children had access to appropriate counselling and behavioural support services.

### **3.1.2.3 Extra-curricular opportunities**

Jackson (2015) presented a case study Virtual School that provided opportunities for extra-curricular activities through trips to the theatre and museums, and encouraged looked after children to engage in creative leisure activities such as drama. Creating extra-curricular opportunities enabled these children to encounter ‘decisive turning points on [their] developmental pathway’ (Gilligan, 2000, p. 45), to become more resilient and engaged in their learning. Drew and Banerjee (2019) similarly described how some Virtual School Heads in their research ensured that looked after children had access to cooking and gardening opportunities, as well as pottery classes.

### **3.1.2.4 Transition support**

Support for transitioning and for post-16 looked after children were raised as important issues in several of the included studies. Professionals wanted to ensure that these looked after children were supported. For looked after children moving from primary to secondary education, Drew and Banerjee (2019) gave examples of how individual Virtual School Heads had introduced transition mentors, school visits for looked after children, and even additional support during school holidays.

In the reviewed studies, we found that for looked after children entering or approaching post-16 education, professionals aimed to be supportive despite the lack of PP+ funding for this cohort. For example, Drew and Banerjee (2019) described how Virtual School Heads provided careers support through the employment of careers advisors or work experience programmes. One Virtual School Head whose narrative was included within Sebba and Berridge’s (2019) research reported on how Virtual School staff accompanied prospective looked after university students on open day visits.

### **3.1.3 How PP+ is allocated**

In terms of the allocation of PP+, Rivers (2018) described how “*Virtual heads were given the authority to set the strategy regarding how the funding was to be allocated to schools and education providers*” (p. 154). It seems that Virtual School Heads have considerable flexibility over how they choose to allocate PP+ (i.e. in their administrative procedures for allocating PP+ funding). However, the administrative processes that Virtual School Heads employ are not discussed at length in this academic literature. The PEP received some comment and we review this below.

Sebba and Berridge (2019) described how the majority of Virtual School Heads stated that PP+ was only distributed on the condition that a quality PEP was completed, to justify the interventions for which the funding would be used. However, ensuring that

good quality PEPs are produced appears to be a perennial issue for all Virtual Schools, as noted by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2016), particularly when they are engaging with a number of different stakeholder groups. For instance, Sebba and Berridge (2019) reported how Virtual School Heads may have to challenge professionals when PEP forms are deemed to have been completed to a poor standard. Similarly, Rivers (2018) narrated how historically within her region, PEP plans were paper-based, which meant that tracking progress for individual looked after children and cohorts of looked after children was problematic. The introduction of an electronic PEP system, which allowed all professional stakeholders involved in supporting looked after children to view the same information, helped resolve this issue.

Our scoping review highlighted the importance of effective governance, organisation, and maintaining strong working relationships with those involved in the multi-agency team working with looked after children, such as Designated Teachers, foster carers, Social Workers, the Local Authority, and schools (Rivers, 2018; Sebba & Berridge, 2019). Challenges facing all professionals involved in multi-agency working are well-documented, including by Sebba and Berridge (2019) who point out how some Virtual School Heads can encounter problematic relationships when working with numerous parties. They gave evidence of the potential for breakdowns in multi-agency cooperation, which could be attributed to cultural differences between education and social care organisations.

The studies covered in this review raised matters concerning support for post-16 looked after children, both in terms of PP+ funding limitations and the coordination of the transition process. Rivers (2018) expressed concern that “*as Virtual Head I have no resources allocated for post-16 pupils*” (p. 159). Rivers went on to explain that their Virtual School has “*wherever possible, been flexible with [PP+] funding to include the post-16 cohort in additional provision alongside those of statutory school age.*” (p. 159). Driscoll (2013) described how Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers may experience challenges in supporting looked after children through their transition out of Key Stage 4, which the author attributed to the simultaneous pressures and disruptions for looked after children in terms of sitting their final exams, preparing for the next stage of their education, and leaving care. Additional challenges occurred when there was limited communication between stakeholders involved in the transition process (Driscoll, 2013).

### **3.1.4 Measuring the impact of PP+**

In terms of establishing effectiveness of PP+-funded interventions, professional stakeholders in the field will be aware that a lot of attention has been focused on interventions to support looked after children, but the role of PP+ in this has received scant attention.

Much of the literature on interventions is somewhat lacking as it offers no firm conclusions about effectiveness in terms of improved educational outcomes (Evans et

al., 2017; O'Higgins et al., 2017). Many academic papers discuss relatively small-scale projects and a few describe the involvement of the Designated Teacher and Virtual School Head (Bhojwani & Kitts, 2014; Lewis et al., 2015; Webber, 2017) in the provision of interventions. However, some quasi-experimental work has been published that trialled interventions focused on looked after children (e.g. Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo et al., 2013).

There is clearly a paucity of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions that support educational outcomes for looked after children. From the reviewed studies, it is evident that examples of measuring impact were limited, though Sebba and Berridge (2019) pointed to Virtual School Heads using measures strategically "*to demonstrate that those who stayed in care longer with fewer placement changes did better ... in order to direct resources to factors that contribute to stability.*" (p. 550-551). The National Consortium of Examination Results (NCER) is addressing this through the establishment of a bespoke national system to measure the educational performance and progress of looked after children (NCER, 2017), that is being developed to help Virtual School Heads to target resources effectively.

## **3.2 Summary of academic literature**

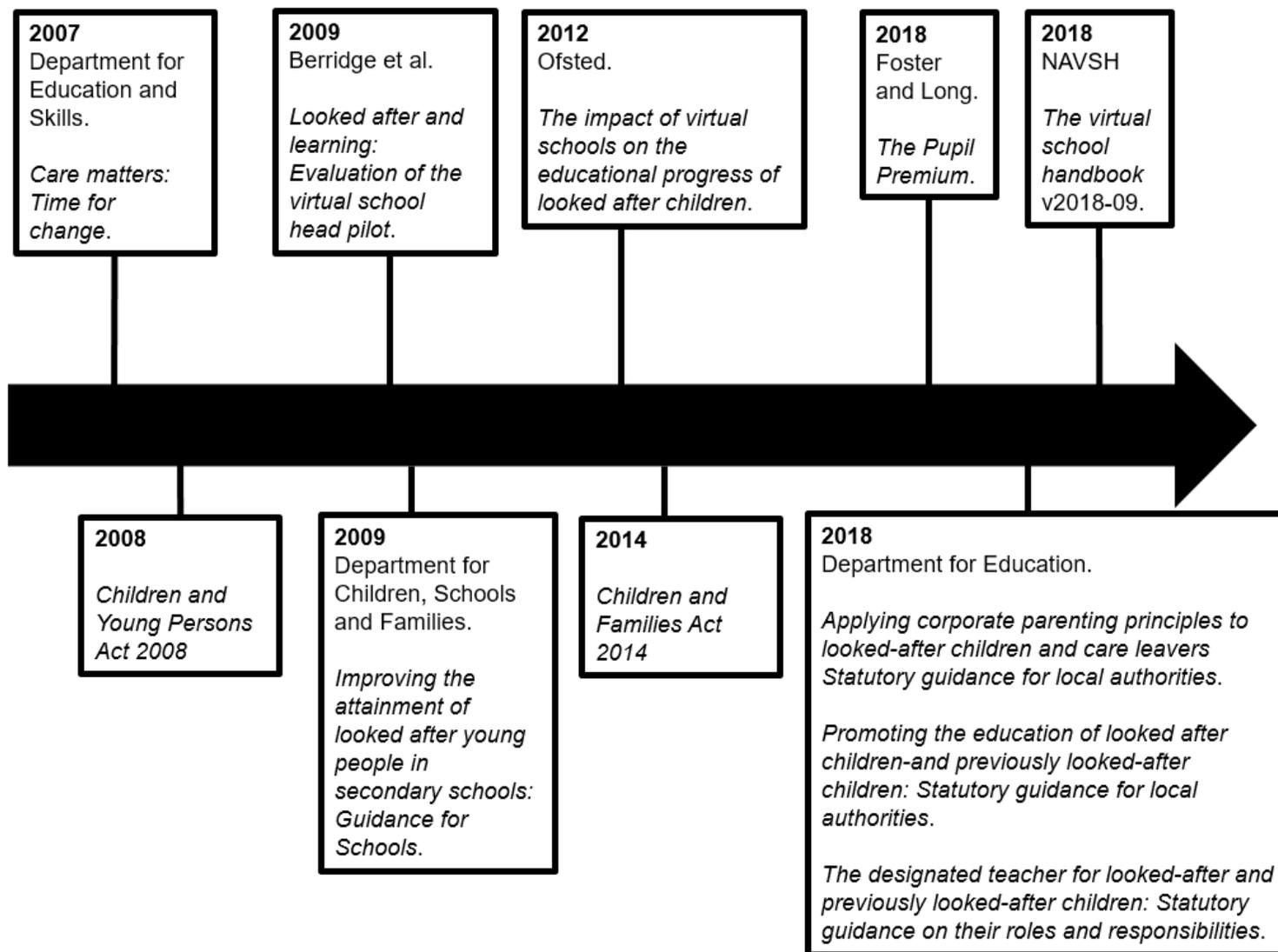
Although the scoping review revealed insights into the support and guidance for the use and allocation of PP+ that exists currently, significant gaps remain in the academic literature, particularly in regards to evidencing impact of PP+-funded interventions.

## **3.3 Policy background**

A strand of literature that is key to our report include the publications that expand on government primary and secondary legislation. Current legislation relating to looked after children across health, social care and education is too extensive to cover fully here. Hence, we focus on the key documents regarding the establishment of the Virtual School along with current statutory guidance on related operations.

We have constructed a timeline representation of the development of the Virtual School along with its responsibilities towards achieving optimal educational outcomes for looked after children. This, along with a summary of the key policy background that we have reviewed, is included below.

