GOTHIC MEDE ACADEMY

LOOKED-AFTER AND PREVIOUSLY LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN POLICY

Revised September 2026

Document Control

Academy	Gothic Mede Academy
Policy	Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children Policy
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Policy owner	Designated Teacher / Headteacher
Approval	Trust / Governing Body in accordance with BEST governance arrangements

1. Purpose and Aims

Gothic Mede Academy and BEST are committed to providing high-quality education for all pupils based on equality of access, opportunity and outcomes. The Academy recognises that looked-after and previously looked-after children can experience barriers to learning arising from previous trauma, abuse or neglect, loss, separation, disrupted attachments, placement changes and other experiences.

The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Academy will promote the educational achievement, inclusion, wellbeing and safeguarding of looked-after and previously looked-after children, while ensuring that their individual wishes, feelings, needs and circumstances are understood and reflected in support and planning.

- promote high educational expectations and outcomes for every looked-after and previously looked-after child
- ensure children have full access to a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum and to the wider life of the Academy
- identify and address barriers to attendance, learning, progress and participation
- ensure each looked-after child has an effective Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- ensure children are listened to and involved, in an age- and developmentally appropriate way, in decisions affecting their education and support
- work effectively with carers, parents where appropriate, social workers, Virtual School Heads, health professionals, SEND professionals and other agencies
- ensure safeguarding concerns are identified, recorded, shared and acted upon in accordance with the Academy's safeguarding arrangements
- support positive transitions, including admission, placement changes, phase transfers and preparation for adulthood

2. Scope and Definitions

For this policy, a looked-after child is a child who is subject to a care order (interim or full) or who is voluntarily accommodated by a local authority, in accordance with the Children Act 1989.

A previously looked-after child is a child who was previously looked after and left care through an Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order, or a child who was adopted from state care outside England and Wales.

Children who have returned to their birth parents after being looked after are not, solely for that reason, previously looked-after children for the purposes of Pupil Premium eligibility. The Academy will nevertheless remain alert to their individual educational and safeguarding needs.

3. Statutory and Guidance Framework

This policy has regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance, as applicable to academies:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.
- Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children (DfE, 2018).
- The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children (DfE, 2018).
- Children Act 1989 and relevant care planning regulations and guidance.
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008.
- Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Relevant statutory guidance on SEND, attendance, suspension and permanent exclusion, information sharing and data protection.

The Academy will also have regard to relevant local safeguarding partnership procedures and Central Bedfordshire Council / Virtual School arrangements.

4. Core Principles

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The Academy will maintain a child-centred approach and will consider what is best for the child when making decisions about education, welfare and safeguarding.

- Looked-after and previously looked-after children are entitled to the same high expectations as their peers.
- A child's care status will not be used to lower expectations or unnecessarily limit opportunities.
- Support will be individualised rather than based on assumptions about children in care.
- Children's wishes and feelings will be sought and taken seriously.
- The Academy will use trauma-informed, relational and inclusive approaches where appropriate.
- Confidential information will be shared only where lawful, necessary and proportionate, with safeguarding taking priority.
- Educational planning will be integrated with wider care planning and, where relevant, child protection planning.

5. Safeguarding and Child Protection

The Academy recognises that many children become looked after because of abuse and/or neglect and that becoming looked after does not remove safeguarding risk. Previously looked-after children may also remain vulnerable.

All safeguarding concerns relating to looked-after and previously looked-after children will be managed under the Academy's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and KCSIE 2026. Concerns must be reported promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy DSL.

The Designated Teacher (DT) and DSL will work closely together. The DT leads on promoting educational achievement and supporting the education and wellbeing of looked-after and previously looked-after children; the DSL retains responsibility for the Academy's safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

The Academy will remain alert to risks including abuse and neglect, exploitation, missing episodes, attendance difficulties, placement instability, domestic abuse, child-on-child abuse, online harms, sexual abuse and other forms of harm. Children may experience multiple harms at the same time.

Where a child is subject to a child protection plan, the Academy will contribute actively to multi-agency planning and will ensure that relevant safeguarding arrangements are considered alongside the child's care planning.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Governing Body / Trust

The governing body / Trust will ensure that the Academy appoints a Designated Teacher, provides appropriate resources and oversight, and has effective arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

- ensure the policy is reviewed and implemented
- ensure relevant staff receive appropriate training and information
- monitor outcomes, attendance, exclusions and participation for looked-after and previously looked-after children

6.2 Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented effectively and that the Designated Teacher and DSL have sufficient authority, access to information and support to discharge their responsibilities.

6.3 Designated Teacher

The Academy's Designated Teacher is Michael Warlow for the 2026–27 academic year.

