The main purpose of the EPAC is to make schools and other providers aware of the needs of adopted children and to encourage dialogue between parents and schools. It gives a structure to the conversation and ensures that there is collaboration between schools and parents, as well as any other professionals such as Suffolk Permanence Team and Virtual School.

An EPAC can only be completed when parents choose to identify their children as adopted.

The majority of children and young people adopted today have suffered neglect and/or trauma in their birth families and became a Child Looked After (CLA) before their final move to join an adoptive family. Parents emphasise the need to make schools fully aware that adopted children continue to have the same needs as they had as a child in care. Indeed, these issues may have been exacerbated as adoption is yet another move in their journey. There is also a need to make lasting relationships within their family. This can cause anxieties for children who have had difficulties with relationships and attachments in the past*.*

**Research Findings from Adoption UK into Adopted Children’s Problems in School**

According to Adoption UK: ‘The majority of children adopted in England come from a background of abuse and or neglect. Adoption UK knows from its membership that adopted children frequently experience significant difficulties in school due to early trauma they may have experienced, and schools have a key role to play in building brighter futures. According to their research, due to the lasting impact of early life experiences, **80% of adopters said their child needs more support than their peers and nearly two thirds of parents (59%) said their child is always trying to catch up in school and make up for their early life experiences.**

Adoption alone will not always enable a child to overcome their difficult start in life, and many children will require ongoing additional support. However, the idea that adoption alone will transform a child’s life persists, with more than 3 in 4 parents telling us that some people expect their child to do well in school because they are now in a stable, loving family.

Day to day, many adopted children face difficulties in school. The areas they often struggle with, compared with their peers, include concentrating in class, sitting still, forming positive friendships, managing their feelings and social skills.

More than a quarter of parents surveyed said their child regularly refuses to go to school. 43% of parents said that their child’s school does not understand that their child has any problems because they’re overly compliant. Many adopted children become compliant as a result of early life trauma; they develop this approach as a coping mechanism to prevent further rejection. This behaviour can lead to further social difficulties and affect their wellbeing.

Of significant concern is the number of adopted children that have been subject to school exclusion whether fixed term or permanently. Adoption UK report that, in the calendar year 2020, children represented in The Adoption Barometer 2021 were 14 times more likely to be permanently excluded and almost two and a half times more likely to be suspended than national averages for England. Whilst it is positive that most adopted children remain in school, over three years of The Adoption Barometer, reported exclusion and suspension rates for adopted children have remained persistently higher than national averages.

**Nearly two thirds (65%) of parents said their child’s school or teacher doesn’t understand the impact of their child’s early life experiences on their ability to engage in education.** It is difficult for adopted children to achieve their potential in education if there is little understanding of the impact of their early life experiences. Therefore, Adoption UK is calling for better support and awareness training for teachers and education staff on adoption issues.

Although two thirds of parents surveyed do not feel that their child’s school or teacher understands the impact of their difficult start in life, nearly a quarter of parents reported that their child’s school and teacher have a good or very good understanding. **Strong staff awareness of adoption and the right support in school can be transformative for many adopted children and we have heard about good practice across the UK.**

*Difficulties experienced in school are further born out in government statistics which show that 64% of all pupils achieved expected thresholds at GCSE compared to 35% for children adopted from care (DfE, 2018). Furthermore, very few young people (6%) with a care background go onto to higher education (DfE, 2015), compared to 43% in the general population.*

Suffolk Virtual School and Permanence Team is proposing the EPAC to be used by schools and families as a way of improving collaboration and ensuring that there is a clear plan of support for the child and family. It can also be used to target the Pupil Premium+, currently £2,345 per child/year, which will come from the DfE if the adoption is detailed in the (October) census. PAC UK have produced a useful document on Pupil Premium Plus which can be found: <https://www.pac-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Pupil-Premium-Plus-Guide-Web-Version-V1.6.pdf>

**The EPAC is not a statutory document,** in contrast to the Personal Education Plan (PEP) but draws on the success of the PEP process. Reviews should be agreed between parents and schools and should be according to need. EPAC’s should begin after the last PEP when the child leaves Care for adoption.

*With thanks*

**Completing the form**

The Suffolk EPAC form is intended to be a suggested template which can be tailored by individual schools so that it fits readily with existing school documents and systems. It can also be individualised (e.g., having additional sections) according to need.

The responsibility for introducing and inviting families in to complete an EPAC should sit with the school (e.g., Designated Teacher). Though in practice, parents often approach school’s first. It is helpful to remember that adoption requires therapeutic parenting and that adopters have attended numerous courses (and hence are well informed about the needs of adopted children). Consequently, they are often very proactive in supporting their children.

To date, we have found that it is useful to introduce parents to the form and ask them to complete relevant sections before the meeting. For example, relevant information on pre-adoptive/ SGO experiences as well as working with their child/ YP to establish their views.

**Who attends the meeting?**

The designated teacher and key staff who can implement and monitor the plan, should attend the meeting with parent(s)/ carer(s). The child/ YP may also want to attend too; this needs to be their decision and in practice often children and YP do not want to participate at this level. Ideally, meeting slots should be for one hour (though may take longer initially) and held in a nurturing environment.

**Reviewing the plan**

When and how often the plan is reviewed is agreed at the meeting and will vary from family to family. It might be yearly; it might be every half-term.

**Additional support**

If you need additional support, please contact Dr Jane Leighton (specialist educational psychologist working the in Suffolk Permanence Team) via email: jane.leighton@suffolk.gov.uk.