

Known, Included and Ambitious: Promoting the education of care-experienced learners

Toolkits for Providers

October 2026

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Introduction

In October 2026, we published a thematic report exploring the educational journeys of care experienced learners.

It evaluates how effectively maintained schools, pupil referral units (PRUs) and local authorities promoted the education, well-being and aspirations of care-experienced learners aged 3 to 16.

The full report can be found here: Known, Included and Ambitious: Promoting the education of care-experienced learners - Estyn

A suite of toolkits was developed to complement this report and support providers in their evaluation practice. All five toolkits, along with a set of reflective questions for governors can be found below.

Toolkit 1: Evaluating leadership and strategic oversight

This toolkit is intended to support schools, PRUs and local authorities to reflect on how effectively leadership, governance and corporate parenting arrangements improve outcomes for care-experienced learners.

Features of stronger practice

In stronger practice:

- leaders maintain ambitious expectations for participation, achievement and future opportunities
- where care experience is known, learners are understood and their progress is monitored through clear governance and improvement arrangements
- educational progress and attainment are monitored alongside attendance, exclusions and well-being
- PEPs are used as effective educational planning and review tools rather than compliance documents
- leaders understand the experiences and outcomes of the wider care-experienced population, including adopted learners and those in kinship or SGO arrangements
- partnership arrangements support coordinated action
- leaders evaluate the impact of support and funding on educational outcomes over time

Questions to support self-evaluation

- How do we know that our actions are improving educational outcomes for care-experienced learners?
- How do we know that our expectations for care-experienced learners are as ambitious as those for other learners?
- How effectively do our systems support care-experienced learners whose circumstances are known, while respecting families' choices about disclosure and confidentiality?
- What does our monitoring tell us about patterns in educational progress, participation and attainment?
- How do we know that PEPs are improving educational outcomes rather than simply recording support?
- Where might adopted learners, learners in kinship care arrangements or those subject to special guardianship orders be overlooked?
- How well do governance, corporate parenting and partnership arrangements challenge us about educational outcomes?

- What evidence demonstrates that our support, interventions and use of funding are improving educational outcomes?

Possible evidence sources

- learner progress, attainment and attendance information, alongside participation in learning, enrichment and wider school life
- PEPs and other learner planning documents
- learner, carer and staff feedback
- corporate parenting, governance and improvement reports
- partnership and multi-agency working records
- funding evaluations and impact reviews
- self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation

Toolkit 2: Evaluating learning, well-being and progression

This toolkit is intended to support schools, PRUs and local authorities to reflect on how effectively they support care-experienced learners to engage in learning, make progress and achieve their potential.

Features of stronger practice

In stronger practice:

- learners experience safe, predictable and supportive environments that help them engage in learning
- staff maintain ambitious expectations and use trauma-informed and attachment-aware approaches consistently in everyday practice
- support is tailored to learners' individual strengths, needs and circumstances, taking account of factors that may affect learning and participation
- support, curriculum planning and future pathways are aligned to educational success
- reduced timetables and personalised pathways are reviewed regularly and linked to ambitious long-term outcomes
- progress, achievement, attendance, participation in learning and wider school life are monitored and discussed together
- leaders evaluate the impact of support and interventions on educational outcomes as well as participation and well-being
- learners are supported to participate fully in school life and prepare for future education, training or employment

Questions to support self-evaluation

- How do we know that care-experienced learners feel safe, included and ready to learn?
- How consistently do trauma-informed and attachment-aware approaches influence learners' day-to-day experiences?
- How do we know that our expectations for learning and achievement are as ambitious as those for other learners?
- What does our evidence tell us about learners' progress, attainment and curriculum access, alongside attendance and well-being?
- How do we know when learners are ready for support to be reduced without compromising their progress or well-being?

- How well do we understand the interaction between care experience and other factors affecting learning and participation?
- How do we know that reduced timetables, alternative provision and personalised pathways are improving engagement and educational outcomes without creating longer-term risks to curriculum access, qualifications or future opportunities?
- What evidence shows that support plans and interventions are improving educational progress rather than simply maintaining learners' involvement in education?
- How well do we prepare learners for future education, employment and training?

