

Looked After Children Policy

Policy statement

First Steps Pre-school is committed to providing quality provision based on equality of opportunity for all children and their 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.

Children and young people become 'looked after' if they have been taken into care by the local authority, or have been accommodated by the local authority under a voluntary care arrangement. Most looked after children will be living in foster homes or subject to an adoption placement order, but a smaller number may be in a children's home, living with a relative or even placed back home with their natural parent(s).

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 in to the 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 impact on their emotional well-being.

At First Steps, we place emphasis on promoting children's right to be strong, resilient and listened to. Our policy and practice guidelines for looked after children aim to promote secure attachments in children's lives as the basis for resilience. For young children to get the most out of 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.

2. Principles

- The term 'looked after child' 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. Monitoring of children who fall into 'groups' is anonymous and in line with ensuring inclusion for all children.
- Places are not offered to babies and children under two years who are in care; instead other services such as Noah's Ark are offered to enable a child to play and engage with other children where the carer stays with the child.
- Places may be offered to two-year-old children who are in care. In such cases, the child should have been with the foster carer for at least two months and show signs of having formed a secure attachment to the carer and where the placement in the pre-school will last a minimum of three months.
- Funded places for three and four-year-olds who are in care are offered to ensure they receive their entitlement to early education. It is expected that a child will have been with a foster carer for a minimum of one month and formed a secure attachment to the carer. The placement in the pre-school should be expected to last a minimum of six weeks.
- 'Stay and play' provision may be offered for a child who is two to five years old who is still settling with their foster carer, or who is only temporarily being looked after.
- Where a child who normally attends the pre-school is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer the placement will continue to be offered for the child.

These procedures are written in line with current guidance Early Years Foundation Stage – (EYFS). The supervisor is responsible for ensuring all staff understand and follow these procedures.

3. Procedures

- The designated person for looked after children are the safeguarding officers, Rachel Kehoe and Becky Russell.
- Every child is allocated a key person. This is no different for a looked after child. The safeguarding officer ensures they have the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs.
- The designated person and the key person liaise with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and his or her family and ensures appropriate information is gained and shared.
- The preschool recognises 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 parents or foster carer's role in relation to the pre-school without prior discussion and agreement with the child's social worker.

- A Care Plan will be drawn up to incorporate the child's needs and a settling in process agreed. Regular contact should be maintained with the child's social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer. The plan will be adhered to by the setting and any changes to the plan will be made in conjunction with the child's Social Worker.
- The care plan should consider eg
 - The child's emotional needs and how they are to be met
 - How any emotional issues that affect behaviour are to be managed
 - The child's sense of self, culture, language and identity – how this is to be supported
 - How any special needs should be supported
 - How and with who information should be shared
 - The child's need for sociability and friendship
 - The child's interests and abilities and possible learning journey
- In addition the care plan will also consider:
 - How information will be shared with the foster carer and local authority as well as what information is shared with whom and how it will be recorded and stored.
 - What contact the child has with his/her birth parent(s) and what arrangements will be in place for supervised contact.
 - What written reporting is required.
 - Wherever possible, and where the plan is for the child's return home, the birth parent(s) should be involved in planning; and
 - With the social workers agreement, and as part of the plan, the birth parent(s) should be involved in the setting's activities that include parents, such as outings, fun-days etc alongside the foster carer.
- The settling-in process for the child is agreed, it should be the same as for any other child, with the foster carer taking the place of the parents, unless otherwise agreed. It is even more important that the 'proximity' stage is followed until it is visible that the child has formed a relationship with his or her key person sufficient to act as a 'secure base' to allow the gradual separation from the foster carer. This process may take longer in some cases, so time needs to be allowed for it to take place without causing further distress or anxiety to the child.
- In the first two 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.
- Observations about communication, interests and abilities will be noted to form a picture of the whole child in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- 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's treatment of the child, or if abuse is suspected, these are recorded in the child's file and reported to the child's social care worker according to the setting's safeguarding children procedure
- Transition to school will be handled sensitively and the designated person and or the child's key person will liaise with the school, passing on relevant information and documentation with the agreement of the looked after child's birth parents.

Previously Looked After Children – The statutory duty also applies to previously looked after children.

4. Disseminating and Implementing this Policy

All pre-school staff will be required to read this policy on their induction and to comply with the contents of the policy.

The implementation of the policy will be monitored by pre-school staff.

If incidences of non-compliance do occur, this will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis through performance management of staff.

Any adverse incidents will be recorded and reviewed to ensure the policy is fit for purpose.

The policy will be formally reviewed at least every 3 years.

Guidance

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

Virtual school resources at Norfolk County Council <https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/>