Children in Care Policy

Approved by:	Lauren Meston	Date: 01/09/2026
Last reviewed on:	01/09/2026	
Next review due by:	31/08/2027	

Introduction:

Future Pathways is committed to promoting the safety, educational progress, wellbeing and aspirations of children in care and previously looked-after children. We recognise that care-experienced young people may have experienced disruption, loss, trauma, changes of placement or school, interrupted learning and additional barriers to attendance and achievement. These experiences must never lead to lower expectations.

As an alternative provision, Future Pathways may support young people who remain on the roll of a commissioning school, are placed by a local authority, or are educated through another referral arrangement. Effective support therefore depends on close and timely partnership with the young person, carers, social workers, the commissioning school, the relevant Virtual School Head and other professionals.

This policy sets out how Future Pathways will identify, safeguard and support children in care, contribute to Personal Education Plans, promote attendance and progress, share information appropriately, and maintain ambitious expectations for each young person.

Aims of this policy:

- promote high aspirations, educational achievement, attendance, wellbeing and stability for children in care and previously looked-after children
- ensure that care status is recognised as a potential indicator of vulnerability without defining a young person by their care experience
- provide consistent, relational and trauma-aware support within Future Pathways
- ensure relevant information is obtained promptly at referral and shared safely with staff who need it
- contribute effectively to Personal Education Plans (PEPs), reviews and multi-agency planning
- work closely with commissioning schools, social workers, carers, Virtual School Heads and local authorities
- identify and remove barriers to learning, qualifications, attendance, enrichment and progression
- reduce avoidable disruption to education and support stable placements and successful transitions
- ensure safeguarding concerns are recognised and acted on without delay
- listen to the young person and ensure their wishes, feelings, strengths and aspirations inform planning

Terminology and scope:

For the purpose of this policy, a child in care (also referred to in legislation and national guidance as a looked-after child) is a child who is in the care of, or provided with accommodation by, a local authority under the Children Act 1989. The responsible local authority is sometimes different from the authority in which the child is currently living or being educated.

A previously looked-after child is a child who is no longer looked after because they became subject to an adoption order, special guardianship order or qualifying child arrangements order, or who has been adopted from state care outside England and Wales where the relevant criteria are met.

Future Pathways also recognises that children with a social worker, children in kinship care and care leavers may face overlapping educational and safeguarding barriers. Where relevant, staff will apply the same principles of high expectations, inclusion, information sharing and coordinated support, while recognising that the statutory arrangements may differ.

This policy applies to all young people attending Future Pathways who are in care or previously looked after, and to all staff, tutors, instructors, agency staff, volunteers and partner-provider staff who have responsibility for their education, supervision or support.

Legal and guidance framework:

This policy has been developed with regard to current legislation and national guidance, including:

- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008, including duties relating to designated staff for looked-after and previously looked-after children
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Academies Act 2010, where applicable
- Department for Education: The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children - statutory guidance
- Department for Education: Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children - statutory guidance
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (in force from 1 September 2026)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
- Working Together to Improve School Attendance, updated July 2026
- Department for Education: Alternative provision - statutory guidance, updated February 2025
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement, updated July 2026
- Pupil Premium conditions of grant and Virtual School Head responsibilities for looked-after children
- Equality Act 2010, SEND Code of Practice and relevant data-protection legislation

Future Pathways will also follow the procedures of the responsible local authority, Virtual School and commissioning school where these apply to an individual placement.

Status of Future Pathways and the Designated Teacher duty:

The statutory duty to appoint a Designated Teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children applies to maintained schools and academies in accordance with the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, the Academies Act 2010 and associated statutory guidance. The exact legal duty that applies to Future Pathways depends on the legal status and registration of the provision and the registration status of the individual young person.

Where a young person remains on the roll of a commissioning school, that school's statutory Designated Teacher remains responsible for the school-level duties attached to that role. Future Pathways will work closely with that Designated Teacher and will provide timely information for PEPs, attendance, progress, safeguarding, behaviour, SEND and transition planning.