## Timeline: The development of the Virtual School



The role of the Virtual School Head originates in the white paper, Care Matters, in which it was proposed that '*Virtual School heads will oversee the education of children in care in their authority, and those children in the authority's care who are placed out of authority, as if they were the head of a single school*' (Department for Education and Skills, 2007; p. 10). Under the Children and Young Persons Act, 2008, schools had been required to appoint a designated member of staff known as the Designated Teacher, to take responsibility for promoting the education of looked after children. To see how these policy innovations could advance the educational outcomes for looked after children, a pilot scheme for Virtual School Heads ran for two years in 11 Local Authorities. A review study assessed the impacts of the Virtual School Head project (Berridge et al., 2009).

Building on the positive outcomes of this Virtual School Head pilot, some Local Authorities voluntarily established the Virtual School Head role and supported virtual teams in their areas (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). The Ofsted review (2012) of the Virtual School Head pilot reported favourably on the scheme and soon after, in the Children and Families Act, 2014, the statutory requirements stipulated that all Local Authorities appoint a Virtual School Head. The Children and Social Work Act, 2017 consolidated the duties of Local Authorities as corporate parent regarding looked after children and previously looked after children. With respect to education, the current statutory guidance was issued in 2018. This sets out the role of the Designated Teacher and the duties of the Local Authority (DfE, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c).

In 2013, the PP+ for looked after children was introduced by the government. Its aim being to enhance educational outcomes for looked after children and provide financial support for Virtual Schools to meet this goal. In 2014, previously looked after children were included, extending PP+ to cover children who were adopted or who had left Local Authority care (Foster & Long, 2018).

During the ten year history of the Virtual School Head, statutory guidance regarding looked after children and PP+ involving multi-agency teams has been interpreted and applied flexibly. While developing their proficiency, professional stakeholders have implemented the guidance effectively and developed high levels of insight and practical know-how. NAVSH published its handbook (NAVSH, 2018) to encourage best practice and assist professionals in navigating the field. Many Virtual Schools have produced their own documents to support carers and school staff in their geographic region. These are available through Local Authority websites and often contain downloadable exemplar policies, technical guides and codes to guide practice.

### **3.4 Insights and recommendation**

The scoping literature review revealed that there is limited available academic literature to guide professionals involved in supporting education outcomes of looked after

children. However, information and guidance was available in depth within related policy documentation.

Although the review located examples of interventions that are used to support educational outcomes for looked after children, it revealed a paucity of academic literature on the effectiveness of such interventions, resulting in a lack of:

- Fully-informed information and guidance for stakeholder professionals; and
- Evidenced-based interventions to improve educational outcomes for looked after children.

To address this gap, the following recommendation is made for consideration.

### **Recommendation 1**

Identify evidenced-based interventions that improve education-related outcomes for looked after children, through further research.

## 4. PP+-related guidance and support

In this chapter, we report on guidance and support available to professionals about PP+. We examine where the participants in our research obtained information and help to support their effective use of PP+. This sets the platform for our subsequent chapters that address PP+ in terms of: its use (what it is spent on), how it is allocated (the administration and procedures around the PP+ grant), and how the impact of PP+ is measured (assessing what works).

We present the policy backdrop to guidance and support through reference to selected extracts from statutory guidance from the DfE (2018), and The Virtual School Handbook (NAVSH, 2018). Here, we also report on the types of resources that participants identified and give some examples that they reported they were using during their practice. One area of support that participants raised was training and we explore some of their comments pertaining to this. We identify some concerns regarding access to and coverage of resources and offer recommendations.

### 4.1 Statutory guidance on PP+

These extracts identify the responsibilities of the Virtual School for meeting the information and training development needs of professionals supporting the education of looked after children. The Virtual School Head has a key role in keeping stakeholders up to date.

**DfE (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children-and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“[Virtual School Heads] ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to meet the training needs of those responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children. This may include themselves as [Virtual School Head], carers, adoptive parents, Designated Teachers, other school staff, Social Workers and [Independent Reviewing Officers]”. (p. 29)*

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

*“The [Virtual School Head] should be the authoritative voice of the learning needs of looked after children and how they can be met. They should, therefore:*

- take a lead in supporting/training Social Workers to understand schools, and school staff to understand social work and the needs of looked after children*
- provide regular professional development for Designated Teachers and, by setting up a local network, encourage Designated Teachers to exchange their best practice.*
- be a routine contributor to Social Worker induction programmes as well as providing examples of good practice to inform social work supervision arrangements*
- seek opportunities to bring together the professionals working with looked after children*
- challenge all targeted and specialist services, and service providers, to prioritise professional development that takes account of the children’s needs*
- develop an effective working relationship with local Training School Alliances, and any other brokered providers of school improvement, to ensure they have sufficient capacity to address the needs of schools with respect to the learning needs of looked after children*
- develop similar links to local teacher training providers so they can provide authoritative training on the needs of looked after children, and the far larger number of children on the edge of care”. (p. 54-55)*

## **4.2 Resources used to guide and support effective use of PP+**

The survey aimed to identify the resources professionals access for information about using PP+. The majority of participants indicated that they had accessed some form of PP+ guidance and support. We asked them to describe the materials (e.g. documents) and people with whom they consulted. The results are presented in Table 1 below. To support data interpretation, all the sources of information used by more than 50% of each participant cohort (Virtual School Heads, Designated Teachers, and other professionals) have been highlighted in green in Table 1.

The majority of Virtual School Heads reported that they consulted public sector documentation, such as that published by the DfE and materials produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). Designated Teachers and other professionals indicated that they relied most on their Virtual School for information and advice on PP+ and that they benefitted from formal training provided by their Virtual School. The majority of each stakeholder group reported accessing informal advice from colleagues.

Table 1. Key resources reported by participants as useful for guiding their effective use of PP+

| Source of Information  | % Virtual School Heads (n = 61) | % Designated Teachers (n = 79) | % Other Professionals (n = 47) |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Advice from the Virtual School, for example on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding allocation strategies</li> <li>Effective strategies and interventions</li> </ul>  | 36                              | 78                             | 72                             |
| Formal training from: <a href="#">NAVSH</a> , Virtual Schools, and other professionals and providers.  | 39                              | 62                             | 51                             |
| Informal training from colleagues and other professionals  | 48                              | 39                             | 45                             |
| Formal advice from other colleagues  | 43                              | 42                             | 64                             |
| Informal advice from other colleagues  | 61                              | 63                             | 62                             |
| Public sector documents e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From the <a href="#">Department for Education</a></li> <li>From <a href="#">Ofsted</a></li> <li><a href="#">Timpson Review of Exclusion (2019)</a></li> <li><a href="#">National Governors' Association</a></li> </ul> | 59                              | 33                             | 36                             |
| <a href="#">Education Endowment Foundation</a>   | 61                              | 37                             | 34                             |

Other sources of information and guidance were mentioned by a smaller number of participants. They included publications from non-governmental organisations and academic organisations, e.g.

- [Rees Centre, University of Oxford](#)
- [Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children \(PALAC\)](#), UCL
- [Attachment Aware Schools, Bath Spa University](#)

5% of the total survey participants indicated that they had not used any resources to support their use of PP+:

- Two, a Virtual School Head and a Head Teacher reported that they did not think they needed the information. They had both been in post for more than five years and thus likely to be experienced. However, keeping up to date with new developments in policy is considered good practice for all public sector professionals.

- Four Designated Teachers, one school governor and one Social Services professional indicated, in their survey responses, that they had not consulted any sources of PP+-related information because they did not know where to find it. Three of these Designated Teachers had been in their role for between one and five years. The other professionals had all been in their role for more than five years. Given the length of service of each of these participants, reporting that they did not know where to find any relevant information indicates there is a potential issue regarding poor level of awareness of accessible PP+-related information and guidance for some professionals.

Below we list a selection of the resources that survey respondents reported they had accessed to guide their use of PP+.

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

The NAVSH handbook is a guide to help support Virtual School Heads to fulfil “*their duties and functions*” experienced as part of their role (p. 8). The guide is designed to be used alongside existing statutory guidance from the DfE.

## **Statutory publications from the DfE (2018) on looked after children:**

### **[Promoting the education of looked after children-and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“This guidance is for: Local Authority officers (in particular Directors of Children’s Services), Virtual School Heads, Social Workers, Local Authority post-adoption support teams, officers carrying out a Local Authority’s function as a school admission authority, Special Educational Needs and Disability departments, Independent Reviewing Officers ... Personal Advisers, care leaving services, and Lead Members for Children’s Services” (p. 5).*

### **[The Designated Teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance on their roles and responsibilities](#)**

*“This guidance is for governing bodies of maintained schools in England, proprietors of academies and Designated Teachers for looked-after and previously looked-after children in such schools. It may also be of interest to head teachers, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and other teaching staff working with such children.” (p. 5). This guidance is to be used by these stakeholder groups when “promoting the educational attainment of looked-after and previously looked-after children” (p. 5).*

### **[Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“This guidance is designed to help local authorities consider the kinds of services that may be offered when having regard to the corporate parenting principles. It is not intended to be prescriptive about what must be offered. It is expected, however, that services respond to the individual needs of looked after children and care leavers when they exercise their functions in relation to these children and young people” (p. 4).*

### **Publications from UK Government:**

**Gov.uk. (2019).** [Pupil Premium 2018 to 2019: Conditions of grant](#)

This website provides an overview of Pupil Premium, which includes PP+.

**Gov.uk. (2019).** [Pupil Premium: Funding and accountability for schools](#)

This website focuses on Pupil Premium overall, though information is provided regarding the funding for PP+ for the 2019-2020 financial year.

**Gov.uk. (2015).** [Pupil Premium: Virtual School Heads' responsibilities](#)

This website provides information for Virtual School Heads in terms of their accountability, and their responsibilities for supporting looked after children and allocating PP+.

**Foster and Long (The House of Commons Library) (2018).** [Pupil Premium briefing paper](#)

While this briefing paper focuses on Pupil Premium, information is included regarding the funding for PP+.

**Education Endowment Foundation (EEF):** [The Sutton-Trust EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#)

The Teaching and Learning Toolkit provides an overview of academic evidence into areas that may support educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people. Specific strands within the Toolkit that participants in this project sought guidance from included: Digital Technology; Feedback; Meta-cognition and self-regulation; Peer tutoring; and Teaching assistants.

