

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



Introduction

This paper has been produced to outline to children, parents, foster carers and social workers Foster Care Link's policy on the promotion of educational achievement of children in foster care.

Statutory framework

Section 22 (3) of the Children Act 1989 places a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of all looked after children.

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 requires fostering services to give a high priority to meeting the educational need of children in foster care and to ensure that they are encouraged to achieve their potential (Standard 8).

Further requirements are imposed by the Standards include:

- the need to give high priority to helping carers meet children's educational needs
- the expectation that carers contribute to the assessment of the child's educational needs and the delivery of personal education plans
- setting out clearly in the placement agreement the role of carers and how costs arising from educational needs will be met
- the need to have systems in place to demonstrate the educational attainment of children in foster care and the number excluded from school
- the need to put in place arrangements for structured occupation during school hours for all children not in school

The education of looked after children is further underpinned by the Statutory Guidance on the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After issued by the Department for Education. (Published in July 2014 and updated February 2018).

The Guidance refers to the importance of the role of the Virtual School Head in relation to looked-after children.

References to the standards and guidance are made at relevant points throughout this policy.

The Importance of Education

Education matters to all children, including those looked after.

School is an important part of everyday life for children. It is somewhere to develop self-confidence and skills, to receive praise and encouragement, to learn about and build relationships and to achieve.

School is often the one stable point in a looked after child's life and plays an important role in retaining links with a child's life before they entered foster care.

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



For many abused children it will be the most important place in their life, providing stability and safety.

Education is also one of the keys to successful outcomes for looked after children. Children looked after are disadvantaged in many ways and the successful promotion of education will counterbalance some of these disadvantages while a failure to promote education will further disadvantage the child.

Historically social services departments have frequently failed to give sufficient attention to this area of children's lives.

Foster Care Link expects all staff and carers to give a high priority to meeting the educational needs of every child in foster care and ensure that she/he is encouraged to achieve her/his potential. This includes Islamic 'Madressa' education and other religious schools and institutions.

All involved in the care of looked after children should have high aspirations for children and not settle for second best. Foster Care Link will seek to ensure that all children are given appropriate opportunities to succeed and will encourage children, staff and carers to value and take pride in children achieving their potential, whatever this might be.

Barriers to Success

Some of the barriers children face in achieving educationally that have been identified in research include:

- children experience numerous, and often unplanned, moves of home
- they experience unnecessary moves of school or are out of school for prolonged periods
- making and sustaining relationships with peers can be particularly difficult due to lack of continuity in care and schooling
- lack of continuity in care providers and teachers means that children cannot rely upon familiar adults who they trust to advocate for their needs
- low self-esteem, and perhaps a justifiable mistrust of adults from pre-care and care experiences, can act as a barrier to enjoyment of schooling and educational success
- some children experience bullying, racial abuse or harassment
- social services departments, LEAs and schools do not gather and share information that would help them to plan effectively
- local authorities do not monitor the educational progress or needs of looked after children individually or as a discrete group
- social services and LEAs, individual schools, carers, social workers and teachers are unclear about their respective roles and responsibilities
- those responsible for the day-to-day care of children do not place sufficient value on education
- schools and carers display lower expectations of looked after children, which can contribute to underachievement and failure
- schools and social services do not act quickly and sensitively to help children catch up when their education is disrupted

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



- looked after children are over represented amongst pupils excluded from school
- the special educational needs of some children are not identified or addressed
- the needs of black and ethnic minority children are not always adequately considered in the care placement or educational placement

Factors Leading to Success

Factors leading to successful educational attainment by looked after children include:

- stable and consistent care
- early reading
- regular school attendance
- support from well informed foster carers
- the use of mentors
- understanding the importance of education for future life chances
- financial support for further and higher education

Planning for Children's Educational Needs

Social workers will need to consider the child's educational needs before the child becomes looked after.

Detail of the child's school and educational history should be recorded on the child's Care Plan and form part of any child's Placement Plan.

The child's care plan should take account of the child's educational history, the need for continuity, the need to identify any educational need the child may have or to carry out any assessment in respect of any special educational need.

The care plan should take account of any existing Individual Education Plan and statement of Special Educational Needs drawn up through the SEN Code of Practice.