Where Future Pathways itself is legally required to appoint a statutory Designated Teacher, the proprietor or relevant governance body will ensure that a suitably qualified and appropriately senior member of staff is formally appointed in accordance with the regulations. Nothing in this policy should be read as transferring a statutory Designated Teacher duty from a commissioning school or local authority unless the law and placement arrangements provide for this.

Key roles and responsibilities:

Lauren Meston - Managing Director and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

Lauren Meston has overall organisational responsibility for ensuring that children in care attending Future Pathways are appropriately safeguarded and that the provision works effectively with commissioning schools, social workers, carers and Virtual Schools. The DSL will ensure that safeguarding information relevant to a child in care is understood, securely recorded and acted upon.

In line with safeguarding guidance, the DSL should have or be able to access the details necessary to understand the child's legal status and care arrangements, including who has parental responsibility, relevant contact arrangements, the name and contact details of the social worker and, where relevant, the Virtual School Head or Virtual School team.

Future Pathways Children in Care coordination

The Managing Director may delegate day-to-day coordination of PEP information, attendance returns, progress updates and professional liaison to an appropriately experienced member of staff. Delegation does not remove the responsibility of all staff to safeguard, support and maintain high expectations for the young person.

All staff

- maintain high expectations and avoid assumptions about achievement, behaviour or future prospects because a young person is in care
- understand that care-experienced young people may need predictable routines, trusted relationships and sensitive responses to change or perceived rejection
- know how to report safeguarding, attendance, bullying, exploitation, missing-from-education or wellbeing concerns
- share relevant educational information promptly with the staff coordinating the placement
- protect confidentiality and only discuss a young person's care status with those who need to know
- support the young person to participate fully in lessons, practical activities, enrichment, educational visits and careers planning wherever reasonably possible

Commissioning school / statutory Designated Teacher

Where the young person remains registered with a commissioning school, Future Pathways will expect the school's Designated Teacher to retain oversight of its statutory responsibilities, including liaison with the Virtual School and contribution to the PEP. Future Pathways will provide accurate and timely information and will attend meetings where requested or where this would benefit the young person.

Virtual School Head / Virtual School

The Virtual School Head of the authority that looks after the child has a statutory role in promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children. Future Pathways will cooperate with the Virtual School, respond to requests for information, contribute to planning

and discuss use of Pupil Premium Plus or other support where this is relevant to the placement and identified PEP needs.

Social worker and carers

The social worker is responsible for ensuring that the child's care planning includes education and that an up-to-date PEP forms part of the care plan. Carers have an important role in supporting attendance, routines, communication and educational aspirations. Future Pathways will communicate constructively with both, within agreed information-sharing arrangements.

Referral, admission and information gathering:

Because Future Pathways receives young people through referral and commissioned placements, essential information must be obtained before or immediately at the start of the placement. The placement should not rely on assumptions that information has transferred automatically from the home school or local authority.

For a child in care, Future Pathways should seek, as appropriate:

- the name of the responsible local authority and Virtual School
- the social worker's name and contact details
- the current carer or residential placement contact details
- the commissioning school and its Designated Teacher contact details
- the child's legal status and any information necessary to understand parental responsibility and education decision-making
- any relevant restrictions or agreed arrangements concerning contact, collection, visitors or information sharing
- the current PEP and date of the next PEP review
- current attendance information and any patterns of missing education or leaving without permission
- current attainment, qualifications, curriculum position and assessment information
- SEND information, EHCP where applicable, reasonable adjustments and specialist advice
- safeguarding information necessary to keep the young person safe, including exploitation, peer, online, missing or contextual risks
- health or medical information required for safe education
- transport arrangements and who is authorised to collect the young person where this is relevant
- known strengths, interests, trusted adults, aspirations and the young person's views about the placement

Where essential information is missing, Future Pathways will seek clarification promptly from the commissioning school, social worker, Virtual School or local authority. A lack of paperwork must not prevent immediate safeguarding action where a risk is identified.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs):

Every looked-after child must have a Personal Education Plan as part of their care plan. The PEP is a live record of how the child's education will be supported and should be reviewed regularly. Where Future Pathways is delivering some or all of the young person's education, the provision will make a meaningful contribution to the PEP process.

