

Virtual School Pupil Premium Policy Financial Year 2026/27

Introduction

Our policy is informed by the Department for Education (DfE) document:
[Pupil premium: conditions of grant for the 2026 to 2027 financial year - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-for-the-2026-to-2027-financial-year)

Throughout our policy, the Pupil Premium for Looked After Children will be referred to as VS (Virtual School) Pupil Premium to distinguish it from other forms of Pupil Premium allocations.

- The amount per looked after child is £2,690. It is **not** a personal budget for individual children.
- Children and young people will be eligible as soon as they enter care.
- Local authorities continue to be responsible for distributing the VS Pupil Premium payments to schools and academies. However, in addition, Virtual School Headteachers are responsible for making sure there are effective arrangements in place for allocating VS Pupil Premium funding to benefit children looked after by their authority.
- The overall grant allocated to each LA will be calculated on a per capita basis.
- The grant must be managed by the Virtual School and used for the benefit of the young person's educational needs as identified in the Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- PEPs will need to be monitored closely by designated teachers, the Virtual School team, social workers, team leaders and Independent Reviewing Officers

In addition, and through a separate process, children adopted from care, and those who left care or on a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangements Order will be entitled to £2,690. This funding is passed directly to the school and is therefore outside the remit of this policy.

Our allocation of VS Pupil Premium is based on a "child's needs-driven model", managed through high-quality PEPs.

2. Looked After Children Pupil Premium Policy

2.1 Overall Principles

- The Headteacher of South Gloucestershire's Virtual School is responsible for the use of VS Pupil Premium to improve outcomes for all South Gloucestershire's looked after children, wherever they live.
- We are committed to working in collaboration with schools and other agencies to ensure each individual child receives an entitlement (though there may be exceptions to this principle, as outlined below).
- To this end we aim to passport a high percentage of the money to settings if they can demonstrate the impact VS Pupil Premium is having/will have on outcomes and meet The Virtual School's compliance criteria (see 3.2 below).
- In the academic year 2025-26, some of the grant was used to fund Virtual School-led interventions (e.g., Letterbox Club, a literacy project). This is subject to review on an annual basis but is anticipated to continue in the 2026-27 academic year.

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- South Gloucestershire Council and the Virtual School Headteacher are corporate parents, so the question: 'Would this be good enough for my child?' is a central one in making decisions and evaluating the effectiveness of the use of VS Pupil Premium
- South Gloucestershire Virtual School work in an integrated way with schools offering one link to every school to support with Children in Care, Previously Looked After Children, Children living in Kinship Care and those who have social care involvement. The Virtual School will work with schools to provide a caring and nurturing environment which supports all these students in South Glos Schools. VS Pupil Premium will be used on occasion to support wider school training and provision to support all Virtual School children.

Reasons South Gloucestershire's Virtual School has centrally pooled a proportion of VS Pupil Premium

The DfE's February 2018 statutory guidance: 'Promoting the Education of looked after and previously looked after children' states

"VSHs, working with education settings, should implement PP+ arrangements for all looked-after children, in need of support for whom the authority is responsible, in accordance with the latest conditions of grant published by the department and any supplementary departmental advice it issues. VSHs have considerable flexibility in the use of PP+ funding in order to maximise its impact for individual looked-after children as well as the whole looked-after cohort. All VSHs should publish a clear policy on their use of PP+, including how they decide the level and use of top-sliced funding". (Page 19)

"The proportion of PP+ funding centrally pooled by the VSH 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."

In order to be transparent and accountable for this public money, South Gloucestershire's Virtual School has a Governing Body with representatives including a Headteacher from each sector of education. As with all schools, the governing body has responsibility to understand the finances of the Virtual School and to have a clear oversight of the VS Pupil Premium spend providing suitable challenge and scrutiny of the spend and its impact.

In order to support the cohort as a whole, it is beneficial or necessary for South Gloucestershire's Virtual School to administer certain expenditure itself, for example:

1. Letterbox Club - literacy packages for specific pupils to support reading across the cohort.
2. Flash Academy EAL programme for UASC
3. Additional 1:1 tuition support for Y11 students, commissioned by The Virtual School for extra support for GCSEs, outside school hours.
4. Throughout 2026/27 we will continue to provide enhanced training for designated teachers for looked after children and previously looked after children, plus briefings and bespoke individual support to all schools with South Gloucestershire looked after children, as required. In most cases this will be provided without further cost to the setting.
5. Centrally pooled VS Pupil Premium will contribute towards the salaries of some Virtual School staff for them to provide individual feedback and support to schools, social workers, carers and young people. The Virtual School also provides free training to social care staff and carers.

Department for People

6. Some VS Pupil Premium Grant is spent on systems to enable the Virtual School to have immediate oversight of personal education plans and attendance information collection; for example, The Virtual School's commissioned provider for an online PEP.

Principles for spending any VS Pupil Premium that The Virtual School has not been able to passport directly to schools due to non-compliance

The Virtual School provides feedback on compliance to schools via direct contact, training and support as well as calling schools to account for the outcomes for looked after children. However, The Virtual School Headteacher reserves the right to retain VS Pupil Premium if schools do not demonstrate they are spending it appropriately for the child's academic needs.

- Where any surplus is retained, the Virtual School will use this money to meet additional needs for individuals or groups of pupils who have complex needs or challenging circumstances that require more funding (see below).