*You can have a lot of impact for very little input. We use the Education Endowment Foundation a lot for research, to have a look at effective resources and effective use of money generally in teaching” (Designated Teacher 81).*

**Ofsted** e.g. (2012): [The impact of Virtual Schools on the educational progress of looked after children](#)

*“This report examines the impact of Virtual Schools, established by local authorities to support and improve the educational achievement of looked after children.” (p. 1).*

[Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children \(PALAC\), UCL.](#)

*“PALAC is a Knowledge Exchange ... programme that seeks to support practice in schools to improve outcomes for students in care. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for this group of children and young people.”*

**The Rees Centre, University of Oxford**

E.g. Sebba et al. (2015). [The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data](#). The Rees Centre, University of Oxford.

*The Rees Centre report in 2015 was a real game changer as it identified the factors that have the greatest impact on outcomes for looked after children. This changed the focus of how I allocated my [PP+] - greater focus on stability, keeping pupils in mainstream education and mental health support. (Virtual School Head 17)*

**Local Authority/regional sources** e.g. [Hampshire and Isle of Wight Virtual School](#)

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Virtual School team have produced a 2018 document, which provides support on *“accessing funding to improve educational outcomes of children and young people in care”* (p. 1).

## 4.3 Training

Virtual School Heads have a statutory duty to offer training. More than 50% of Designated Teachers and 'other professionals' who participated in the survey indicated that they had received formal training from a wide range of providers. However, some Designated Teachers and 'other professionals' described how they have to 'learn on the job'.

*I have had no statutory training for being a Designated Teacher (Designated Teacher 32)*

*When I first started to take on the role of contributing to PEP for [looked after children] in our school, I was learning on the job. I had not received any training in what a PEP involved or guidelines as to how [PP+] funding should be used. This knowledge has improved over time and through experience. (Other professional or school role 6)*

Some participants identified training needs for specific areas, including:

- Training for specific stakeholder groups, such as Designated Teachers, Social Workers and carers;
- Supporting mental wellbeing and attachment issues for looked after children;
- Raising professionals' aspirations and expectations for looked after children;
- Supporting professionals to bridge the gap between the educational and personal needs of looked after children; and
- Training on effective interventions, and evidencing impact from interventions, including use of SMART targets.

Statutory guidance from the DfE (2018a) describes how SMART targets should be “**specific**, significant, stretching, **measurable**, meaningful, motivational, agreed, **achievable**, action-orientated, realistic, **relevant**, result-orientated, **time bound**.” (p. 17).

Two examples of how SMART targets can be implemented within PEP forms are described by [Cheshire West and Chester Virtual School](#):

- To improve reading age should become 'will be able to blend phonemes in words like string and catch'.
- To achieve a '7' in my science test should become 'to revise the topic of enzymes for my end of term science test in order to achieve a grade 7'.

According to the statutory guidance (DfE, 2018a), Virtual School Heads are expected to be responsible for supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children and

have access to appropriate sources of training. The professional stakeholders who support looked after children come from diverse professional backgrounds and the evidence from our fieldwork suggests that they have varying degrees of experience, levels of training and understanding about how PP+ can be used.

#### **4.4 Insights and recommendations**

Our findings suggest that, although the majority of the professionals reported accessing available information and advice about PP+ and were supported by formal training opportunities through their Virtual School, there were some (mainly Designated Teachers) who indicated that they did not know where to access such resources, had unmet training needs and felt they were left to 'learn on the job'.

To address this gap, the following recommendations are made for consideration:

##### **Recommendation 2**

Provide information, advice and formal training on PP+ that is accessible to, and meets the particular needs of, all professionals who play a key role in supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children.

##### **Recommendation 3**

Extend the resources available on the NAVSH website to develop a repository for:

- Policy, academic and practitioner publications that focus on supporting the education of looked after children, including the effective use of PP+; and
- Evidenced-based interventions and resources that can be funded by PP+.

## 5. How PP+ is used to support educational outcomes

The focus in this chapter is the use made of PP+ funding to support the educational outcomes for looked after children. We investigate what is done with the PP+ funds before we move to a discussion of wider issues that emerged in the fieldwork regarding allocation (administration and procedures) and measurement of impact (auditing and assessing what works) of PP+-funded interventions. Allocation and measuring impact of PP+ are covered in the next two chapters.

In this chapter, we set out the policy context for the PP+ use through a selection of extracts taken from DfE statutory guidance (DfE, 2018). Next, we explore how use of PP+ is underpinned by the transfer of the grant to and its subsequent dispersal and/or use by Virtual School Heads. Our fieldwork collected many examples of PP+-funded interventions and these are presented as illustration of how the PP+ is being used. We asked survey respondents about the factors that they felt drove decisions on PP+ spending and these are discussed below.

### 5.1 Statutory guidance on the use of PP+

The extracts below outline guidance on the use of PP+, as directed by the DfE. The funds can be spent on what are generally termed direct interventions at the school level and centrally pooled money used at the Local Authority level. It is clear that the intention is for PP+ to provide 'additionality'. That is, it should not be spent on resources that looked after children are already eligible to receive as pupils, along with their non-looked after peers.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“Both [Virtual School Heads] and schools manage their [PP+] allocation for the benefit of their cohort of looked after or previously looked after children and according to children’s needs. It is not is not a personal budget for individual children; however, both [Virtual School Heads] and schools may choose to allocate an amount of funding to an individual to support their needs” (p. 19-20).*

*Top slice: “The proportion of [PP+] funding centrally pooled by the [Virtual School Head] and used to provide support best delivered at a Local Authority-wide level – e.g. training on attachment for all Designated Teachers in the authority area” (p. 19).*

The DfE places an obligation on the Virtual School Head to ensure that all carers and professionals are kept up to date on PP+ and have opportunities for development and training, to optimise their support to the educational needs of looked after children. This may be through funding dispersed from the centrally pooled PP+ grant.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“[Virtual School Heads] ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to meet the training needs of those responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children. This may include themselves as [Virtual School Head], carers, adoptive parents, Designated Teachers, other school staff, Social Workers and [Independent Reviewing Officers]”. (p. 29)*

The statutory guidance presents case study examples of how funding may be spent on a bundle of support for looked after children. For example, this may include individual support in the classroom, educational help at home as well as training in specific skills development for the staff involved.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

Case study: How was the pupil premium used – one-to-one teaching assistant support, individual and whole school attachment and trauma training and Letterbox in the home. (p. 22)

To expand on what is appropriate use of PP+, both the guidance for Designated Teachers and that for Local Authorities identify some key characteristics of interventions, and the Virtual School Head and Designated Teacher consider these when making decisions about which interventions they anticipate will be beneficial. The DfE has not published a list of recommended actions or specific interventions for supporting educational outcomes of looked after children. Rather, the Virtual School Head and Designated Teacher are guided to use their discretion and implement bespoke support on a case-by-case basis. In the guidance for Designated Teachers, there is an explanation of how PP+ can be used and this is reproduced below.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018):**

- [Promoting the education of looked after children-and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#) (p. 21).
- [The Designated Teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance on their roles and responsibilities](#) (p. 23).

Below is a summary of positive characteristics of interventions that can be helpful when considering whether an intervention might be an effective use of PP+ to support a looked-after and previously looked-after child. Designated Teachers may also find it helpful to refer to [The Sutton-Trust EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#).

**Getting the most from [PP+]**

This table was produced by Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head for City of Wolverhampton Council

Approaches that are:

- Individually tailored to the needs and strengths of each pupil
- Consistent: based on agreed core principles and components, but also flexible and responsive
- Based on evidence of what works
- Focussed on clear short-term goals which give opportunities for pupils to experience success
- Include regular, high quality feedback from teaching staff
- Engage parents/carers in the agreement and evaluation of arrangements for education support (e.g. via the PEP)
- Supporting pupil transition (e.g. primary-secondary/KS3-4)
- Raising aspirations through access to high-quality educational experiences
- Promote the young person's awareness and understanding of their own thought process (metacognition) and help to develop problem-solving strategies
- Which emphasise:
  - Relationship-building, both with appropriate adults and with peers
  - An emotionally intelligent approach to the setting of clear behaviour boundaries
  - Increasing pupil's understanding of their own emotions and identity
  - Positive reinforcement
  - Building self-esteem
  - Relevance to the learner: relate to pupil's interests where possible - make it matter to them
- A joined-up approach involving Social Worker/carer/[Virtual School Head] and other relevant professionals

- Strong and visionary leadership on the part of both of the pupil’s head teachers
- A child centred approach to assessment for learning

## 5.2 The PP+ grant

The PP+ grant is provided by Government to every Local Authority. To gauge how much of a Local Authority’s PP+ grant is available to Virtual Schools, we asked Virtual School Head survey respondents: *What percentage of the PP+ for the looked after children you have responsibility for are you able to access?* A substantial majority of Virtual School Heads (95%, n = 60) reported that they had access to 100% of the PP+ grant received by their Local Authority. The remaining Virtual School Heads reported having access to less than 50% of their Local Authority’s PP+ grant. However, we are unable to explain this further because survey respondents did not elaborate on their responses.

Virtual School Heads are able to retain a proportion of their PP+ budget for activities provided centrally by the Virtual School. Statutory guidance from the DfE (2018a) explains how PP+ funding can be “*centrally pooled by the [Virtual School Head] and used to provide support best delivered at a Local Authority-wide level e.g. training on attachment for all Designated Teachers in the authority area.*” (p. 19).

The survey also asked Virtual School Head participants: *What percentage of the available PP+ funding do you usually allocate to support the **individual needs** of looked after children?* Sixty-one Virtual School Heads responded as follows:

- 31% Virtual School Heads reported usually allocating 100% of their budget;
- 67% Virtual School Heads usually allocated more than 50% of their budget, but not 100%; and
- Only one Virtual School Head reported that they usually allocated less than 50%.

## 5.3 How PP+ is used

The responses indicate that most Virtual School Heads retain some PP+ budget centrally to support the needs of their Local Authority’s cohort of looked after children.