- act as a central point of contact and advocate for looked-after and previously looked-after children
- lead on promoting educational achievement, progress, attendance, participation and positive outcomes
- coordinate and quality assure PEPs for looked-after children
- ensure the child's views are reflected in educational planning
- liaise with carers, social workers, Virtual School Heads and other professionals
- ensure staff understand relevant information about a child's care status, education, needs and circumstances on a need-to-know basis
- support transitions and placement changes
- monitor barriers to learning and coordinate appropriate support
- advise staff and governors on issues affecting looked-after and previously looked-after children
- work closely with the DSL where educational, attendance, behavioural or wellbeing concerns may also indicate safeguarding risk
- seek multi-agency support promptly where a child is experiencing significant difficulty or is at risk of suspension/permanent exclusion

6.4 Designated Safeguarding Lead

The DSL will retain lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection. The DSL will ensure that safeguarding information relating to looked-after children is appropriately recorded and that the Academy maintains effective links with children's social care and other safeguarding partners.

6.5 Virtual School Head

The Academy will maintain effective communication with the Virtual School Head (VSH) for the local authority that looks after the child. The VSH has strategic responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children looked after by that authority.

The Designated Teacher will work with the relevant VSH on PEPs, educational outcomes, barriers to learning and the effective use of Pupil Premium Plus for looked-after children, in accordance with the local authority's arrangements.

6.6 Academy Staff

All staff will maintain high expectations, follow Academy safeguarding procedures, share relevant concerns with the DSL/DT, and avoid assumptions or stereotypes about looked-after or previously looked-after children.

- support children sensitively and maintain appropriate confidentiality
- keep the Designated Teacher informed about educational progress and significant concerns
- recognise the possible impact of trauma, loss, separation and disrupted attachments
- promote inclusion, participation, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing
- understand that behaviour may communicate unmet need and consider appropriate relational and restorative responses

7. Admissions, Transition and Placement Changes

Looked-after children will receive the highest priority within the Academy's admission arrangements where this is required by the applicable admission arrangements and law. The Academy recognises that placement changes can result in mid-year admissions and will provide a positive, planned and sensitive transition.

- pre-entry visits and transition information will be offered where appropriate
- key educational, care and safeguarding information will be obtained promptly
- the child's views will be sought
- the Academy will liaise with the social worker, carer, previous setting and Virtual School where appropriate
- transition to the next phase or setting will be planned in advance wherever possible

8. Personal Education Plan (PEP)

Every looked-after child must have a Personal Education Plan as part of the child's wider care planning. The PEP will be coordinated by the Designated Teacher and will be reviewed in accordance with local authority arrangements and the child's needs.

The PEP will be a live, outcome-focused document that identifies the child's strengths, educational needs, barriers to learning, measurable targets, agreed interventions, responsibilities, timescales and arrangements for monitoring impact.

- include the child's wishes, feelings and aspirations
- consider attainment, progress and attendance
- identify SEND and any unmet or emerging special educational needs
- identify appropriate evidence-informed interventions
- consider emotional wellbeing and barriers arising from trauma or instability
- identify transition arrangements
- record the involvement of the carer, social worker, Designated Teacher and other relevant professionals
- link appropriately with the child's care plan and, where relevant, child protection planning

Where a looked-after child has possible or identified SEND, the Academy will use the SEND framework to secure appropriate assessment, provision and review.

9. Educational Achievement, Curriculum and Inclusion

All looked-after and previously looked-after children will have access to a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum and to the full range of Academy opportunities. The Academy will monitor progress and attainment and act promptly where a child is not making expected progress.

- high expectations will be maintained
- support will be differentiated according to individual need
- barriers to learning will be identified and addressed
- children will be encouraged to participate in enrichment and extracurricular opportunities
- staff will promote aspirations and preparation for further education, employment and adulthood

10. Attendance, Missing Education and Exploitation

Attendance and punctuality of looked-after and previously looked-after children will be monitored closely. Patterns of absence, unexplained absence or concerns about a child's whereabouts will be followed up promptly in accordance with the Academy's attendance and safeguarding procedures.

The Academy will contribute to multi-agency planning where there are concerns about children going missing, exploitation, placement instability or other circumstances that may affect safety or education.

11. Behaviour, Suspension and Permanent Exclusion

The Academy will consider the individual circumstances of a looked-after or previously looked-after child when responding to behaviour, including relevant trauma, SEND, mental health, communication needs, placement instability and safeguarding factors.

