

CHILDREN IN CARE POLICY

FOREST OAK SCHOOL

and

MERSTONE SCHOOL



Introduction

This policy sets out how the Governing Body of Forest Oak and Merstone Schools aim to promote the educational achievement and welfare of pupils in Public Care. The Governing Body is committed to providing quality education for all pupils at Forest Oak and Merstone Schools based on equality of access, opportunity and outcomes. This policy includes requirements set out in the statutory guidance on the duty of local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by the local authority and includes in particular,

“a duty to promote the child’s educational achievement”.

(Section 52 of the Children Act 2004)

Who are Our Children in Care?

The term Children Looked After has a specific legal meaning based on the Children Act. A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she has been provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, or is placed in the care of a local authority by virtue of an order.

The child or young person will either have been taken into care by the local authority, or have been ‘Accommodated’ by the local authority (a voluntary care arrangement). The young child or person may be the subject of an emergency order for their protection. The child or young person may be compulsorily accommodated – includes children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement.

Most children in care will be living in foster homes but a smaller number may be in a children’s home, living with a relative or even be placed back at home with their parent(s) sharing parental responsibility with the local authority.

The term ‘looked after’ was introduced by the Children Act and refers to children who are subject to care orders and those who are accommodated. More recently the term ‘children in care’ has been introduced and used to refer to this group of children, in response to children and young people’s dislike of the term Looked After Children or LAC. In this document therefore, the term ‘Children in Care’ (CiC) will largely be used, although the two terms mean the same thing and can be used and are used interchangeably.

In Supporting Children in Care we will:

- Create a whole school ethos in which all staff understand their role and accept their responsibility as a Corporate Parent
- Provide a safe and secure environment, which values learning and believes in the abilities and potential of all children
- Strive to bring the educational attainment of Children in Care nearer to those of their peers
- Make sure that the child or young person has access to education appropriate to their age and ability which includes a broad and balanced curriculum
- Have a Designated Teacher for Children in Care who will act as their advocate and co-ordinate support for them, liaise with carers, parents (as appropriate), social workers and school staff on a wide variety of educational, emotional and care issues

- All staff and governors are committed to ensuring improved educational life chances for Children in Care by ensuring that the relevant personnel have reasonable support and time to complete tasks and responsibilities; also, to establishing and maintaining appropriate reporting and monitoring procedures both within the school and with other agencies.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Designated Teacher has to:

- Be a qualified teacher or the Principal
- Be a person who has been working in the school or setting for at least six months
- Maintain a register of all Children in Care including those within the local authority and those placed outside of Solihull
- Liaise with relevant external support services for Children in Care
- Develop a strong partnership with the parents / carers to enable children in care to achieve their potential
- Attend review meetings as appropriate
- Maintain up-to-date records of individual Children in Care including:
 - Status, e.g. care order or accommodated
 - Type of placement, e.g. foster, respite, residential, adoptive
 - Name of social worker and contact details
 - Ensure statutory documentation is kept up-to-date and is relevant to the child's needs and ability through the Personal Education Plan (PEP)
 - Daily contact and telephone numbers of those who need to be contacted in an emergency or for any other concerns e.g. name of child, name of parent or carer or key worker in the children's home
 - Share Child Protection /Disability information (if not appropriate to share, indicate the confidential nature of the information)
 - Share relevant health information
 - Share baseline information and all test results
 - Named officers in the local authority with regard to exclusion, attendance and transition issues such as the Virtual School Head Teacher
 - The child's entitlement to decide who attends their Children in Care Statutory Reviews (6 monthly). If the school does not attend it must submit a written report that promotes the continuity and stability of their Personal Education Plan
 - Participate in appropriate LAC training and joint agency training where available
 - If there are safeguarding concerns for a Child in Care, contact and advice should be sought from MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) for Solihull.