Participants reported a range of uses for PP+. These resources and interventions were funded by either centrally held PP+ (at the level of the Virtual School) or at the level of individual schools. Initiatives implemented by schools were funded by either PP+ devolved directly to them by the Virtual School Head or by specific PP+ funding that schools requested through the PEP process (refer to chapter 6).

### 5.3.1 Specialist support services

Specialist services include: speech and language therapy, educational psychology and counselling/mental health services.

*[Some of our PP+] budget is used for pooled resources, such as... educational psychologists ...speech and language therapists ...mental health practitioner ...education welfare officer ...a careers advisor and we also have a primary specialist, a secondary specialist and a SENCO within the [Virtual School] team as well. So some of that funding is pooled to create targeted roles within the Virtual School, who can then go out and do interventions and work with our children. (Virtual School Head 69)*

*About 10% or so of my budget goes on a ... [Service Level Agreement] with the [regional educational psychology] service. The bulk of that is used for attachment awareness training in schools. (Virtual School Head 67)*

### 5.3.2 Training for stakeholders, particularly around emotional needs

*[What] works very, very well for our children and young people if they're having emotional health and wellbeing issues, is the ... enhanced Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) role with enhanced supervision from an educational psychologist where the ELSAs have additional training on attachment and trauma informed practice. (Virtual School Head 68)*

### 5.3.3 Additional staffing

PP+ was used to employ additional school staff to support looked after children. One school employed a care leaver as a Classroom Assistant to support looked after children:

*I thought it was great, she has employed an apprentice, a care leaver, to work as a classroom assistant ... looked after children and previously looked after children and so this person is there on a morning and she talks to them a bit and they do little sessions... (Virtual School Head 65)*

Another school employed a Higher Level Teaching Assistant, trained in attachment awareness, as a Key Worker to provide daily support for a looked after children.

*...her key worker is where we put the [PP+] funding ... somebody who is spending a few hours with her every day, given her chaotic life, for her that person is the constant... (Designated Teacher 82)*

One Virtual School Head employed a reading consultant to work with foster carers, and plans to employ a maths consultant to work in a similar way with them.

### **5.3.4 Virtual School staffing and resources**

This includes additional expenditure on electronic support devices.

*...for staffing, for our electronic platforms, for additional one to one support, for training for Designated Teachers... We've had no permanent exclusions... we've used these proactive electronic platforms to monitor attendance, so we can get in there early. ...if you're in school, you're learning, so what happens attainment will improve... (Virtual School Head 68)*

*...currently it funds our [electronic PEP] system and our attendance monitoring system. They're both funded out of [PP+] as well. ...we have some specific careers advice for our youngsters. That is pretty much the main uses of our [PP+]. (Virtual School Head 67)*

### **5.3.5 Bespoke interventions**

A Designated Teacher described using PP+ to support a looked after child's transition from school to college and adult life by funding a bespoke curriculum that included GCSE Food Technology.

*So I've got a lad who's just left Year 11 in a care home, and what we did is we completely bespoke his timetable for him. So some of his budget went definitely on this. But we made him do GCSE Food Technology, but we didn't enter him for the exam. We just wanted him to learn how to cook so that once he'd – you know, because he could be in a flat come September. (Designated Teacher 80)*

*...one-to-one tuition is ... another massive factor and a spend that our schools are using their [PP+] allocations on. (Virtual School Head 68)*

### **5.3.6 Equipment**

Participants reported on PP+ being used to buy specific resources for cohorts of looked after children including computer hardware.

*...most Year 7 get an iPad or a laptop to be able to assist with homework... and where needed printers is becoming a new thing for us, because a lot of the resource – we have an online platform for homework, but sometimes the resources need to be printed off and the kids in care don't have the printers. (Designated Teacher 80)*

One Designated Teacher was considering using PP+ to fund contact lenses for an older looked after child.

*Obviously, it won't necessarily help them get English and Maths GCSE but it might help her self-esteem, which in turn might help her develop into a more rounded person. I suppose it's how you perceive education. For us education, yes, it's about getting GCSEs but it's also about developing somebody who can be a functioning member of society and give something positive back later. It is all interlinked. (Designated Teacher 82)*

### **5.3.7 Regional events**

These included dedicated events, such as Designated Teacher conferences and celebration days for looked after children.

*... [we use PP+] for an annual [looked after children] award event, and we also use it for rewards systems, bespoke to individuals, throughout the year. For example, we would award perhaps a voucher for improved attendance for a set period of time, or if there's something unique has happened for a young person and we're told about that, we will support with a bespoke reward. (Virtual School Head 67)*

### **5.3.8 Social support**

This category captures all additional support interventions that do not necessarily have an immediate focus on educational outcomes but are considered useful as a pathway to impact. Examples given by participants included school or social clubs, celebration days and foster care support. Events were identified that developed cultural awareness or employability for looked after children, such as aspiration projects involving visits to industry/commerce and universities and activities to foster culture - “*theatre/music/art events*” (Virtual School Head 51).

*What they do is they have like a hub, which acts almost like a grandparent and then a group of carers who are all associated, who are almost like extended family, aunts and uncles. And the idea being that if a child needs ... a sleepover, and they could go to one of the family members that they know, this cluster of families who act as an extended family, or to the grandparent, the base carers. But they're all foster carers. But the idea of this kind of grandparent placement is they don't have children particularly assigned to them and they're free to have these sleepovers whenever. (Designated Teacher 81)*

### 5.3.9 Post-16 looked after children

According to the statutory guidance (DfE, 2018b), the PP+ grant is not available to support 16-18 year-olds.

The alignment of the PP+ grant to the financial year and not the school year was cited by a few Virtual School Heads as advantageous, in that it had enabled them to support some 17 year-olds entering Year 12 or college.

*...because the [PP+] money's allocated on a financial year, it kind of gives us that flexibility to support children into Year 12. (Virtual School Head 69)*

*...we employ a post-16 officer... to capture young people before they fall. [with a] remit to be proactive... and offer enhanced careers advice and guidance... to prevent NEET... (Virtual School Head 68)*

One Virtual School Head described how they had allocated PP+ funding into a separate funding pot during a pupil's year 11, to ensure it was available to support them as they transitioned into college.

*...the [PP+] that we would normally allocate to Year 11s ...what we did... is we gave our Trust, so basically the Social Workers, we gave them a pot of funding so that when children go onto college they can actually allocate that funding based on need to actually help the transition into college. So for instance if a child goes to college and they do hairdressing, they get a basic [hairdressing] kit... [if they are] doing construction, if they don't have their own boots and their own stuff ...the foster carers and Social Workers can apply into this fund and get an amount of money that means then they can go and get the boots or whatever [they need for their course]. (Virtual School Head 64)*

However, a large number of participants expressed frustration that PP+ is not available for this post-16 cohort.

*...we sometimes struggle to get PEPs from colleges because a school is really keen to have a good quality PEP because that releases the [PP+] funding or helps release the funding but a college, yes... there's less of an impetus there. (Virtual School Head 65)*

*...whilst we can still be influential over [post-16] settings and we can still challenge and we can still insist on personal education plans and we can still disseminate training, advice, guidance, not having that benefit that the pupil premium grant [for post-16 cohort] ... it's a lost opportunity. ...I don't having any [PP+] left over to award to my post-16 community. (Virtual School Head 66)*

## 5.4 Factors impacting on PP+ use

Our fieldwork interviews provided the opportunity to explore, with Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers, their views on their use of PP+. Drawing on their experience we asked them to identify what, in their opinion, was informing use of PP+. We asked participants what factors they thought were missing or not sufficiently taken into consideration when PP+ was used but, in their opinion, should be better accounted for.

As shown in Table 2 below, survey respondents indicate an awareness of what they think should be a determining factor for how PP+ is used and what factors, from their perspective, do actually drive PP+ use - and that these do not always align. The findings illuminate potential tension between listening to the voice of the looked after children and being a good 'corporate parent'.

Table 2. Views on the factors that should inform how PP+ is used compared with factors that do inform how PP+ is used

| Important Factors                                     | % Virtual School Heads (n = 61) |    | % Designated Teachers (n = 79) |    | % Other Professionals (n = 47) |    | % Total (n = 187) |    |
|---|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|----|-------------------|----|
|   | Should                          | Do | Should                         | Do | Should                         | Do | Should            | Do |
| Views of looked after children                        | 72                              | 34 | 90                             | 54 | 79                             | 30 | 81                | 42 |
| Evidence of effectiveness of PP+-funded interventions | 85                              | 44 | 53                             | 22 | 68                             | 26 | 67                | 30 |
| Cost of PP+-funded interventions                      | 7                               | 33 | 6                              | 44 | 13                             | 57 | 8                 | 44 |

A significant majority of all professionals working with looked after children expressed the opinion that the views of looked after children should be one of the most important factors taken into account when informing how PP+ is allocated. However, a markedly smaller number felt that this factor is, in practice, the most important issue when it comes down to how PP+ is used. A similar finding was also demonstrated regarding the effectiveness of PP+-funded interventions. Conversely, although finance seems to be a factor in influencing how PP+ is used, only a few participants felt that the cost of PP+-funded interventions should be an important factor in deciding how to use PP+.

The extant empirical research is part of the on-going endeavour to discover not simply what works, but also to determine what works for specific looked after children and the cost-effectiveness of the various approaches employed. The importance of the voice of the looked after children, around whom the interventions are built, remains paramount in the research process. To date, however, this endeavour remains largely unfulfilled. It should also be acknowledged that evidencing the effectiveness of interventions is likely challenging due to the vast number of social and personal variables involved in supporting the often complex needs of looked after children.

## 5.5 Insights and recommendations

Although PP+-funded interventions initiated by Virtual School Heads and Designated Teacher are many and varied, our findings indicate that many professionals want more information and guidance to inform how they use PP+ to effectively support educational outcomes for looked after children.