Where a looked-after child is at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion, the Designated Teacher will work with the Headteacher, DSL, social worker, carer, Virtual School and other relevant professionals to consider whether additional support or alternative strategies could reduce the risk of exclusion.

Decisions about suspension or permanent exclusion will be made in accordance with the Academy's Behaviour Policy and current statutory guidance.

12. Emotional Wellbeing and Trauma-Informed Practice

The Academy recognises that looked-after and previously looked-after children may have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, loss and disrupted attachments. Staff will seek to understand the individual child's experiences and use appropriate relational, trauma-informed and restorative approaches.

- Staff will avoid labelling or stereotyping.
- Children will be supported to build secure, positive relationships with trusted adults.
- Concerns about mental health or emotional wellbeing will be addressed through the Academy's appropriate pastoral and safeguarding pathways.
- Safeguarding concerns will always be considered alongside wellbeing concerns.

13. Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is intended to support the educational outcomes of eligible looked-after and previously looked-after children. For looked-after children, arrangements are managed through the relevant Virtual School/local authority; for eligible previously looked-after children, funding is allocated directly to the school.

The Academy will use PP+ in accordance with current DfE funding conditions and evidence-informed approaches, linking spending to identified educational needs and, where appropriate, the PEP.

For previously looked-after children, parents, guardians or carers are responsible for declaring eligibility and providing appropriate evidence where required for school census purposes. The Academy will communicate clearly with families about this process.

- PP+ is not a personal budget for an individual child.
- The Academy will evaluate the impact of funded approaches.
- Parents/carers will be encouraged to contribute to discussions about appropriate support.

14. Information Sharing, Confidentiality and Record Keeping

The Academy will maintain accurate and up-to-date records of looked-after and previously looked-after children and will ensure that staff who need information to safeguard or support the child can access relevant information appropriately.

For looked-after children, appropriate staff will have access to relevant information about legal status, care arrangements, contact arrangements and the level of authority delegated to carers. The DSL should have details of the child's social worker and the relevant Virtual School Head.

Information will be shared lawfully, securely, proportionately and on a need-to-know basis. Safeguarding concerns will not be withheld where information sharing is necessary to protect a child.

- LAC status will be recorded/flagged appropriately on Academy information systems.
- Safeguarding records will be maintained in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- When a child transfers, relevant educational and safeguarding information will be transferred securely and promptly in accordance with applicable requirements.

15. Partnership with Parents, Carers and Professionals

The Academy will develop respectful, constructive partnerships with carers, parents where appropriate, social workers, Virtual School staff, health professionals, SEND professionals and other relevant agencies.

The Academy will recognise that parental responsibility and delegated authority may differ for looked-after children. Staff will check who has authority to make particular decisions and will follow the child's care and contact arrangements.

- Information will be shared with the appropriate adults and professionals.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be considered.
- Disagreements will be managed professionally and escalated through appropriate procedures where necessary.

16. Children's Voice

The Academy will ensure that looked-after and previously looked-after children are listened to and involved in decisions affecting their education, support and wellbeing. Their views will be sought in an age- and developmentally appropriate way and reflected in PEPs and other planning.

Where the child's wishes cannot be followed, the reasons should be explained to the child in an appropriate and supportive manner.

17. Staff Development

The Designated Teacher will receive appropriate training and maintain current knowledge of the educational and wider needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children.

Relevant staff will receive information and training to understand safeguarding, trauma, attachment, placement instability, SEND, attendance, exploitation and other issues that may affect looked-after and previously looked-after children.

- Safeguarding training will be delivered in accordance with KCSIE and the Academy's safeguarding arrangements.

18. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Designated Teacher will monitor the implementation and impact of this policy and report relevant information to the Headteacher and governing body/Trust.

- number and quality of PEPs
- attendance and persistent absence
- progress and attainment
- suspensions and risk of permanent exclusion
- participation in enrichment and wider opportunities
- SEND identification and provision
- safeguarding concerns and effectiveness of multi-agency working
- use and impact of PP+ where applicable
- transition outcomes

19. Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read alongside the Academy's:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Positive relationships Policy
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy
- SEND Policy / SEND Information Report
- Pupil Premium Strategy
- Equality Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Information Sharing / Data Protection arrangements
- Admissions Policy

- Mental Health / Wellbeing arrangements, where applicable
- Educational Visits and Activities Policy, where applicable

20. Implementation, Publication and Review

This policy will be made available to staff and governors/trustees and published on the Academy website in accordance with the Academy's publication arrangements.

Because this policy sits within the Academy's safeguarding and statutory responsibilities, it will be reviewed annually and sooner where there are significant changes to legislation, statutory guidance, local safeguarding arrangements or Academy practice.