The placement agreement must be used to detail the arrangements for meeting the child's educational requirements. These should include:

- the role of the carer
- the role of the parents
- what needs cannot be presently met
- what the plan is to meet such needs in the future
- arrangements for securing continuity of education
- arrangements for re-introducing a child to school if there has been a break in attendance
- arrangements to provide additional educational assistance
- arrangements for making/reviewing Individual Education Plans, Statements of Special Educational Needs, Personal Education Plans, Pathway Plans
- arrangements for structured occupation during school hours for children not attending school
- financial arrangements for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and school equipment

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



Personal Education Plans

Every looked after child must have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which:

- ensures access to services and support
- contributes to stability
- minimises disruption and broken schooling
- signals particular and special needs
- establishes clear goals
- acts as a record of progress and achievement

When a child becomes looked after, the child's social worker will inform the child's school and local education authority. The social worker is responsible for ensuring that a PEP is drawn up within 20 school days of becoming looked after or entering a new school.

The PEP should be drawn up in partnership with:

- the child
- the child's parents
- the child's foster carer
- the designated teacher
- Virtual School Head
- relevant others (e.g. educational psychologist, learning support assistant, health professional)

Reviewing Plans

Children's care plans and PEPs will be considered and confirmed at the first statutory childcare review, within 28 days of the child becoming looked after.

Care plans and PEPs will be reviewed again within 3 months of the first review and thereafter at least once every six months.

Foster Care Link recognises the importance of the need for the various strands of the planning process to be co-ordinated and will work with placing authorities to seek to review PEPs as part of the statutory childcare review process.

Where this is not possible (eg a childcare review taking place during a school holiday), the PEP must still be reviewed no more than 6 months since the last PEP review with the outcome being considered at the next childcare review.

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



Identifying an Educational Placement

Securing an appropriate educational placement will be one of the main criteria used to identify an appropriate foster placement. The Head of the Virtual School should take a lead role in ensuring that arrangements are in place for a looked after child's education.

This should be a full-time place in a local mainstream school, commencing without delay, unless the circumstances of the child make full-time or mainstream provision unsuitable.

Where there is a need to make an immediate placement in order to ensure the child's welfare is otherwise protected, or the child does not have a school place, or the location of the foster placement makes it impractical for the child to remain at their current school, Foster Care Link expects placing authorities to secure an appropriate educational placement within 20 school days.

Where there is a need to exceed this 20 day limit (eg because of a delayed appeal against an admission decision), placing authorities will be expected to immediately secure temporary alternative provision.

Out of Authority Placements

The local education authority where the foster carer lives is the responsible agency for providing an appropriate educational placement and for all decisions in respect of a child's special education including identification, assessment and producing and maintaining a statement.

Children with Special Educational Needs

While many looked after children achieve high levels of attainment at school, Foster Care Link recognises that looked after children are more likely than their peers to have special educational needs. These will often be the result of previous experiences, disrupted schooling or previously unmet need.

It is also likely that children separated from their families will have emotional and behavioural responses to this separation. These may lead to problems in sustaining a placement in a mainstream educational setting and achieving the child's potential without the provision of additional support.

Foster Care Link expects social workers, teachers and carers to work together to identify, assess, plan for and address the special educational needs of children placed in foster care.

The provision of additional support is usually the responsibility of the child's school with the help of the relevant education authority. There may be occasions when there is an additional need which cannot be met by the school or education authority and Foster Care Link expects placing authorities to give high priority to the provision of additional support or equipment to meet the child's needs.

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



Children with a Disability

Foster Care Link believes that all children should be encouraged and enabled to reach their potential and that wherever possible this is best achieved through the provision of mainstream schooling and equal access to the National Curriculum.

All children should also be encouraged and enabled to take part in extra-curricular activities and school trips.

However, a disproportionate number of looked after children are disabled and face additional prejudice, isolation and low expectations.

Foster Care Link recognises the additional difficulties facing a child with a disability and will expect placing authorities to provide the necessary support to the child and/or their carer to ensure the child is given the same opportunities to fulfil their potential as their peers.

Children from Ethnic Minorities, Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and Refugee Children.

Children from some ethnic minorities are over-represented in the looked after population.

While such children are not in themselves a homogenous group they frequently share the common experience of racism and negative stereotyping that further disadvantages them in the care and education systems. They may also be more vulnerable to social isolation and bullying.