Future Pathways will provide information for PEPs on:

- attendance, punctuality and engagement
- baseline assessments, attainment, progress and qualifications
- literacy and numeracy development where relevant
- strengths, interests, practical and vocational engagement
- social, emotional and mental-health presentation within education
- relationships, behaviour, regulation and any identified support strategies
- SEND, reasonable adjustments and access arrangements
- safeguarding or contextual issues affecting education where it is appropriate and lawful to share them
- short-term and longer-term educational targets
- careers, transition and post-16 planning
- the young person's views, wishes and aspirations
- support or resources that may be required to remove barriers to learning

Targets should be specific, realistic, ambitious and measurable. Future Pathways will provide progress information in sufficient time for PEP meetings and will attend meetings when invited or when its participation is needed to make effective decisions.

The young person's voice is central to the PEP. Staff will help the young person prepare for the meeting, express what is going well, identify barriers and state what support they believe will help. A young person who does not wish to attend the full meeting should still have a meaningful opportunity to contribute.

Pupil Premium Plus and additional resources:

For looked-after children, Pupil Premium Plus is managed by the Virtual School Head of the local authority that looks after the child. It should support evidence-informed interventions linked to assessed needs and the PEP. Future Pathways does not assume that funding automatically follows a placement or is available for unrestricted use.

Where additional resources are requested for a young person attending Future Pathways, the provision will identify the educational need, intended intervention, expected impact, cost where relevant and method of review. Any agreed funding will be used for the purpose authorised by the Virtual School or commissioning body and its impact will be evaluated.

For previously looked-after children, eligibility and funding arrangements differ. Future Pathways will work with the commissioning school, parent/carer and relevant professionals to understand what support is available and how it should be used.

Safeguarding children in care:

Children in care can be particularly vulnerable because of past experiences, placement instability, disrupted relationships or contextual risks. Care status is not itself evidence that a child is at immediate risk, but it is relevant context when staff assess safeguarding concerns.

Staff must remain alert to concerns including:

- missing episodes or leaving the provision without permission
- child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, county lines or coercive peer relationships
- online harm, grooming, blackmail or unsafe contact
- self-harm, suicidal ideation, substance misuse or acute emotional distress
- bullying, discriminatory behaviour or targeting linked to care status
- unsafe contact with adults or peers, including breaches of known contact arrangements

- changes in placement, family contact or court proceedings affecting emotional wellbeing
- unexplained absence, significant changes in presentation or withdrawal from education

Any safeguarding concern must be reported to the DSL without delay and managed under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Future Pathways will share information with the social worker, commissioning school, local authority or police where necessary and lawful to protect the child.

Confidentiality, dignity and information sharing:

A young person's care status is sensitive personal information. It must not be displayed, discussed publicly or disclosed to peers, parents of other young people or staff who do not need the information to perform their role.

At the same time, confidentiality must never prevent proportionate information sharing for safeguarding, education planning or emergency purposes. Staff who supervise the young person must receive the information necessary to keep them safe and implement agreed plans.

Staff will use respectful language and avoid unnecessary labels. The young person should be consulted, where appropriate, about how they wish their care experience to be referred to in day-to-day education and who they feel comfortable speaking to about it.

Attendance and punctuality:

Attendance is a safeguarding and educational priority. Future Pathways will maintain accurate attendance records for the sessions it delivers and will provide attendance information to the commissioning school and/or local authority in accordance with the placement agreement and current attendance guidance.

Unexplained absence by a child in care will be followed up promptly. The response will take account of the individual risk assessment and known missing or exploitation risks. Future Pathways will not wait for a pattern to develop before sharing concerns where absence may indicate risk.

Where attendance begins to deteriorate, Future Pathways will work with the young person, carer, commissioning school, social worker and Virtual School to understand the barrier and agree support. Attendance difficulties will be approached with professional curiosity and support as well as clear expectations.