These insights further support consideration of recommendation 3:

### **Recommendation 3 (repeated)**

Extend the resources available on the NAVSH website to develop a repository for:

- Policy, academic and practitioner publications that focus on supporting the education of looked after children, including the effective use of PP+.
- Evidenced-based interventions and resources that can be funded by PP+.

The lack of provision of PP+ for looked after children beyond the age of 16 was raised as a concern by many participants and informs our 4<sup>th</sup> recommendation for consideration:

### **Recommendation 4**

PP+ should be extended to support educational outcomes for looked after children beyond the age of 16 years.

## **6. How PP+ is allocated**

The focus in this chapter is the allocation of PP+. This addresses the issues that emerged in the fieldwork regarding the administrative procedures for PP+. In the previous chapter, we reported on a range of PP+-funded interventions and how professional stakeholders are undertaking creative and innovative practice to support the educational achievement of looked after children. In this chapter, we identify the central procedures associated with allocating PP+ funding and present evidence from participants of some procedural tasks that they can find demanding to execute.

We set the scene with the policy context for the allocation of PP+ by listing extracts from the relevant DfE statutory guidance (2018) and the NAVSH Handbook (2018). The administration of PP+ is underpinned by the transfer of the PP+ grant to the Local Authority and its subsequent dispersal via the Virtual School. Our fieldwork identified examples of challenges faced by stakeholder professionals engaged at critical points within this process.

To generate insights into the PP+ allocation process, we asked participants about what they considered are enablers and barriers that impact on their experiences. These factors are discussed.

### **6.1 Statutory guidance on allocating PP+**

The selected extracts below outline the administration of PP+, as directed by statutory guidance from the DfE (2018). The NAVSH Handbook (2018) supplements this with additional commentary from the Virtual School perspective. The document that appears to be key to the administration of PP+ and through which the funding is mobilised, is the PEP. Much statutory guidance hinges around the PEP that is drawn up for every looked after child.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children-and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the Local Authority that looks after the child and the school. Social Workers, carers, [Virtual School Head], Designated Teachers and, as appropriate, other relevant professionals will need to work closely together.” (p. 14)*

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

*“It is the duty of the [Virtual School Head] to ensure every child has a high quality PEP and to review PEPs termly. This requires them to have a process for assessing compliance and quality at least termly.*

*A robust pupil education planning strategy that is published to schools and Social Workers can help define what makes a PEP ‘good’ in a particular Local Authority.” (p. 50)*

The statutory guidance sets out the responsibilities of the Virtual School Head, the Designated Teacher, and other professionals for devising and maintaining the PEP. The agreed PEP document is the means to obtaining PP+ funding for the interventions deemed appropriate for a looked after child. The initiation and maintenance of the PEP necessitates inputs from a multi-agency team.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children-and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

*“Once requesting the initiation of a PEP, the Virtual School will need to work with the child’s Social Worker and relevant Designated Teacher to facilitate its completion and agree how PP+ ... can most effectively be used to facilitate the child’s educational attainment and progress.” (p. 16)*

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

*“The PEP and its Review also provides a snap-shot that enables the [Virtual School Head] to keep track of educational attainment, progress and engagement with learning for every looked-after child. That tracking allows the [Virtual School Head] to monitor the impact of interventions deployed by the school and the use of the PP+, devolved to them.” (p. 43)*

**DfE statutory guidance (2018b). [The Designated Teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance on their roles and responsibilities](#)**

*“For looked-after children, [PP+] funding is managed by the Virtual School Head ... for the purpose of supporting their educational achievement. The [Virtual School Head] and schools, including the Designated Teacher, should work together to agree how this funding can most effectively be used to improve looked-after children’s attainment. All PEPs should include information about how that looked-after child is benefitting from the use of [PP+] funding to improve their attainment.” (p. 22).*

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

*“[The Virtual School Head] should have the support of social work manager in insisting that Social Workers always attend PEP meetings and take responsibility for making sure that the PEP is prepared in advance or created promptly when a child is taken into care, and then sent on to the Designated Teacher in a timely fashion. Close liaison between Social Workers, Designated Teachers and the Virtual School is essential.”(p. 47)*

The PEP is a planning tool to document the educational journey of an individual looked after child. It is also a means to account for the PP+ grant that has been spent by the Local Authority via the Virtual School Head on providing interventions to the cohort of looked after children. Specific, detailed targets that are Specific, Measurable,

Achievable, Realistic and Timebound (SMART) are stipulated for each PEP [more information about SMART targets in sections 6.2.1.1 and 7.4]. The Virtual School Head is available to support a school, via the school's Designated Teacher, to produce the PEP.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

A PEP should include:

- *“SMART short-term targets, including progress monitoring of each of the areas identified against development and educational needs;*
- *SMART longer-term plans for educational targets and aspirations;*
- *identify actions, with time scales, for specific individuals intended to support the achievement of agreed targets and use of any additional resources (e.g. the PP+) specifically designated to support the attainment of looked-after children;*
- *highlight access to effective intervention strategies and how this will make/has made a difference to achievement levels.”* (p. 17)

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

*“Taking on responsibility for writing PEPs can ensure they are of consistently high quality, while having the [Virtual School Head] rather than the Social Worker or [Designated Teacher] drive the PEP process can ensure compliance with statutory timelines.”* (p. 45).

*“The [Virtual School Head] can help a [Designated Teacher] focus on the quality of their planning by reducing the bureaucratic burden the PEP can present, particularly when a school has a significant number of [looked after children] on roll &/or where they have looked after children on roll who are in the care of different [Local Authorities], each with different PEP requirements.”* (p. 50)

The PEP contents, identified below, indicate the extent and nature of the PP+-funded support that looked after children may receive.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a). [Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)**

PEP content should include the “*support needed to help the child realise their short and long-term academic achievements and aspirations. This includes:*

- *support to achieve expected levels of progress for the relevant national curriculum key stage, and to complete an appropriate range of approved qualifications;*
- *careers advice and guidance and financial information about further and higher education, training and employment. Discussions about longer-term goals should start early and, ideally, well before Year 9 (age 13-14) at school. High aspirations are crucial to successful planning for the future. They should focus on the child or young person’s strengths and capabilities and the outcomes they want to achieve; and,*
- *out-of-school hours learning activities, study support and leisure interests.”*  
(p. 15)

## **6.2 Administrative processes for allocating PP+**

We asked participants to tell us what they considered were the most significant enablers and barriers to working effectively with PP+. They told us that one of the most important issues related to the administrative processes for allocating PP+.

The top priority for all groups of participants was having a comprehensive needs assessment for each looked after child to inform their PEP. The second priority was having a dedicated multi-agency team around the looked after child to guide effective planning and facilitate drawdown of PP+. The enabling power of this multi-agency team was particularly emphasised by the Designated Teacher respondents. This may not be surprising, given their central statutory role in supporting educational outcomes for looked after children within the school setting

We explore these two enablers in detail: i) the PEP; and ii) the multi-agency team around looked after children.

### **6.2.1 The PEP**

Effective allocation of PP+ appears to hinge on the quality of PEP created for each looked after child. As shown in the statutory guidance (see extracts), the PEP is a plan of educational targets, as agreed by the multi-agency team through their on-going collaborative discussion. PP+ is allocated for interventions identified in the PEP as

being necessary to support improvements in educational outcomes for individual looked after children. The Virtual School Head relies on the quality of a completed PEP to inform and justify PP+ expenditure. As presented in this chapter, certain challenges appear to be associated with the management of the PEP process and these are discussed below.

### **6.2.1.1 SMART targets driving the PEP**

According to statutory guidance, the PEP should focus on SMART targets (DfE, 2018b). However, our findings report that some Designated Teachers described challenges in identifying these SMART targets.

*SMART targets require too much time to prepare.* (Designated Teacher 32)

*It can be frustrating when... funding for an intervention/resource which the school and parents feel is important for the child's needs [is not available], often because the target has not been worded in a way that is deemed to be a 'SMART' target.* (Designated Teacher 30)

Clarity regarding what are deemed to be sufficiently SMART targets and acceptable ways to present them in the PEP, would help some Designated Teachers optimise their support to looked after children.

### **6.2.1.2 A flexible PEP format**

For some Virtual School Heads, the opportunity to have a degree of flexibility regarding the allocation of PP+ was beneficial for meeting their responsibilities.

*As [Virtual School Head] I have the opportunity to take full responsibility for the [PP+] spend ... This allows me to effectively use the [PP+] in line with strategic and operational needs supporting additional staffing, targeted support for pupils, additional support for pupils in line with need, CPD for all stakeholders and resources where appropriate.* (Virtual School Head 57)

Our findings suggest that many Virtual School Heads welcome the flexibility accorded to PEP administration within their Local Authority because it enables them to develop a bespoke PEP that meets their local needs.

*....we've created our own PEP* (Virtual School Head 65).

One Designated Teacher reported that because completing the PEP could be “quite onerous” they had redesigned their PEP to minimise the paperwork burden (Designated Teacher 81).

A potentially negative aspect of this flexibility with PEPs appears to be the lack of consistency in how statutory guidance is interpreted, as described by these Designated Teachers during a paired dialogue session:

*I don't think [there is] official guidance [for the PEP]... (Designated Teacher 80)*

*The [Local Authority] chooses the key information [for the PEP]. (Designated Teacher 81)*

### **6.2.1.3 Looked after children moving between different Local Authorities**

Some Designated Teachers indicated that they found it problematic when they had to work with different PEPs from different Local Authorities, describing specific challenges in understanding the different PEP criteria that they had to meet in order to secure PP+ funding.

*...you've got children coming in with all kinds of different platforms of how to record a PEP and the funding works differently and the support works differently, it's a pain. (Designated Teacher 80)*

*There's a whole range of arrangements which is really good for Virtual Schools because you can think each financial year - is my arrangement right for the cohort, for the priorities, for what's coming out of the data and what I know about the cohort's needs. From the school's point of view though you now have a school with ... it could be five/ten other Local Authorities' children in their school and it's a nightmare for them... (Virtual School Head 63)*

Although Virtual School Heads appreciated the flexibility that they had to develop their own PEPs to meet the specific needs of the looked after children cohorts within their Local Authority, a range of survey participants from across professional roles, voiced concerns about the problems encountered when having to work with different PEP administrations.