Possible evidence sources

- learner progress, attainment and achievement information
- attendance, exclusion and behaviour information, alongside participation in learning and wider school life
- curriculum access, qualification pathways and destination information
- PEPs and other learner support plans
- learner work, assessments and progress reviews
- intervention records and evaluations
- learner, parent/carer and staff feedback
- classroom observations, individual case-tracking and professional discussions
- professional learning and policy documentation
- self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation

Toolkit 3: Evaluating relationships, belonging and learner voice

This toolkit is intended to support schools, PRUs and local authorities to reflect on how effectively they build trusted relationships with care-experienced learners and ensure that learners' views, experiences and aspirations influence support and decision-making.

Features of stronger practice

In stronger practice:

- learners have access to trusted adults who understand their experiences, strengths and aspirations
- learners feel safe, respected and valued and experience a strong sense of belonging
- staff demonstrate understanding of care experience through everyday interactions and responses
- learners are able to share their views through regular conversations and meaningful relationships, not just through formal processes
- learners' views influence decisions about their support, learning and future plans
- learners understand how their views have influenced decisions and actions
- schools, PRUs and local authorities respond sensitively to issues relating to identity, stigma, confidentiality and care experience
- leaders evaluate how effectively relationships, belonging and learner voice support learners' engagement and educational experiences

Questions to support self-evaluation

- How do we know that care-experienced learners have trusted adults they can turn to?
- What evidence tells us that learners feel safe, respected and that they belong?
- How do we know that staff understand learners' experiences and respond appropriately in their everyday practice?
- How do we know that learners have regular and meaningful opportunities to share their views, rather than being consulted only through formal meetings?
- What evidence shows that learners influence decisions about their learning, support and future plans?
- How effectively do we identify and respond to issues relating to identity, stigma, confidentiality and care experience?
- What evidence demonstrates that relationships, belonging and learner voice are improving learners' engagement and educational experiences?

Possible evidence sources

- learner, parent and carer and staff feedback
- learner participation in PEP reviews and support planning
- examples of learner voice informing support, planning and decision-making
- attendance, participation and engagement information
- case tracking and learner reviews
- records of learner participation groups or forums
- evidence of changes made in response to learner feedback
- self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation

Toolkit 4: Evaluating transitions and continuity

This toolkit is intended to support schools, PRUs and local authorities to reflect on how effectively they promote educational continuity and support care-experienced learners during periods of transition and change.

Features of stronger practice

In stronger practice:

- schools, PRUs and local authorities recognise educational continuity as essential to helping care-experienced learners remain engaged in learning during periods of change
- planning for transitions and changes begins early and reflects learners' individual circumstances and needs
- information is shared promptly and appropriately to support continuity and reduce the need for learners to repeat personal information
- arrangements minimise disruption to learning, engagement and support when circumstances change
- learners remain known, understood and supported when they move between providers or access alternative provision
- local authorities and providers plan proactively to protect continuity of Welsh-medium education and access to Welsh-language support where this is the learner’s existing or chosen language pathway
- providers work collaboratively to maintain continuity of learning, relationships and support during placement moves, school changes, transitions to permanent care arrangements and other periods of instability
- leaders evaluate the impact of transition and continuity arrangements on learners' experiences, engagement and progress

Questions to support self-evaluation

- How do we know that educational continuity is maintained during placement moves, school changes and other periods of instability?
- What evidence demonstrates that transition planning begins early enough and reflects learners' individual needs?
- How effectively do our information-sharing arrangements reduce disruption to learning and support?
- How well do schools, PRUs, local authorities and other agencies work together to maintain continuity?

- How do we know that learners remain visible and continue to receive appropriate support when they move between providers or access alternative provision?
- How effectively do we protect learners' continuity of Welsh-medium education and access to Welsh-language support when their school, care placement or support arrangements change?
- How do we know that our transition arrangements improve learners' engagement, progress and educational experiences?

Possible evidence sources

- transition plans, reviews and learner support plans
- learner, parent/carer and staff feedback
- attendance, engagement and progress information before and after transitions
- records of placement moves and school changes
- information-sharing and multi-agency working records
- case tracking and learner reviews
- destination and progression information
- Welsh-medium continuity arrangements
- self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation

Toolkit 5: Evaluating equity and opportunity

This toolkit is intended to support schools, PRUs and local authorities to reflect on how effectively they identify, understand and respond to the needs of care-experienced learners, while promoting belonging, participation and equitable outcomes.