If a young person leaves the site or an off-site activity without permission, the Future Pathways Absconding / Leaving Without Permission Policy will be followed immediately.

Teaching, learning and educational progress:

Future Pathways will maintain ambitious expectations for children in care. Staff will not narrow a young person's curriculum or qualification opportunities simply because they are in care, have experienced disruption or are attending alternative provision.

Planning should seek to secure continuity in learning and qualifications wherever possible. Where a young person joins Future Pathways part-way through a course or key stage, staff will work with the commissioning school to identify prior learning, examination boards, coursework, access arrangements and the most realistic route to successful accreditation.

Future Pathways will use assessment and regular review to identify gaps in learning and will provide targeted support within the resources and placement arrangements available.

Progress concerns will be communicated early rather than waiting for the next formal PEP meeting.

SEND, health and emotional wellbeing:

Children in care may also have SEND, disabilities, medical needs or social, emotional and mental-health needs. Care status must not be used to explain away needs that require assessment, reasonable adjustment or specialist support.

Where a young person has an EHCP, Future Pathways will contribute to the plan and review process as appropriate and will implement the provision for which it is responsible. Staff will work with the commissioning school, SENCO, local authority and other professionals to avoid duplication or gaps between the PEP, EHCP, risk assessments and support plans.

Future Pathways will use relational and trauma-aware approaches while maintaining clear boundaries and expectations. Staff will seek to understand the function and context of behaviour without excusing harmful conduct or lowering expectations.

Behaviour, suspensions and placement stability:

Children in care can be disproportionately affected by exclusion and disrupted education. Future Pathways will therefore use early intervention, relational practice, reasonable adjustments, risk assessment and multi-agency planning to reduce avoidable placement breakdown.

Where behaviour presents serious or repeated concerns, the young person's social worker, commissioning school and Virtual School should be involved early where appropriate. Any decision that may materially change or end the placement should be discussed with the commissioning body and relevant professionals wherever circumstances allow, with the young person's educational continuity and safeguarding needs central to planning.

Where statutory suspension or permanent exclusion rules apply to the legal status of the setting, Future Pathways will follow the current Department for Education guidance. Where those statutory powers do not apply directly to Future Pathways, the provision will still avoid informal or unlawful exclusion practices and will follow the contractual, safeguarding and education-continuity arrangements agreed with commissioners.

Bullying, discrimination and peer relationships:

Care experience may make a young person vulnerable to stigma, intrusive questioning, rumours or bullying. Bullying or discriminatory behaviour linked to care status will be challenged and recorded. Staff will not require a young person to disclose personal details of their care circumstances to explain or defend themselves.

Any bullying concern will be managed under the Future Pathways Anti-Bullying Policy. Where the behaviour may constitute child-on-child abuse or creates a safeguarding risk, the DSL will lead or oversee the safeguarding response.

Practical, vocational, off-site and enrichment activities:

Future Pathways provides practical, vocational and community-based learning. Children in care should have equitable access to these opportunities. Staff will consider any relevant safeguarding, health, transport, contact or consent arrangements when planning catering, salon, art, boxing, outward-bound, community or other off-site activities.

Care status alone must not be used as a reason to exclude a young person from an activity. Where additional arrangements are needed, Future Pathways will work with the carer, social worker, commissioning school or local authority to make participation safe and practical.

Consent arrangements must reflect who has parental responsibility and any specific delegation of decision-making authority. Staff must not assume that a foster carer, birth parent, residential worker or social worker can provide every type of consent without checking the agreed arrangements where the matter is significant.

Transitions, placement changes and education continuity:

Transitions can be particularly significant for children in care. Future Pathways will plan carefully for entry, changes of timetable, movement between providers, reintegration to a commissioning school, post-16 progression and the end of a placement.

Where a young person changes care placement or education placement, Future Pathways will provide relevant educational records promptly and securely to the appropriate receiving setting or commissioning body. Staff will identify any qualification deadlines, coursework, access arrangements, transport issues, trusted-adult support and safeguarding information that must be transferred to prevent avoidable disruption.