*Out of county children rarely get to access the support of their designated county and are unable to access the support from the county in which they go to school -as they are out of county - ridiculous - a [looked after child] is [a looked after child] and it shouldn't matter if they are in or out of county, they should be able to access both services for support. It should be the child that matters not their original circumstances or the county they were placed into care in... (Designated Teacher 40)*

*[We need Local Authorities] to use the same system to allocate funds so schools cannot use the excuse that they don't understand local systems to access funds. (Virtual School Head 27)*

*No uniformity ... every [Local Authority] is different. I work in a secure unit and take [young people] from across the UK. [It is] a nightmare with all different expectations (Designated Teacher 32)*

*[We need] Nationwide agreements to the funding allocation - not each authority operating differently. (Local Authority officer/advisor 2)*

*[We need a] Nationally standardised PEP process which links [PP+] to educational outcomes. (Virtual School Head 27)*

#### **6.2.1.4 Academic versus financial year compliance**

Unspent PP+ funding is usually allocated in the closing months of the financial year. A few participants suggested that last minute PP+ spend might not be the most appropriate use of the grant for meeting the needs of looked after children.

*And I think that's why traditionally a lot of Virtual Schools just buy something in the sort of February time. ... And that's where [intervention 1] come in with some authorities because they've found that they've had a pot of [PP+] money that they haven't spent... that happened with us and they bought into [intervention 2] which we just never used, it wasn't suitable ... (Virtual School Head 64)*

#### **6.2.1.5 PEP completion for post-16 looked after children**

A completed PEP is a statutory requirement for all looked after children until the age of 18. However, the PP+ grant does not extend to post-16 year olds and, likely resulting from this, PEP completion rates for this particularly vulnerable cohort are low.

*...we sometimes struggle to get PEPs from colleges... a school is really keen to have a good quality PEP because that releases the [PP+] funding... but a college... there's a less of an impetus there. (Virtual School Head 65)*

It could be argued that this vulnerable cohort, who often have to cope with many transitional layers on reaching 16 years, are being let down by a system that fails to provide PP+ to support post-16 educational outcomes. Some participants suggested that the lack of PP+ funding for this cohort is linked to low levels of completion of PEPs for this age group.

*...I think there was a post-16 [PP+] then that would improve PEP completion, and I think it would improve outcomes for 17, 18 year olds. (Virtual School Head 69)*

## **6.2.2 Multi-agency team around looked after children**

The second factor that the participants described as an enabler for effective allocation of PP+, is the multi-agency team convened to support the looked after child and manage their PEP. Social Workers are usually tasked with initiating the PEP and the Designated Teacher then takes over responsibility for managing the process in their school, with support from members of the multi-agency team. The completed PEP, listing agreed interventions, allows the Designated Teacher to request PP+ to fund these interventions.

*The PEP [review meeting] which includes the Social Worker, carers, pastoral manager, the young person and Designated Teacher is a really useful forum for considering how best to help the young person. We decide together on what our priorities are, based on all the evidence including the wishes, thoughts and feelings of the child. The funding enables us to target specific support and intervention, which change according to success and challenges that occur. (Designated Teacher 14)*

### **6.2.2.1 Shared understanding of PP+**

As mentioned above, the rigorous administration of the statutory PEP record is central to the allocation of PP+. However, there appear to be gaps in understanding the purpose of PP+ amongst some stakeholder professionals. Notably, that the principle of 'additionality' is not fully understood i.e. spending "...above and beyond what every young person is entitled to." (Virtual School Head 65).

*For me (PP+) is additional funding above and beyond what every young person is entitled to so we would work hard with schools to say you want to spend PP+ on this, what would you do if the child wasn't looked after, where would the money come from, so it's to make it above and beyond. (Virtual School Head 65)*

*...[It is important that] Finance Services within Local Authorities do not assume that the funding can be used for anything other than direct support for [looked after children], the interpretation of what [PP+] can be used for and diversion of funds to other functions risks diluting its impact. (Virtual School Head 6)*

### **6.2.2.2 Managing multi-agency collaboration**

Regular PEP review meetings are held and are pivotal to the multi-agency approach to ensure appropriate planning to meet the specific needs of a looked after child. Although

the Designated Teacher does not always have to chair these meetings, their role is crucial to facilitating the collaborative process that leads to the effective allocation of PP+. These multi-agency meetings are the site of joint planning around the PEP and are where the administrative process is set in motion.

*...The real skill is ensuring the PEP meeting is really focussed and includes a review of how the child is in school. A good [Designated Teacher] is invaluable. (Virtual School Head 47)*

*...I find the regular (3 x a year) PEPs incredibly useful and supportive and value the diverse input into decision making. (Designated Teacher 14)*

*If an effective multi agency team is in place, then the holistic needs of ... [individual looked after children] can be considered at the PEP meeting and there will be a close match to the individual needs of the [pupil]. There will also be close monitoring of the impact from all professionals involved in the life of the ... pupil. (Virtual School Head 56)*

Our fieldwork generated many positive accounts of how this collaborative, multi-agency approach was working effectively to support education outcomes for looked after children. However, reports of breakdown in teamwork were not uncommon and participants cited a number of factors, which we present below.

*Where [there is] inadequate consultation between professionals and emergency decisions are made, the [looked after child] is the victim. (Designated Teacher 24)*

### **6.2.2.2.1 Scheduling**

The daily workload pressures on professional stakeholders appeared to be a barrier when trying to schedule multi-agency team meetings.

*We find that some PEP meetings are convened by someone other than the [Designated Teacher] and often the Social Worker Assistant attends and it is not cost effective to send someone from the Virtual School. It can be difficult to get the right people around the table and decisions are made and then may be overturned as those with decision-making powers are not present and actions have to be authorised outside of the meeting. (Virtual School Head 50)*

*It is always so very difficult to get professionals other than school to commit to meetings or take some responsibility for helping to gather a comprehensive assessment/ picture of an individual's needs. (Designated Teacher 6)*

*I held a PEP recently and no Social Worker attended. The [looked after child] felt this showed a general lack of support for his well-being. As much as we as a school want to reinforce the message that the pupil is at the centre of all we do, it is very difficult to demonstrate this in such circumstances. Lack of a Social Worker also means that there is no other professional from the care team in place to challenge how funding is used. (Other professional or school role 3)*

#### **6.2.2.2.2 PEP records**

Both hardcopy and electronic PEPS are used for planning, tracking and sharing information between multi-agency stakeholders.

Although the value of using the PEP as a record to track what works was highlighted as a useful resource for future planning cycles, one Virtual School Head suggested that this function was not always employed.

*[We need] a way of tracking what interventions have been used for individual pupils over the years, so you can use the evidence to see what approaches have made the most difference and therefore what may be useful to return to, when things become difficult. I don't believe that PEPs are fulfilling the [historical] aspect well enough. (Virtual School Head 61)*

Another Virtual School Head indicated that not all members of the multi-agency team had access to all the PEP records and that this was problematic when attempting to make fully informed decisions regarding appropriate interventions.

*...our team have access to [electronic PEP system] but not all parts of it, the council didn't buy the modules for the PEPs but we need a system that everybody can look at, that schools can look at and do something that Social Workers can and so can the Virtual School team. (Virtual School Head 65)*

#### **6.2.2.2.3 Turnover – staff and looked after children**

High levels of staff turnover and high levels of mobility amongst looked after children can both impact negatively on continuity and collaboration.

*If the [Designated Teacher] doesn't know the child well, if the [looked after child] has had multiple placement moves or education moves, then effective multi agency working is unlikely. (Virtual School Head 56)*

*...teams around a child frequently change due to staffing / absence of staffing, so little continuity is kept for [looked after children] between PEP / [looked after child] meetings and as a result the communication can be lacking and in some cases non-existent without Designated Teachers chasing Social Workers and*

*Virtual School to pin down dates for meeting and / or re-arrange meeting when no representative has turned up. ... (Designated Teacher 40)*

### **6.3 Insights and recommendation**

This chapter emphasised how the effective allocation of PP+ centres on:

1. An informed PEP which is tailored to the needs of the looked after child.
2. Multi-agency team collaboration to inform and support educational outcomes.

However, the findings provide insights into specific challenges faced by some professionals involved in supporting looked after children. These include difficulties in managing the PEP process, especially for those Designated Teachers who have to work with PEPs from more than one Local Authority. Additional challenges arise when trying to manage the practicalities of multi-agency team meetings, notably ensuring attendance from all the key professionals involved. These insights inform our fifth recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 5**

Increase opportunities for networking within and between professional stakeholder groups, to share good practice.

## 7. Measuring the impact of PP+

This chapter focuses on measuring and evidencing the impact of PP+-funded interventions and resources. We investigate what professional stakeholders understand about impact on educational outcomes for looked after children, and the types of measures they employ to evidence impact. We identify some key challenges related to evidencing (measuring) impact that may present as barriers to the effective use of PP+ to improve educational outcomes for looked after children.

We present relevant extracts from the statutory guidance that aim to support stakeholder professionals in their endeavours to evidence impact from PP+-funded interventions.

### 7.1 Statutory guidance on measuring the impact of PP+

Key policy extracts outline the responsibilities for measuring the impact of PP+. Existing policy guidance appears to be flexible in regards to how professional stakeholders can deliver on this. Reference is made to employing quantitative and to a lesser extent, qualitative indicators of impacts achieved from using PP+.

**Gov.uk (2015).** [Pupil Premium: Virtual School Heads' responsibilities](#)

*"[Virtual School Heads must] be able to demonstrate how the pupil premium ... funding you are managing is raising the achievement of your looked-after children."*

The overall policy ambition regarding PP+ termed 'closing the gap' in educational achievement between looked after children and non-looked after children, is clearly stated.

**DfE statutory guidance (2018a).** [Promoting the education of looked after children-and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

PP+ funding is "*provided to help improve the attainment of looked-after children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers.*" (p. 19)

Commentary on the statutory guidance is provided by NAVSH (2018). This describes the measurements that can be used to gauge impact: both quantitative and qualitative measurements are referenced.