The Designated Governor needs to:

- Know the current number of CiC on school roll
- Know number of CiC with up-to-date PEPs
- Know the overall attainment of CiC in the school and their performance compared to peers

- Know the authorised and unauthorised absence levels of CiC
- Know the number of CiC who have been excluded in previous six months and the reasons for exclusions
- Know how the local authorities support educational achievement of the CiC
- Ensure that the Designated Teacher has the opportunity to attend training and that school staff and governors are aware of the DCSF Statutory Guidance
- Have knowledge of the Duty on Local Authorities to promote the Educational Achievement of Children in Care, under Section 52 of the Children's Act 2004
- Take a proactive approach in coordinating with, and supporting the relevant local authority with regard to the education of Children in Care attending the schools
- Ensure that the Designated Teacher and staff are aware of and enabled to carry out their responsibilities effectively with the full support of the Principal.

The Governing Body will:

- Make certain that there is a dedicated governor or committee to champion and monitor the work of the school in supporting its Children in Care as part of a larger group of vulnerable children
- Ensure that the Designated Teacher has opportunity to attend training and that school staff and governors are aware of the DCSF statutory guidance
- Have knowledge of the Duty on Local Authorities to promote the Educational Achievement of Children in Care, under Section 52 of the Children's Act 2004
- Take a proactive approach in coordinating with, and supporting, the relevant local authority with regard to the education of Children in Care attending the school
- Ensure that the Designated Teacher and staff are aware of and enabled to carry out their responsibilities effectively with the full support of the Principal.

The School Approach

- The voice of the Child in Care will be listened to and acted upon, having access to counselling if required
- We will celebrate the achievements of Children in Care
- Our staff will have high expectations of Children in Care
- Our staff will have high expectations of the child, encouraging achievement and ambition
- Our Children in Care will be able to access support and guidance from staff if they need to do so
- For our young Children in Care there will be clarity in relation to who is and is not allowed to collect them from school
- Training will be provided, where appropriate, so that all our staff understand the needs of Children in Care in order that they actively promote the child's best interest. Staff will be aware of a variety of issues that may undermine the child's ability to engage in the learning process including: feelings of loss; rejection; anger; isolation; confusion and low self-esteem.
- Adults in our school will be sensitive to the child's wishes over what is known and by whom regarding their case status

- We will ensure that effective assessment, recording and reporting practices are established
- There will be appropriate information sharing about individual Children in Care keeping staff up to date and informed
- The Designated Teacher will ensure that positive messages about behaviour and achievement are shared within our school and between school, carers, parents (as appropriate), social workers and outside agencies. The Designated Teacher will ensure that high educational expectations are maintained
- Our school will work in partnership with carers, agencies and parents (where appropriate)
- We will support carers to value educational achievement and improve attendance
- Our staff will help Children in Care to feel that they are fitting in and offer them a safe haven and a sympathetic ear in a crisis
- Our staff will be aware that being or becoming 'in care' has a major impact on children's lives and that when considering children's learning and or behaviour, due consideration will be given
- We will make certain that our staff are aware of possible unresolved feelings that the child may have about their own families and siblings, in addition to insecurity over their current homes and carers.

Special Educational Needs (see SEND policy)

- We will have systems in place so that we can identify and prioritise when Children in Care are underachieving and have early intervention to improve this. Contact must be made with the LAC team as soon as concerns are raised.
- Each child has an EHC (Education, Health and Care) plan or Statement of Special Educational Need in the process of transition to a draft EHC plan, and we will ensure that the annual review takes place in conjunction with carers and social services.

Admissions and Transitions

We will:

- Prioritise Children in Care within our own admissions procedures and admit children as quickly as possible recognising the importance of re-establishing schools' stability for the Children in Care
- Ensure a warm welcome to our school by providing appropriate induction for all Children in Care so that there is a smooth and successful transition which includes carers and parents where appropriate
- Make sure that on admission or transfer all relevant information is obtained from the outset
- Forward appropriate documentation, in a timely manner, to any receiving school at the point of transition where receiving school is made known
- Make every effort to provide continuity of schooling, learning and educational experience.

Attendance

We will:

- Ensure that attendance data is readily available for monitoring where required
- Establish a first day of absence procedure where attendance is identified as a problem
- Inform the social worker when a child is absent for an extended period of time
- Inform the carer, social worker, parents (if appropriate) if there are any concerns about attendance and / or punctuality
- We will acknowledge attendance in any education meetings, celebrate success and set realistic targets, if it is a concern, including regular and punctual attendance.