Features of stronger practice

In stronger practice:

- care-experienced learners are known and understood within the school or local authority, without being stigmatised or defined by their circumstances
- schools, PRUs and local authorities create safe opportunities for learners and families to share information voluntarily and use this sensitively to inform support and planning
- staff understand the difference between equality and equity and recognise that learners may require different support to access the same opportunities and outcomes as their peers
- learners experience a strong sense of belonging and are included fully in learning and wider school life
- support is tailored to learners' individual strengths, needs and circumstances and takes account of factors affecting learning and engagement
- leaders identify and remove practical, financial and social barriers to participation
- learners have equitable access to learning, enrichment activities, support services and next steps in learning, training or employment
- leaders and staff maintain ambitious expectations and monitor whether provision is reducing barriers and improving outcomes

Questions to support self-evaluation

- How do we know that all groups of care-experienced learners are identified and understood within our systems?
- Where might adopted learners or learners in kinship care or SGO arrangements be less visible?
- How effectively do we create a culture in which learners and families feel safe to share information about care experience, confident that their wishes about confidentiality will be respected and that the information will be used sensitively to provide appropriate support?
- How do we know that the curriculum is inclusive of care-experienced learners and that activities, content and teaching approaches do not unintentionally exclude, stigmatise or disadvantage them?

- What evidence shows that care-experienced learners feel they belong and can participate fully in school life?
- How do we know that barriers to learning, participation and achievement are being identified and removed?
- What evidence tells us that care-experienced learners have equitable access to learning, enrichment activities and progression opportunities?
- How do we know that our expectations are as ambitious for care-experienced learners as they are for other learners?
- What evidence demonstrates that our provision is improving outcomes and reducing inequalities over time?

Possible evidence sources

- learner, carer and staff feedback
- attendance, engagement, progress and outcome information
- curriculum access, qualification pathways and involvement in enrichment and wider school life
- destination and progression data
- records relating to identification and monitoring of care-experienced learners
- participation in educational visits, enrichment activities, learner leadership opportunities and wider school experiences
- ALN, attendance and well-being information
- Welsh-medium continuity and transition information
- self-evaluation and improvement planning documentation
- corporate parenting and local authority monitoring reports
- equality, diversity and inclusion reviews
- case tracking and learner support reviews

Appendix 1: Reflective questions for governors

Adapted from governor training materials developed by Cardiff Virtual School

These questions are intended to help governors in evaluating how effectively their school promotes the education, well-being and aspirations of care-experienced learners and fulfils its corporate parenting responsibilities.

Visibility and strategic oversight

- How many care-experienced learners attend the school, including those who may no longer be formally looked after?
- How does the governing body assure itself that the school creates a safe and respectful environment in which learners, families and carers feel able to share information about care experience voluntarily?
- How does the governing body assure itself that learners whose circumstances are known are understood and considered appropriately within school improvement and self-evaluation?
- Is there a designated teacher and link governor for care-experienced learners?
- How does the governing body monitor the experiences, well-being, attendance, progress and outcomes of all care-experienced learners?

Belonging, relationships and participation

- How do leaders know whether care-experienced learners feel safe, included and that they belong in the school community?
- What opportunities do care-experienced learners have to contribute their views and influence decisions?
- How do leaders monitor participation in enrichment activities, trips, leadership opportunities and wider school life?
- How does the school celebrate and recognise learners' achievements and successes?

Staff understanding and support

- What professional learning have staff undertaken relating to care experience, attachment and trauma-informed practice?
- How do leaders know that this learning is influencing day-to-day practice?
- How effectively are Personal Education Plans (PEPs) used to support learning, participation and aspiration?

- How effectively are ALN and care experience considered together when planning support?

Ambition, expectations and outcomes

- How well are care-experienced learners progressing from their starting points?
- How do leaders monitor educational progress alongside attendance and well-being?
- How do governors know that expectations for care-experienced learners are sufficiently ambitious?
- What evidence is there that learners are achieving their potential and moving successfully into further education, training or employment?

Transitions and continuity

- How does the school support learners joining mid-year or moving between phases?
- How is continuity maintained during placement changes or changes in professional support?
- How effectively does the school support progression into further education, employment or training?

Reflecting on your corporate parenting role

- How does the school contribute to its role as part of the corporate family?
- Would we be satisfied if this support was being provided to our own children?
- What are the school's strengths in supporting care-experienced learners?
- What remains a priority for improvement?