Where possible, the young person will be prepared for change in advance and given clear information about what will happen next. Their views about transition will be sought and included in planning.

Careers, aspiration and preparation for adulthood:

Future Pathways will actively promote ambitious destinations for children in care and will challenge assumptions that restrict access to further education, apprenticeships, training or employment. Careers advice and guidance should take account of the young person's interests, strengths, qualifications, care plan and transition needs.

For older young people, Future Pathways will work with the commissioning school, social worker, Personal Adviser where applicable, Virtual School and careers professionals to support coherent post-16 and post-18 planning. Practical issues such as travel, equipment, identification, bursaries and application deadlines should be identified early where they may affect progression.

Young person voice and participation:

Future Pathways will involve children in care in decisions about their education. Staff will ask what helps, what makes education difficult, which adults they trust, what they are proud of and what they want to achieve.

Young people will be given opportunities to contribute to PEPs, reviews, risk assessments and transition plans in a way that is appropriate to their age, communication needs and preferences. Their views will be taken seriously, even where professionals ultimately make a different decision.

Working with carers, families and professionals:

Future Pathways will maintain constructive professional relationships with carers, social workers, commissioning schools, Virtual Schools, local authorities and other agencies. Communication should be timely, factual, respectful and focused on the young person's welfare and educational outcomes.

The person who should receive routine information or give consent may vary according to the child's legal status and delegated authority arrangements. Staff will check rather than assume. Where there is uncertainty about parental responsibility, contact or information sharing, the DSL will seek clarification from the social worker or responsible local authority.

Record keeping and monitoring:

Future Pathways will maintain accurate records relating to children in care in accordance with data-protection and safeguarding requirements. Records may include referral information, key professional contacts, attendance, PEP contributions, progress data, risk assessments, safeguarding records, communication and placement-review information.

The Managing Director will monitor the effectiveness of provision for children in care, including where data is available and proportionate:

- attendance and punctuality
- engagement and placement stability
- progress and qualifications
- suspensions, placement concerns or incidents
- safeguarding and missing episodes
- participation in PEPs and review meetings
- access to enrichment, careers and transition support
- young person voice and feedback from carers, commissioning schools and professionals

Small cohort sizes may make individual young people identifiable. Monitoring and reporting will therefore preserve confidentiality and avoid unnecessary disclosure of personal information.

Concerns and complaints:

A young person, carer, parent or professional who has concerns about the support provided by Future Pathways should raise them promptly with Lauren Meston, Managing Director and DSL, or another appropriate senior member of staff. Safeguarding concerns will be handled under safeguarding procedures rather than waiting for the complaints process.

Where a concern relates to a statutory responsibility held by the commissioning school, social worker, local authority or Virtual School, Future Pathways will support the person raising the concern to identify the appropriate route and will share relevant information where lawful and necessary.

Monitoring and review of this policy:

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where there is a significant change in legislation, statutory guidance, Future Pathways' legal status or commissioning arrangements, or where learning from a case identifies a need to amend practice.

The review will take account of feedback from young people, staff, carers, commissioning schools, social workers, Virtual Schools and local authorities where appropriate.

Related Future Pathways policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Absconding / Leaving Without Permission Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy

- SEND Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Educational Visits Policy
- Supporting Young People with Medical Conditions / Medication Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Careers Policy
- Risk Assessment procedures

Reference guidance:

- Department for Education - The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children (statutory guidance)
- Department for Education - Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children (statutory guidance)
- Department for Education - Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- HM Government - Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
- Department for Education - Working Together to Improve School Attendance, July 2026
- Department for Education - Alternative provision, updated February 2025
- Department for Education - Suspension and Permanent Exclusion guidance, July 2026
- Department for Education - Pupil Premium: Virtual School Heads responsibilities and 2026 to 2027 conditions of grant

Signed: Lauren Meston

Lauren Meston - Managing Director and Designated Safeguarding Lead, Future Pathways

Date: 16/08/2026

Next review due: 31/08/2027