**NAVSH (2018). [NAVSH Virtual School Handbook](#)**

*“Inspectors (and line managers) will be most interested in the impact of the [Virtual School Head] on quantitative measures of attainment, progress, attendance, exclusion and emotional health. Qualitative measures should therefore be used with caution as measures of [Virtual School Head] effectiveness.” (p. 31)*

*“Qualitative measures could include:*

- Designated Teacher understanding of the needs of, and best educational practice in relation to, looked after children*
- Demonstrable Head Teacher & School Governor support for their school’s Designated Teacher that empowers them to implement best practice*
- Understanding of, and support in, implementing that best practice from all children service professionals*
- Multi-agency collaboration in delivery of services to [looked after children] which is pro-active, outcome focussed, and avoids duplication*
- Parent/carer confidence and involvement with education*
- Greater ambition and support across the corporate parent body, including by elected members, for looked after children and young people in the care of their Local Authority” (p. 31)*

However, there is strong emphasis placed on quantitative evidence, as highlighted below.

**DfE (2019). [Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2018](#)**

Outcome measures included in this report were quantitative recordings of educational attainment, educational progress, absenteeism, and rate of permanent and fixed term exclusions.

## **7.2 Impact measures**

We asked survey participants two connected questions regarding measuring the impact of PP+. First, we asked them to indicate how they felt impact from PP+-funded interventions was usually measured (Table 3). Secondly, we asked about which measures they considered to be most effective at evidencing impact (Table 4).

Table 3: Measures typically used to evidence impact of PP+-funded interventions

| <b>Measure</b>   | <b>% Virtual School Heads<br/>(n = 61)</b> | <b>% Designated Teachers<br/>(n = 79)</b> | <b>% Other Professionals<br/>(n = 47)</b> | <b>% Total<br/>(n = 187)</b> |
|--|--|---|---|------------------------------|
| Educational progress data  | 92   | 87  | 79  | 87                           |
| Educational attainment data  | 89   | 81  | 72  | 81                           |
| Behaviour in school data   | 75   | 75  | 66  | 73                           |
| Attendance in school data  | 79   | 62  | 62  | 67                           |
| Mental health/emotional well-being outcomes                          | 62   | 67  | 55  | 63                           |
| Feedback from looked after children                                  | 61   | 66  | 51  | 60                           |
| Feedback from Designated Teachers                                    | 85   | 58  | 53  | 66                           |
| Feedback from parents/guardians                                      | 48   | 63  | 51  | 55                           |
| Feedback from other professionals working with looked after children | 51   | 51  | 43  | 49                           |
| Peer/social support outcomes   | 43   | 30  | 38  | 36                           |

Participants across all groups of professional stakeholders identified educational progress and attainment as the top two measures that are usually used to evidence impact of PP+-funded interventions. Virtual School Heads also rated 'feedback from Designated Teachers' as one of the top measures that they often used for evidencing impact.

Table 4: Measures considered most effective for evidencing impact of PP+-funded interventions

| Measure                                     | % Virtual School Heads (n = 61) | % Designated Teachers (n = 79) | % Other Professionals (n = 47) | % Total (n = 187) |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Educational progress data                   | 89                              | 84                             | 85                             | 86                |
| Educational attainment data                 | 49                              | 28                             | 36                             | 37                |
| Behaviour in school data                    | 46                              | 48                             | 45                             | 47                |
| Attendance in school data                   | 48                              | 34                             | 25                             | 36                |
| Mental health/emotional well-being outcomes | 43                              | 71                             | 64                             | 60                |
| Feedback from looked after children         | 43                              | 65                             | 53                             | 55                |
| Feedback from Designated Teachers           | 46                              | 13                             | 26                             | 27                |

All stakeholder professionals considered educational progress to be one of the most effective measures of impact. However, some differences emerged between the professional groups regarding the other measures of success that they considered most effective for evidencing impact of PP+-funded interventions. Most notably, Designated Teachers rated 'mental health/emotional wellbeing' almost as highly as 'educational progress', suggesting that Designated Teachers may value a more holistic approach to measuring impact of PP+-funded interventions beyond the more conventional data e.g. attainment and progression, collected by schools.

### 7.3 The journey to improved attainment

Findings from paired dialogues and interviews advocated use of other measures of success for evidencing the impact of PP+-funded interventions besides the conventional data (attainment, progress).

*...there might be softer outcomes that we know might be on the pathway to improving attainment. So for example... somebody's attendance might be really poor and we know that if we can get their attendance up closer to 100 percent then a knock-on effect, we would suspect, will be that their attainment will improve down the road... therapeutic interventions and also ... extracurricular*

*activities probably have more of an impact for looked after children than they might do for other children. (Virtual School Head 69)*

*You're measured on your attainment at Key Stage 2 and attainment at Key Stage 4, and it's not the right measures. ... We might know that the child ... [is] not getting excluded because the school has other strategies, but at the end of the day, if they don't get a grade 5, it's seen as you haven't had an impact... (Virtual School Head 67)*

Participants reported that evidencing progress on the journey towards improved educational attainment should take into account factors such as social and emotional wellbeing. However, this is not directly nor adequately evidenced in data that is currently collected by schools.

*...there is a challenge around what we mean by success for a young person and [it can] be quite narrow. (Virtual School Head 66)*

*... there's an enormous correlation between an SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) score and a Progress 8 score at the end of Key Stage 4... So that's given us some confidence as a Virtual School to support interventions which do address mental health and wellbeing and improve self-esteem because we can see directly that's going to have an impact on that young person's attainment just from past analysis. (Virtual School Head 66).*

*It would be useful to have suggestions of how to measure more qualitative progress. It can be difficult sometimes to evidence when progress in relation to emotional and mental wellbeing has been made. There is often a lot of focus on school grades and it's a shame when there is a perception that a child hasn't made progress because their school grades haven't improved, when actually they have made a lot of progress with their emotional wellbeing and mental health - which is often the area that these children require the most support in. (Designated Teacher 53)*

*With some [looked after children], their educational attainment may always be below Nationally Expected Standards even with a lot of additional educational intervention and support. Sometimes, it would be better to spend [PP+] funding on things that actually develop a child's other talents or boost their social and emotional development such as sport, music drama etc. and the impact of this is hard to measure numerically - support with how to evidence this effectively would be beneficial. (Designated Teacher 45)*

## 7.4 SMART targets

Virtual School Heads expressed the importance of using SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) targets in the PEP to act as drivers for improvements in educational outcomes for looked after children.

*In terms of [PP+] measurement I genuinely think that the only way you can measure is to look at the PEPs really in terms of individuals and see what was needed, what you've spent it on and what the outcomes were... (Virtual School Head 65)*

*If a [young person] does not have a clear and comprehensive assessment of their needs then it is difficult to identify how [PP+] could be allocated to support them educationally. SMART targets with costed interventions that are evidence based are the best way to ensure effective allocation that makes a difference to children's outcomes. (Virtual School Head 27)*

Many participants suggest that these SMART targets can and should include both conventional and other measures of success including social and emotional wellbeing. Both could be used to evidence the educational journey of looked after children towards improvements in progress and attainment as well as in 'closing the gap'.

*From the PEP, a target is set and we are very clear that they have to be SMART targets, so it's not to learn the ten times tables. ... It could be increased confidence in lessons and we might then suggest perhaps you could use a Boxall profile, perhaps you could use a teacher survey. There may be increased evidence of task completion through book scrutiny. Increased academic profile at the next data drop. So, we're always very clear about what is the measurement going to be. (Virtual School Head 68)*

*You're measured on your attainment at Key Stage 2 and attainment at Key Stage 4, and it's not the right measures. Until we change the way we're measured, you're always looking at PP+, is it impacting on the child's data. We might know that the child ... [is] not getting excluded because the school has other strategies, but at the end of the day, if they don't get a grade 5, it's seen as you haven't had an impact, have you? (Virtual School Head 67)*

*The measures we use constrain us because people are interested in how many permanent exclusions we've prevented, but that's not something that ... you can't say I've prevented ten exclusions this year, even though we might have done because unless they went on to get a grade 5, it doesn't count. (Virtual School Head 67)*

Our findings suggest that the appropriate use of SMART targets is important for drawing down PP+ funding for interventions that drive the improvements in educational outcomes for looked after children. However, many participants from across the stakeholder professional roles identified a need for more guidance and training to ensure that SMART targets are understood, appropriate and used effectively within PEPs.

*[We need an] understanding how to write effective SMART targets and measuring impact (Virtual School Head 31)*

*[We need] best practice on measuring impact [and] evidence of typical impact when an intervention is used (it would help make a comparison with individual cases). Evidence of ineffective interventions - and what makes them so. (Other professional or school role 7)*

## **7.5 Evidenced-based interventions**

Participants indicated a need for access to exemplar, evidenced-based PP+-funded interventions. Some referred to the need for a 'toolkit', specifically identifying a need for:

*...more research within effective use and impact - more cross county/country information and a database of research. (Head Teacher 2)*

*Research based intervention strategies. Too many school[s] are left to their own devices to decide how they see fit and sometimes this gets swept up in staffing. But if they were given a menu of research-based interventions, they can apply that to specific pupils in their school dependent on need. Which can then be discussed effectively at PEPs. (Designated Teacher 15)*

*...a comprehensive list of evidenced based interventions in terms of support broken down into Key Stages. If this could be regionalised this would be even better. (Virtual School Head 10)*

*An agreed strategy / guideline document to outline best use of funding (bank of tools etc.) (Virtual School Head 8)*

*A 'toolkit' to share of best practice as identified by professionals working with [looked after children] and underpinned by evidence based research. (Virtual School Head 20)*

*A [PP+] looked after child toolkit like the EEF toolkit (Virtual School Head 1)*

## 7.6 Benchmarking

Several professionals reported that, to effectively monitor and improve educational outcomes, there is a need to benchmark the education-related outcomes for looked after children at the point at which they enter the care system. Some suggested that the first PEP, undertaken at the point of entering the care system, should be employed as this benchmarking tool.