Some of these children will be unaccompanied minors who have not only been separated from their primary carers, but also from their own country, religion language and culture. Foster Care Link will seek to ensure that all such children will have the same educational opportunities as any other looked after child.

The Government have recognised the further disadvantages suffered by such children and Objective 4.4 of Quality Protects requires local authorities *'To ensure that children looked after from black and ethnic minority groups gain maximum life chances from educational opportunities, health and social care'*.

Foster Care Link will ensure that the particular educational needs of children from ethnic minorities are identified and addressed in care plans, placement agreements and Personal Education Plans.

Children not attending a School

All children of school age will be expected to attend school full-time and wherever possible this will be in a local mainstream school.

Where a child is not attending school full-time, Foster Care Link will work with the placing authority, the child, the carer and colleagues in education, including the Head

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



of the Virtual School, to put in place a plan for structured education and occupation during school hours.

Such plans will take account of the individual circumstances of both the child and the carer.

Further Education

While government guidance on the education of looked after children focuses on the compulsory years of schooling, attention also needs to be paid to promoting educational achievement beyond these years.

Participation in education and training is the single most effective way to enable children to acquire and develop skills for independent living and the most reliable route to better life chances.

Foster Care Link will encourage all looked after children to undertake further education or training beyond their sixteenth birthday.

To this end, consideration of the child's needs in terms of education will remain a core element of statutory childcare reviews and Pathway Plans will be used to identify how these needs are to be met.

Foster Care Link will expect placing authorities to will ensure that children have access to the necessary financial support to enable them to take advantage of appropriate further education or training opportunities.

Data

Foster Care Link will establish systems for monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of all children placed with foster carers.

Standards in Foster Care

Foster Care Link expects foster carers to actively promote the education of looked after children and meet the following standards:

- carers are familiar with the child's educational history and assessed educational needs
- there is effective regular contact and co-operation between the child's carers and her/his school
- the child's foster carers take an interest in and encourage the child's education to include attendance at school functions and meetings at school to discuss options and careers
- carers are aware of and actively pursue the opportunities provided at school including facilities, events, parents meetings and guidance at strategic points in the child's educational career

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



- the child is enabled to take advantage of school facilities, outings, recreational events and options which take account of her/his background, interest, abilities and potential
- carers are actively involved at all stages in the preparation and reviews of statements of Special Education Needs
- the child's regular school attendance is actively encouraged and monitored by carers
- the child's achievements at school are appropriately acknowledged in the foster home
- the foster home provides opportunities for the child to pursue her/his education including quiet space, available literature, access to information and time set aside for homework and school projects
- the child considers that her/his carers encourage and support the importance of her/his education and is helped by them to get the best out of educational opportunities
- the carer takes advantages of joint training programmes for carers, teachers and schools which address the identification of educational needs and clarify roles and responsibilities in responding to those needs
- the carer contributes to the assessment of the child's educational needs and progress for the planning and review process
- the foster carer contributes to the delivery of the child's PEP

Supporting Carers

While carers will be responsible for promoting a child's educational achievement on a day to day basis they cannot achieve this without appropriate support.

This will be achieved by:

- meeting carer's costs arising from a child's education in accordance with Foster Care Link's payment scheme for carers with any additional costs paid as agreed in the placement agreement
- placing authorities ensuring that all children have an appropriate full-time, permanent educational placement or
- making appropriate arrangements for structured occupation during school hours in agreement with the carer
- ensuring that the carer's role in terms of school contact is clearly laid out in the placement agreement
- ensuring that the child's social worker advocates on the child's behalf as a corporate parent in terms of admissions, exclusions and other issues affecting a child's education
- placing authorities providing the carer with such information and assistance, including, equipment, as may be necessary to meet the educational needs of any child placed
- providing carers with appropriate training and development opportunities

Foster Carer Training

POLICY ON THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



Relevant training will be provided as part of Foster Care Link's ongoing training programme. Supervising social workers should ensure that they pay attention to the training needs of carers and other members of their household, addressing these in the appraisal of training and development needs which must be documented in the annual review report. Social workers should encourage carers to make use of any available training opportunities run by Foster Care Link or external agencies.

Further Information

Detailed guidance and advice can be found in the Department for Education statutory guidance 'Promoting the Education of looked-after and previously looked-after children', February 2018.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>)