- For some children the VS Pupil Premium is only a fraction of the cost of the support they need e.g.:
 - children who come into care in an emergency with a fragmented home and education history and who are behind academically
 - children who must move into or out of the area in an emergency
 - children placed out of authority in other LAs where the level of support from Virtual School teams may not be the same and who therefore will lose out without additional help
 - children where there is a significant and often delayed reaction to abuse and neglect, which manifests in hard to anticipate behavioural 'spikes'

In view of this, there could be a significant difference in the amount of VS Pupil Premium distributed.

Proposals to pool VS Pupil Premium in a school to enhance services, providing its use is directly linked to looked after children's needs via the PEP, are allowed.

2.2 Circumstances in which VS Pupil Premium will not be provided

VS Pupil Premium will not be used to double fund or replace funding which should already have been allocated to the school to support the child and specifically:

- to fund services that should be provided via an EHC Plan
- other statutory work e.g., statutory assessment or support from health
- the interventions put in place do not require any funding
- the school's own funding covers the cost of the interventions
- the PEP action plan does not meet requirements (see section 3.1).

3. Management and accountability

The Headteacher of The Virtual School will be accountable to the Corporate Parenting Board and The Virtual School Governing Body for setting up a transparent and rigorous allocation process and ensuring maximised impact of the grant.

Department for People

3.1. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

- The PEP's Provision Map Section will double up as the accountability for VS Pupil Premium funding.
- The VS Pupil Premium will only be provided to meet the needs identified in a high-quality plan in the PEP with clear targets for improvement, underpinned by well-targeted support.
- Settings must use the VS Pupil Premium to improve outcomes for children in the following areas:
- academic achievement and progress – we recommend that the VS Pupil Premium should be spent on supporting outcomes for English and/or Maths where possible - particularly if the child is only just at or is falling below age-related expectations (ARE)
- wider achievement e.g., in an area in which the child has shown an interest (impact to be evidenced clearly)
- attendance
- inclusion [by reducing internal and external exclusion]
- social, emotional and wellbeing skills from an accredited provider
- transition into the next key stage and/or to a new learning provider.
- The VS Pupil Premium information on the PEP form will show the area of curriculum identified for support, agreed intervention, cost and impact (or expected impact) of the intervention.

Please note that national and international studies have shown that one to one tuition has a disproportionately positive impact for children in care.

3.2 Allocation of funding to settings and retention policy

To better meet the needs of all young people, South Gloucestershire Virtual School have a Needs Driven Model of distributing Pupil Premium Plus. This model gives both schools and the Virtual School greater flexibility in meeting the needs of all young people by enabling funding to be targeted more effectively.

The VS Pupil Premium Grant will be transferred to schools at the end of Term 2, 4 and 6.

- Pupil Premium Plus will be funded using a *Needs Driven Model* which means that schools can apply for funding specific to a young person's needs.
- All Pupil Premium requests need to be documented within the PEP document and agreed by the Virtual School.
- Schools can request funding for up to 12 months to support a specific intervention(s). This should ensure that funding is more easily managed in schools and will mean that additional funding might not be required at subsequent PEP meetings.
- Where there is a need to clarify what funding a school is providing from its own resources, the school may need to provide evidence before VS Pupil Premium can be allocated.
- Independent non-maintained settings will receive an allocation of funding up to a maximum of £1,000 per academic year, based on information provided in the young person's PEP. Any payment agreed will be made in line with the compliance round (if applicable) following the date of the young person's PEP.

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We reserve the right to withhold the funding if settings do not provide adequate evidence that it is being used to address the child's needs or do not cooperate fully with The Virtual School's compliance factors. These are currently:

- having up to date termly PEPs which show evidence of VS Pupil Premium expenditure and impact. The PEP also needs to be judged above Red. PEPs which are Red will only be considered for payment if any gaps and deficiencies within the paperwork are clearly understood by the Virtual School.

3.3 VS Pupil Premium for Children and Young People from other Local Authorities

- Different approaches will be adopted by different LAs, as the contexts vary
- South Gloucestershire settings who have children and young people in care from other Local Authorities on their roll must contact the Headteacher of the relevant Virtual School to request their VS Pupil Premium policy, as, nationally, all Headteachers of Virtual Schools are responsible for the allocation of VS Pupil Premium for all school aged children and young people in care to their authority, even though the child/young person is educated in a South Gloucestershire school.
- The name and contact details of other Virtual School Headteachers can be requested from South Gloucestershire's Virtual School

4. Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus

Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus for looked after children in Years 12 and 13 has been introduced to Virtual Schools. South Gloucestershire Virtual School will distribute up to £1,000 per academic year to settings and services to support the education, training, and employment of young people.

4.1 Conditions of payment for the Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus

- Funding requirements are clearly identified within the Pupil Premium section of the Post 16 PEP.
- Identification of need is agreed between educational/training setting, the virtual school and social care at the young person's PEP meeting.
- The Virtual School has ultimate control and decision-making responsibility for any Post 16 Pupil Premium payments made.
- There will be no limitations, at this stage, on what this grant can be used for, and decisions will be made on an individual basis relating to personal need.
- If funding beyond £1,000 is required to support a young person, the Virtual School will agree with social care how best to continue/increase the required support if possible.

Kind regards

Steve Claypoole

Head Teacher South Gloucestershire Virtual School