Exclusions

We will:

- Identify any Child in Care who is at risk of exclusion and contact the LACES (Looked After Children Education Services) Team, Social Worker, Virtual School Head Teacher and relevant professionals to put proactive strategies in place to avoid the Child in Care missing days from school
- Ensure in the case of a fixed period (permanent) exclusion that the carer (or person holding parental responsibility) and the Social Worker have:
 - Received verbal communication
 - Within one day a letter has been sent specifying the period and reason(s) for the exclusion
 - Date of return
 - Outline of the rights of carers to make representations to the governing body, where appropriate
 - Detail arrangements made to enable the excluded child/young person to continue his/her education
 - Make sure in the event of any exclusion to contact the LACES Team, the Virtual School Head Teacher, Social Worker and carers with the details of the exclusion outlining the reasons why the child has been excluded so that appropriate responses can be made.

Multi-Agency Liaison

- We will support the child/young person to engage fully in planning and decision making
- The Designated Teacher will liaise closely with carers, parents (if appropriate) and the pupil's social worker on a variety of issues including homework, kit and equipment required and any trips to be attended. It is important that positive messages about behaviour and achievement are shared
- There will be a well-planned and coordinated approach to meeting the child's educational and social needs where, for example, potentially disruptive changes in school can be prevented

- There will be a clear understanding about the role and responsibility of staff in relation to the child/ young person and the roles and responsibilities of the other professionals involved
- Our staff will share positive perceptions and high expectations of the child with other professionals and especially with the child
- We will be aware of and sensitive to the appropriate role of the parents
- Our Designated Teacher will ensure that request from the local authority for statistical or other information held by the school are completed and returned on time to comply with statutory obligations
- We will encourage each of our Children in Care to access out of hours learning activities realising the positive impact this could have on their self – esteem and learning.

Personal Education Plans (PEPS)

We will:

- Hold a PEP meeting in time for every statutory care review that involves the social worker, foster carer, the child and parent if appropriate. Additional attendees may include, for example, representative key worker from the Virtual School. We will seek the views of the child/young person as to appropriate attendees in line with the statutory guidance if appropriate
- Have a PEP for each CiC which includes appropriate SMART targets. This will be compatible with the timing of the child's Care Plan. Other school documents, e.g. EHC plan, transition plan, behaviour plan will be fed into and form part of the PEP
- Make certain that following the writing of a PEP, any educational recommendations will be adhered to by our staff in order that all our Children in Care have the opportunity to fulfil and achieve the targets set
- Make or support applications for a Personal Education Allowance (PEA), e.g. those who are at risk of underachieving academically or for extracurricular activities through discussion at PEP meetings
- Ensure that a date is agreed and set for the next PEP meeting and that an electronic copy of the PEP is sent through to the LACES Team and social worker.
- PEPs within our local authority adhere to the following process:
 - For new children in care or a change in education placement, the PEP needs to take place within 20 school days or in an emergency placement within 10 school days
 - They have to be conducted within timescales to ensure the PEP is available for the first statutory review of the child's care plan – within 28 days of becoming a Child in Care
 - PEPs from Nursery to Year 13 are to be reviewed termly
 - PEPs are to be quality assured
 - PEPs reflect the voice of the child or young person
 - PEPs should reflect how the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is being used and its impact.

Links to Other Policies and Documentation

Although this policy is the key document outlining our approach to supporting Children in Care, references to our SEND, Equalities, Pupil Premium and Admissions policies may also be relevant to Children in Care.

Monitoring and Reviewing the Policy

Our Children in Care policy will be reviewed on a regular basis and adjustments will be made where appropriate.

We recognise the importance of context and will evaluate new strategies as robustly as possible to ensure that the approaches we are using have the desired effect.

In order to do this effectively we will, where relevant, undertake on-going evaluations of the strategies we are using.

Disseminating the Policy

This CinC policy along with details of actions will be published on our website. All staff and governors will have access to this policy.

Appeals Procedure

Any appeals against this CinC policy can be made through the Governors' complaints procedures.