

Looked After Children Policy

Aim:

Early Years settings are committed to providing high quality provision based on equality of opportunity for all children and families. All staff are committed to doing all they can to enable 'looked after' children in their care to achieve and reach their full potential.

Definition of 'looked after' children (LAC): *children and young people become looked after if they have been either taken into care by the local authority, or have been accommodated by the local authority (a voluntary care arrangement). Most LAC will be living in foster homes, but a smaller number may be in children's homes, living with a relative or even placed back home with their natural parents.*

We recognise that children who are being looked after have often experienced traumatic situations: physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect. However, we also recognise that not all looked after children have experienced abuse and that there are a range of reasons for children to be taken into care of the local authority. Whatever the reason, a child's separation from their home and family signifies a disruption in their lives that has an impact on their emotional well-being. Most local authorities do not place children under 5 with foster carers who work outside the home. However, there are instances when this does happen or where the child has been placed with another family member who works. Playdays maintains that it is not appropriate for a looked after child who is under 2 years old to be placed in day care setting in addition to a foster placement.

At Playdays we place emphasis on promoting children's right to be strong, resilient, and listened to. Our policy and practise guidelines for looked after children are based on these two important concepts, attachment and resilience. The basis of this is to promote secure attachments in children's lives as the basis for resilience. These aspects of wellbeing underpin the child's responsiveness to learning and are the basis in developing positive dispositions for learning. For young children to get the most out of their educational opportunities they need to be settled enough with their carer to be able to cope with further separation, a new environment, and new expectations made upon them.

The term LAC denotes a child's current legal status; this term is never used to categorise a child as standing out from others. We do not refer to such a child using acronyms such as LAC.

We do not offer placements for children aged under 2 years, regardless of if they are LAC or not. We offer instead advice and information about how to access other services for a child to play and engage with others, where the carer stays with the child.

We offer places for children aged from 2 years in exceptional circumstances who are in care. In such cases the child should have been with the foster carer for at least 2 months and show signs of having formed a secure attachment to the carer and where the placement in the preschool will last a minimum of one term.

We offer places for funded 3 and 4-year old's who are in care to ensure they receive their entitlement to early education. We expect that a child will have been with a foster carer for a minimum of one month and has formed a secure attachment to the carer. We expect that the placement in the preschool will last a minimum of 6 weeks.

We will always offer stay and play provision for a child who is 2-5 years old who is still settling with their foster carer, or who is only temporarily being looked after.

Policy Written By: Sam Yates

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To be reviewed: Annually

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Where a child who normally attends our setting is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer we will continue to offer the placement for the child.

Method:

The designated person for LAC is the designated child protection officer. Our named Child Protection/Safeguarding Officer is Terri Clarke. Deputy: Angela Russell

Every child is allocated a key person when they start and this is no different for a looked after child. The Safeguarding Officer ensures the keyworker as the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs.

The safeguarding officer and the keyperson liaise with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and his or her family and ensures appropriate information is gained and shared.

We recognise the role of the local authority social care department as the child's corporate parent and the key agency in determining what takes place with the child. Nothing changes, especially with regard to the birth parent's or foster carers role in relation to the preschool without prior discussion and agreement with the child's social worker.

At the start of the placement there is a professionals meeting that will determine the objectives of the placement and draw up a care plan that incorporates and the child's learning needs. This is reviewed after 2 weeks, 6 weeks and 3 months. Thereafter at 3 to 6 monthly intervals.

The care plan needs to consider such issues for the child as:

- Emotional needs and how they are to be met
- How any emotional issues and problems that affect behaviour are to be managed?
- The child's sense of self, culture, language and identity – how this is to be supported
- The child's need for sociability and friendship
- The child's interests and abilities and possible learning journey pathway
- How any special needs will be supported?

In addition, the care plan will consider:

- How information shared with the foster carer and LA as well as what information is shared with whom and how it will be recorded and stored.
- What contact the child has with their birth parents and what arrangement will be in place for supervised contact. If this is to be the preschool, when, where and what form the contact will take will be discussed and agreed.
- What written reporting is required.

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- Wherever possible and where plan is for the child to return home, the birth parents should be involved in planning.
- With the social worker's agreement and as part of the plan, the birth parents should be involved in the preschools activities that include parents such as outings, fun days etc. alongside the foster carer.

The settling in process for a child is agreed. It should be the same as for any other child, with the foster carer taking the place of the parent, unless otherwise agreed. It is even more important that the 'proximity' stage is followed until it is visible the child has formed a relationship with their keyperson sufficient to act as a secure base to allow the gradual separation from foster carer to. This process may take longer in some cases so time is needed to allow for it to take place without causing further distress or anxiety to the child.

In the first 2 weeks after settling in the child's wellbeing is the focus of observation, their sociability and their ability to manage feelings with or without support.

Further observations about communication, interests and abilities will be noted to form a picture of the whole child in relation to the EYFS 7 areas of learning.

Concerns about the child will be noted in the child's file and discussed with the foster carer.

If the concerns are about the foster carer treatment of the child, or if abuse is suspected, these are recorded in the child's file and reported to the child's social worker according to the Safeguarding Children procedure.

Regular contact should be maintained with the social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer.

Transition to school will be handled sensitively and the safeguarding officer or the child's keyworker will liaise with the school, passing on relevant information and documentation with the agreement of the LAC birth parents.

Further Guidance

Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care DfE 2000

Who Does What: How Social Workers and Carers Can Support Education of Looked After Children DfES 2005

Supporting Looked After Learners – A Practical Guide for School Governors DfES 2006