*[We need] a starting position analysis that outlines the needs of the child (Virtual School Head 2)*

*If you can't benchmark you can't measure progress and there is no benchmarking. ... What you need is some sort of national data collection system which is derived from direct contact with schools rather than school census data that's the only way you could do it therefore you could establish looked after measures at a certain point on attendance, exclusion, progress, whatever you wanted really because you've collected it directly from schools and then you could measure progress. That's never happened so the data's not reliable. (Virtual School Head 62)*

Benchmarking is potentially an onerous task when collecting and managing data both at the individual case level and for cohorts of looked after children, although it is a key first step for gauging the progress made by looked after children from the point that they enter the care system, and important for audit purposes.

## 7.7 Electronic PEP

An individual looked after child's educational journey is likely to be fragmented, crossing Local Authority boundaries and involving many agencies. One approach that may offer a way forward through this 'messiness' is the online or electronic PEP. Several participants suggested that the electronic PEP system offers a less time consuming and more efficient resource for collating and analysing data than conventional paper based PEPs.

*The difficulty is looking at bigger cohort data. It would be a lot more difficult for example, you know, if we want to say, "What makes an impact for Year 8 student?" We'd perhaps have 40 students in Year 8 and we'd have to print out all of their PEPs and look at whether things have made an impact. So at the moment a gap for us is that we just don't have the tool to pull that information together. And my business support officer is amazing and probably she'll spend a lot of August doing just that, just reading through people's PEPs ... what she did for me last year was she categorised all of the interventions to therapeutic interventions, teaching support, equipment, extracurricular activities, so she categorised all of the different types of interventions and then she looked at yes,*

*no or partial, whether those things helped children to meet the outcomes that were identified. So she could say, for example, 57 percent of children who accessed therapeutic interventions met the outcome identified within their PEP. But it's a very onerous task. So obviously, if we had an electronic PEP that report could probably be pulled off in ten minutes, whereas it probably takes her a week to look through the PEPs and make that decision. (Virtual School Head 69)*

*On the [electronic PEP] system, the PEP is like a live document almost. It's a live document which all the Social Worker, the carer, whatever, input their information. My advisor comes along, checks it through and provides feedback to the Designated Teacher. Sometimes the feedback is just, yep, great, this is really informative. Sometimes it might be, hang on, I can see that English is falling. Why are your interventions in Maths? ... They're able to keep track of the PEPs every term, and track progress and attainment through the PEP system. That's how we keep an eye on what's going on. (Virtual School Head 67)*

An online PEP can facilitate multi-agency collaboration when it is employed in a bespoke manner:

*We can personalise that system, so there are certain features of the system that you inherit, but there is lots of it that you mess around and you can tailor to different year groups and to suit your needs. We have an online PEP and the carers have access, Social Workers, Designated Teacher in school, and anyone else in school that may need [it] ... There's a section on there for the young person's view... (Virtual School Head 67)*

Participants were aware that the adoption of electronic PEPs for the Virtual School needs to be undertaken with care, as there can be complications regarding issues such as systems compatibility and accessibility across agencies. They indicated that caution is needed when buying 'off the shelf' online PEPs.

*I have a few concerns with the [electronic PEP]. When we took on the [electronic PEP] it was in 2015. They were about the only provider that were there. There are more providers on the market now. ... Long term, it would be ideal if we could generate our own PEP within the social care systems, or currently, social care and education have completely different systems, which again, something the Local Authority is looking at, but it takes time. (Virtual School Head 67)*

## **7.8 'Additionality' versus 'plugging a budget gap'**

Many participants were clear that PP+ funding should be used for 'additionality': for the "...above and beyond what every young person is entitled to." (Virtual School Head 65).

*...there's a duty upon me and my team to ensure that what it is used on it gains the maximum use and that's very dependent on the individual child's learning needs, the context of their life as a whole. ... the funding cannot be used for something that a child is already eligible for... [that] element of 'additionality' and that it doesn't replace or substitute something that a young person is already eligible for... (Virtual School Head 66)*

In the opinion of some participants, the apparent paucity of evidence to show that PP+ is narrowing the attainment gap is due, to a large extent, to the fact that funding is not being used exclusively for the purpose of 'additionality' but instead is being used to plug gaps in both education and social care budgets.

*I'm very conscious that I can sometimes be funding something that really and truly a young person should be entitled to ordinarily, and not really providing additionality ... [but I'm] providing something that's quicker, it's more efficient, it prevents a placement breakdown, because if we waited for the system to bring this in under the ordinary processes and procedures it would be too late... (Virtual School Head 66).*

*It's about making sure that we're using that budget to create additionality, and I guess my concern with that is that as school budgets are squeezed and social care budgets are squeezed, Virtual Schools are being asked to fund things that perhaps would have been funded by schools or by social care in the past. (Virtual School Head 69)*

## **7.9 Impact on exclusion rates**

The PP+ grant was introduced to 'narrow the gap' in attainment between looked after children and their non-looked after peers. National data (DfE, 2019) demonstrates that a key impact of PP+ has been the reduction in exclusion rates for looked after children. Comments from the participants support this evidence from the DfE

*...one of the most significant impact measures is around permanent exclusion. ...by 2017, you were no more likely to be permanently excluded as a looked after child than any of your peers, which I think is – for me, that's the biggest piece of evidence of the impact of [PP+]. (Virtual School Head 69)*

*Three years in a row we had a ... reduction in the number of exclusions. (Virtual School Head 67)*

## **7.10 Insights and recommendations**

Our findings indicate that evidencing impact of PP+-funded interventions was typically achieved using conventional measures of education success i.e. attainment and

achievement and increasingly, exclusion rates were also being used. However, many participants expressed the concern that this risked undermining successes that looked after children make in other areas, such as readiness to learn or social and emotional development.

The findings suggest that education-related outcomes for looked after children would be improved by:

- Developing an evidence base of ‘what works’ for this specific cohort;
- Providing information, advice and guidance on how to evidence the impact of PP+-funded interventions; and
- Benchmarking education-related data at the point the child enters the care system.

These insights inform the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1 (repeated)**

Identify evidenced-based interventions that improve education-related outcomes for looked after children, through further research.

**Recommendation 3 (repeated)**

Extend the resources available on the NAVSH website to develop a repository for:

- Policy, academic and practitioner publications that focus on supporting the education of looked after children, including the effective use of PP+; and
- Evidenced-based interventions and resources that can be funded by PP+.

**Recommendation 5 (repeated)**

Increase opportunities for networking within and between professional stakeholder groups, to share good practice.

**Recommendation 6**

Benchmark conventional measures (e.g. attainment, progress and attendance) and other measures of education-related success (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing, attitude) at the point of entering the care system, using a more bespoke 'first PEP'.

## 8. Summary of recommendations and areas for further research

### **Recommendation 1**

Identify evidenced-based interventions that improve education-related outcomes for looked after children, through further research.

### **Recommendation 2**

Provide information, advice and formal training on PP+ that is accessible to, and meets the particular needs of, all professionals who play a key role in supporting the educational outcomes of looked after children.

### **Recommendation 3**

Extend the resources available on the NAVSH website to develop a repository for:

- Policy, academic and practitioner publications that focus on supporting the education of looked after children, including the effective use of PP+; and
- Evidenced-based interventions and resources that can be funded by PP+.

### **Recommendation 4**

Extend PP+ funding to support the educational outcomes for looked after children beyond the age of 16 years.

### **Recommendation 5**

Increase opportunities for networking within and between professional stakeholder groups, to share good practice.

### **Recommendation 6**

Benchmark conventional measures (e.g. attainment, progress and attendance) and other measures of education-related success (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing, attitude) at the point of entering the care system, using a more bespoke 'first PEP'.

## **8.1 Areas for further research**

The findings from this project suggest that the following areas that would benefit from further research:

### **8.1.1 Impact and role of the PEP in supporting improved educational outcomes for looked after children**

This research has demonstrated how a quality PEP plays a pivotal role in the allocation of PP+. It was beyond the remit of this project to demonstrate whether the PEP document has led to improved educational outcomes for looked after children. It may be argued that other factors such as a cohesive multi-agency team focused around looked after children, organised and tailored PEP meetings, or a streamlined funding process, may be shaping positive outcomes. We recommend that further research seeks to unpack the nature and extent of the role played by the PEP documentation in influencing educational outcomes for looked after children.

### **8.1.2 How PP+ is used: ‘Additionality’ versus ‘plugging a gap’ in education and social care budgets**

Some participants in this research were concerned that rather than PP+ being used to support additionality for looked after children, the funding was instead being used to close existing budget gaps in education and social care. This feedback is concerning, as it suggests that PP+ may not be being used in ways that ensure that looked after children are effectively supported. Our research did not explore how allocated PP+ was spent beyond the example interventions that were shared with us by participants. It is important therefore, that additional research be conducted to investigate how Local Authorities are spending allocated PP+ funding.

### **8.1.3 How looked after children experience PP+-funded interventions**

The participants involved in this research were all professionals with experience of supporting PP+ and/or the educational outcomes of looked children. A key limitation of this work is that we have not examined the personal or lived experiences of looked after children, or their parents, carers and guardians. In order to understand whether, and if so, how PP+ has supported the educational outcomes of looked after children, it is important to engage with the children and young people who access PP+-funded interventions, their parents and carers.

### **8.1.4 The educational-related needs of post-16 looked after children**

Participants in this project have indicated that post-16 looked after children can have unmet education-related needs due to their ineligibility for PP+ funding. Referring back

to the scoping literature review in chapter 3, we reported that this cohort have to navigate significant educational and life challenges (Driscoll, 2013). It is important that further research explores the impact of any unmet needs of post-16 looked after children who are in post-16 education.

### **8.1.5 What 'impact' means to the different stakeholders involved in supporting educational outcomes for looked after children**

Many participants expressed concern that PP+ impact was evidenced using conventional measures of educational success (i.e. attainment and achievement) and that this risks undermining successes that looked after children make in other key areas such as readiness to learn and emotional development.

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